# Index

Boxes, figures, notes, and tables are i by b, f, n, and t following page numbers. Features are specially noted.

#### A

accountability of institutions. See also transparency defined, xvi, 84 dual accountability, 26, 26f, 200-202, 201f, 270 early policy announcements and, 22 importance of, 10, 84, 85b, 249 military and, 149 to taxpayers, 26 Aceh Aceh Peace Process Support Program (European Commission), 138 (feature) Aceh Peace-Reintegration Board (BRA), 138 (feature) ASEAN role, 18, 233, 234b building inclusive-enough coalitions, 12, 120, 137 (feature) commitment mechanisms to lock in signals, 138 (feature) community-driven programs, 138 (feature) delivering early results, 138 (feature) economic and human costs of violence, 63 Monitoring Mission, 18, 38 (feature), 138 (feature), 252 Reintegration and Livelihood Survey (World Bank), 138 (feature) signals for confidence-building, 137-38 (feature) social accountability, 157 success in preventing violence, 108 adaptability of institutions, 110-12, 111b, 119, 196-97. See also best-fit approaches AfDB (African Development Bank), 197, 213n91 Afghanistan community-based programs, 24 (feature), 133-34b, 141n54, 261b cross-border violence, 67 (feature) drug production and trafficking, 10 financing rebels, 54 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 education reform, 169 foreign troops and security stresses, 218 humanitarian aid, phasing from international to local institutions, 266b international ideological movements and local grievances, 5 international support for, 183 for local initiatives, 194 investment in conflict prevention, 273b mistrust of siding with either Taliban or NATO, 100b M-Paisa, 162, 177n87

multidonor trust funds for, 33, 202, 203b National Rural Access Program, 161 National Solidarity Program, 18, 24 (feature), 131, 133b, 136, 141n50, 169, 170b, 255, 261b organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) Pashtun tribal areas on Pakistan border, 219 passage of laws and regulations, 175n44 radio "edutainment" programs, 213n111 road and traffic access, 161 special envoys to, 183, 208n7 technical assistance, 196 trafficking financing rebels, 54 violence, 53, 54t women's empowerment, 169, 170b Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), 33, 203b Africa. See also specific countries and regions Chinese trade with and investment in, 183 climate change coalition obtaining adaptation funding (2010), 232, 242*n*50 employment and security as most pressing needs in, 128 mediation used in, 187b mobile phones, 158b regional infrastructure challenge, 235m African Development Bank (AfDB), 197, 213n91 African National Congress (ANC), 14, 120, 121 African Union (AU) African Peer Review Mechanism, 233 Border Program, 35, 44n101, 219 extra-constitutional changes of government and coups d'état, norms for dealing with, 190 GEMAP, agreement to, 126b Peace and Security Commission, 187b peacekeeping capacity of, 182, 281b sanctions, 190 support to social and poverty reduction programs in West African countries, 44n105, 292n24 Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), 194b agenda for international action, 290-91 agreements to abstain from violence. See also elite pacts; specific declarations and agreements lack of creditability, 75b agriculture sector, support for, 162, 230, 257 AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network), 194b amnesties for war crimes, 187

Amnesty International, 114 (feature) ANC. See African National Congress Angola Guinea-Bissau assistance, 207 (feature) reintegration budget, 202 Annan, Kofi, 187b Anti-Corruption Interagency Council, 156 Arbour, Louise, 37, 39 (feature), 288, 289b Argentina confidence-building, 12 "disappeared," women's role in demanding information on, 124, 140*n*26 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 inclusive-enough coalition-building needing military support, 139n14 security personnel standards, 151 transitional justice, 166, 255 transition from military rule, 154 Armed Conflict Database, 70n62 arms trade and trafficking, 220-21, 220t, 241nn19-22 arraignment courts, 155b ARTF (Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund), 33, 203b ASEAN crisis prevention and recovery experience, 38 (feature), 44n102, 271 East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve program, 286 Food Security Information System (AFSIS), 230b as model of regional cooperation, 238 (feature) Myanmar disaster situation (2008), 186, 233, 234b political leadership role of, 233, 234b subregional initiatives, 35 ASEAN-EU Aceh monitoring mission. See Aceh Asia. See also specific countries and regions mediation rarely used in, 187b Asian Development Bank, 25, 229, 236, 239 (feature), 243n68 assessment tools international tools, 272t post-conflict/post-crisis needs assessment, 250 strengthening, 23, 250 use of, 22-23 asset expansion programs, 162, 257 assistance programs, international. See humanitarian aid; international support Association of Southeast Asian Nations. See ASEAN AU. See African Union audits donor funds released upon, 202 social audits of government records, 175n61 AusAID, 185 Fragile States Unit, 209n14 Australia cross-governmental operation in Solomon Islands (Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands, RAMSI), 185 International Deployment Group (IDG), 212n86 Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (AUSTRAC), 229b, 242n42 Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) guerillas, 151 Azam, Jean-Paul, 119

