Introducing the Peace Observatory: Peace Negotiations in Armed Conflicts, 1989-2023

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Abstract: This article introduces the Peace Observatory, a new global dataset that captures over 11,000 rounds of peace negotiations in interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts between 1989 and 2023. The Peace Observatory disaggregates peacemaking into distinct negotiation rounds. Each round is coded by its phase in the peace process (prenegotiation, negotiation, or implementation), topics discussed, mediator involvement, and outcomes. This level of detail enables new insights into the sequencing, design, and effectiveness of peace efforts over time. To demonstrate the value of the dataset, the article explores how the involvement of autocratic states as mediators affects negotiation outcomes. Using round-level data, the analysis shows that the involvement of autocratic mediators is associated with a higher probability of concluding negotiated settlements, but also that autocratic involvement is associated with shorter-lived negotiated settlements. This exploratory analysis demonstrates that the Peace Observatory offers a novel empirical foundation to unpack peace processes. More broadly and beyond, the Peace Observatory will make it possible to study how peace processes unfold, providing scholars and practitioners with the tools to examine when, how, and why negotiations gain traction, stall, or succeed.

Introduction

This article introduces the Peace Observatory dataset. The dataset covers peacemaking efforts in interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts recognized by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) from 1989 to 2023. A distinctive feature of the Peace Observatory is its disaggregation of peace processes into over 11,000 distinct negotiation rounds, each uniquely coded and documented.

A round of negotiations is defined as a discrete phase within a broader peace process, initiated when conflicting parties engage in direct or indirect dialogue, and concluded when talks end either with an agreement, a pause, or a breakdown. Each round is treated as a unique event, allowing researchers to trace the evolution of peace efforts with greater temporal and substantive precision.

By capturing dynamics within negotiation rounds – including the phase of the peace process, the issues discussed, the presence of mediators, and the outcomes – the dataset enables in-depth analysis of how peace is pursued incrementally. This allows researchers to move beyond binary assessments of whether peace efforts culminate in a formal agreement, and instead trace the step-by-step evolution of negotiations. It becomes possible to analyze the sequencing of issues, the timing of different mediation efforts, and the design of dialogue frameworks. The Peace Observatory's disaggregated data thus supports comparative and process-oriented research into the conditions under which negotiations gain traction, stall, or succeed, helping scholars and practitioners alike to better understand and support effective peace interventions.

The remainder of this data feature proceeds as follows. First, we explain the rationale for the dataset. Second, we detail the data collection process and the types of information included. Third, we present descriptive trends in global peace negotiations from 1989 to 2023, including shifts in mediation, the types of actors involved, and the evolving scope of peace agreements. Fourth, we illustrate how the dataset can be used to analyze the impact of mediation by examining how the involvement of autocratic states in mediation efforts shapes negotiation outcomes. The final section concludes.

Rationale

Most existing datasets on peacemaking focus exclusively on mediation efforts, often overlooking the broader landscape of peace negotiations (Melander et al., 2009; DeRouen et al., 2011; Duursma, 2020). Furthermore, many of these datasets code mediation at the conflict-year level, which limits their ability to capture the timing, sequencing, and content of individual negotiation efforts (Svensson, 2007; Regan et al., 2009; Duursma, 2020). A partial exception is the Civil Wars Mediation (CWM) dataset, which provides start and end dates for mediation events (DeRouen et al., 2011). However, these events often span extended periods and may encompass multiple rounds of negotiations, without distinguishing between them. The Managing Intrastate Low-Intensity Armed Conflict (MILC) dataset also offers temporal data on the beginning and end of third-party peacemaking efforts but is limited in scope to conflicts with fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths per year and only covers the 1993–2004 period (Melander et al., 2009). Crucially, neither the CWM nor the MILC dataset includes information on negotiations that occur without third-party involvement, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of the full range of peacemaking activities.

Two recently developed datasets have advanced the study of peace negotiations by taking negotiations themselves as the unit of analysis and by including both bilateral and mediated talks: the African Peace Processes (APP) dataset (Duursma and Gamez, 2022) and the Peace Negotiations in Civil Conflicts (PNCC) dataset (Arı, 2022). The Peace Observatory builds directly on the methodology developed for the APP dataset but significantly expands its scope by providing global coverage of negotiations in armed conflicts.

Compared to the PNCC dataset – and other existing datasets, for that matter – the Peace Observatory introduces at least five unique features that significantly advance the conflict resolution literature. First, each observation in the dataset is accompanied by an analytical summary describing the round of negotiations. Transparency is a core principle of the Peace Observatory: every summary of a negotiation round comes with detailed references to all sources used, including UN reports, academic literature, news articles, and NGO documentation. Users can explore the summaries on the Peace Observatory website: https://peaceobservatory.com/.

Second, unlike most datasets that focus exclusively on intrastate conflicts (Arı, 2022; DeRouen et al., 2011; Duursma, 2020), the Peace Observatory also includes data on negotiations in interstate and non-state conflicts. While these conflict types are analytically distinct, they often overlap in practice. Contemporary conflicts rarely involve just two opposing sides; rather, they feature shifting alliances, multiple actors, and fluid patterns of violence and cooperation. Capturing negotiations across all three conflict types allows for a more nuanced analysis of how peace is negotiated in diverse and complex settings (Palmiano Federer et al., 2019).

Third, the Peace Observatory covers the entire period from 1989 to 2023 for any conflict that was active at some point during this timeframe and also includes negotiations that occurred before the official outbreak of an armed conflict as recorded by UCDP. By capturing peace efforts that precede the onset of armed conflict, the dataset opens up new avenues for research on early engagement strategies (Zartman, 2005).

Fourth, the dataset provides detailed information on the characteristics of each round of negotiations, including the phase of the peace process – prenegotiations, negotiations, or implementation – as well as the goals pursued, such as ceasefires, disarmament, or political arrangements. In addition, the dataset provides information on the names and types of third parties involved in mediated talks. This level of detail enables researchers to study how the sequencing and substance of negotiations evolve over time, how specific goals are introduced

and revisited across phases, which third parties engage and when they join or leave the process, and how different phases contribute to progress towards peace (Svensson and Wallensteen, 2010; Duursma et al., 2025).

Fifth, the Peace Observatory systematically captures a wide range of agreement types, not only final peace agreements but also temporary ceasefires, definitive ceasefires, process or partial agreements, and implementation accords. This stands in contrast to datasets such as PNCC, which only include comprehensive agreements (Arı, 2022). Having data on this broader spectrum of negotiated settlements enables researchers to analyze the incremental nature of peacemaking and examine how partial or temporary agreements contribute to – or fall short of – sustained progress toward peace. It also allows for the study of process design, sequencing, and the conditions under which limited agreements evolve into more comprehensive settlements (Duursma et al., 2025). This, in turn, enables researchers to move beyond a narrow focus on "big peace" moments – such as the signing of a comprehensive peace agreement – and instead study the incremental, often fragmented nature of peacemaking (Buchhold et al., 2018; Piccolino, 2023).

Having explained the rationale for the Peace Observatory, this article will next discuss how the data for the Peace Observatory have been collected.

Data Collection

The Peace Observatory defines peace negotiations as a structured deliberative process involving two or more conflicting parties, in which dialogue focuses on addressing one or more underlying issues of the conflict and/or adopting measures to end armed combat. Negotiations may address a wide range of topics, including ceasefires, international borders, power-sharing, amnesties, monitoring mechanisms, reconciliation, and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). In addition, they may cover locally salient issues such as land access, water rights, cattle movement, and the free movement of people and goods.

A round of negotiations refers to a discrete, identifiable phase within the broader peace process, characterized by a distinct set of discussions, meetings, or interactions. Each round is marked by an initiation – where parties come together or resume indirect dialogue after a period of non-engagement – and a conclusion, signaled by an agreement, a pause in talks, or a formal cessation of discussions. These rounds vary widely in length and intensity, ranging from single-

day meetings to prolonged exchanges over weeks. Each round is treated as a unique event withs its own objectives and outcomes.

Each round in the Peace Observatory dataset is coded using a detailed template that records core attributes of the negotiation process. This includes the start and end date of the round of negotiations, the phase of the peace process (prenegotiation, negotiation, or implementation), the type of negotiation (direct or indirect), the names and types of third parties involved in mediated talks, the substantive issues discussed, the involvement of external parties that provide external military support to the main primary conflict parties, and whether the round resulted in an agreement. When an agreement is concluded, it is categorized into one of several types: temporary ceasefire, definitive ceasefire, process or partial agreement, final agreement, or implementation agreement. Every round is accompanied by a structured analytical summary that outlines the background, actors involved, negotiation goals, process dynamics, and outcomes.

To ensure transparency and source traceability, all summaries are grounded in a "saturation approach," building on the methodology developed for the African Peace Processes (APP) dataset (Duursma and Gamez, 2022). This means that researchers consult multiple sources for each conflict until no new information on peace efforts emerges. A wide variety of source types are used, including UN and regional organization reports, NGO publications, news articles, academic literature, memoirs, and relevant web content. All sources referenced in the summaries are explicitly listed. These summaries, along with the complete dataset and codebook, are publicly accessible via the Peace Observatory website: https://peaceobservatory.com/.

With the data collection process thus explained, the next section will provide an overview of peace negotiations that have taken place between 1989 and 2023.

