

Please find below information about the projects that have been granted FBA Research Grants 2023.



Andrea Ruggeri, University of Oxford

Project title: Ex-Combatant Remobilisation: The Role of Mid-Level Commanders

Project description

The purpose of the project is to improve our understanding of the conditions under which ex-combatants are likely to remobilize to further our academic knowledge and improve DDR interventions on the ground. To achieve these goals, the project proposes a new analytical framework that focuses on ex-combatant networks and highlights the role of mid-level commanders (MLCs) as agents of remobilization within them. The project proposes three steps to empirically test the framework. First, it bids to collect and analyse survey data on network structures of ex-combatants in Colombia, Liberia and BiH to demonstrate and describe the nature of interdependencies within them, highlighting the unique loyalty to MLCs. Second, it aims to collect and analyse interview data on ex-MLCs in the same three settings to explore how MLCs perceive their role in ex-combatant networks and understand their goals as well as actions they are willing to take to obtain them. Last, it aims to conduct in-field experiments in Colombia and BiH to investigate the effect of divergent and convergent signals by ex-combatants' leaders and MLCs on the beliefs of their rank-and-file fighters. In doing so, it aims to demonstrate the disproportionate leverage of MLCs on beliefs of rank-and-file fighters. In sum, the purpose of the project is to 'open the black-box' of ex-combatant networks and highlight the pivotal role of MLCs within them by advancing both the discipline's theoretical and empirical stock of knowledge.



Nina Wilén, Egmont Institute of International Relations, Belgium

Project title: Military Interventions and Security Force Assistance (SFA) in the Sahel

Project description

This project provides an accessible analysis of why, how and with what consequences external actors have intervened in support of local security actors in the Sahel, a region which has been disproportionately affected by transnational security threats during the past decade. The project covers bilateral security force assistance (SFA) initiatives from France, US, Belgium, and Sweden, and from a multilateral perspective:

MINUSMA, EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel, Niger. It includes both assistance to external and internal security forces. Drawing on participant observation of SFA operations in the region, interviews with key actors and an examination of official documents, the project addresses the overarching theoretical questions that continue to capture the attention of both academic debates and policy makers relating to SFA about rationale, feasibility, results and consequences, while providing an in-depth empirical analysis of how this plays out in the Sahel. This is crucial research to improve peacebuilding efforts related to security sector governance and human security more broadly in the region.



Anders Themnér, Uppsala University

Project title: Communities at Risk: Mediation as a Tool to Defuse Ethnic Tensions in Post-War Liberia and Beyond

Project description

In post-civil war societies, state institutions often lack the capacity to regulate interpersonal disputes. Such governance ‘vacuums’ constitute a problem in communities polarized along ethnic cleavages, where seemingly small quarrels easily escalate into large-scale ethnic violence. To address this challenge, peacemakers often collaborate with traditional leaders to increase their mediation capacity. Even if research has identified the key role mediation has in hindering violence, there is less knowledge about who community members actually choose to turn to, to settle their disputes. This is worrisome. If peacemakers work with mediators who lack local legitimacy, it may not only undermine efforts to prevent large-scale ethnic killings, but actually increase the risk of such violence. The purpose of this project is therefore to investigate why some mediators are more popular than others when it comes to settling inter-ethnic personal disputes. We suggest that most residents prefer to take their inter-ethnic disputes to societal brokers (individuals who possess networks that transcend ethnic cleavages) for arbitration. To assess this proposition, we will conduct a study of Voinjama—a war-ravaged community in Liberia—using social network analysis and ethnographic fieldwork.



Govinda Clayton, ETH Zurich

Project title: Local Ceasefires: How local initiatives impact conflict and peacemaking dynamics

Project description

Ceasefires are an essential component of all peace processes. The transition from violence to peace almost always requires a settlement on the terms under which belligerents agree to cease hostilities. Creating or sustaining a ceasefire is therefore often a primary focus for mediators. At the same time, ceasefires also occur during conflict to mitigate and manage violence locally. These arrangements are often negotiated by civilians, local leaders, business leaders, and civil society, performing a vital humanitarian function, and potentially offering entry points for broader peacemaking efforts. Yet, relatively little research has looked at the micro-foundations of ceasefires. This is a striking gap in research since sub-national factors are a key component of civil conflict dynamics and many of the determinants of ceasefires appear indeed to be driven by local phenomena. This project will therefore collect the first systematic data on all local ceasefires in civil conflicts from 1989-2022. We focus on ceasefires addressing local issues in the context of civil wars, as well as ceasefires concluded in non-state conflicts between communal groups and rebel groups. Ceasefires concluded in non-state conflicts by their very nature often revolve around issues related to the immediate sub-state, politico-geographic context of the conflict parties.