# B

Bakassi Boys (Nigeria), 136b Balkans fears of oppression and civil conflict, 74 modern organized violence, 67 (feature) bargainers and proposers/responders, 82b Becker, Gary, 79b Belize, violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 4f Bellerive, Jean-Max, 153 best-fit approaches adapted to local conditions, 8, 13, 22, 106, 145, 196-97, 259-60 advantages of, 248 for citizen security, justice, and jobs, 256t defined, xvii, 117n17 duration of, 169 experimental, flexible approach, 171 food aid response, 286 job creation, 161-63 judicial reforms, 155 preferred to best practices, 107b, 147 procurement arrangements, 199 trade-offs in, 258 best practices, success not guaranteed by use of, 146-47 birth registration programs, 154-55 Bolivia, drug trafficking and, 10, 223b border areas and insecurity, 218-20. See also regional and cross-border initiatives Bosnia and Herzegovina "Bulldozer Initiative" of 2002, 157 currency board, 168 developmental progress, 53 economic goals met through justice and inclusion, 132b education reform, 169 High Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils, 154 international aid for, 183 law enforcement personnel, vetting of, 151 mass rape, 60 MDG progress, 6 regulatory simplification, 257 religious and ideological grievances, 67-68 (feature) streamlining of peace agency implementation, 291n3 success in preventing violence, 11 World Bank support for negotiations, 186 Botswana, success of aid from single or dominant donor, 199 The Bottom Billion (Collier), xi, 105b Brahimi, Lakhdar, 15, 165b Brancati, Dawn, 178n112 branding of aid programs, 191, 210n50 BRAVO (Birth Registration for All versus Oblivion) program, 154 Brazil Fica Vivo program, 186 indirect vs. direct costs of violence, 65b multisector response to homicide rate, 148, 148b NGO Viva Rio, 197, 213n92 police pacification units, 152 victims of political violence, reparations for, 125-26 break from past. See commitment mechanisms

Breaking the Conflict Trap (Collier), 105b bribes. See corruption "Brookings Process," 210n52 budgets, 33, 127, 128b, 149, 160b, 214n116, 256. See also transparency Burkina Faso AU Border Program pilot project, 219 developmental comparison with Burundi, 63, 64f Burundi community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b deaths from political violence, 70n62 development consequences of violence, compared to Burkina Faso, 63, 64f duration of aid for, 193 integrating former rebels into national army, 100b, 132b poverty reduction, international or joint national-international strategies, 193 rapid-results approach, 170 volatility in international aid to, 195b Business Edge of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), 177*n*88

business regulation, 157

# C

cabinets, size of, 121, 124 California gang-related homicides in Los Angeles, 123b legalizing drugs, 43n86 Cambodia community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b duration of donor projects in, 196 EC survey of assistance to, 25 qualified contractors not interested in bidding on projects, 197 Canada Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center (FINTRAC), 242*n*42 Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START), 185, 209n14 capacity of institutions. See institutional capacity "capture the narrative," 124 Caribbean and modern organized violence, 67 (feature), 76b Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Fund, 236b Carnegie Commission Report on Preventing Deadly Conflict, 186 cash transfer programs, 162, 177n92 Cederman, Lars-Erik, 81 Celtel (mobile phones company), 158b Central Africa. See also specific countries spillover effects in, 77b Central African Republic overtaxing of capacity by "too much, too soon" reform, 146 public financial management (PFM) reviews, 174n14 volatility in international aid to, 195b Central America. See also specific countries corruption and, 34, 57 depth of institutional transformation, 172–73 (feature) drug trafficking and, 34, 57, 223b gangs and rebels, 55, 57, 69n26 peace processes involving neighboring countries, 218, 233

private security industry in, 135 regional cooperation to manage public goods, 212n90 U.S. deportation of maras, 78b violence, 172-73b rising despite political peace, 58f weak institutions failing, 10, 76b Central Asia. See also specific countries external pressures and external assistance, 238-40 (feature) Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation program, 239 (feature) Central Asia Regional Information and Coordination Center, 239 (feature) Centre for Global Development, 34, 282b Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (Aceh, Indonesia), 186 Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCAI, Colombia), 114 (feature) Chad, camps for displaced populations, 61 Chad College, 101b Chambas, Mohamed Ibn, 208b Charte du Nord (Côte d'Ivoire), 82 children infant mortality rates in countries affected by violence, 63, 63f as victims of deadly diseases, 210n49 as victims of violence, 60 Chile building inclusive-enough coalitions, 12, 121, 122, 127 civilian oversight of judiciary, 154 confidence-building, 12 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 political transitions and peacemaking, 13 security personnel standards, 151 success in preventing violence, 11 transitional justice, 166 transition from military rule, 154 China economic reform, 146b infrastructure investment supporting private sector development, 200 social networks of migrant workers, 79b Township and Village Enterprises, 146 trade with and investment in Africa, 183 China Road and Bridge Corporation, 227b CICIG (International Commission Against Impunity). See Guatemala citizen security, 148-53 cross-border insecurity, 20, 218-20 defined, xvi, 116n13 developmental progress and, 6, 7t, 41n51 economic costs of, 5 global effects of lack of, 66 importance of, 45, 252 interdisciplinary approaches, 131, 132b investing in as essential to reduce violence, xii, 273b, 282b linking to justice, 256-57 local level and community policing, 152 nonstate actors not good fit for, 135 role of security forces and, 19, 149 security stresses, 73-78, 74t