Patterns of Peacemaking: Continuity and Evolution in Conflict Resolution Processes

The Peace Observatory offers unique insights into continuities and evolution in peacemaking. In this section, we first look at the substantive issues addressed during negotiations. We then assess trends in the frequency of negotiations and mediation efforts over the past three decades, as well as the nature and extent of third-party involvement. Finally, we consider the outcomes of negotiation rounds.

Topics Addressed in Peace Negotiations

The topics addressed in peace negotiations reflect the evolving priorities and constraints of the conflict parties and, where present, mediators. As peace processes unfold, the focus of negotiations often shifts in response to changing dynamics on the ground, shifts in power, or openings for compromise. The Peace Observatory systematically records the substantive issues discussed during each round of negotiations, providing insights into how the agenda of peacemaking evolves over time.

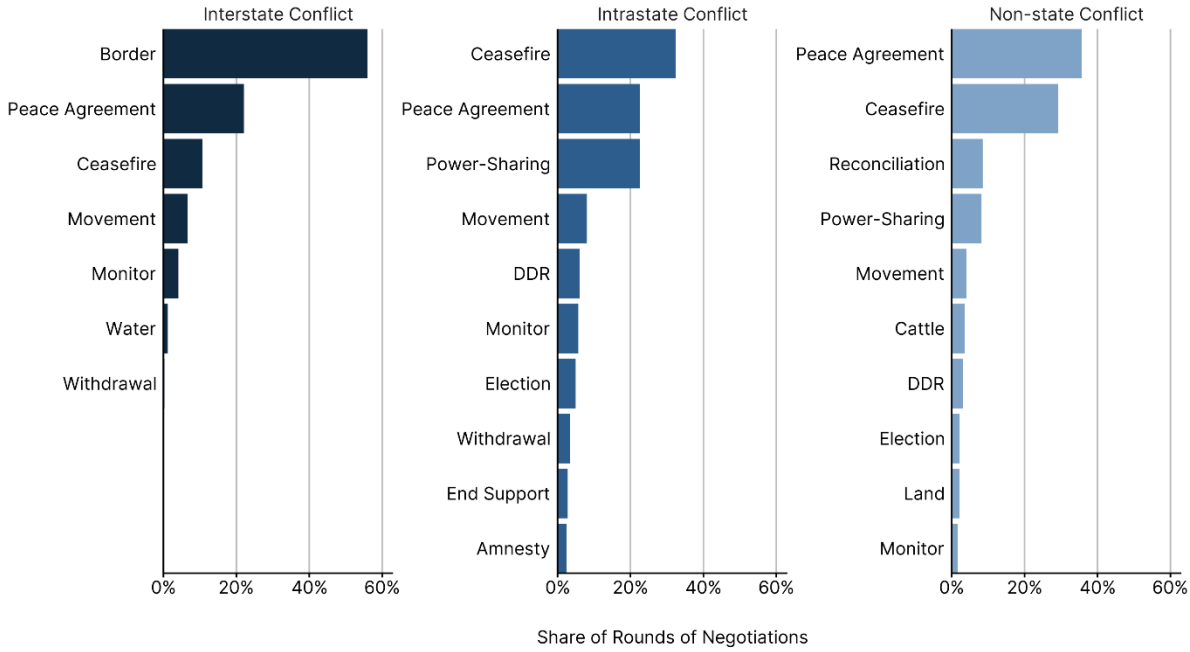
At different stages, negotiations may prioritize ending violence, with talks centered on temporary or permanent ceasefires, disarmament, and the deployment of monitors. In other instances, attention shifts to political arrangements such as power-sharing or the establishment of new governance structures. Negotiations may also focus on transitional justice and social healing through reconciliation processes or the granting of amnesties.

The Peace Observatory captures a broad range of negotiation topics, including peace agreements[1], ceasefires, international borders, power-sharing, elections, monitoring and peacekeeping, reconciliation, amnesties, and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). It also includes issues of practical and local significance, such as land, water, cattle, and the freedom of movement of people and goods. In internationalized intrastate conflicts, rounds may address the role of external actors, including the withdrawal of foreign troops or the cessation of external military support to conflict parties. These topics are not mutually exclusive. A single round of negotiations often involves multiple issues.

The bar charts in Figure 1 below present the ten most frequently addressed topics during the negotiation phase of peace processes in interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts. Prenegotiations or negotiations aimed at implementation are thus excluded. In interstate conflicts, negotiations are dominated by discussions over borders, which are typically aimed at defining, redefining, or affirming territorial boundaries. Ceasefires and the conclusion of peace agreements also appear, though less frequently. Across all conflict types, the conclusion of peace agreements and the negotiation of ceasefires are consistent priorities.

[1] The codebook provides detailed definitions for each topic. Notably, the category "conclusion of a peace agreement" captures two distinct types of rounds: those in which parties have agreed on specific issues and seek to formalize that consensus in a written accord – where the specific issues are also coded – and those in which sources report that the parties are attempting to reach a peace agreement, but without specifying its content.

Figure 1: Top Ten Topics in the Negotiation Phase



In intrastate conflicts, power-sharing emerges as a frequent topic, reflecting efforts to redistribute political and military authority within a single state. Freedom of movement is also commonly addressed, encompassing concerns such as the return of displaced persons, restoring movement in and out of blocked areas, facilitation of humanitarian access, and lifting of trade restrictions. DDR processes also feature prominently, signaling steps toward demilitarization and reintegration of combatants.

In non-state conflicts, which often involve communal, ethnic, or identity-based actors, negotiations frequently revolve around peace agreements, ceasefires, reconciliation, and power-sharing. Here, power-sharing typically refers to decentralized governance arrangements or customary authority roles rather than national institutions. Additionally, resource-related issues – particularly cattle and land – are sometimes a topic in negotiations, reflecting the local livelihood-based nature of many of these conflicts.

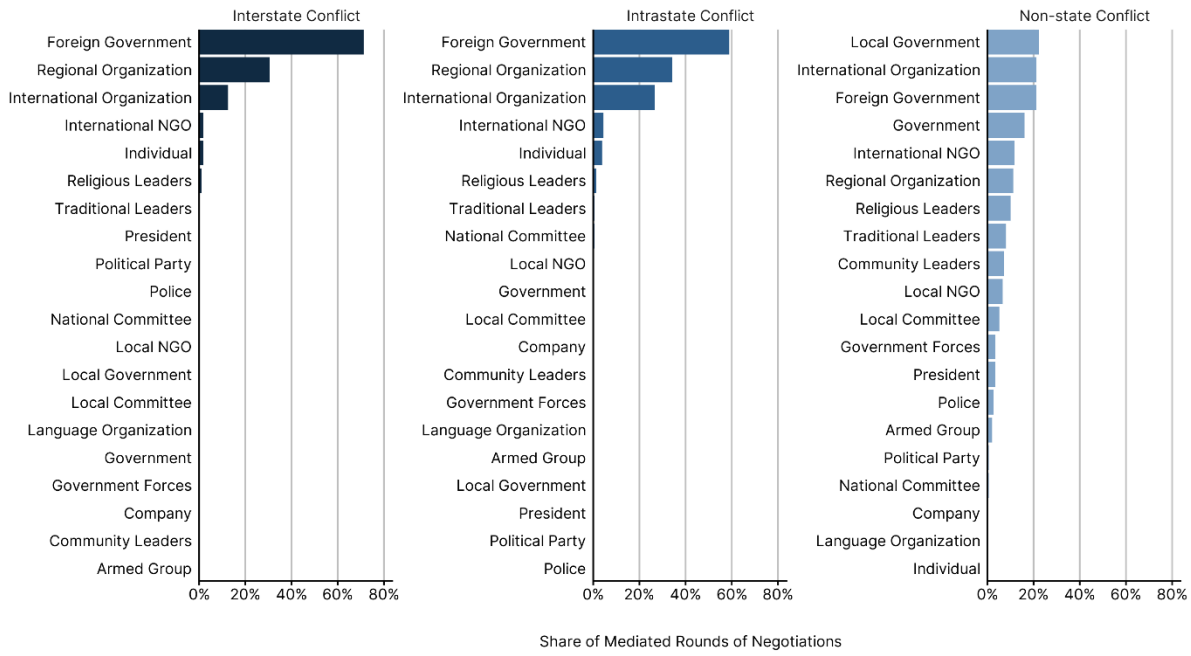
Frequency of Negotiations and Mediation Over Time

Mediation is often central to conflict resolution. The Peace Observatory tracks the presence of mediators in negotiation rounds and identifies the specific third parties involved. Mediation is defined as third-party-assisted negotiation in which the mediator maintains some influence over

the process, with the consent of all negotiating parties (Clayton et al., 2023). This distinguishes mediation from other forms of peacemaking by emphasizing structured, voluntary engagement facilitated by an external actor. Mediators vary widely – from states with political leverage (Touval, 1992), to international organizations with global legitimacy (Sisk, 2010), to religious leaders who offer moral authority (Princen, 1992), and NGOs that bring technical expertise and flexible engagement (Papagianni, 2012). Regional organizations, particularly in Africa, often mediate based on proximity and principles of subsidiarity (Duursma, 2020).

The Peace Observatory categorizes these actors and captures which types are involved in each negotiation round. The bar charts in Figure 2 below display the distribution of mediator types in mediated rounds of negotiations in interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts between 1989 and 2023. In interstate and intrastate conflicts, foreign governments, regional organizations, and international organizations are the most frequent mediators. In non-state conflicts, local and national government officials, as well as international NGO and religious leaderss are additionally particularly active.

