

Competing Political Actors in a Peace Process: A Case Study of Sri Lanka 2002-2005

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Introduction

Existing literature on civil war termination, often refers to the threat of spoilers as one of the major issues that has to be dealt with if the war is to be effectively terminated and peace is to succeed (Stedman 1997; Greenhill and Major 2007; Newman and Richmond 2006; Mac Ginty 2006). However, the concept of spoiling has led to a debate in the literature. In an influential article, Stedman (1997) suggests that the greatest source of risk to civil war peace processes comes from so-called spoilers- leaders, and groups that perceive peace as a threat and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it. The concept of spoiling has since gained significant ground as well as widespread legitimacy both in academia and among critical policy circles. The concept of spoiling as it is currently employed surpasses its original meaning and has given rise to a number of uncertainties concerning its definition and empirical applicability. For example, spoiling in the form of intra-party political dynamics has not been given adequate recognition as a factor affecting the war termination process. The act of spoiling committed by the intra- party opposition can put a strain on the negotiation process by delaying or threatening a relapse to war. Therefore, this lack of clarity with regard to some of the key aspects of the spoiler concept risks undermining the usefulness of the concept itself.

Research Problem

Existing literature focuses primarily on spoiling and violence committed by key actors who are central to the peace process, thereby suggesting that the acts of spoiling committed by peripheral actors are not a significant explanatory variable. In contrast, this study attempts to relate spoiling with peripheral and competing political actors to the peace process, while trying to understand the reason as to why peace negotiations are brought to a crisis situation as a result of an act of spoiling committed by competing

political actors. The competing political actors who are indirectly involved in the process are referred to in this study as actors located in the periphery of the peace process.

Therefore this study explores the following research problem:

Why is it that most events of spoiling are followed by a crisis in the peace negotiations?

A crisis in the peace negotiation process can be defined as a move away from a settlement with regards to the negotiation by the parties. An indication of this can be the postponement or cancellation of the peace talks or the withdrawal of one or both parties from the negotiation process.

Objectives of the Study

Firstly, the key objective of this research is to understand how events of spoiling lead to a crisis in the negotiation process. Secondly, this research will further help to attain a better understanding of the factors concerning the negotiation processes. Thirdly, it seeks to enable future peace negotiations to correctly diagnose the type of spoiling, which will be crucial in selecting an appropriate and more effective strategy of spoiler management. Fourthly, it is known that most parties of a civil war prefer coming to a negotiation since the war is costly, therefore, this research aims at investigating the cost involved in peace making, by focusing specifically on explaining why the parties reject peace negotiations in the aftermath of spoiling. Finally, the overall objective of this study is to understand the factors, strategies and patterns that explain the occurrence, prevention, and management of a crisis in the aftermath of spoiling and also to identify the mechanisms through which spoiling affects peace negotiations.

Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Evidence

The theoretical framework of the study builds on theories that explain why opponents turn to peace negotiations, and why parties reach peace agreements. This literature explains that violence is only one way of destroying the peace process. In this perspective, Darby and Mac Ginty (2000) recognize violence as one of the main influences on the dynamics of the peace process. Most of the literature acknowledges that the use of violence is the strategy for undermining peace. Therefore, the existing literature has not

distinctively distinguished spoilers from violence where two terms were used in order to illustrate an interruption to the peace process in which the main argument is that spoiling through violence created by primary and secondary actors causes the failure in the peace process. In the recent literature, the threat of spoilers often referred to as one of the major issues that has to be dealt with if the war is to be terminated and peace to be established (Stedman 1997, 2002; Greenhill & Major 2007; Newman & Richmond 2006,; Mac Ginty 2006). They argued that, spoilers, leaders or a certain faction that oppose a peace agreement are willing to use violence to undermine it.

Methodology

The research began by mapping some of the main features of the qualitative research and case study methodology. This study employs a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in its single case study. I use causal mechanisms, process tracing and analytical narratives as methodological approaches; therefore, this research uses a mixture of both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

The empirical analysis is based on extensive research carried out in relation to single case study, drawing on a vast range of primary and secondary sources. The main data sources are contemporary newspapers, journal articles and reports by academic scholars. Personal accounts in the form of memoirs, biographies and autobiographies that give an inside view of the events, have also been a useful source. Online data sources, government policy reports were also used. These are substantiated by primary data sources such as archival documents etc.

Key Findings

Most of the literature acknowledges that the use of violence is the strategy of undermining peace and therefore, the existing literature has not distinctively distinguished spoilers from violence where the two terms were used in order to illustrate an interruption to the peace process in which the main argument is that spoiling through violence created by primary and secondary actors causes the failure in the peace process. Therefore, the findings this research can be summarized as follows: Spoiling created by competing political actors causes the crisis in the peace process. Moreover, this study also, makes the distinction between ‘spoiling’ and ‘violence’ in

which these are considered to be in two stages of a continuum where violence is presented as a strengthening tool for a crisis generated by spoiling.

Conclusion

The present research in context of peace negotiations established the distinction between ‘spoiling’ and ‘violence’ in which these were considered to be in two stages of a continuum where violence was presented as a strengthening tool for crisis. The research also explored that, the influential spoilers who generated a crisis in the peace process, eventually causing it to be a failure, emerged through competing political parties. Therefore, it is of vital importance to consider spoiling in a broader spectrum in the conflict resolution field.

Keywords: Civil War; Competing Political Actors; Negotiations; Peace Process; Spoiling; Violence