citizen security (continued) selected indicators, 336-37t transnational ideological threats, 222-26 citizen security, justice, and jobs importance of, 128, 147-48, 148b, 248 international support for, 199-200 serious gaps, 205 roadmap for breaking cycles of violence, 13 track for improving global response for security and development, 2, 28-31, 29f in WDR framework for building resilience to violence, 45f, 47t, 103, 106 civilian oversight of security, 150b, 151, 154, 256, 275 civilian surge capacity, 196, 212n86 civil society confidence-building and, 13 premature load-bearing and, 101b service delivery by, 134 civil wars GDP losses due to, 5-6 natural resource rich countries and, 54 number of, 51, 52b, 269 recurring, 57, 58t. See also repeated cycles of violence classification of economies, 341-42, 343t climate change African states, coalition obtaining adaptation funding (2010), 232, 242n50 food insecurity and, 230 impact on conflict risk, 35 water stress and, 230 CMI. See Crisis Management Initiative coalitions. See inclusive-enough coalitions cocaine. See drug trafficking "cocooning" efforts to bypass national organizations and institutions, 145 coercion to maintain national stability, 8 Cold War and civil wars as dominant form of violence, 183 "collaborative capacities," 41n40, 209n32 collaborative coalitions, 2, 16-18 Collier, Paul, xi, 33, 105b, 117n34, 282b, 291n14 Colombia absence of state governance in regions of, 7 assassinations of government and political figures ordered by drug cartels, 101 assessment tools, use of, 23 border security with Ecuador, 220 community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b confidence-building, 15, 114 (feature), 254b quick, visible results for, 130b court reform, 155b Democratic Security Policy, 149, 150b disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program, 151 drug trafficking and, 10, 43n86, 223b, 285 international support for, 184 justice sector reform, 22, 154 lessons learned from, 113-14 (feature) multisector response to homicide rate, 148, 148b

Politica Nacional de Rehabilitación (PNR), 130b, 141n45 redeployment of security forces, 251 security goals through multisectoral intervention, 132b success in preventing violence, 11, 113-14 (feature), 121, 122, 250 color revolutions, 117n27 Commission on Human Security report (2003), 45, 116n16 commitment mechanisms adaptability of, 119 defined, xvii, 209-10n35 international support for, 188-90 signals of break with past and, 104, 124–27, 126b, 138 (feature) community-driven development (CDD) adapted to country context, 30 capacity-building through, 131, 132-33 citizen security, justice, and jobs, 19, 30 cross-border development programming, 283 donor risk management and, 202 evaluations of effectiveness of, 141n49 in post-conflict environments, 122, 138 (feature) state-society relations strengthened through, 133-34b community empowerment programs, 255 Community of Sant'Egidio, 154, 182b complementary programs for institutional transformation, 18-19 conditional cash transfers, 162 confidence, defined, xv confidence-building, 119-42 as basic principle for violence prevention, 247-48 basic tools for, 17 (feature), 250-55, 251t commitment mechanisms. See commitment mechanisms defined, 41-42n52, 116n14 delivery of early results. See early results differentiating tools to match country circumstances, 253-55 inclusive-enough coalitions, 120-27, 185-88. See also inclusiveenough coalitions international support for, 185-93, 272t lessons from national reformers, 119 roadmap for breaking cycles of violence, 11, 12-13, 18-20 track for improving global response for security and development, 28 trade-offs for, 253-55 in WDR framework for building resilience to violence, 45f, 46-47*t*, 103-6 conflict diamonds, 25, 34, 43n87, 220, 220t, 221b, 240n13, 241n14 "conflict trap," 117n34 contracting out, 134, 142n59, 202, 227b conversation on violence, xix-xx, xxii, 2 coordinating international aid, 271. See also international support corruption anti-corruption initiatives, 19, 42n61, 156-57, 258, 260, 262b, 284 bilateral cooperation against, 264b credibility of new regimes in legacies of, 126, 248 in developed countries, 36 financial flows and financial system weaknesses, 25, 227-29, 284-85 private sector anti-corruption mechanisms, 157, 158b regional and cross-border initiatives, 20