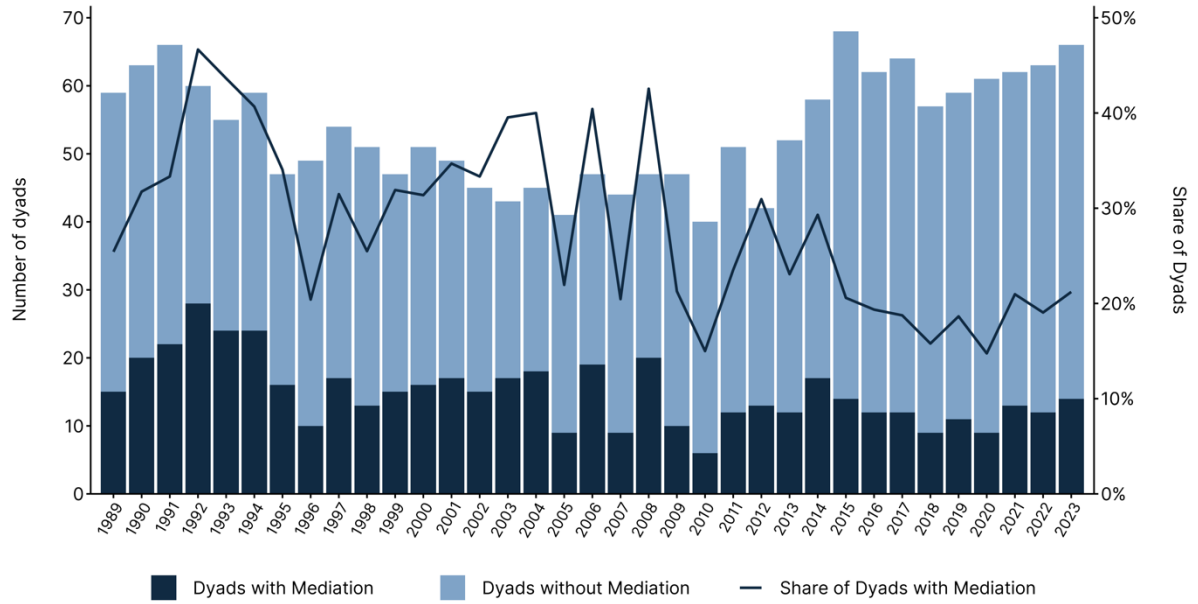
Figure 2: Mediator Types in Mediated Rounds of Negotiations



Recent scholarship notes a decline in negotiation and mediation efforts in intrastate conflicts, especially in the post-9/11 era (Howard and Stark, 2017; Lundgren and Svensson, 2020). This

decline reflects a shift in international priorities – from conflict resolution to stabilization, and from dialogue to containment of armed groups labeled as terrorists. The Peace Observatory's data confirms this trend. Focusing solely on intrastate conflicts, Figure 3 below shows a relative decline in the proportion of these conflicts with mediated negotiations. However, the absolute number of mediated conflicts has remained fairly stable since the mid-1990s. The relative decline in the 2010s is primarily due to an increase in the number of active intrastate conflicts.

Figure 3: Mediation in Active Intrastate Conflict Dyads

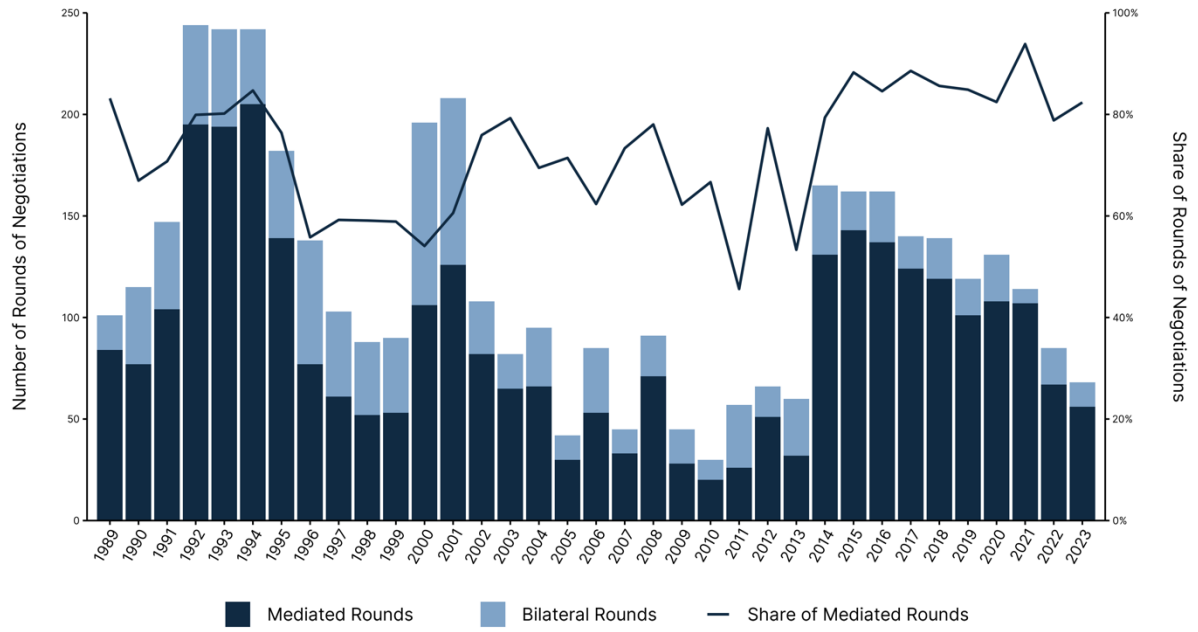


Data on mediation comes from the Peace Observatory and data on active conflict dyads comes from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).

At the level of negotiation rounds, Figure 4 below reveals two peaks in mediation activity: the early 1990s and again between 2014 and 2018. The latter corresponds with heightened international engagement in conflicts such as those in Libya, South Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen, and Syria. Figure 4 (below) shows that a significant proportion of all rounds of negotiations in active intrastate conflicts is mediated by third parties. Together with Figure 3 (above), it reveals the tendency of (international) mediators to focus on a couple of conflicts but, once involved, engage strongly in the peace processes, as reflected in many rounds of negotiations. While mediated rounds declined again after 2018, they remain more frequent than during the late 1990s and early 2010s. Moreover, recent years show a growing share of mediated talks, indicating increasing reliance on third-party involvement as a standard feature of peacemaking.

Accordingly, by focusing on individual negotiation rounds, the Peace Observatory allows researchers to go beyond binary classifications of conflicts as "mediated" or "not mediated". It enables a more nuanced understanding of how frequently, when, and in what capacity mediators are engaged over the course of a peace process.

Figure 4: Mediated and Bilateral Rounds of Negotiations in Active Intrastate Conflict Dyads



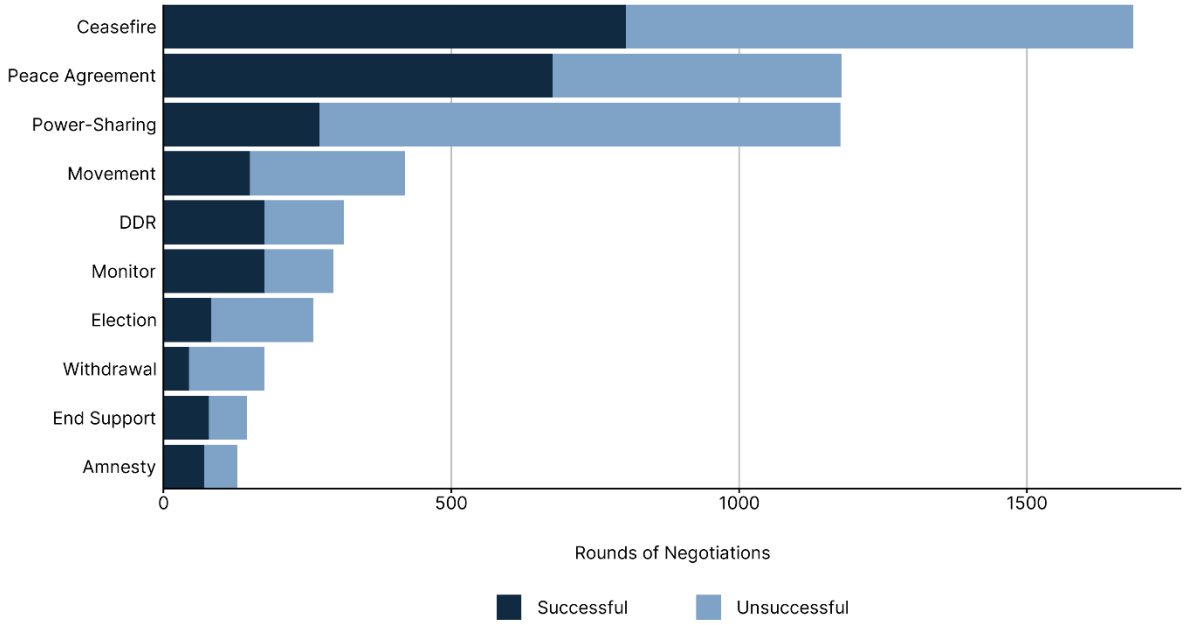
Outcomes of Peace Negotiations

Peace negotiations can produce a wide spectrum of outcomes, ranging from limited concessions on specific issues to temporary ceasefires and comprehensive peace agreements. To capture this diversity, the Peace Observatory records whether a round of negotiations achieved its stated goal, and, if an agreement was concluded, what type of agreement it was.

