

MEDIATOR KNOWLEDGE COMPETENCY: HOW VARIOUS TYPES OF MEDIATOR TRAINING IMPACT THE SUCCESS OF THE PEACE MEDIATION PROCESS

Erin ROWLAND CARLIN

*Institute for National Security & Military Studies,
Department of Criminal Justice, Austin Peay State University*

Abstract: This paper seeks to begin remedying that lack of microlevel research. Borrowing from the fields of human relations and psychology, I argue that individual mediator competency skills can have important effects on the outcome of peace mediation processes. These competency skills are commonly grouped into three forms – knowledge, know-how, and behavior competencies. The focus on this paper zeroes in on the first – knowledge competency skills. Utilizing qualitative research gathered through 28 interviews with mediators, collected from either personal efforts or first-hand written or recorded accounts, I assess the impact of knowledge competency skills gained through formal, religious, or military training. While I initially intended to find support for formal training having positive impacts on mediation in Western states – where one’s educational background can play a role in audience acceptance of one’s expertise – and religious training having a positive impact on mediation in cultures where social connections are more highly valued, the revelations of this research actually underscored the importance of military training for individual mediators. As interviewees in this study consistently revealed, military training provides individual mediators’ with specialized knowledge of the military and armament jargon needed in drafting agreements between combative parties. Those with officer-level backgrounds also often have effective organizational experience with leading multiple initiatives at one time, as has often become part of complex mediation processes today. Finally, mediators with military backgrounds are often regarded by disputing parties as those that can empathize with their experiences and positions, thus building an instant comradeship. Still, as this research will reveal, there are other potential merits and needs for future investigation regarding formal training and religious training of individual mediators.

Keywords: mediation, mediator training, peace mediation process, international relations, peace

Introduction

In recent decades, the importance, frequency, and complexity of peace mediation, has led to a growing body of conflict mediation research within the field of International Studies. Within this literature, researchers have debated what conflict management factors are important to achieving peace resolutions, whether they be ceasefires, partial settlements, or full settlements. Conflict ripeness, intensity, duration, and issue type are just a few of the factors that have been examined in relation to the conflict itself. The literature is also rife with investigations of disputing party characteristics, which are too numerous to list here but include such variables as relative power, state alliances, political system, and dispute history. Moreover, both psychology and political science include a fair amount of research on the psychological interactions of negotiating, or 'disputing,' parties.

What is surprising in this vast investigation of factors related to conflict mediators, the overwhelming majority of the research only focuses on the mediating entity/body, which I term the *macrolevel* of mediator analysis. Collecting data largely from the creation of the UN in 1945 through to present day, scholars have assessed whether the geographic proximity of a mediating state to the negotiating parties influences mediation outcomes. They have researched whether a mediating state's regime type plays a role in successful resolutions, or what effect mediator bias or leverage has on the negotiations. However, a portion of the story remains missing because of the lack of studies conducted at the *microlevel* – the level of the individual mediator(s).

This paper seeks to begin remedying that lack of microlevel research. Borrowing from the fields of human relations and psychology, I argue that individual mediator competency skills can have important effects on the outcome of peace mediation processes. These competency skills are commonly grouped into three forms – knowledge, know-how, and behavior competencies. The focus on this paper zeroes in on the first – knowledge competency skills. Utilizing qualitative research gathered through 28 interviews with mediators, collected from either personal efforts or first-hand written or recorded accounts, I assess the impact of knowledge competency skills gained through formal, religious, or

military training. While I initially intended to find support for formal training having positive impacts on mediation in Western states - where one's educational background can play a role in audience acceptance of one's expertise - and religious training having a positive impact on mediation in cultures where social connections are more highly valued, the revelations of this research actually underscored the importance of military training for individual mediators. As interviewees in this study consistently revealed, military training provides individual mediators' with specialized knowledge of the military and armament jargon needed in drafting agreements between combative parties. Those with officer-level backgrounds also often have effective organizational experience with leading multiple initiatives at one time, as has often become part of complex mediation processes today. Finally, mediators with military mediators with combat backgrounds are often regarded by disputing parties as those that can empathize with their experiences and positions, thus building an instant comradery. Still, as this research will reveal, there are other potential merits and needs for future investigation regarding formal training and religious training of individual mediators.

Background on Mediation Research

In the 2009 Sage Handbook of Conflict Resolution, mediation scholar Jacob Bercovitch notes that for many years, both formal and informal mediation practitioners at the domestic and international levels did not think their form of conflict management contained any patterns that could be measured and analyzed. However, as mediation attempts increased in the 1990s (Greig & Diehl, 2012) and the decades that followed, scholars in the subfield of mediation indeed began to find patterns associated with mediation success and the ripeness of the conflict for mediation (Zartman, 2000; Greig, 2005), the conflict's intensity (Ghosn, 2010; Bercovitch & Gartner, 2006b; Greig & Regan, 2008; Wiegand, 2014), the willingness of the conflicting parties to settle a conflict (Zartman & Touval, 1996; Bercovitch, 1997), mediator bias versus neutrality (Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2009), mediator leverage (Böhmelt, 2010; Beardsley, 2008; Greig & Diehl, 2012), mediator tactics and characteristics (Svensson & Wallensteen, 2010; Rubin, 1992; Wilkenfield et al., 2005), contentious issues (Walter, 2009; Fearon, 2004), and non-state actors (Crocker, 2018).

For mediation to occur, Zartman (2000) suggests that first, conflicting parties must have reached a point in their hostilities where the situation

is so costly and uncomfortable that parties are willing to make mutual concessions. The longer the duration of the conflict, the more likely parties will seek other means of resolution as neither side may be able to militarily prevail (Greig & Regan, 2008). At that point, it may be said the conflict is 'ripe' for negotiation or mediation. However, if both parties have not yet experienced high costs, or if the conflict has escalated too much, mediation is likely to be less effective, and forcing one party to the table too early can lower their satisfaction with the process (Wiegand, 2014; Ghosn, 2010; Wall et al., 2001). Mediation is also unlikely to occur in enduring rivalries, low-intensity conflicts, or civil wars (Bercovitch, 2007; Greig, 2005; Wallenstein & Svensson, 2014). Particularly, in low-intensity conflicts, the negotiating parties usually attempt to solve the hostilities themselves as mediation comes with tradeoffs. Negotiators sometimes fear they may be persuaded to accept unanticipated concessions (Bercovitch, 2007) or, in the case of civil wars, undesirably legitimize a hostile domestic group (Wallenstein & Svensson, 2014). Thus, mediation is more prevalent in international conflicts (Melin & Svensson, 2009) where the intensity is higher but the conflict is not enduring.

Taken together, much (but not all) of the previous research on macrolevel conflict mediation factors that impact mediation outcome can be represented by Figure 1-1. As displayed in this figure, considerable previous research in this area has often assumed individual mediators are only agents of mediating entities, and variables related to the mediating entities are almost solely what accounts for any effects of the third-party on mediation outcome. Because the individual mediator is only an agent, factors related to him individually have minuscule or insignificant effects on whether a mediation succeeds.