standards and harmonization, 229 transnational, 226-27 violence associated with, 6-7, 252 Costa Rica community policing, 152 court reform, 155b economic costs of violence, 65b cost-benefit analysis for criminal violence, 81 costs of violence, 5, 65b, 66, 186. See also human costs of violence Côte d'Ivoire militants and gangs, 54 multisectoral community approaches, 260 social inequalities and civil war, 82, 83 Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) frameworks, 87b, 95n65, 117n19 country-specific strategies, framework for, 248-50, 249t coups d'état donor support to social and poverty reduction programs in West African countries with, 44n105, 292n24 international community's norms for dealing with, 190 reduction of number of in Africa, 36, 68n5 court system reform. See justice and fairness criminal justice functions and dispute resolution, 153-56, 199, 276 crisis escalation, recognizing signs of, 252 Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), 43n80, 137 (feature), 186 cross-border initiatives. See regional and cross-border initiatives cross-border insecurity, 20, 218-20 culture of democracy, 165b Cyclone Narghis recovery efforts of ASEAN, 38 (feature)

## D

data gaps for studying violence climate change's impact on conflict risk, 35 continuing global learning platform, 288-90 future research agenda, 290 international aid flows, 280 justice and fairness issues, 82 labor market data in developing countries, 79b, 93n27 methodology and, xix weak institutions at risk for onset and recurrence of civil war, 73,84 data sources and methodology, 341 death rates in Central America, 172 (feature) former Soviet Union during transformation of government, 101, 102*b* infant mortality rates in countries affected by violence, 63, 63f from wars, 2, 3f, 51, 52b, 68n2, 338 debt relief, 183 decision-cycle-oriented feedback loops, 171 decision making, hierarchy of, 255 de Greiff, Pablo, 140n33 de jure vs. de facto outcomes, 145 delivery mechanisms, 31, 104-6 Democratic Charter of 2001 (OAS), 51 Democratic Republic of Congo absence of state governance in regions of, 7 criminal gangs supporting political activities, 5

diamond trade. See conflict diamonds early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 EU Operation Artemis in, 281b fragmentation of international aid to, 199, 211n66 lootable natural resources of, 54, 57, 81 payments to ex-combatants, 110 peacekeeping force, deployment of, 192 polling by SMS (short message service), 205, 214n132, 291n7 road and traffic access, 161 Rwanda–DRC agreement (2007), 218 school management by religious organizations, 134 security forces committing human rights abuses, 149 stabilization policy to curb hyperinflation, 168 women-run small businesses, 177n98 women's organizations, role in sexual violence prevention, 152 democratization culture of democracy, 165b risks for civil war with, 101 demographics, key indicators for, 354-55t Deng Xiaoping, 146b deportation from U.S. of gang members back to Central America, 173 (feature) of maras, 78b Desai, Nitin, 165b DESEPAZ (Colombia), 113 (feature), 132b developed countries anti-corruption initiatives, 229 double standards of, 36, 287 organized crime within, 76b development. See also developmental consequences of violence global system of, 2 key indicators of, 344-45t national vs. regional administration of, 219 developmental consequences of violence, 5, 60-66 GDP losses, 64-65, 65b international scope, 66 poverty/wealth gap and, 60, 60f spillover effects, 65-66 trade and, 6, 64, 71*n*73 Development Assistance Committee framework, 34, 200 Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) Initiative, 292n25 devolution and decentralization, 164-66, 167b diamonds. See conflict diamonds; natural resources differentiating strategy and programs to country context, 21–23, 48, 48*t*, 111–12 Dili Declaration (May 2010), 198 diplomacy, global system of, 2 Dirty War (Argentina), 124 disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, 151-52. See also reintegration of ex-combatants displaced populations and refugees, 61, 66, 127, 338 dispute resolution, 134, 155, 175n35. See also justice and fairness domestic violence, 152, 169 donor behavior, change of, 26, 194-96, 212n74. See also international support donor risk management, 31-34, 202-4, 278-80, 282b. See also dual accountability Dos Santos Cruz, Carlos Alberto, 129b

double compacts, 193, 211n67, 265 double standards of developed countries, 36, 287 Doyle, Michael W., 210n35 DRC Speaks! (geo-polling project using cell phones), 214n132, 291n7 drivers of conflict, 9f drug consumption, 57, 222 legalization, 222, 224-25b drug-related violence assassinations of government and political figures ordered by drug cartels, 101 in Central America, 10b, 34, 53 in West Africa, 5, 34, 56b drug trafficking economics of cocaine trafficking, 222b external stresses and, 34, 172 (feature), 217, 220t importance in fragile states, 221 interdiction efforts against cocaine trafficking, 223b internal stresses and, 74 legalization, 222, 224-25b policy impact on producing, transit, and consuming countries, 43n86 dual accountability, 26, 26f, 200-202, 201f, 270 dynamics of change and differences among countries, 48, 99, 111-12. See also differentiating strategy and programs to country context; transforming institutions