For each round, the dataset codes whether parties made tangible progress on the issue under negotiation. For example, if the objective was to reach an agreement on amnesty, the outcome is considered successful only if the parties explicitly agreed to an amnesty provision. However, this agreement between parties must not necessarily occur in the form of a written and formal peace agreement. The bar chart in Figure 5 below illustrates the success rate of negotiation rounds in intrastate conflicts between 1989 and 2023, disaggregated by topic. It shows how

frequently specific issues were successfully negotiated, relative to how often they were discussed.

Figure 5: Succes in Negotiation of Topics in Intrastate Conflicts



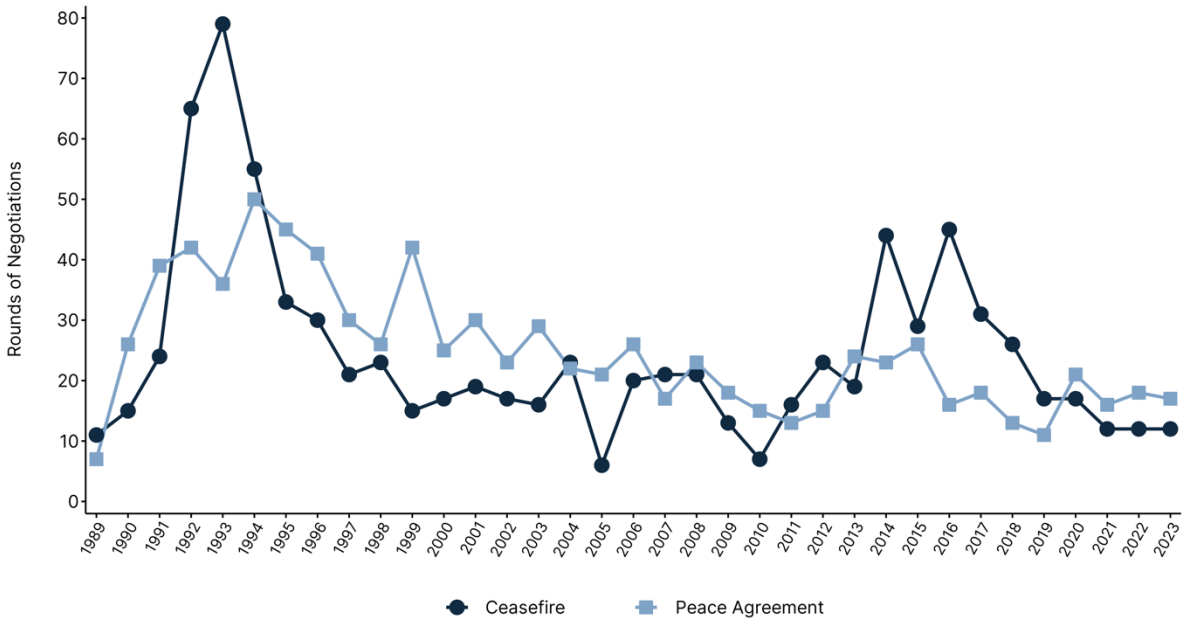
Ceasefires are the most frequently negotiated topic but only with tangible progress in about half of the cases. The conclusion of peace agreements appears to be more successfully negotiated once explicitly addressed. Likewise, issues of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), as well as monitoring arrangements, show relatively high success rates. By contrast, topics such as power-sharing, elections, or the withdrawal of foreign troops often prove more contentious and yield lower rates of agreement – likely due to their complex political implications or the high stakes involved.

In addition to tracking outcomes by topic, the Peace Observatory also distinguishes between different types of agreements. Two broad categories are ceasefire agreements and peace agreements, with the latter disaggregated into three subtypes: process or partial agreements, final agreements, and implementation agreements.

The line chart in Figure 6 below presents the number of negotiation rounds in intrastate conflicts that resulted in either a ceasefire or a peace agreement between 1989 and 2023. Two distinct peaks emerge: the first in the early 1990s, during the post-Cold War surge in

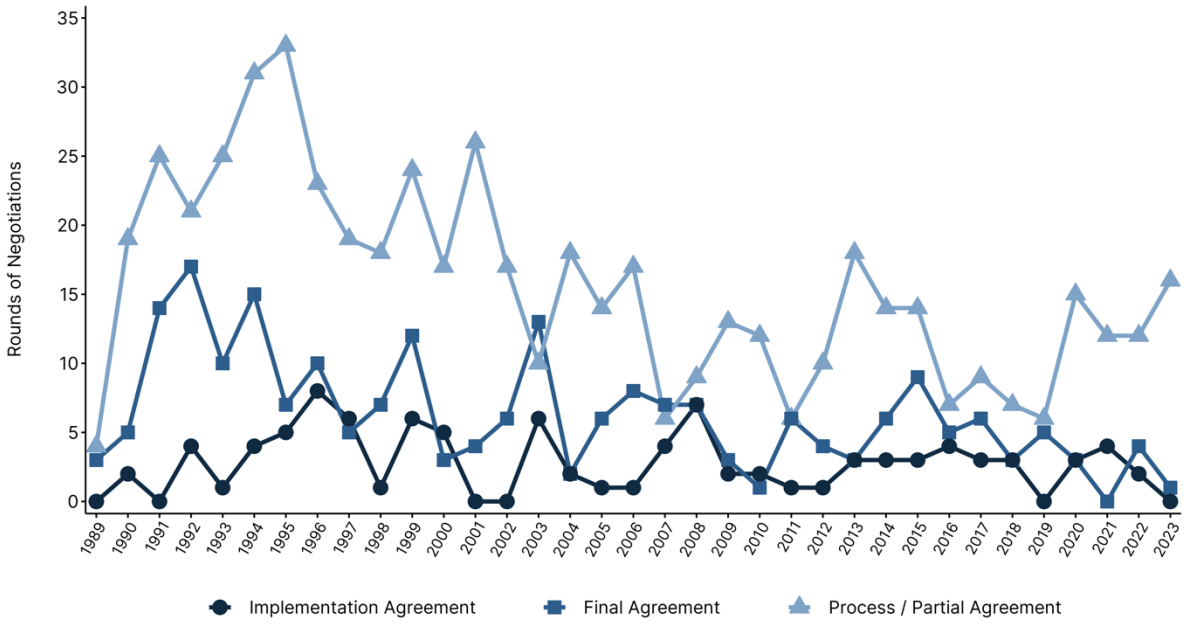
international peacemaking, and the second between 2014 and 2017, when conflicts such as those in Syria, South Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen saw intensive negotiation efforts. In both periods, ceasefire agreements outnumbered peace agreements, reflecting their role as steppingstones in protracted conflicts.

Figure 6: Rounds of Negotiations Ending with an Agreement in Intrastate Conflicts



Disaggregating peace agreements reveals important trends. It follows from Figure 7 below that process and partial agreements – those aimed at resolving specific issues or outlining future steps – are the most common and have again become more prominent in recent years. This shift suggests a growing reliance on incremental approaches to peacemaking, particularly in fragmented conflicts where comprehensive settlements are difficult to achieve (Karakus and Svensson, 2017). Final agreements – intended to resolve the conflict in its entirety – remain relatively rare and have declined since the mid-2010s. This highlights the persistent challenge of achieving comprehensive peace, especially in contexts with complex actor constellations and high levels of mistrust. Implementation agreements, which confirm or operationalize prior accords, are the least frequent.

Figure 7: Rounds of Negotiations Ending with a Peace Agreement in Intrastate Conflicts



Together, these patterns underscore an important insight: peace processes increasingly rely on step-by-step progress rather than a single, definitive agreement. This reflects a broader shift in the practice of peacemaking toward gradual, adaptive strategies. The Peace Observatory's round-level data allows researchers and practitioners to track these developments in detail. Beyond describing trends of peace negotiations, the dataset enables researchers to examine factors and mechanisms that drive these developments. In the next section, we will use the Peace Observatory to explore how the involvement of autocratic states as mediators affects negotiation outcomes.

Data Application: Exploring the Outcomes of Autocratic Mediation

Mediation by autocratic states has gained attention in recent years. Several observers point to a rise in mediation by such actors (Lewis et al., 2018; Lewis, 2022; Costantini and Hanau Santini, 2022; Hellmüller and Salaymeh, 2025), with former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker going as far as to claim that "democracies aren't the peacemakers anymore" (Crocker, 2024). The Peace Observatory data allows us to explore this claim.

To identify whether a third-party mediator is an autocracy or democracy, we rely on the V-Dem dataset's classification of regime types (Coppedge et al., 2025). V-Dem differentiates

between four regime types based on "the de-facto implementation of democratic institutions and processes" (Lührmann et al., 2018: 60). In closed autocracies, elections are either non-existent or uncompetitive (Lührmann et al., 2018). In electoral autocracies, multiparty elections are held but fail to meet democratic standards. In electoral democracies, there are free and fair multiparty elections, but insufficient institutional safeguards. Finally, in liberal democracies, free and fair elections are accompanied by strong legislative and judicial oversight, civil liberties, and rule of law. We collapse these four regime types into two, namely autocracy and democracy.