However, one must question if this lack of further consideration for individual mediator (or microlevel) effects on mediation success leaves a hole in the understanding of how mediating bodies and their agents impact the outcome of peace talks. The ability to achieving enduring peace is important. In taking on a conflict, individual mediators and mediating entities have significant interests in achieving a successful resolution. While a positive outcome can improve an entity's reputation, failure may result in political criticism, reputational loss, or strategic liabilities (Princen, 1992; Greig & Regan, 2008; Melin & Svensson, 2009). Furthermore, mediation is financially costly, albeit though not as costly as war or peacekeeping. Mediators may be asked to engage in subsequent meetings with the same parties or to remain in the conflict area for a

protracted time as ‘the probability of success [in sustaining peace] increases to the extent the same mediator participates in subsequent mediations’ (Greig & Regan, 2008, p.765). Personnel and living costs can grow for both the mediating and negotiating parties, making the financial burden too difficult to sustain over the long term for some states or groups, especially rebel groups. Thus, it is prudent to know what other third-party factors may contribute to timely, lasting resolutions versus those factors that can impede the peace process.

Figure 1.



Existing Research on the Microlevel

Some literature in the field has noted the potential impact of individual mediators on the mediation process. For example, both practitioners and researchers seem to agree one factor that exists both at the macrolevel and the microlevel and can affect mediation outcomes is bias. When mediation was formalized by the United Nations, the international organization called on John W. Burton of Australia to write the initial guidelines for international mediators. Burton, an International Relations professor

regarded by some as the founder of peace science research (Dunn, 1995; Steinmeyer, 2017), believed in conflict *provention*, ‘taking steps to remove sources of conflict...to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control behavior’ (Dunn, 1995, p.203). He felt this could be partially accomplished through formalized alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and professional mediators that exhibited neutrality towards negotiating parties in hostile situations (Burton & Duke, 1990).

Burton’s concepts have largely been adopted as practice in Western mediation. However, scholars still debate whether neutrality is always appropriate in mediation or if mediator bias can sometimes be beneficial. Those that support professional neutrality argue mediators should be impartial towards disputants and largely unfamiliar with the local conditions of the conflict or the parties involved prior to negotiations. Too much knowledge could bias them towards certain resolution outcomes (Jackson, 1952; Northredge & Donelan, 1971; Burton & Dukes, 1990; Beber, 2012). Conversely, some scholars have suggested biased mediators are better able to gain combatants’ trust and can be more effective when they are biased towards weaker or conciliatory parties in a conflict (Rauchhaus, 2006; Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2007, 2009).

Mediators can also credibly transfer information during negotiations to alleviate information asymmetries (Regan, et al. 2009). Fearon (1995) suggests that during conflicts, parties have incentives to misrepresent their capabilities or resolve. To resolve conflictual situations, the transfer of information is key, especially to combatants, and can reduce the duration of civil wars as combatants may be more willing to transfer credible information to mediators than directly to their adversaries (Regan & Aydin, 2006). Mediators have special skills that they can use to accomplish this information. At the macrolevel, process knowledge in the form of past mediation experience and colonial ties, and diplomatic knowledge in the form of diplomatic ties are effective in securing peace agreements (Keels et al., 2018). However, these factors have not yet been fully investigated on the microlevel. Perhaps the closest scholars have come to doing so is the insider-outsider debate. In this discussion, outsider mediators – entities and individuals external to the conflict area – are compared to insider mediators – those familiar with the culture and vulnerable to the conflict because they live in the conflict area (Roepstorff & Bernhard, 2013). Lee and Hwee Hwee (2009) find that in areas of the work where communal ties are particularly important, like in Asia, insider mediators’ commonalities and connectedness with the disputing parties make them

more trusted. This trust is key, especially when directive-manipulative strategies are used in the mediation process (Muldoon, 1996).

In their review of theory development in mediation, taken from various fields including political science, legal studies, and sociology, Wall et al. (2001) point to several important findings concerning individual mediators. One of these discoveries is that mediators' ideologies, training, and rules of their practice strongly influence their selection of particular tactics and strategies. Inexperience can limit these techniques, but professional neutrality seems to have little effect on technique selection. Despite this finding, Chester Crocker (2018), a former mediator himself, suggests a rise in the creation of mediation entities has resulted in a free-for-all mediation arena where the lack of 'gatekeepers' to create barriers of entry into the conflict-management space has resulted in a lack of discipline in the mediation process.

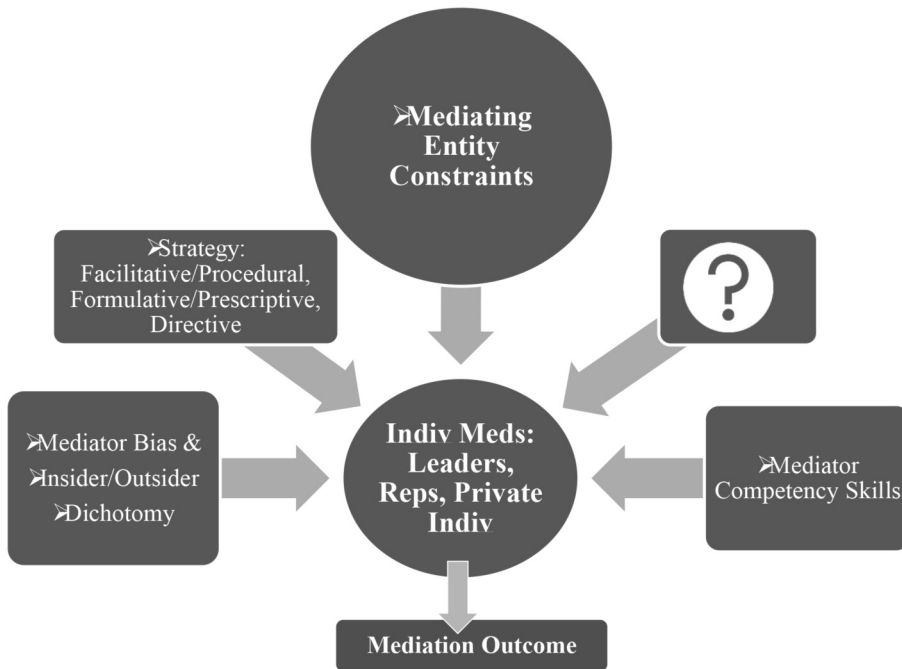
Historically, most mediators have come from major power states and IGOs. However, mediators from regional organizations are indeed on the rise (Wallenstein & Svensson 2014). Plus, a number of non-governmental institutions like the International Peace Institute, the International Mediation Institute, and a variety of international professional schools – which train individuals either online or in person – are also trying to become go-to choices for disputants seeking conflict management options. Despite this growth, however, there remains a limited pool of senior professional mediators in the field, and these individuals are overloaded with a number of conflicts to mediate (Crocker 2018).

As the number of novice international and civil war mediators burgeon and the small number of seasoned mediators retire, it has never been more important to determine what characteristics of individual mediators contribute to the likelihood of successful conflict resolutions. In the fields of sociology, business, psychology, and public administration, a variety of studies already exist on personal factors that can be used to determine which individuals are the best fit for particular jobs. However, in the field of conflict management where the consequences of failure carry far greater economic and humanitarian costs, our knowledge of the mediation profession is largely incomplete and there is an insufficient understanding of how individual mediators may impact the mediation process for the better or worse.

As displayed in Figure 1-2, I acknowledge that while macrolevel factors can indeed impact mediation outcomes, there is also more going on at the individual mediator microlevel that is affecting the likelihood of

mediation success, which I follow previous research in defining as the achievement of a full or partial settlement or ceasefire reached between disputing parties.

Figure 2.



Understanding Competency Skills

The field of Human Relations has utilized vast research on organizational theories to test how to optimize professional performance in a variety of occupations. Key to that research are human competency skills which the literature has summed into three categories – Knowledge, Know-how, and Behavior. The competency category of *Knowledge* includes a person's cognitive processes, education, and training, and is associated with that person's ability to communicate and reason, as well as comprehend new or updated theoretical processes. Conversely, *Know-how* is 'learning by doing' or the practical knowledge gained through

practice and experience. Finally, *Behavior* includes a person's traits, talents, and qualities that spur how he acts and reacts to certain conditions and/or interacts with different people (Russo 2016).