#### E

early results balance of quick, visible results vs. longer-term institutionbuilding, 129-31, 130-31b basic tools for, 255-58 confidence-building and, 104-6, 128-36, 248 defined, xvii delivery of, 19, 138 (feature), 253 interdisciplinary approach, 131, 132b international support for, 190-93 early warning system for food insecurity, 230b, 286 East Asia Emergency Rice Reserve program, 286 Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, 236b Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, 236b Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, 235, 236b Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority, 236b ECOM (soft commodity trading company), 213n111 economic activity by country, 350-51t Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) GEMAP, agreement to, 126b, 206 (feature) Guinea-Bissau assistance, 207 (feature) Liberia and planning for transition, 32 (feature), 206 (feature) mediation initiatives of, 29, 186, 233 pressure on countries with coups d'états, 16 West African Coast Initiative on organized crime, 283 economic reforms, 167-68 interdisciplinary approaches, 131, 132b economic stresses, 6, 7t, 74t, 78-81, 90t economic theories of violence, 75-76b economic theory and impunity, 116n9 ECOWAS. See Economic Community of West African States

ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community), 237b, 238 (feature) Ecuador's border security with Colombia, 220 education reform, 169 religious organizations managing schools, 134 responsibility decentralized to local level, 135b, 142n57 Egmont Group initiative, 228, 241-42n39 EITI. See Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Ekeh, Peter, 136b elections, 8, 101, 120, 164, 251 electricity Ghana supplying to Liberia, 32 (feature), 191b importance for jobs and security, 128, 158, 160, 160b, 257 elite cooperation in elections, 164 elite pacts defined, xv, 72 as strategy to prevent violence, 86 vicious cycle of violence and, 88 El Salvador deportation of maras from U.S., 78b economic costs of violence, 65b homicide rates, 58 military stalemate and reforms, 173 (feature) transition moment, 173 (feature) violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 2, 4f, 54t women guerrillas involved in land reform, 163 employment. See jobs energy. See also electricity; oil consumption patterns, 230 Equator Principles, 286, 292n19 escaping violence and developing resilience. See transforming institutions "Esquipulas Process," ending Nicaraguan war (1987), 218 Ethiopia allocation of budget support to local and municipal governments, 43n92, 291n6 development progress, 51 MDG progress, 6 Productive Safety Net Programme, 161, 176n73 ethnic differences. See also justice and fairness horizontal inequality and onset of civil violence, 75b, 81-82, 94nn46-47 European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), 237b, 238 (feature) European Commission Aceh Peace Process Support Program, 138 (feature) on duration of aid programs, 196 public financial management (PFM) reviews, 174n14 survey of assistance to Cambodia, 25 European Union Congo force from, 194 Guinea-Bissau assistance, 207 (feature) long-standing regional programs, 25 mediation used in, 187b model of cross-border regional cooperation, 44n100, 219–20, 235, 237b, 242n51, 284 Operation Artemis in Democratic Republic of Congo, 281b programs for previously conflict-affected border regions, 35 travel restrictions imposed by Zimbabwe's leaders, 189

exclusion of groups. See also inclusive-enough coalitions challenges of, 249 due to past abuses, 121, 124, 127, 140n27, 162 ideologically motivated groups capitalizing on themes of injustice and exclusion, 222 linked to violence, 252 public attitudes toward, 168-69 expectations defined, xv of rapid change, 8, 108-10 unrealistic due to levels of mistrust, 99-101, 100b external stresses, xi, 216-43 core tools to address, 263t cross-border insecurity, 218-20 cross-border security linked to development, 263 defined, 72 deportation of maras from U.S., 78b diminishing, 107 economic stresses, 226-29 illicit international financial flows, 227-29 transnational corruption, 226-27 external support and resistance to, 11, 15-16, 106-7 gang culture, 173 (feature) mobilizing external support, 262-65 national action to address, 17 (feature) reducing international support, 262-65 regional action, 281-86 regional stresses, 233-37. See also regional and cross-border initiatives resource stresses, 229-32 role of, 10, 11 track for improving global response for security and development, 28, 34-35 trafficking, 220-22, 220t transnational ideological movements, 222-26 vulnerability to, 9f in WDR framework for building resilience to violence, 45f, 47t, 103 weak institutions and vulnerability, 101-3 external support and resistance to external stresses. See external stresses Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), 34, 37, 188, 210n38, 285, 286, 288

# F

Fafo surveys

on human costs of violence, 59
on land dispute resolution by traditional authorities, 134, 141–42*n*56

fairness. See justice and fairness
Famine Early Warning System Network, 230*b*, 286
FAO. See Food and Agriculture Organization
FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), 79*b*, 113