Maria Martin de Almagro Iniesta, University of Ghent

Project title: Gender, Climate Change and Conflict in practice: Adaptation, Resilience and Sustainable Peace in the Africa Great Lakes Region

Project description

This project aims to map and examine how local communities in general, and women's movements in particular, adapt and remain resilient in settings where climate change is exacerbating protracted conflict. By examining two local communities in the Africa Great Lakes Region, the project will produce new theoretical and empirical knowledge on how indigenous communities experience climate-related security risks, and how they develop resilient practices to prevent conflict, displacement and worsening of livelihood conditions. The study will put a particular emphasis on understanding how gendered norms and power structures increase or mitigate the likelihood of climate-related insecurities. I will rely on innovative methodological

approaches that include multi-level and multi-temporal oral narratives developed through Participatory Action Research, body-mapping and arts-based knowledge production. This approach is designed to overcome limitations of current scholarship on Environmental Peacebuilding in incorporating indigenous knowledges and perspectives. Furthermore, the project studies together regional and local dynamics of climate-related conflict exacerbation to examine the potential of international efforts to climate-related conflict prevention and to challenge policymakers to include indigenous knowledges when designing programs geared towards conflict-affected communities.



Isak Svensson, Uppsala University

Project title: The Inside and Outside of Peacemaking: Bridging the civil society – mediation divide.

Project description

To what extent can mediators shape the trajectory for civil society organizations in peace processes? Under what conditions can mediator-civil society relationships contribute to enhancing mediation effectiveness? Whereas research on civil society as well as mediation has grown a lot over the last years, there is relatively little research on the relationship between civil society organizations and external mediators. This project explores civil society-mediation dynamics, drawing on a unique database – the Non-Warring Actors in Peace Processes (NoWA) data. Building and creating synergies with on-going research projects, this project will be able to provide novel insights into the dynamics of mediators-civil society relationships.

In particular, the project will explore how the relationships between mediators and civil society tend to occur in the context of peace processes, as well as the extent to which mediators-civil society relationships can help to explain the effectiveness of peace processes.

The type of information will be useful, for example, in the ongoing FBA-initiated process on Improving Mediation Effectiveness. To better understand the empirical landscape, as well as to have a systematic collection of best practices, can also be very beneficial for FBA programs in conflicts such as in Yemen, DRC, Ukraine and elsewhere.



Hanne Fjelde, Uppsala University

Project title: Promoting peace or partisan interests? The double-edged sword of states' electoral security provision.

Project description

In emerging democracies, state security forces are frequently tasked with a vital role in upholding law and order during elections and protecting the rights of citizens to freely cast their vote without violent interference. At the same time, these same actors are often deployed to increase the electoral fortunes of the incumbent and act in ways that undermine electoral integrity. This presents a paradox: the state's coercive agents that are best placed to protect citizens from electoral insecurity might also represent their greatest source of threat. Still, we know little about the ambiguous role that the state's coercive institutions play in the electoral environment and how this affects citizens' political attitudes and engagement. This project will address this research gap by studying how citizens' experiences with police and armed forces during elections influence their perceptions of the integrity of the elections, the legitimacy of their regime and, in turn, their political participation. The project will develop a novel theoretical framework to understand how variation in states' electoral security provisions influence political attitudes and behavior at the individual level, and examine how these are conditioned by vulnerabilities and risks shaped by individual, group and community level factors. The project will draw on data from a post-election survey from the 2023 Nigerian elections, combined with in-depth qualitative material and focus groups.



Susanne Alldén, Université Evangélique de l'Afrique Bukavu

Project title: Wives across frontlines – A comparative perspective on the RE-integration of army wives and women and girls forcibly recruited into non-state armed groups in DRC.

Project description

The aim of the project is to investigate and challenge mainstream narratives and assumptions about Re-integration processes, by focusing on individuals formerly associated with armed actors who have been excluded to varying degrees, in both practice and research.

The project compares the experiences of women and girls forcibly recruited into non-state armed groups and the experiences of army wives in DRC. This comparison highlights the limitations of policies and processes based on thinking of conflict and post-conflict recovery efforts in terms of before, during and after. By focusing on two groups,

heterogeneous as they are, the project helps recenter the voices of people affected by conflict, and their priorities and goals for their own reintegration.

RE-integration connotes a 'before' and an 'after'. Yet, for many women and girls formerly associated with armed actors (FAA), a return to a 'before' is not straight-forward and is often neither possible nor desirable. Physical, emotional, societal and historical trauma can hinder successful RE-integration, yet these realities also bring new meaning to recovery and RE-integration. Insufficient attention to such factors obscures understandings of what the RE-integration of FAA means for their lived experiences and, ultimately, may set programming up to fail.

Foregrounding the voices of women and girls FAA in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and those practitioners who interface with them everyday highlights the limits of traditional policy frameworks to substantively integrate a people-centred approach in existing reintegration programming. Such limits betray a lack of understanding of life before and experiences during armed conflict, and crucially, limits possibilities to support FAA as they strive towards an 'after'.