Though some work in applied psychology has explored competency skills, specifically in relation to negotiations between dissident parties (Smolinski and Xiong, 2020; McClelland, 1973; Mansfield, 2006), in the field of conflict mediation research, there has been a lack of similar organizational studies that identify how to optimize individual mediator performance. However, one can reasonably assume mediators also need competency skills to overcome negotiator resistance in mediation proceedings. Therefore, a study on these competency categories as they specifically apply to mediation is highly important to improving the process of peace talks and consequently, saving many lives through an increase in the pacific settlement of hostilities. Due to the limited space available of this work, I reserve further examination of know-how and behavior competencies to later publications. However, focusing on the area of knowledge competency, I assert skills in this area can largely be measured through whether a mediator has engaged in mediation training, which occurs in three major forms – formal training, religious training, and military training,

What is often regarded as *formal training* is largely based upon Australian peace negotiator John W. Burton's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) guidelines for mediation that suggest mediators should be unbiased third-parties that maintain professional neutrality towards any and all disputants in a conflict (Burton and Dukes 1990). After being adopted by the United Nations, Burton's ADR guidelines for formal mediation training spread to many Western states and regional organizations, as well as mediating nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that resided inside those areas. Thus, formal training became associated with *Westernized mediation*, which in turn, expanded the concept of professional neutrality to recommend mediators should have little to no knowledge of the disputants and the background of the conflict prior to engaging in mediation proceedings. Instead, mediators should 'discover' this knowledge during the mediation process. They should also have no social ties to the negotiating parties. By exhibiting such professional neutrality, mediators would guard against bias.

However, research on the insider-outsider dichotomy in mediation has revealed cultures that place emphasis on social connections, like in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, have tended to regard such professional

neutrality with great skepticism (Billings-Yun 2009; Roepstorff and Bernhard 2013). To them, these ‘outsider’ mediators who profess to have no relations to any of the dissidents may instead have hidden biases and agendas. Thus, these cultures are more accepting of ‘insider’ mediators, mediators with pre-existing ties to one or both negotiating parties, for two main reasons. First, the mediators’ biases are known. Second, their social connections legitimize them similar to how a mediator’s degrees/education and professionalization may legitimize him in Western states.

Previous literature has argued that mediators can use their insider knowledge to better establish trust with negotiating parties (Muldoon 1996) and mediating entities with diplomatic and process knowledge of the disputants are more adept at credibly transferring information, leading to greater likelihood of mediation success (Wiegand et al 2019). Because this insider-outsider dichotomy and the link between diplomacy knowledge and mediation success has been recently investigated in these and other studies, I do not test the direct effect a mediator’s background knowledge of the conflict and disputants has on conflict mediation outcome. Instead, I accept these arguments that mediator knowledge can have a positive effect on achieving peace settlements or ceasefires. However, I argue cultural expectations of individual mediators’ closeness to the disputants and the profession of mediation can create regional differences with regard to formal mediation training, and this difference centers around the element of professional neutrality.

While the concept of professional neutrality in Westernized formal training has led to the adoption of using outside mediators to avoid bias against negotiating parties, I consider this stance to verge on the extreme. Better knowledge of disputants can alleviate information asymmetries (Regan et al. 2009), and through credible transfer of information, reduce the duration of conflicts, particularly in civil wars (Regan & Aydin 2006). Mediator knowledge of the parties in a conflict can also help thoughtful mediators better understand each disputant’s fundamental needs, resistances to peace, and sticking points, which can aid in overcoming resistance to the peace process.

Instead, when testing how the relation between formal training and the likelihood of mediation success, I argue the primary focus should be on that training type’s original mandate of professional neutrality. Through Western legal traditions, Western states have established expectations that mediators are to be professionally neutral. Thus, those mediators with formal training should be better adept to conduct

mediation proceedings in a manner that is both acceptable and expected by Western disputants. On the other hand, social cultures often regard professionalism neutrality with great skepticism (Lee and Hwee Hwee 2009). Similar legal traditions that mandate professional neutrality in mediation have often not been established in those cultures. Thus, disputant parties often see mediators who claim to be 'professionally neutral' as hiding their true allegiances and agendas. Instead, they often prefer to know a mediator's bias, which can be established through communal connections, and again, these communal connections are key to mediator legitimacy more so than legal degrees or certifications of formal training. It is for these reasons that I also look at the impact of religious training and military training with regards to mediation as both embrace their own concepts that can differ from those promoted by Westernized formal training. First, mediators with religious training often draw on value-based connections with disputants that appeal to their own worldview. With legitimate knowledge and acceptance of a community's religious texts and belief systems, they have more interpretive authority of those texts than 'outsider' mediators. Using religious concepts, they can make faith-based principles behind reconciliation more palatable and authentic to the disputants (Peace Insight 2017), and even if their specific faith may be somewhat dissimilar, local priests, rabbis, imams, and sheikhs can still appeal to remaining religious commonalities.

Religious mediators can also draw on their background knowledge of the negotiating parties to better assess the emotional and physical needs of those communities. Plus, their 'insider' ties with social cultures through their faith-based communal networks give these mediators the legitimacy, credibility, and respect that is needed to guide such negotiating parties through the peace process. These faith-based ties often additionally extend to larger religious NGOs and regional networks, and through these, religious mediators also have access to large amounts of human and financial resources that can help aid in relief, mitigating the effects of poverty, hunger, and need for medical attention (Democratic Progress Institute 2012).

On the other hand, military training of mediators varies by country and has a somewhat different agenda than the other two types of mediation training. Around the world, many state militaries offer mediation training that primarily seems to be reserved for officers (Druckman et al. 1997). Depending upon the state, though, these militaries may embrace ADR concepts of professional neutrality, as do U.S. and Australian forces (Wood 2013-2014), or their military mediation training

may utilize very different concepts. Departing from ADR, they may emphasize knowledge of the language of the disputants or of the genesis and underlying issues of the conflict. They may also see the sacrifice of neutrality as a minor obstacle to overcome as long as trustworthiness and credibility have been established (Druckman et al. 1997).

What remains common is that military training of mediation centers around how the military should interact with local actors in order to best achieve peace. This training can focus on humanitarian and governance needs, as well as conflict analysis, conflict prevention, peace enforcement, peacebuilding, etc., (African Union Mission in Somalia 2015). However, it can also blur the instructional lines between serving as a third-party mediator versus a primary party-negotiator in the conflict who might need to deescalate hostilities. In the former, military training still calls for a mediator to maintain the goals of his constituents (e.g., establishing peace) while also preserving his own goals, like ensuring the safety of his troops. Thus, mediators are encouraged to increase their own strength, as they would in a primary-party role, and use it to reduce one or both disputants' strength and/or to leverage them. However, this may come with the cost of encouraging retaliation and directly involving the mediator's forces in the conflict as a primary-party (Druckman et al. 1997).

It is for these reasons that regardless of a military mediator's attempt to learn the language or background knowledge of the disputants and the conflict, he will probably be seen by the local community as an 'outsider' that is most likely not neutral. Thus, I expect mediators with military training to have a negative effect on the likelihood of mediation success, regardless of the region of the world or whether it is an interstate versus civil conflict. Although training increases one's knowledge competency skills and in conflict situations can improve how military members diffuse and overcome hostilities, formally trained mediators and religious mediators are likely more prone to achieving ceasefires or peace settlements, with regional caveats for each.