Figure 8 shows that the participation of autocratic states in rounds of negotiations has remained relatively stable over time, generally fluctuating between 20% and 35%, with one peak above 40% in 2018. The share of negotiation rounds featuring democratic involvement tends to be similar to that featuring autocratic involvement, while involvement by both regime types (mixed mediation) has almost consistently been lower. Generally, autocratic states mediating is nothing new.

Figure 8: Share of Rounds of Negotiations Where At Least One Autocracy and/or Democracy Acts as a Mediator

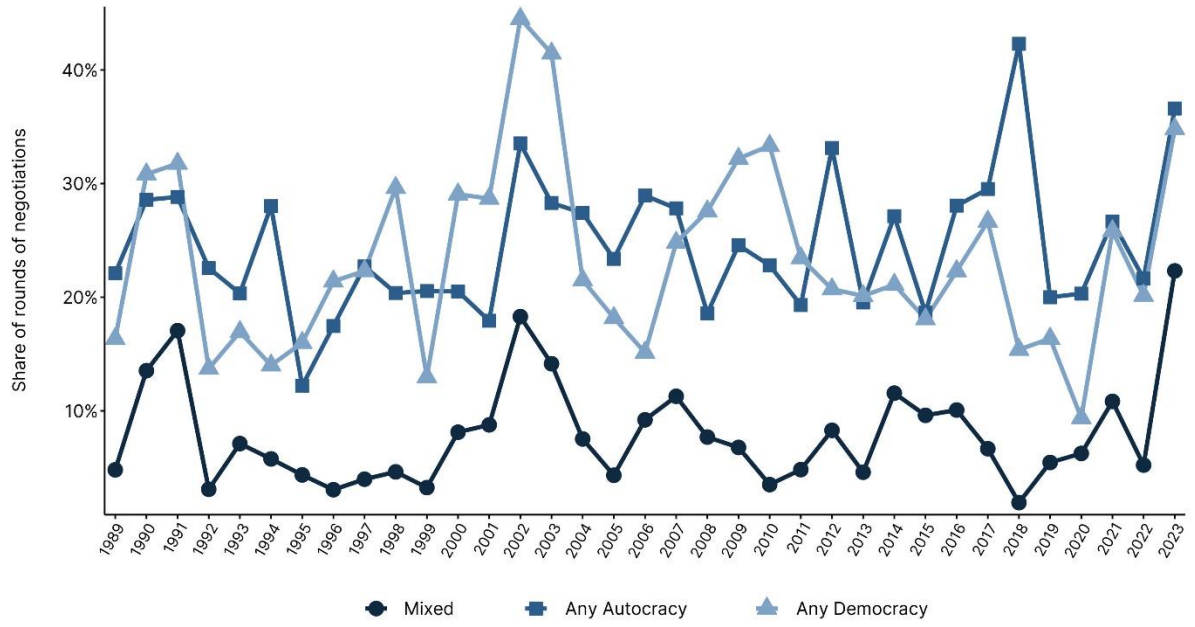
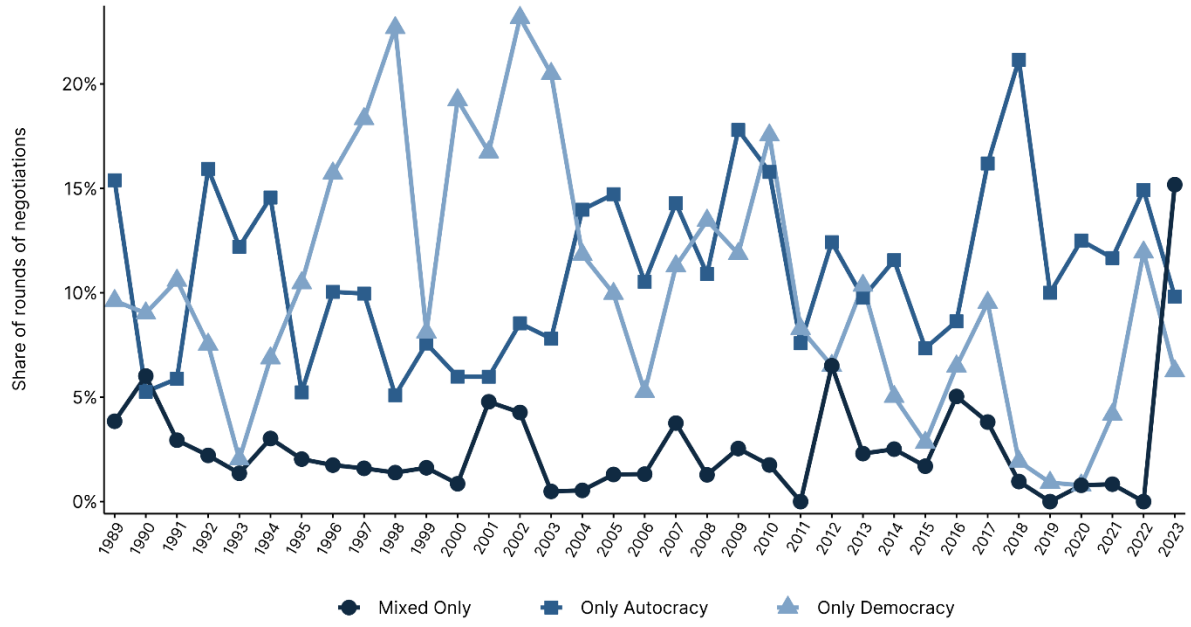


Figure 9 below shows the share of negotiation rounds where only autocracies, only democracies, or only a mix of both acted as mediators. The figure reveals that autocracies have consistently been involved in mediation without the involvement of a democratic state or other types of mediators, particularly from the mid-1990s onward, with several peaks around or above 15% and a notable surge after 2015. In contrast, the share of rounds mediated only by democracies has declined since the early 2000s and has largely remained below the share of rounds mediated only by autocracies since. Mixed mediation, where both autocratic and democratic states are present in the same round, remains relatively rare throughout the time period, though it has seen an uptick in 2023 due to joint mediation efforts by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States in the conflict between the Israeli government and Hamas.

Figure 9: Share of Rounds of Negotiations Where Only Autocracies and/or Democracies Act as Mediators



Turning to how often certain autocratic states have been involved in mediation, Figure 10 ranks autocratic states by their total number of mediated negotiation rounds between 1989 and 2023. The data reveal a small group of highly active autocratic mediators, led by Russia – by far the most prolific – with over 400 rounds. Egypt, Ethiopia, and Uganda also stand out with sustained engagement across multiple peace processes.