(feature), 121, 252, 253

Fearon, James D., 10, 78, 84, 85*b*, 94*n*39, 105*b*, 119, 141*n*49
fears of oppression, 74
feasible results indicators to demonstrate progress, 17 (feature)

feudalism, 90 (feature) finance flows and financial system weaknesses, 25, 227-29, 284-85 key indicators of, 352-53t Financial Action Task Force (FATF), 228, 241n38 Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN, U.S.), 242n42 financial intelligence units (FIUs), 241-42n39, 242n43 financial support for security and justice reforms, 29 Fixing Failed States (Ghani & Lockhart), 42n71, 211n67 flexibility in approaches to progress, 171 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 34, 231, 232b, 286 food insecurity, 229-30, 230b, 285-86 food shocks (2008-09), 8, 81, 86f, 103 Foreign Exchange Transaction Reports, 242n43 forestry industry. See timber industry former Soviet Union and increased violence due to government transformation, 101, 102b fragile countries affected by conflict and violence, 39n3, 68n8, 87b aid programs in, 25, 183 child welfare in, 63 corruption. See corruption external stresses for. See external stresses food shocks, 81, 103, 285-86. See also food insecurity global tendency to ignore, 217 landlocked or island nations, 233-34 mistrust and expectations of, 100b resisting independence, 166 Sub-Saharan Africa's regional infrastructure challenge, 235m technical assistance, 196 Fragile States Facility (FSF), 213n91 fragility composed of weak capacity, accountability, and legitimacy of institutions, 85, 87b defined, xvi, 95n65 innovative thinking about, 95n68 in WDR framework for building resilience to violence, 45f fragmentation of aid. See international support framework for building resilience. See WDR framework (2011) Free Aceh Movement, 108, 120, 137 (feature) Freedom House, 114 (feature), 208n1

#### G

g7+, 43n91, 197, 291n5 gangs dispute resolution mechanism of, 133–34 global rise of, 53*f* homicides related to, 123*b*, 172 (*feature*) links to employment, respect, and identity, 79 multisectoral programs of prevention at community level, 148 reasons for membership, 79*b* gaps in data. *See* data gaps for studying violence Garang, John, 78 GDP. *See* gross domestic product GEMAP. *See* Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program gender-based violence, 60–61, 61*t*, 152 gender issues. *See* women Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (2008), 59 geographical location. See justice and fairness Georgia coordination between humanitarian and development partners, 193 corruption crack down, 156 Germany recognition of past crimes, 166 systematic and gradual reform, 259 Ghana confidence-building, 12 Consultative Assembly, 121 electricity supplied to Liberia, 32 (feature), 191b National Architecture for Peace, 189b peace committees, 23 refugees seeking shelter in, 66 success in preventing violence, 11, 108, 120, 121, 122, 189b Ghani, Ashraf, 42n71, 193, 211n67 global conversation on violence, xix-xx, 2 Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, 228 Global Information and Early Warning System, 230b, 286 globalization changes in, xii leading to external stresses. See external stresses Goldstone, Jack A., 81 Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), 42n61, 126b, 206 (feature) Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries, 35, 43n98, 236, 243n68, 263, 284 greed or grievance as motive for violence, 75b Green Climate Fund, 242n50 grievance as motive for violence, 75b, 88 Griffiths, Martin, 187b gross domestic product (GDP) losses due to civil war and violent crime, 64-65, 65b losses due to neighboring conflicts, 5, 65 military expenditures as percentage of, 338-39 paired with political instability as predictor of civil war onset, 93n9 Groups of Friends, 218, 240n6 Guatemala anti-corruption initiatives, 42n62 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 173 (feature), 179n143 court reform, 155b deportation of maras from U.S., 78b economic costs of violence, 65b gang membership, reasons for, 79b GDP losses due to violence, 5 homicide rates, 58 International Commission Against Impunity (CICIG), 18, 42n62, 189, 190b, 210n46, 252, 265 multisectoral community approaches, 260 peace accords, 173 (feature), 209n29 private security industry, 135 violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 2, 4f women's courts, 155 women's equality, 209n29

Guéhenno, Jean-Marie, 149, 151 Guinea, value chain projects in, 176*n*67 Guinea-Bissau assistance programs, 207 *(feature)* reintegration budget, 202 UN Peacebuilding Commission in, 184 volatility in international aid to, 195*b*, 207 *(feature)* Gusmão, Xanana, 125

