

# COVID-19 and Peace in Conflict-Affected Areas

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The relationship between COVID-19 and peace has been considered from a variety of perspectives. In addition, different empirical studies on the link between the pandemic and peace in conflict-affected areas exist. However, little work has been performed on examining these studies to highlight key findings on the theme of COVID-19 and peace in conflict-affected areas. A conflict-affected area is a country, or part of a country, where widespread violence or armed conflict was present when COVID-19 emerged in December 2019, or that was transitioning from recent armed conflict to peace by the time the disease arose. What do we know, so far, about how peace has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in conflict-affected areas? To address this question, this paper begins by recognizing the multidimensionality of peace and clarifying that the main aspects of peace in conflict-affected areas being considered in the article are relations between conflict parties, peace efforts, and peace processes. Afterwards, the paper discusses existing evidence regarding the impact of COVID-19 and state responses to it on these components of peace in conflict-affected areas. The conflict-affected areas considered include Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, the Philippines, Yemen, and other zones. The central finding of the article is that the existing studies on COVID-19 and peace in conflict-affected areas present mixed findings. On the one hand, the virus generated opportunities for cooperation between conflict parties in some cases, such as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip of Israel-Palestine. However, on the other hand, it created conditions that enabled conflict and impeded peace efforts and processes in many or most conflict-affected areas. The paper explains that two factors that determined how the disease affected peace in conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected areas are the pre-COVID-19 political and socio-economic conditions in an area, and how state and non-state actors responded to the pandemic. The article closes with a summary of the discussion and identification of its major limitations.

Keywords: COVID-19 ; peace ; COVID-19 and peace ; COVID-19 in conflict-affected areas ; impact of COVID-19

COVID-19 arose in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China. By early April 2020, close to 2 million cases and over 100 thousand deaths had been reported worldwide in more than 200 “countries, areas or territories” <sup>[1]</sup>. These numbers increased in subsequent months, while different governments and peoples adopted a variety of responses to the disease. The current paper draws on the existing literature about the disease and its impact to provide an overview of its relationship with peace in conflict-affected areas. A “conflict-affected area” is a country, or part of a country, where widespread violence or armed conflict was present when COVID-19 emerged in December 2019, or that was transitioning from recent armed conflict to peace by the time the disease arose <sup>[2][3][4][5][6]</sup>. This introductory section is followed by a segment where attention is given to the importance of clarifying what is meant by “peace” in the discussion on COVID-19 and peace. The clarification is useful mainly because peace is a multidimensional concept, which has been used in multiple ways in different contexts. After the section, the paper explains that to fully understand the impact of COVID-19 on peace, at least three stages of its influence should be considered. These are short-term, medium-term, and long-term stages and effects. After discussing these, the article draws on the existing academic literature on COVID-19 and peace to describe the different ways the virus and responses to it have affected peace in conflict-affected areas.

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