Based on the logic of the above discussion about mediator training, I expect that:

H(1): In conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success.

H(2): In conflicts where disputants place emphasis on social connections, (conflicts in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) and especially in civil conflicts, mediators with religious training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success.

H(3): In all regions, mediators with military training will have a greater likelihood of mediation failure.

Research Methods

Little information exists, especially public information, regarding the training curriculum mediators undertake prior to engaging in conflict mediations. Moreover, while some information may be deduced from prominent mediators' titles of 'General' or 'Pope,' no known data currently records if individual mediators have completed military, religious, or formal *mediation* training. There is also a lack of unified or common curricula. Multiple IGOs and NGOs, like the United Nations, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), and Swiss Peace, are known to have their own training programs and supporting handbooks or materials. The U.S. military also trains its officers in mediation strategies in case there is a need to deescalate conflicts, especially local ones (Asquith). Furthermore, the Catholic Church has often engaged in international and civil conflict mediations. However, few can explain, except for those who have actually engaged in conflict mediation, 1.) what mediation training looks like, 2.) whether the knowledge competencies gained from mediation training are effective or essential in mediating peace settlements, and 3.) whether some types of training are more effective than others.

Moreover, even if quantitative data were to be gathered today that profiled individual mediator demographics, training/educational backgrounds, etc., researchers would have much difficulty reporting which mediators were connected to what conflict management attempts and outcomes. In the modern era, parties involved in international and civil conflict mediations are often bound by strong confidentiality agreements that greatly limit discussion of particular mediation proceedings or the microlevel actors involved. Therefore, further study of the impact of mediator competencies on conflict management outcomes is well-suited for a qualitative investigation that allows mediators to share their experience and opinions regarding what microlevel skills/ characteristics seem to influence mediation outcome positively or negatively without violating any confidentiality agreements, to which they may still be bound, on the specific proceedings of certain conflict management processes.

To qualitatively analyze how mediator training may contribute to mediation success or failure, I designed an original survey and conducted interviews with those in the field. Survey data that was quantitative in

nature was reserved for future research and assessment of mediator *know-how* and *behavior* competencies, while several of the open-ended survey questions and interview questions were relevant to the investigation of knowledge competency skills gain through mediator training. I did encounter difficulties, however, in identifying and recruiting mediators.

Because of the confidentiality of many conflict mediation proceedings, details regarding the individual mediators that were involved in specific conflicts from the year 2000 onwards were especially elusive. Furthermore, because many mediators have other primary jobs, they often do not identify as a peace or conflict mediator on professional bio pages or websites such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Also, a large number of those who professionally identify as 'mediators' on their bio pages are attorneys who mediate civil cases, particularly those related to family law and corporate disputes with domestic or international businesses. Therefore, great care was taken in recruiting peace mediators that fit one of the following criteria: 1) I had met them in professional settings and knew their prior involvement in conflict mediation; 2) They were vetted and referred by another conflict mediator; or 3) They were professionally linked to a mediating entity and had identified expertise in mediating peace settlements for interstate or civil conflicts.

In Bercovitch's International Conflict Management data, about 22.68% of mediations through 2003 were conducted by leaders of countries, IGOs, and RGOs while 4.5% of mediations were conducted by private individuals. Former heads of state are frequently listed in this latter group. Current or former leaders of states, IGOs, and RGOs are extremely difficult to access, though I did attempt a few interview requests through various foundations to which they were linked. These requests were unfruitful. Thus, my interview and survey responses were solely conducted with representatives of governments, IGOs, RGOs, and national organizations, as well as private individuals. To avoid having to obtain special prior permission from mediating entities, I also promised the respondents I would not purposely link them to their mediating entity though they could use their own professional discretion in commenting on the training, mediator selection processes, and procedures they knew about with various entities. I also charged them to use professional judgment in discussing any details of mediated conflicts, especially regarding what was or was not confidential to the proceedings.

Because confidentiality agreements often limit mediators from disclosing the inner proceedings of conflict mediations in which they

participated, I also worded both my survey and interview questions to be opinion-based. Thus, I asked several questions regarding which individual mediator characteristics they believe, from their professional experience, positively or negatively influenced mediation proceedings. I then narrowed the focus of my questions to inquiries about the applicability and helpfulness of formal, military, and religious mediation training. Overall, I found members of the mediation community were far more willing to agree to interviews than they were to complete a survey. Still, I was able to collect some feedback on open-ended survey questions to combine with information revealed in interviews.¹

To expand my qualitative data, I also collected information from numerous recorded mediator panels and interviews that were conducted by entities including the International Mediation Institute (IMI), the International Peace Institute (IPI), and the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) Finland – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation. These panels and interviews focused on discussing the traits of effective mediators (especially master mediators), how peace can best be achieved in mediation, the professionalization of mediation through training, and/or details of how specific mediation attempts either succeeded or went awry. Therefore, parts of the discussions were in line with information I was trying to collect from current or former mediators through my survey and interviews. Where information shared applied to any of my survey or interview questions, I transcribed the direct quotes from the mediators in the recordings. In a similar form, I also collected information from lead mediators' autobiographies and mediation guides or first-hand assessments by fellow mediators and support staff who were present at the mediation proceedings. Regarding the latter, executive summaries of interviews collected through the Oral Histories Project at the United States Institute of Peace (and available online) served as an invaluable source of information, especially those on The Sudan Experience Project and the Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Also, these methods allowed me to include some primary source information from former leaders of states and/or IGOs.

Altogether, I was able to obtain information from first-person accounts of over 28 interstate and civil conflict mediators. Most were willing to be identified in this research, but six chose for their identity to remain confidential while still allowing for some demographic information to be shared to reflect diversity in the population of respondents. At least 25%

¹ See Appendix.

of the mediators in this study openly identified as female. Also, at least one respondent was professionally open in identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. In light of the U.N.'s Women, Peace and Security initiative and similar initiatives by some other mediating entities, especially those in the West, to actively include more diversity on mediation teams, this information was important for exploring diverse mediator perspectives, especially for future research regarding individual acceptance by negotiating parties.

Within this study, the individual mediators also varied in age, primary profession, experience, training, country of professional origin, and type of entity/entities with which they are affiliated. Some were early in their post-graduate careers while others were mid-career or retirees. Some of the mediators were career diplomats, which may or may not have retired to adjunct positions with universities or opening their own NGOs. Others were career mediators or full-time professors, and several were engaged with various entities in training mediators. Their training methods, experiences, programs, and philosophies varied greatly, which allowed for valuable insights regarding how the professionalization of mediation differs from region to region and state to state, etc. Most of the mediators were, or had been at some point, affiliated with an IGO. However, several had also been official representatives for their states in mediation proceedings, and a few were either strictly affiliated with NGOs or had left an IGO to work for an NGO. Particularly, most whose primary careers were in mediation worked for NGOs.

Finally, the countries of professional origin for mediators in this study were identified to help reinforce that this study contains a variety of cultural perspectives. Their countries included the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Germany, Guatemala, Columbia, Finland, Pakistan, Switzerland, Peru, Singapore, Ghana, The Netherlands, and Kenya. One also identified professionally as 'European,' in general. Primarily, mediators hailed from the United States, the U.K., the European Union (E.U.), and states in Africa or Latin America. Thus, a limitation of this study is that there was no participation from mediators in Eastern Europe and the Middle East and limited participation from mediators in Asian states. Particularly, the lack of inclusion of Chinese or Russian mediators is of concern as both states have been frequently involved in conflict management attempts. The absence of responses from 'insider' mediators in the Middle East also creates an informational gap regarding cultural expectations in mediation. Particularly, the Middle East was an

area where religious mediators were expected to be highly valued because of their social connections and spiritual authority. Consequently, to understand cultural expectations of negotiating parties in the Middle East and mediating parties in China, this study is largely reliant on the testaments of mediators from other parts of the world.