#### Н

Haiti anti-corruption initiatives, 20, 264b confidence-building, 129b corruption, 227 disarmament project (2003-04), 212n79 disaster's effect on institutional transformation, 103 election violence, 67 (feature) international aid for, 183 justice sector reform, 22 multidonor trust funds for, 202 NGOs operating in, 183, 197 overtaxing of capacity by "too much, too soon" reform, 146 police reforms, 13, 153, 153b polling of citizen perceptions, 259 reforms prior to 2010 disaster, 110b volatility in international aid to, 195b health issues associated with violence, 66 disease focus of humanitarian aid, 210n49 reform, 169 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (World Bank/IMF), 206 (feature) heroin. See drug trafficking Herzegovina. See Bosnia and Herzegovina high-income countries. See developed countries Hoeffler, Anke, 84 Holst Fund (Palestinian Authority), 33 homicide rates. See death rates Honduras deportation of maras from U.S., 78b homicide rates, 58 judicial branch, 175n45 private security industry, 135 violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 4f human costs of violence, 6, 59-60, 59f humanitarian aid disease focus of, 210n49 duration of assistance, 33, 191-92 growth of, 183 phasing from international to national and local institutions, 19, 29–30, 265, 266b, 272t in post-conflict environments, 2 rapid relief from, 191 trade-offs with, 265 human rights abuses civil wars and, 64, 82, 82b institutional accountability and, 88 military and, 149

Index

prosecutions for, 51 signaling early intent to redress, 125 Human Rights Watch, 136*b* human security. *See* citizen security humility, 246 Humphreys, Macartan, 141*n*49 Al-Hussein, Zeid Ra'ad, 273*b* 

#### 

IADB. See Inter-American Development Bank Ibrahim, Mo, 158b Ibrahim Prize for African leadership, 37, 288 IBRD (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development), xi ICRG. See International Country Risk Guide IDA (International Development Association), 196 identity. See justice and fairness ideological grievances, 5, 67-68 (feature) ideology-based groups and transnational ideological threats, 83, 83f, 222-26, 241n30. See also terrorism and terrorist attacks IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), 232b IFC. See International Finance Corporation IFIs (international financial institutions), role in developmental underpinnings of violence prevention, 275-76, 280 Ijaz, Syeda S., 84 illegal drug trade. See drug trafficking Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (U.S.), 78b IMF. See International Monetary Fund immunization drives, 210n49 impunity and use of violence, 114, 116n9 inclusion. See inclusive-enough coalitions; justice and fairness inclusive-enough coalitions, 16-18, 120-27 adapted to local context, 118, 122 confidence-building and, 12-13, 104, 111, 248 defined, xvii international support for, 185-88 lessons learned, 124 types of coalitions and strategies, 120-24 India "back to basics" job creation programs, 19 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 161, 176n73 Indonesia. See also Aceh "back to basics" job creation programs, 19 building inclusive-enough coalitions, 12, 120, 137 (feature) community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b corruption crack down, 156 multidonor trust funds for, 202 political transitions and peacemaking, 13 rapid-results approach, 171 success in preventing violence, 11, 108 Indonesian Reconstruction Agency, 265 industrialized countries. See developed countries inequality. See also justice and fairness horizontal inequality and onset of civil violence, 75b, 79, 94nn46-47 horizontal vs. vertical inequality, 179n131

link between income inequality and criminal violence, 79 risk for civil conflict and, 6, 22 vulnerability to criminal activities and, 7 infant mortality rates in countries affected by violence, 63, 63f informal employment, 162, 257 infrastructure investment, 158-61, 200, 234, 235m, 257 institutional capacity Central American reform, 173 (feature) challenges of, 249 changes in international capacity, 30 "collaborative capacities," 209n32 defined, xvi, 84 early policy announcements and, 22 importance of, 84 indicators of, 95n65 justice reform and, 154 operational gaps in capacity, 210n52, 270-71 strong capacity indicators but low governance indicators, 116n4 trust and capacity to deliver change, 100 violence and, 88 weak capacity and early results possible, 131-36 institutional challenges, types of, 249 institutional legitimacy as key to stability, xi-xii, 7 early results achieved despite, 131-36 Western model not necessarily relevant, 8 institutional transformation. See transforming institutions institutions, defined, xvi, 41n36 Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), 23, 199, 271 interdisciplinary approaches, 131, 132b interlinked violence, 54-55 internal international agencies. See international support internal stresses defined, 72 economic stresses, 74t, 78-81, 90t justice and fairness, 74t, 81-84, 90t security stresses, 73-78, 74t, 90t International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), xi International Commission against Impunity (CICIG). See Guatemala International Commission on Property Rights for the Poor, 232 International Committee of the Red Cross, 154 international comparison of economic risks for political conflict, 80b International Corruption Hunters Alliance, 34, 229, 284 International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), 64, 78, 95n65 International Development Association (IDA), 196 International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 31, 36, 286-87 International Finance Corporation (IFC), 177n88, 200, 213n111, 292n19 international financial institutions (IFIs), role in developmental underpinnings of violence prevention, 275-76, 280 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 232b International Institute for Strategic Studies, xi International Monetary Fund (IMF), 188, 206–7 (feature) International Network on Conflict and Fragility (OECD), 10, 84