Figure 10: Number of Negotiation Rounds Mediated by Autocratic States

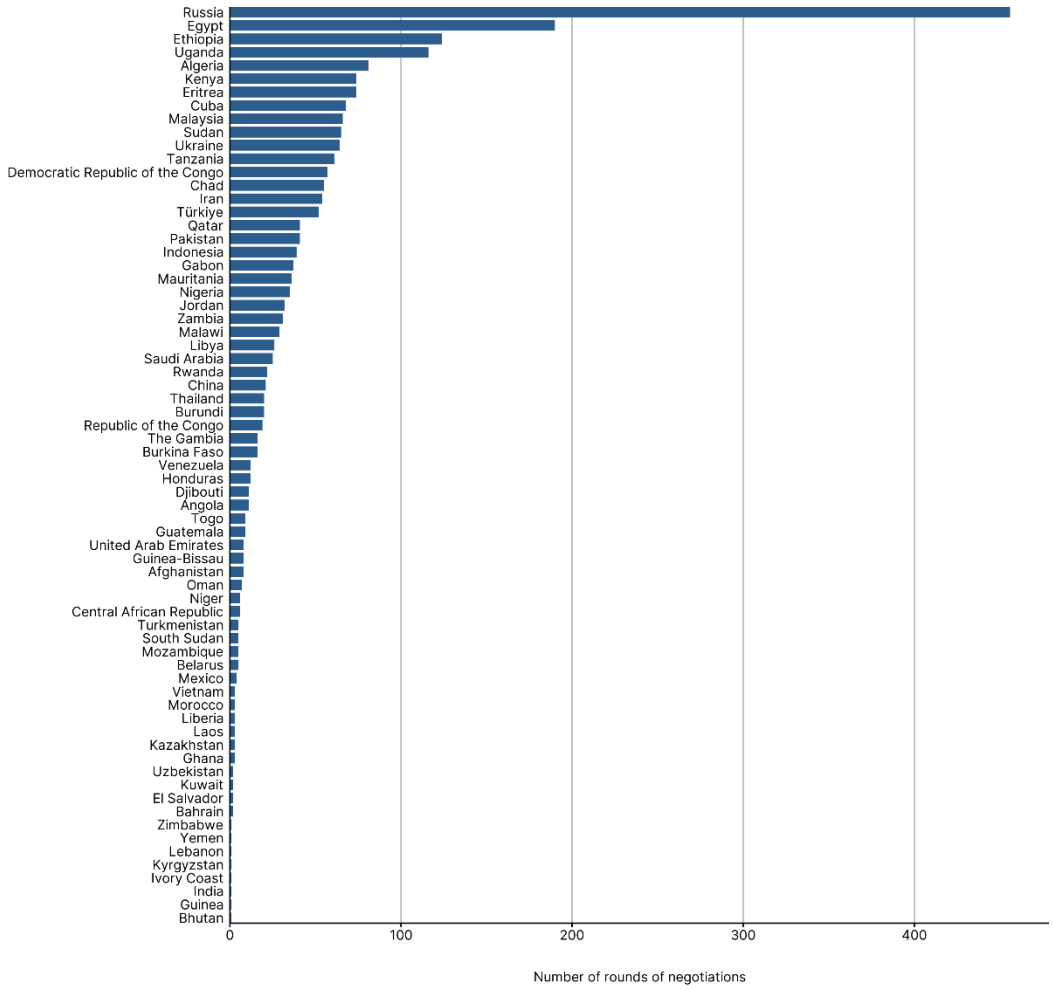
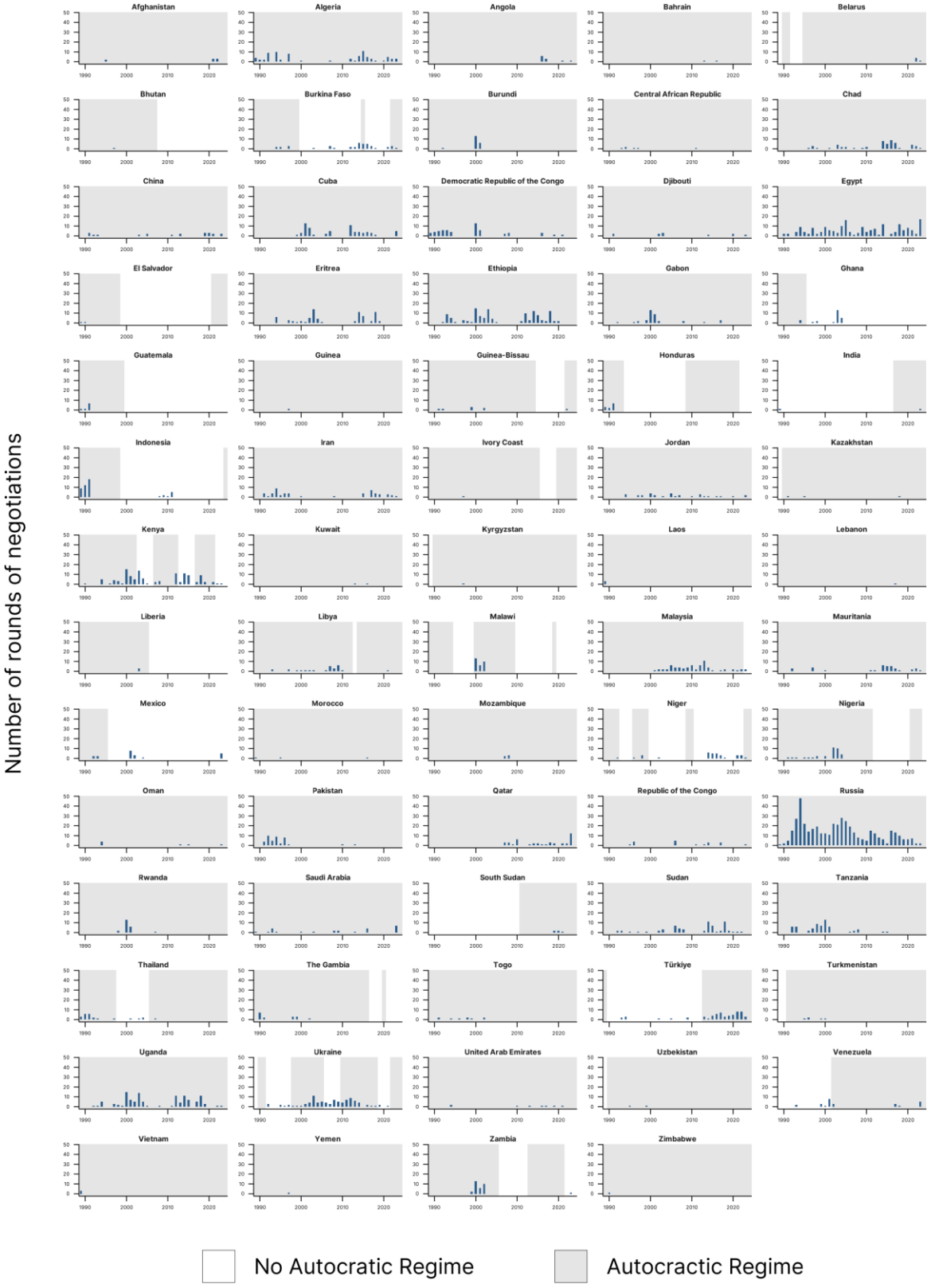


Figure 11 disaggregates these trends over time, displaying the annual frequency of mediated rounds of negotiations for each autocratic mediator. The figure includes all states that experienced autocratic rule at any time between 1989 and 2023 and mediated at least one round of negotiations under this autocratic regime. Several states, including Russia, Egypt, and Ethiopia, show consistent involvement over extended periods, underscoring the strategic and institutional nature of their mediation roles. Crucially, the data somewhat challenges the narrative of a significant rise in "new" autocratic mediators. While countries such as Qatar, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran have become more active in recent years, their overall involvement remains limited, or at the very least relatively similar, when compared to the consistently high levels of mediation by states like Russia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Uganda.

Figure 11: Annual Frequency of Mediated Rounds of Negotiations by Autocratic States



Having provided descriptive statistics on the involvement of autocratic states in mediation, we now examine how this involvement is associated with mediation outcomes. Relatively few previous quantitative studies have examined how autocratic third parties influence mediation outcomes. A partial exception is a study by Crescenzi et al. in which they examine the effect of regime type based on the Polity data series, arguing that "the transparency and oversight of democratic political systems disciplines democratic mediators to remain honest," which means they are "an attractive option for conflict resolution and can successfully help the parties reach a peaceful settlement" (Crescenzi et al., 2011: 1075). However, in this study – which focuses on contentious issues between states such as territorial, river, or maritime disputes – Crescenzi et al. (2011) find that while more democratic states are significantly more likely to be accepted for mediation, they are associated with a smaller likelihood of the conclusion of an agreement. Interestingly, this significant negative association between the level of democracy and the conclusion of an agreement only holds in the full sample but disappears when restricting the sample to disputes in the western hemisphere.

Instead of focusing on the level of democracy, we focus on the involvement of autocratic mediators, relying on the V-Dem dataset's classification of regime types (Coppedge et al., 2025). Specifically, we examine how instances of *any autocratic mediation*, where an autocracy is mediating alone or among multiple mediators, influence outcomes of mediation. As an additional exploration, we split the *any autocratic mediation* category into *only autocratic mediation* and *autocratic co-mediation*. Only autocratic mediation refers to instances where only an autocratic state or a group of autocratic states are involved in mediation, whereas autocratic co-mediation refers to instances where an autocratic state or a group of autocratic states are involved in mediation alongside non-autocratic mediators.

In all models, we control for key contextual factors that may influence mediation dynamics and negotiation outcomes. These include whether the conflict concerns territory (Davies et al., 2024), the number of battle-related deaths recorded in the 12 months before the round of negotiations started (Davies et al., 2024), conflict duration (Davies et al., 2024), the presence of foreign troops supporting the conflict parties (Davies et al., 2024), UN peacekeeping deployment (Hellmüller et al., 2023), and the number of prior negotiation rounds. Furthermore, we include conflict fixed effects in some of the models. The use of fixed effects controls for unobserved, conflict-specific characteristics – such as the nature of the conflict – which might otherwise obscure this pattern. Since all our outcome variables are binary, we employ logistic

regression models with robust standard errors clustered at the conflict level to account for the non-independence of negotiation rounds within the same conflict.

In the first part of this analysis, we use the Peace Observatory data to examine whether a negotiated agreement – either a ceasefire or peace agreement – is concluded during a round of negotiations involving the primary conflict parties.[2] Since our focus is on negotiations involving the primary conflict parties, we exclude one-sided negotiations where the mediator meets with only one of the conflict parties, as well as negotiations in which external states that support the conflict parties replace one or both of the primary conflict parties. Rather than focusing on territorial, river, or maritime disputes like Crescenzi et al. (2011), we focus on all intrastate and interstate conflicts between 1989 and 2023 as identified by the UCDP. Moreover, rather than taking a dispute as the unit of analysis, we take the round of negotiations as unit of analysis.

Nevertheless, in line with the study by Crescenzi et al. (2011), we find a positive and significant association between autocratic mediation and the conclusion of a negotiated settlement across all models in Table 1.

Table 1: Logit Estimates on the Conclusion of a Negotiated Settlement

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Any Autocratic Mediation	0.573***	0.576***	0.650***	0.519*
	(0.183)	(0.187)	(0.165)	(0.287)
Constant	-1.004***	-0.838***	0.0343	0.176
	(0.192)	(0.191)	(0.208)	(0.331)
Observations	6,227	4,499	2,251	919
Wald chi2	134.23***	97.25***	131.45***	166.89***
Control Variables	yes	yes	yes	yes
Fixed Effects	no	no	no	no
Sample Restriction	full sample	negotiation phase	negotiation phase & goal is agreement	negotiation phase, goal is agreement & state mediation

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at the conflict level. Control variables: conflict duration (months), territorial conflict, external troop support, fatalities in prior 12 months, number of prior negotiation rounds, and UN peacekeeping presence. *significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

[2] We exclude temporary ceasefires and peace process agreements that are solely aimed at reaching agreement on how to resolve the conflict.