Data & Findings

Formal Training

Originally, I assumed from my knowledge of the previous literature in the field that formal mediation training would largely be related to mediators possessing legal degrees and/or being trained in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) techniques - established by John W. Burton and vastly utilized in Western mediation. This informed the expectations for my Hypothesis 1, that in conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of success. In the West, one's professional authority is partially established through educational attainment and training certificates (Lee and Hwee Hwee 2009). Within mediation, there is an expectation of 'professional neutrality' or non-bias, especially as this is one of the tenants of ADR methods. However, findings from interviews revealed great variation in formal training expectations and programs in the West.

For example, within the United States, little emphasis is sometimes placed on formal training. The U.S. Department of State, a primary supplier of state level mediators, tried to establish a training program in the early 2010s, but the program did not materialize.² Moreover, the Carter Center, an NGO created by Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter that is often engaged in mediation support, does not offer formal training. Instead, Swiss Peace has tended to be a frequent training entity for those U.S. mediators interested in either enhancing their skills or obtaining a certificate. For other interested individuals, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) does promote an online training program. However, its new mediation content is commonly regarded as more theoretical than practical, thus offering little true preparation for the field.³ Overall, in

² Author's interview with an anonymous U.S. mediator, Knoxville, TN, May 2020.

³ Author's interview with mediator and mediation trainer Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

person, formal training programs are largely absent within the borders of United States, except for some university degree or certificate programs crafted to teach diplomacy and mediation skills. However, when U.S. mediators were asked about the content of formal training or where to receive it, respondents often had to take a pause in thought before recalling places like Harvard's Program on Negotiation (PON) or the Fletcher School at Tuft's University.⁴ Ambassador Susan Page noted that training is important for major figures without experience. However, when asked about conflict mediation training options, she mentioned the United Nation's mediator training program and then conceded, 'I know there are a lot of Master's programs in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies. I do think they are very useful and helpful, especially when there are kinds of simulations...but none of these people ever get jobs as mediators.'⁵

On the other hand, in many Western European countries, mediation training is routine and taken seriously. As EU mediator and conflict resolution researcher Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Pirauudeau revealed, U.S. mediators may occasionally have legal degrees, earned prior to rising through the political ranks. In Germany, the educational and career pathway to becoming a mediator is intentionally separated from any legal tracks. Mediators are not lawyers, and those in the two fields differ in their conceptual thinking. Moreover, mediators in Germany are required to have at least 200 hours of training prior to practicing.⁶ They are also legally bound to only utilize facilitative approaches. It is a breach of the law to offer options or solutions.⁷ This differs from Chinese mediation, which is very formulative/prescriptive with solutions being offered.⁸ Thus, disputants seek conflict managers that use either the facilitative or formulative strategy they prefer. Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland have also implemented mediation thinktanks and conflict resolution organizations. Within these entities, career mediators gather information and conduct conflict analysis.⁹ Additionally, Norway has developed specialized

⁶ Author's interview with Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Pirauudeau, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Dr. Joyce Neu in a recorded talk. "Blurring the Lines in International Mediation." YouTube video, 1:00:53. Posted by Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 27 Oct 2017. <https://youtu.be/17j2ymQ4ZSs>.

mediator training on ceasefires,¹⁰ while the Swedish have developed the Folke Bernadotte Academy.¹¹ Overall, though, the consensus from several interviewees was that Swiss Peace and the UN were known for having the best formal mediation training programs with numerous specialized courses, which include High-Level Mediation, Specialist - Ceasefire Mediation, Specialist - Gender and Mediation, and at different points, Specialist - Natural Resource Mediation. Often when RGOs seek formal training, they also turn to the UN. However, much UN training is by invitation only and targets multilateral or state-level practitioners.¹²

While the consensus from several subjects was that formal training - typically from the UN, one of the previously named European programs, or some higher-level U.S. Master's programs¹³ - was effective and important in properly preparing one to lead mediations, there is a lack of consistency in both formal training and professionalization in the field. Several NGOs or national organizations, such as the International Mediation Institute (IMI) have attempted to professionalize mediation, but the number of mediators without any formal mediation training is still very high. Mediators tend to be diplomats, government officials, and former government officials or people who have achieved high level positions in international organizations.¹⁴ They tend to not have any background in mediation, though they may be very skilled at negotiating. However, says Dr. Joyce Neu, mediator, mediation expert advisor, and Founding Executive Director for the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego, 'Negotiation is not the same as mediation. The two are very different skills. Mediation requires stepping back and listening to others.'¹⁵ Neu further explains this issue with a lack of professionalization of the field is what partially prompted the UN in recent years to create its Standby Team of Mediation Experts, made up mostly of young professionals with degrees

¹⁰ Author's interview with mediator Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

¹¹ Author's interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Again, I acknowledge here a lack of greater information on mediation training and practices in Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.

¹⁴ Dr. Joyce Neu in a recorded talk. "Blurring the Lines in International Mediation." YouTube video, 1:00:53. Posted by Maxwell School of Syracuse University, 27 Oct 2017. < <https://youtu.be/17j2ymQ4ZSs> >.

¹⁵ Ibid.

in peace studies and conflict resolution. Nevertheless, an ongoing concern is that assignments to the team are only one-year in length with all of the experts being replaced each year.

Lamenting that he had argued for almost 25 years for mediation to become a formally-trained profession, Dr. Laurie Nathan, mediator and Director of the Mediation Program at Kroc Institute for International Peace, Notre Dame University, repeated a military analogy he often shares with others:

You would never appoint a colonel, a captain, or a major - you would never appoint a general without taking into account her temperament, her experience, her competence, and her skills. I mean, we would be insane. At no level of the armed forces would you make an appointment or promotion without taking into account those factors, but we're appointing senior mediators all the time, ignoring that stuff.¹⁶

In one of the most revealing insights on the impact of formal training on mediation outcome, Dr. Nathan noted he and other very experienced mediators often train UN Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRGs), Heads of Mission, etc., in a 5-day simulation. They work with attendees on tactical skills and techniques. However, the impact of the training on subsequent mediation success is largely dependent upon the temperament of the trainee. Says Nathan:

Some of them are fantastic and some are just really terrible. You wouldn't want them to mediate a fight between your dog and your cat. I mean...even though we have modeled mediation and we have very senior practitioners in the room giving them advice, some of them are just useless. As a very experienced trainer, I am convinced that mediation is part science and part art. You can teach the science, but you can't teach the art. Art is a matter of temperament, and whether you look in your own family or the workplace or the UN or the mediation community itself, there are some of us that hate conflict and run away. We go into flight mode. There are others that go into fight mode. And there are others that are natural temperament peacemakers. Roughly one-quarter or less of the people in the senior UN Mediation training course are natural mediators. And at least one-quarter of them will never, ever be competent mediators. This is my impression based on a lot of training, for a long time, in many parts of

¹⁶ Author's interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

the world. Is this taken into account when senior mediators are appointed? Absolutely not. And when senior mediators make a hash of it, and are generally renown for making a hash of it, do they get reappointed to the next case? Yep, they do.¹⁷

With all of this information on formal training considered, I find insufficient support for Hypothesis 1 that in conflicts between Western states, mediators with formal training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success. This hypothesis might have garnered more support if I had not constrained the scope geographically. Additionally, the analysis of ‘formal training’ was too wide and should have been narrowed to assessing the impact of particular training programs, like the United Nations, Swiss Peace, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, or others, and to comparing their training content, perceived value of the program, etc. As Dr. Nathan noted, the impact of training on improving a mediator’s abilities can also be tempered by that mediator’s personality.

