Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalised Political Unsettlement

Christine Bell, Jan Pospisil
University of Edinburgh

- Re-working political settlements to be more inclusive is central to peace processes – yet, **two forms of inclusion** often seem to have different needs: **horizontal inclusion** between elites, and **broader social inclusion** of a wide set of groups and interests.

- The term political settlement is often used by development actors as a way of emphasising the importance of understanding basis of power relationships within a country, so as to better shape interventions. We suggest that it is useful to keep the concept connected to **common sense understandings** of what a political settlement implies. Our purpose is to address the crucial question of how best to create inclusive political settlements that is realistic about the constraints but imaginative about possible entry points for inclusion.

- We contrast **political settlement** as in the steady-state operation of formal and informal political institutions, with **political unsettlement** as in situations of violent conflict where power is seldom transferred peacefully. We view these situations as on a spectrum.

- We argue that often peace processes achieve not a political settlement in any meaningful sense, but a state of ‘**formalised political unsettlement**’.

- Formalised political unsettlements are situations where the peace processes **institutionalises disagreement** into a set of agreed political and legal structures that lead to perpetual ‘transition’ characterised by no war-no peace experiences, and
ongoing contestation about the nature of the state, played out through its formal institutions

- **‘Formalised political unsettlement’ has four key characteristics:**
  - Its political and legal constitutional frameworks contain conflict (instead of solving it);
  - despite being temporary and exceptional in nature, it is in practice long-lasting;
  - it is a genuinely ‘glocal’ configuration, with multipolar sources of authority and legitimacy sometimes referencing local consent, and sometimes compliance with international standards;
  - it is characterised by enduring transition and permanent ‘unsettledness’ and need to renegotiate rather than change things through normal political processes.

- We suggest that the formalised political unsettlement is here to stay and suggest that while it prioritises horizontal elite inclusion often at the expense of a social contract, it is worth trying to explore its potential entry-points for navigating a more broad-based inclusive outcome.

- **Four key characteristics have some potential:**
  - institutional arrangements are fluid and focused on group accommodation: this can offer space for including previously excluded groups in ways that ‘pure’ liberal democracy cannot;
  - the need for perpetual reform can create moments of opportunity for example for women;
  - reference points remain multipolar, international, national and local visions can hold each other in check and stop them from being pursued in selfish self-interested directions;
  - contestation remains at the heart of the political order – no default position ‘wins’ and this is often the only basis for political equality.

- Understanding and navigating inclusion within the ‘formalised political unsettlement’ is a project which aims to work with the realpolitik of peace processes, while not giving up on claims of inclusion. It provides a useful starting point for understanding entry points useful to pushing the formalised political unsettlement to be more inclusive and transformative than it is set up to be.

*Through the political settlement research programme ([www.politicalsettlements.org](http://www.politicalsettlements.org)), we aim to explore how those in conflict situations navigate and push the formalised political unsettlement.*