In Model 1, where we look at the full sample of negotiations involving both primary conflict parties, we find that the involvement of an autocratic third party in a round of negotiations is associated with a higher likelihood that a negotiated settlement is concluded. All else equal, the probability of a negotiated settlement grows from 11.7% when no autocratic state is involved as a mediator in a round of negotiations to 18.5% when an autocratic third party is involved. In Model 2, where we restrict the sample to the negotiation phase – thus excluding prenegotiations and negotiations aimed at the implementation of an agreement – this probability grows from 14.8% to 22.9%.

It thus follows from Model 1 and Model 2 that the involvement of an autocratic third party is associated with a higher probability of a negotiated settlement compared to the absence of an autocratic third party. Yet an important concern remains: are autocratic mediators truly more effective, or simply more motivated to reach agreements? To address this, we leverage data from the Peace Observatory on the topic of each negotiation round. Using this information allows us to restrict the analysis to rounds where the explicit goal was to conclude a negotiated settlement, either a ceasefire agreement or a peace agreement. This approach isolates the effect of autocratic leverage from variation in mediator intent. If autocratic mediators' effectiveness stems primarily from their leverage rather than their motivation, the effect should persist even when limiting the analysis to rounds where conflict parties or mediators are trying to achieve an agreement. When doing this in Model 3, we indeed still find a significant and positive association between the involvement of an autocratic third party and the conclusion of a negotiated settlement. The substantive effect is also considerable, increasing the probability of a negotiated settlement from 29.8% to 43.2%.

In Model 4, we not only restrict the sample to the negotiation phase and negotiations aimed at concluding an agreement, but we also restrict the sample to negotiations in which at least one state was involved in mediation. This means that the reference category in Model 4 is mediation by at least one democratic state, possibly alongside other types of mediators but not an autocratic state. Again, we find that the involvement of an autocratic state is positively associated with the probability of a negotiated settlement, yet the statistical significance is reduced to the 10% level. Based on Model 4, we find that, all else equal, the probability of a negotiated settlement grows from 32.9% to 43.9% when an autocratic state becomes involved in mediation.

We use the same sample restrictions in Table 2 but further differentiate between *only autocratic mediation*, where all third-parties involved in mediation are autocratic states, and *autocratic*

co-mediation, where autocratic mediators are involved alongside non-autocratic actors. Across models 5-7, both types of autocratic involvement are positively associated with the likelihood that a negotiated settlement is concluded. However, in Model 8, where we compare only autocratic mediation and autocratic co-mediation to mediation efforts in which at least one democratic and no autocratic state is involved, the statistical significance of autocratic co-mediation disappears. Further research is needed to examine this, but one explanation for the difference between Model 8 and the previous models could be that mediation by states in general, regardless of regime type, is more likely to lead to the conclusion of a negotiated settlement. Since the reference group includes a high number of negotiations in which no states are involved in mediation, this could drive the significance in models 5-7.

Importantly, using a Wald test, the differences between the coefficients for only autocratic mediation and autocratic co-mediation are not statistically significant in any of the models. Moreover, the substantive effects of only autocratic mediation and autocratic co-mediation are comparable in magnitude. For instance, in Model 7, the predicted probability of a negotiated settlement increases from 32.0% to 45.3% with only autocratic mediation, and from 31.7% to 45.4% with autocratic co-mediation. This suggests that autocratic mediators may be effective whether they act alone or in conjunction with other non-autocratic mediators.

Table 2: Logit Estimates on the Conclusion of a Negotiated Settlement

VARIABLES	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Only Autocratic Mediation	0.660***	0.640***	0.640***	0.543**
	(0.163)	(0.177)	(0.170)	(0.254)
Autocratic Co-Mediation	0.502**	0.522**	0.659**	0.496
	(0.250)	(0.253)	(0.262)	(0.376)
Constant	-1.003***	-0.836***	0.0340	0.177
	(0.191)	(0.191)	(0.209)	(0.332)
Observations	6,227	4,499	2,251	919
Wald chi2	137.91***	99.66***	132.22***	169.27***
Control Variables	yes	yes	yes	yes
Fixed Effects	no	no	no	no
Sample Restriction	full sample	negotiation phase	negotiation phase & goal is agreement	negotiation phase, goal is agreement & state mediation

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at the conflict level. Control variables: conflict duration (months), territorial conflict, external troop support, fatalities in prior 12 months, number of prior negotiation rounds, and UN peacekeeping presence. *significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

In Table 3 and Table 4, we replicate all models from Table 1 and Table 2 respectively, with the only difference being that we include conflict fixed effects. We do this to account for unobserved heterogeneity across conflicts that may influence both the type of mediators involved and the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. By controlling for time-invariant characteristics at the conflict level – such as the underlying conflict issues, historical grievances, or regional dynamics – we aim to better isolate the association between autocratic mediation and the conclusion of negotiated settlements. The results remain largely consistent with those presented in Table 1 and Table 2. In Models 9 to 11, the variable capturing any autocratic mediation continues to show a positive and statistically significant relationship with the conclusion of a negotiated settlement, even after accounting for conflict-level fixed effects. However, the statistical significance disappears in Model 12.

Table 3: Logit Estimates on the Conclusion of a Negotiated Settlement

VARIABLES	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Any Autocratic Mediation	0.595***	0.552***	0.498**	0.475
	(0.211)	(0.213)	(0.211)	(0.403)
Constant	0.207	0.539	-0.872***	-1.984**
	(0.447)	(0.531)	(0.296)	(0.849)
Observations	5,765	4,109	2,130	829
Pseudo R2	0.1769	0.1559	0.1986	0.1812
Control Variables	yes	yes	yes	yes
Fixed Effects	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sample Restriction	full sample	negotiation phase	negotiation phase & goal is agreement	negotiation phase, goal is agreement & state mediation

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at the conflict level. Control variables: conflict duration (months), territorial conflict, external troop support, fatalities in prior 12 months, number of prior negotiation rounds, and UN peacekeeping presence. *significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

It follows from Table 4 that when including conflict fixed effects, the statistical significance of autocratic co-mediation is reduced to the 10% level in Model 13 and Model 14, and disappears in Model 15. Moreover, while the effect of only autocratic mediation still was significant at the 10% level in Model 8, the statistical significance of only autocratic mediation also disappears in Model 16. Since Model 16 is based on a sample restricted to state mediation, this suggests that outcomes associated with only autocratic mediation do not differ significantly from those associated with mediation by at least a democratic state when unobserved, conflict-specific

characteristics are taken into account. This could point to the weak significant results in Model 8 in Table 2 being driven by selection effects – specifically, that autocracies tend to engage in mediation without other types of third parties in conflicts that are already more conducive to the conclusion of a negotiated settlement. More research is thus needed in this regard.

It is further important to note that the difference between only autocratic mediation and autocratic co-mediation is not statistically significant in any of the models in Table 4. This indicates that, even under stricter sample restrictions and fixed effects, there is no clear evidence that rounds involving autocratic states as co-mediators differ systematically from those where autocratic states mediate alone. Yet, as Model 15 indicates, in rounds pursuing the goal of concluding an agreement, the coefficient for mediation by only autocratic states remains significant while the coefficient for autocratic co-mediation loses significance. This might suggest that autocratic states possess specific leverage to conclude agreements, which they can apply most consistently when the mediator or the mediation team is exclusively autocratic.

Table 4: Logit Estimates on the Conclusion of a Negotiated Settlement

VARIABLES	Model 13	Model 14	Model 15	Model 16
Only Autocratic Mediation	0.658***	0.599***	0.540**	0.489
	(0.155)	(0.184)	(0.218)	(0.353)
Autocratic Co-Mediation	0.540*	0.512*	0.463	0.465
	(0.307)	(0.298)	(0.318)	(0.503)
Constant	0.248	0.571	-0.880***	-1.994**
	(0.444)	(0.503)	(0.300)	(0.919)
Observations	5,765	4,109	2,130	829
Pseudo R2	0.1770	0.1560	0.1986	0.1812
Control Variables	yes	yes	yes	yes
Fixed Effects	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sample Restriction	full sample	negotiation phase	negotiation phase & goal is agreement	negotiation phase, goal is agreement & state mediation

Note: Robust standard errors clustered at the conflict level. Control variables: conflict duration (months), territorial conflict, external troop support, fatalities in prior 12 months, number of prior negotiation rounds, and UN peacekeeping presence. *significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

While the conclusion of a negotiated settlement is a key moment in a peace process, it does not automatically lead to a termination of armed fighting. Accordingly, our last analysis focuses on the durability of concluded agreements. Specifically, to assess whether autocratic mediation influences the longevity of peace, we analyze the durability of negotiated settlements using

Cox proportional hazards models. The dependent variable in these models measures the number of days between the signing of an agreement and its breakdown, operationalized as the point at which cumulative conflict-related fatalities since the signing of the agreement reach or exceed a certain threshold of battle-related deaths. We run models where this threshold is set to 1, 25, or 100 deaths. Agreements that do not meet this failure criterion by 31 December 2023 are right-censored.