Despite the inconclusive results on the effectiveness of formal training, however, it is important to note that disputing parties in many parts of the world have held Western or ‘European’ mediation as superior. Said Ambassador Page, ‘I’ve seen times where a country has felt they are considered “less than” if they receive African experts. [They] believe Europeans or “whites” have had better training, access to resources, and status.’ Therefore a stigma exists with some disputants that they are being slighted by not ‘receiving the best’ if third-party IGOs, like the UN, assign a non-Western mediator.¹⁸ Additionally, Deborah Masucci, global expert in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and Honorary Director of the International Mediation Institute, revealed that IMI conducted an internal survey on the potential credentialing of mediators and found that while US mediators were split on ‘whether certification would improve mediator performance,’ 70% believe it would increase respect for mediation, and 80% of mediators were willing to become credentialed. This led IMI to conclude there was a need for mediation certifications or qualifications to ensure disputants of the quality of mediators.¹⁹

¹⁷ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with former Ambassador Susan Page, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

¹⁹ Deborah Masucci in a recorded talk with Laura Kaster. “Mediator Credentialing Conversation with Deborah Masucci and Laura Kaster.” YouTube video, 36:19. Posted by International Mediation Institute. 17 June 2019. <https://youtu.be/nBhb1i0aReU>.

Altogether, though there was no support for my hypothesis about formal training helping with mediation success, the insights into the complexity and ambiguity of formal training in mediation is fruitful for several reasons. First, the information obtained from the interviews demonstrates the lack of universal training, which even persists to some degree at the UN and among states that are highly involved in mediation, such as the U.S. and several Western European countries. Second, there is a wide call among mediators to professionalize the practice of peace mediation. However, such recommendation comes with the understanding that in some states, those who receive graduate educations in mediation will likely never be appointed (under current political conditions) as a state-level mediator or IGO or RGO representative mediator without first becoming a nationally elected official and/or diplomat. Third, the data collected prompts the need for future comparative research on formal training offered by various entities to determine if certain training programs are more effective and thus, should be emulated and/or form the basis for mediator education in a professionalized field. Moreover, this study further begs the need for research on mediation training programs in Eastern Europe, China, and the Middle East. Fourth, based on current findings, small states in Western Europe seem to be leading the way on providing and requiring formal training of mediators. Though respondents noted particularly strong programs at some U.S. universities, these degree programs are not yet being pushed in the United States as a requisite for mediators officially representing the country. Fifth, there is debate regarding whether the profession of mediation and any required content background for the field should branch off the legal field or be separated from it. Again, such divergence on thought allows for interesting future explorations regarding the advantages and disadvantages of separating mediation from the legal profession.

Religious Training

Another area where I anticipated clearer results was in analyzing the impact of religious training on mediation outcome. While this qualitative study had low participants who originated from Asia and none from the Middle East, I hoped more respondents could comment on whether inclusion on mediation teams of local religious leaders with social connections to the community was helpful in resolving non-Western conflicts, particularly those within the Middle East. Many respondents had not experienced team interactions with local religious leaders.

However, Dr. Nathan shared the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) had been ‘very effective mediators at the local level’ during the Sudan crisis. ‘They are one of the most credible actors. Though they are split by the same factors that caused the civil war, they are arguably the least partisan and the least ethnized of all non-governmental actors. But can they mediate a civil war? No.’²⁰ Nathan attributed this limitation to the SSCC’s lack of experience, stature, capacity, and resources. While such actors might have success with local demands and disputes, ‘when the level of a conflict reaches a certain intensity, [the disputants] are going to have external states or external multilateral organizations [mediating], and that’s the fight we see over and over again. It’s the fight to lead the mediation. Is it the African Union or the UN?’²¹

On the other hand, in some countries, religious organizations are excluded from mediating conflicts. For example, in Turkey, it is illegal for religious leaders to engage in mediation because it is a secular state; a mediator must have legal background.²² In Columbia, on the other hand, religious entities are not excluded from participating in conflict resolutions, but they cannot utilize a religious approach. Mediator and trainer Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., has lived in Columbian communities amongst embroiled disputants and trained religious leaders in his home country of Guatemala.²³ When asked what effect religiously trained mediators had on mediation outcome, were they more or less likely to resolve a dispute, Lucerno offered a comparison between religiously ‘trained’ mediating groups – one in Columbia and one in Guatemala. In the former, a Catholic Church organization was not actively engaged in the mediation talks. However, they were highly effective local partners that helped guide the community towards healing and peace. Said Lucerno:

They were very good with reconciliation processes and helping parties deal with their grievances from the war, and that created the scenario for us to then deal with conflict mediation. You cannot jump directly to conflict mediations in post-war scenarios if the people still have those kinds of deep griefs. The community perceived them as a good

²⁰ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

²¹ Author’s interview with Dr. Laurie Nathan, Charleston, IL, April 2021.

²² Author’s interview with Dr. Andrea Hartmann-Piraudeau, Knoxville, TN, July 2021.

²³ Interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

entity and wanted to work with them. The main thing I liked in Columbia is that they did not bring any religious elements into the proceedings because in Columbia you cannot [do that]....So they said, 'We will talk about God himself but not a Catholic approach of God.'

I had a different experience training [various] Evangelical religious leaders in Guatemala, and they have had all sorts of troubles because they didn't receive any [prior formal] training in conflict mediation, but their communities perceived them as mediators. So, they usually made the mistakes of giving people advice in how to solve their conflicts, and then their own community blamed them for the consequences of that advice. So [formal] training is important.

Overall, there were only a small number of respondents that could comment on the effectiveness of religiously trained mediators. Additionally, with this sample of participants, I was unable to capture information regarding the social connection effect of 'insider' religious mediators in Asia and the Middle East save for learning that religious leaders are not allowed to mediate in secular Turkey. However, the information on local religious organizations in Columbia and Sudan seem to support that religiously trained mediators can be effective local level mediators or reconciling partners (who work alongside mediators) in low-intensity, more localized disputes. Of particular interest is the role they can play in potentially helping communities work through post-conflict grievances by guiding disputants to the point of 'forgiveness' of the adversarial party/parties.²⁴ Speculatively, such local mediation partnerships could increase peace endurance.

Taken together, the very limited data partially supports Hypothesis 2 that in conflicts where disputants place emphasis on social connections, (conflicts in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) and especially in civil conflicts, mediators with religious training will have a greater likelihood of mediation success – meaning a greater likelihood than those with no training. However, I acknowledge this hypothesis should be modified to also include Latin America. Moreover, the conflict scope should be limited to low-intensity conflicts, but I stop short of suggesting civil disputes only as religious leaders may be effective in helping resolve local border skirmishes in some regions. Additionally, there is strong potential that better results could be produced from examining local religious mediators' effects on either peace endurance after mediation or how their

²⁴ Interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

efforts can shorten time it takes for a conflict resolution process to end in a successful settlement or ceasefire.