Table 5 reports the results of two Cox models. In models 17, 19, and 21, we include a binary indicator for whether any autocratic state was involved in mediation. In models 18, 20, and 22, we differentiate between mediation conducted solely by autocratic states and autocratic co-mediation. Models 17 and 18 show the results for the 1 battle-related death threshold, models 19 and 20 for the 25 battle-related deaths threshold, and models 21 and 22 for the 100 battle-related deaths threshold. The proportional hazards assumption holds in models 17, 21, and 22, but not in Model 19. In models 18 and 20, the assumption holds for only autocratic mediation, but not for the autocratic co-mediation. The table reports hazard coefficients, where a positive value indicates a higher risk of agreement failure – that is, a shorter duration before a ceasefire or peace agreement collapses. Since there is such strong agreement across models – including those where the proportional hazards assumption holds – we still interpret the coefficients of the different models, albeit cautiously for Model 19. The results suggest that autocratic mediation is associated with less durable settlements. In models 17, 19, and 21, the coefficient for any autocratic mediation is positive and statistically significant, indicating that the involvement of an autocratic third party increases the hazard of agreement failure.

Models 18, 20, and 21 disaggregate this effect further: agreements mediated solely by autocratic states are significantly more likely to collapse than agreements resulting from negotiations without an autocratic mediator. Autocratic co-mediation shows no significant association with the risk of breakdown in any of these models, including Model 22 where the proportional hazards assumption holds only for the autocratic co-mediation variable. This means that compared to agreements in which no autocratic states are involved in mediation, agreements where only autocratic states are involved are generally at a greater risk of breaking down. This seems not to be the case for autocratic co-mediation. Moreover, the difference between only autocratic mediation and autocratic co-mediation is statistically significant in Model 22.

Table 5: Cox Proportional Hazards on the Durability of Negotiated Settlements

VARIABLES	Model 17	Model 18	Model 19	Model 20	Model 21	Model 22
Any Autocratic Mediation	0.228***		0.181*		0.228**	
	(0.0850)		(0.0947)		(0.104)	
Only Autocratic Mediation		0.461***		0.457***		0.539***
		(0.108)		(0.117)		(0.126)
Autocratic Co-Mediation		0.0517		-0.0624		-0.0597
		(0.105)		(0.122)		(0.136)
Observations	847	847	847	847	847	847
LR chi2	134.73***	144.57***	122.66***	135.29***	121.42***	135.54***
Control Variables	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Fixed Effects	no	no	no	no	no	no
Sample Restriction	agreements	agreements	agreements	agreements	agreements	agreements
Threshold	1 Death	1 Death	25 Deaths	25 Deaths	100 Deaths	100 Deaths

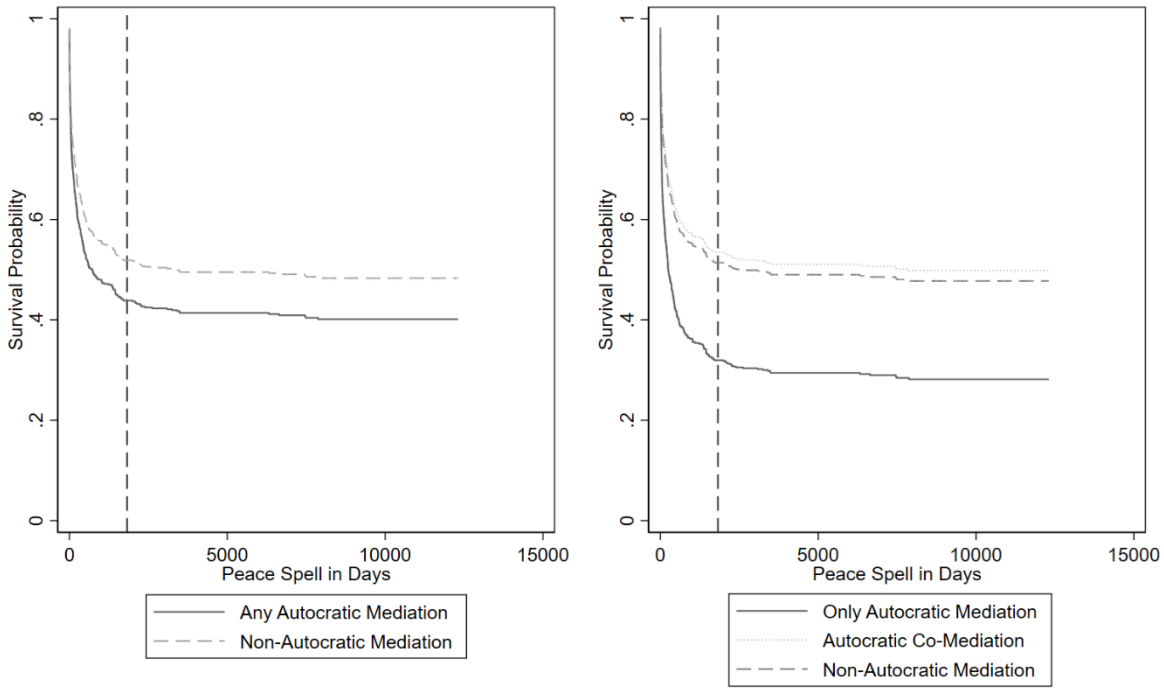
Note: Control variables: conflict duration (months), territorial conflict, external troop support, fatalities in prior 12 months, number of prior negotiation rounds, and UN peacekeeping presence. *significant at 10%; **significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.

Figure 12 visualizes these results by displaying survival curves of models 21 and 22. These are our preferred models to display because they show the effect for the occurrence of a significant escalation in violence and because both these models meet the proportional hazards assumption. Based on Model 21, the left panel shows that the survival probability of agreements mediated by autocratic states declines more rapidly over time, indicating that such mediators are associated with shorter-lived peace. The vertical reference line at 1,825 days marks the five-year benchmark. It follows from the graph that after roughly five years, only 44% of agreements concluded involving any autocratic mediator are expected to remain intact, compared to 52% of those without autocratic involvement.

An even starker pattern emerges when comparing only autocratic mediation, autocratic co-mediation, and no autocratic mediation in the right panel. This comparison is based on Model 22. The first thing to note is that the survival probabilities of agreements concluded through autocratic co-mediation and those mediated exclusively by non-autocratic third parties are very similar. The graph further shows that only around 32% of agreements mediated solely by autocratic states are expected to survive beyond five years, compared to 53% of those co-mediated by autocratic states and 51% of those mediated exclusively by non-autocratic actors. This suggests that the risk of peace agreement collapse is substantially higher when autocratic

states mediate alone. This could reflect a prioritization of short-term bargains over long-term governance arrangements, or a lack of sustained engagement to support agreement implementation. It could, however, also be an artifact of autocratic states mediating in more intractable conflicts where sustaining peace is inherently more difficult. Again, more research is needed on this.

Figure 12: Survivor Function Estimates on the Duration of Negotiated Settlements



In short, using the Peace Observatory, we demonstrate that autocracies have long played a prominent role in mediation. Our preliminary evidence suggests that autocratic third parties are significantly more likely to bring about a negotiated settlement, even when accounting for mediator intent and conflict characteristics. However, this finding disappears when restricting the sample to state-based mediation, thus comparing autocratic mediation directly to mediation by democratic states without the involvement of autocratic states. This suggests that the findings could be driven by the leverage of states in general rather than specifically autocratic mediation. Alternatively, it could be due to a smaller sample size. Regardless, the data application demonstrates how the Peace Observatory data on negotiation phases and the goal of the negotiations allows for additional checks to assess the robustness of the findings.

Furthermore, the findings also become weaker when including conflict fixed effects in the models, suggesting that some of the findings could be driven by autocratic mediators selecting into conflicts more favorable towards the conclusion of a negotiated settlement.

Crucially, the leverage of autocratic states seems to come at a cost: agreements mediated solely by autocracies are less durable. Survival analysis reveals they are more likely to break down, potentially pointing to a focus on short-term stability over lasting peace. Hence, the insights derived from the analysis in this article already underscore the value of the Peace Observatory data in understanding how mediation shapes peace outcomes.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the data application in this introduction article is correlational and cannot establish causation. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind these patterns. For instance, autocratic mediators may be more effective at concluding agreements because they often possess stronger leverage, face fewer domestic constraints, and may be perceived as less intrusive by certain conflict parties. At the same time, their lower emphasis on inclusive governance and democratic reforms could explain why the agreements they help broker are more prone to breakdown. Generally, more research is needed on what drives the findings – such as whether autocracies select into more ripe conflicts, or whether their style of mediation prioritizes elite bargains over broad-based buy-in.

Conclusion

This article introduced the Peace Observatory, a new global dataset that disaggregates over 11,000 rounds of negotiations across interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts from 1989 to 2023. By collecting data at the level of individual negotiation rounds, the Peace Observatory enables researchers to examine the step-by-step evolution of peace processes, including the sequencing of issues, the timing of mediation efforts, and the shifting priorities of conflict parties and mediators. This round-level granularity opens new avenues for comparative and process-oriented conflict resolution research.

To illustrate the analytical potential of the dataset, the article examined how the involvement of autocratic states in mediation shapes negotiation outcomes. The findings suggest that involvement of autocratic states makes the conclusion of a negotiated settlement more likely, though more research is needed on potential selection effects. At the same time, agreements concluded in negotiations in which autocratic states are involved seem to break down more quickly, especially if no other type of third party is involved in mediation alongside autocracies.

Overall, the Peace Observatory supports a more fine-grained analysis of peace processes. Future research can build on this foundation to explore how different forms of mediation, sequencing strategies, and negotiation designs affect the prospects for sustained peace.

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