There were two other takeaways from the responses that have contributed to broadening the understanding of the role of religious training, despite the lack of support for my hypothesis on this factor. First, in my original hypothesis, I had not thought to include potential social connections of religious mediators to local communities in Latin America. Thus, this is an area of future expansion for testing. Second, similar to the findings for formal training, there is a need to either further narrow the category of 'religious training' to a particular denomination, religion, etc., or else compare the group mediation outcomes to one another. With the latter option, studies on religiously trained mediators could also be narrowed geographically. What emerges is that different religions, denominations, and institutions have different expectations regarding what mediator 'training' looks like for their faith. The Catholic Church and its Popes have been occasional mediators in international and civil conflicts and seem to be more formalized in their approach to mediation.²⁵ On the other hand, there is a tendency by some groups to self-declare expertise as peace mediators despite lack of either true institutionalized or external training, such as the Evangelical leaders in Guatemala. Those in this latter category can especially face blame and potentially dangerous backlash for poor formulative suggestions.

Military Training

A surprising and much clearer connection, than formal or religious training, to mediation success emerged with military training. Originally, in Hypothesis 3, I had expected that in all regions, mediators with military training will have a greater likelihood of mediation failure. Evidence from the qualitative data consistently opposed this assumption. Military trained *officers* from various locations were often utilized in mediations for: 1) their abilities to help organize and manage complex mediations with lots of actors, and 2) their expert knowledge of weapons and military craft jargon and expertise, which aids in drafting highly important armament language in any peace agreement.²⁶ Mediator Kenny Gluck illustrated how military

²⁵ See the International Conflict Management (ICM) codebook by Bercovitch (2002) for the list identifying third-party mediators.

²⁶ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

officers could be especially useful in the management phase of mediation, particularly when attempting to draft written agreements. Said Gluck:

There were certain issues that the parties were raising about some of the definitional questions – direct and indirect fire, weaponry, permissible and impermissible activities [especially regarding] the range of different types of weaponry...the category of weapon or unit which you're allowed to move or not allowed to move.²⁷

Having a military trained mediator on the team helped parties know exactly what they were agreeing to and exactly what requests they wanted to make regarding agreements on combat positions and assets. Further, Gluck said he thought it was important to have 'military officers talking to military officers,'²⁸ especially as military trained mediators have an understanding of the types of military units and weaponry.

Vern Hockney, who served in the US Army for five years and did a tour in Iraq before attending a Master's program on conflict resolution and mediation, said military training can create an 'instant brotherhood' with others who have military backgrounds. Particularly in referencing those with experience in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), he said that brotherhood connection 'transcends religious and national boundaries.' Hockney placed the combatants he often encountered into three categories – the 'very right-wing conservative and militaristic,' the liberalistic who 'believed in peace at all costs,' and those 'who were entirely disenfranchised because of the conflict.' Said Hockney, 'Being in the military really helped me to understand the more extreme views that people can hold.'²⁹

Hockney's classmate Mike Duerr, an 11-year officer in the U.S. army who did three tours in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan, attested 'I think with my experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, I didn't realize how much conflict resolution and a lot of mediation I would be doing over there.' For him, those with military experience often have a 'mutual understanding of what it means to wear the uniform.' They can relate to others with military backgrounds, and that similar experience spurs conversations. Says Duerr, the sentiment is 'Yeah, we get where you come from, and we understand how that affects one person doing those things.'³⁰

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

²⁹ Vern Hockney with Michael Duerr in a recorded interview. 2016.

³⁰ Michael Durr with Vern Hockney in a recorded interview. 2016.

While sometimes military officers find themselves serving as local mediators within conflicts, various respondents in this study shared military trained mediators are often formally used as support mediators on a team unless they have served, or are currently serving, in a diplomatic or political position. In the latter case, they may then take on the role of lead mediator. However, lead mediators often highly value the skills of support mediators with military training and rely upon them,³¹ as Juan Carlos Lucerno reinforced with an example from a previous mediation experience:

Two colleagues were with me – one a police officer and one a military officer. They understood mediation though they were not interested in conducting it themselves. They were very good at reading the room and understanding when the context was appropriate for mediation... or if something had changed in the scenario and we needed to change the approach or try another day. I think it is very good to have a team with different kinds of profiles. [Their help] became particularly useful when proceedings became more intense.³²

Another issue that military trained mediators seem to be very adept at handling is instituting structures within groups that were either weak or in which no structures already existed. Says Gluck,

When you're dealing with very weak militaries – very weakly structured, incoherent groups – you...need to put in structures which replace the chain of command of a military unit so you can deal with the various levels,...the bigshots often outside of the country,...all the mid-level and low-level commanders who need to be brought online.³³

For Gluck, those with military training understood these structures and were also good at managing the complexity of all the various staff, groups, and teams involved in mediating numerous elements of a conflict. Said Gluck, the idea that mediators simply mediate is often a fallacy. In one conflict mediation series in which he was involved, Gluck said,

[The mediation team] had 17 peace processes going on around the country – local-intercommunal issues, local-religious issues, local land issues, local issues with different armed factions which need to be

³¹ Author's interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

³² Ibid.

³³ Author's interview with Kenny Gluck, Charleston, IL, May 2021.

mediated locally, but [a mediator is] also the head of a peacekeeping mission. You're supervising a mixed military-civilian activity, which is doing a lot more than just mediating. We were helping set up the new army. We were helping train the police. We were helping set up administrative structures. And we were conducting military operations. So, the mediation is one piece of the puzzle.³⁴

In considering this insight, Gluck's assertion that mediators 'need a lot of managerial skills...to manage a large number of processes and relationships'³⁵ makes sense. For the respondents who had insights on working with mediators with military backgrounds, mediators who were military-trained, officers – either current or former – often exhibited such ability to manage and coordinate numerous groups and mediation efforts that were happening simultaneously. Moreover, it was suggested that in conflict situations where a range of experts is needed, it is often particularly important to have a person with military expertise on the mediation team.³⁶

The interviewees in this study also noted they knew of no reported instances where military-trained mediators were rejected by combatants for possessing a military background, though 1.) combatants often prefer currently active military members over retirees, and 2.) some NGOs avoid dealing with military entities because of NGOs' typical aversion to

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview #30 collected by W. Haven North for the United States Institute of Peace's Oral Histories: The Sudan Experience Project (USIP), October 2006. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/sudan/30.pdf>. The interviewee was a former U.S. State Department officer and current lawyer and member of the United Nations Development Programme that was asked by a former supervisor at the U.S. State Department to serve on the mediation team as a technical legal advisor for the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan.

³⁷ Interview #11 collected by Larry Lesser for the USIP-ADST's Oral Histories: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team project, April 2005. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/afghanistan/11.pdf>. The interviewee was a military veteran and employee of the U.S. State Department who worked as a political officer with the Provincial Reconstruction Team Army Civil Affairs Unit to mediate peace in Afghanistan between 2004-2005.

violence.³⁷ Said one interviewee in an interview project collected by the United States Institute of Peace:

One of the recommendations that was made to [the mediation team] was that the deputy team leader should be an active duty officer, not a civil affairs specialist, and he should be from the kinetic side; this is especially true in a combat environment, or an environment where active combat is still the norm or combat operations are underway. They will respect a fellow combat officer who is in the role of deputy team leader [of the mediation]. They will simply group a civil affairs officer (and those tend to be, of course, reservists)...as part of the civilian team. So, one of the recommendations made was to try to have the number two, a military officer, as an active duty deputy.³⁸

In some cases, combatants also expressed positive support of a mediator's military background connection if it was regarded that the military from that mediator's country had offered them support or protection at some point in the past.³⁹ Regardless, though, the presence of a lower-level (or lead) military officer in a kinetic conflict seemed to help underscore a representative-rank, lead mediator's strength as he is perceived to have the support of a state military behind him,⁴⁰ perhaps serving as either a leveraged threat if a peace agreement is not made or a promise to hold the disputant(s) on the other side of the conflict accountable if they break any agreement.

No studies on the effectiveness of the application of military training to mediation have previously been conducted, and the topic is very rarely noted in recorded mediator panels or interviews. However, within the

³⁸ Interview #71 collected by W. Haven North for the USIP's Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Experience Project, November 2008. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/iraq_prt/71.pdf. The interviewee as a USIP representative who served on several PRTs in Iraq in 2007-2008 before becoming a Director of Programs at USIP.

³⁹ Interview #11 collected by Larry Lesser for the USIP-ADST's Oral Histories: Afghanistan Provincial Reconstruction Team project, April 2005. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/afghanistan/11.pdf>

⁴⁰ Interview #71 collected by W. Haven North for the USIP's Iraq Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Experience Project, November 2008. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/histories/iraq_prt/71.pdf

mediator accounts gathered for this study and others reported in the United States Institute of Peace's transcribed interviews, there is consistent reinforcement that military-trained mediators, whether they are lead mediators or support staff, are often highly useful in: 1) managing and coordinating complex mediation processes, 2) establishing structure where little or no structure exists – both in trying to form cohesive disputant group structures and civil society structures, 3) personally connecting with those disputants who also have combat experience, 4) drafting combat- or military-specific language in agreements regarding the limitations of combat, and/or 5) serving as a guarantor of a representative-level mediator's legitimacy to enforce peace. Moreover, it is not unlikely for officers within state military units to have previous experience conducting localized mediations during their military tours.

Analysis

The overall results of this qualitative research lend support to the argument that mediator knowledge competency skills have important effects on the likelihood of mediation success. Specifically, I found strong support for military training having a positive impact on whether a peace agreement is achieved. Mediators often utilized managerial and organizational skills gained from this training to coordinate complex groups of mediation teams, invited specialists, and multiple disputants. Moreover, knowledge regarding the language of military/combatant assets, vantage points, weapons, and craft was extremely beneficial in drafting concessions or allowances between disputants. Negotiating parties also seemed to be more receptive to military mediators with combat backgrounds as there was a mutual empathy of experience.

On the other hand, mediators with religious training had mixed effectiveness. A major issue in the variety of outcome was a lack of uniformity in training (especially compared to military training which often has high uniformity). Some faith organizations and denominations were consistent and educated in their practices, such as the Catholic Church in Columbia.⁴¹ Conversely, groups that lacked true training but self-declared as experts, like the Evangelical leaders in Guatemala, not only were highly ineffectual, but they also sometimes placed themselves

⁴¹ Author's interview with Juan Carlos Lucerno, J.D., Knoxville, TN, June 2021.

in danger of disputant or communal blame and backlash. In some contexts, though, local religious mediators provided grief support towards conflict reciliation. This seemed to be a particularly useful aspect of religious mediation training in countries that allow non-secular mediators. Limitations to the study were noted, though, as the lack of respondents from the Middle East and Eastern Europe, plus low numbers of Asian respondents limited me from exploring more of how some religious 'insider' mediators may provide local access and acceptance in socially connected, non-Western cultures.

Finally, the effect of formal mediator training was difficult to assess due to the great variance in programs, lack of uniformity of curriculum, and differing mediating strategies supported. Respondents frequently lamented the need for a professionalization of the field and pointed towards formal mediator training programs with the UN or Swiss Peace as some of the best available. They believed the knowledge gathered from these programs was very useful to increasing the likelihood of mediation success as long as the taught tactics and techniques were actually applied, and that application could be dependent upon the individual mediator's personality and willingness to modify their methods based on training information and outcomes.

University graduate programs, on the other hand, had mixed support. Several in the United States were noted as being very useful. except that the students produced from these programs would likely never work in conflict mediation due to the political limitations around much of the practice. In contrast, some university programs in Western Europe were heralded as excellent places for both training and research while other programs were deemed too theoretical and of little practical value. Regardless, though, Western European graduates had greater access to professional careers in the field as some countries in West Europe strongly delineate between the fields of law and mediation and require a high number of formal training hours before one can declare himself as a mediator.

Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative findings of this study supported my assumption that mediator knowledge competency does indeed impact the likelihood of whether an interstate or civil conflict mediation attempt will result in a ceasefire, partial agreement, or full agreement. Particularly, I identified connections between military trained mediators and greater

effectiveness in achieving positive mediation outcomes, primarily due to their organizational and managerial skills in coordinating complex networks of parties and their needs, as well as their knowledge of specialized military and weapons jargon and tactical concepts that aid in the drafting of peace agreements. While respondents in the study advocated for the importance of formal training, I, however, found the terminology for both ‘formal’ and ‘religious’ training needs to be more specific or categorical to properly assess. Within this, though, UN and Swiss Peace training were routinely mentioned by mediators as both effective and highly necessary to the likelihood of achieving successful mediation results. Other training institutions, especially in Western Europe, also offered promise in their training results, but the findings regarding these and non-Western training programs were limited by the backgrounds of the respondents in my study. However, I express this with the caveat that multiple respondents noted the high-value placed by many disputants on Western mediation institutions. There was some mention, though, of some disputants seeking formulative/prescriptive mediation from China, and this needs to be further investigated.

As for religious training, again, this definition was too broad. However, within this group, Catholic organizations were noted as having some established expectations towards proper mediation procedures, and thus, those organizations have been effective in Latin America. Some Evangelical leaders in Latin America have also begun to seek out training. This type of training, though, proposes great possibilities for future research. In some regions of the world, religious ‘insider’ mediators may provide access to and authority in local communities or disputant groups, particularly in cultures that place high value on social connections. On the other hand, in many societies that allow for non-secular mediators, those with religious training may be especially adept in aiding with conflict reconciliation measures that lead to longer durations of peace.

The findings of this research also lend support to my assertion that a strict focus on macrolevel mediator factors in analyzing the impact of a third-parties on conflict mediation success is insufficient. Indeed, macrolevel factors may affect both mediation outcome and whether a mediation is even accepted in the first place. Still, microlevel factors also play important roles in acceptance and outcome. While, most often, offers by third parties to mediate conflicts have already been accepted before individual mediators – the agents of the third parties – are sent to the conflict to initiate peace talks, elements of their person can affect whether

they are, likewise, accepted by negotiating parties and their management of the mediation or advice is respected.

Additionally, this research revealed a potential area of concern regarding mediating entities' lack of consideration of individual mediators' knowledge competency skills. Some mediating entities have good selection, vetting, and training processes in place for mediators. Other entities fail to consider the importance of these processes and instead assign mediators based on their political or diplomatic backgrounds versus their true mediation abilities. Such lack of consideration for an individual mediator's skills can easily have negative impacts on the peace settlement process.

While this research establishes the importance of investigating microlevel mediation factors associated with mediator knowledge competency skills, future research will also need to explore mediator know-how and behavior competencies. Additionally, more remains to be examined regarding the mediating entity selection process for mediators and how mediator training and expectations differ in Eastern Europe, China, and the Middle East. The further opening of mediation research into the microlevel also lends opportunities to better investigate the acceptance or rejection of individual mediators. Overall, there is great research and policy value in better understanding how macrolevel and microlevel mediator factors either singularly or interactively affect the outcome of peace efforts, and hopefully this research has helped build a foundation of support for continued investigation of the salience of individual mediator knowledge competency skills.

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