International Organization for Migration, 232 international support, 2, 27 (feature), 180-214 agenda for action, 290-91 branding of aid programs, 191, 210n50 for citizen security, justice, and jobs, 28, 29f, 199-200 for commitment mechanisms, 188-90 for confidence-building, 185-93 data gaps and development of indicators, 280 donor risk management, 31-34, 202-4. See also dual accountability duration of, 193-96 for early results, 190-93 evolving international architecture, 181-85, 205 government misgivings about working with, 131 for inclusive-enough coalitions, 185-88 internal international agency systems, 197-99 procedural conformism, 205 reforming, 31-34, 32 (feature), 276-81 key indicators of, 352-53t lessons learned from, 205 marshaling support from other countries and from global and regional institutions, 250, 286-88 mobilizing for external stresses, 16-17, 20-21, 264-65 monitoring results, 204-5 new directions for, 268-93 in post-conflict phase, 184, 184f preventing repeated cycles of violence, 270-76 capacity, operational gaps in, 210n52, 270-71 employment, 274 justice and jobs, structural gaps in, 271-74 police and justice, 274-76 principles for combined operations, 271 recovery instead of prevention as focus of, 183-85 reducing external stresses, 281-86 reducing risks of violence, 35-38 roadmap for breaking cycles of violence, 20-21 track for improving global response for security and development, 28, 36-37, 47t for transforming institutions, 193-200 violence with international links, 22 volatility and fragmentation in, 194, 195b, 199, 208b, 211n66, 212n74, 217 ending stop-go pattern of assistance, 280-81, 282b Internet use, effect on governance, 109–10, 117n26 interstate wars, number of, 51, 52b invasions and occupations, 218 Iran, citizen pressure through technology, 110 Iraq Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), 8, 196 elections, 164 electricity crisis during reconstruction, 160b foreign troops and security stresses, 218 multidonor trust funds for, 202 privatized security, failure of, 135 restoration of confidence and "surge" (2006-07), 8 spillover effect of occupation of, 78 Israeli-Palestinian violence, 186

#### J

Jamaica criminal gangs supporting political activities, 5 indirect vs. direct costs of violence, 65b inner-city community infrastructure and services for the poor, 132b militants and gangs, 54 Japan infrastructure investment supporting private sector development, 200 land reform, 162, 257 speed in transforming institutions, 13 women's courts, 156 jobs. See also citizen security, justice, and jobs "back to basics" job creation programs, 19, 257 best-fit approaches, 161-63 developing capacity for, 30-31 exploitative employment as risk, 79 international support for, 200, 271-74 investing in as essential to reduce violence, xii, 79, 289 low skill levels, 161 prioritization of, 274 private sector jobs, 157-58 reintegration of ex-combatants, 138 (feature) self-employment, 162 social cohesion and, 6 transitional employment, 200 women, employment of, 163-64 youth unemployment, 6, 30, 274 Jordan, camps for displaced populations, 61 justice and fairness. See also citizen security, justice, and jobs; social cohesion confidence-building and, 140n33 corruption. See corruption court reform, 154–55, 155b, 175n45 criminal justice functions and dispute resolution, 153-56, 199, 276 defined, xvi developing capacity for, 30, 88 Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, 235 economic goals met through, 132b ideologically motivated groups capitalizing on themes of injustice and exclusion, 222 international support to fix structural gaps in, 271-74 investing in as essential to reduce violence, xii linking to security, 256-57 prioritizing investment in, 273b, 274-76, 282b stresses and vulnerability to violence, 74t, 81-84, 94nn46-47 factor in civil war, 6, 7t transitional justice approaches, 140n34, 166-67

# K

Kagame, H.E. Paul, 158*b* Kazakhstan, regional cooperation and stresses, 238–40 *(feature)* Kecamatan Development Program, 138 *(feature)*, 157 Keefer, Philip, 78, 119 Kenya contested elections (2007), 110 criminal gangs supporting political activities, 5 economic costs of violence, 65b elections, 120, 164 mediation, 187b militants and gangs, 54 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) violence, 54t Kimberley Process Certification Scheme to stem sale of conflict diamonds, 25, 34, 43n87, 220, 221b, 240n13, 285 Kleiman, Mark A.R., 224b Korea, Democratic People's Republic of, Internet's effect on governance, 117n26 Korea, Republic of confidence-building, 12 land reform, 162, 257 speed in transforming, 13, 110 success of aid from single or dominant donor, 199 transition moment, 22, 107 Kosovo "back to basics" job creation programs, 19 community policing, 152 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 refugees from, 66 technical assistance, 196 value chain development in dairy industry, 158, 159b, 257 World Bank support for negotiations, 186 Kuwait invasion (1990), spillover effect of, 78 Kyrgyz Republic, regional cooperation and stresses, 238-40 (feature)

# L

labor migration. See migration Lacey Act, 285 Laitin, David D., 105b Lamamra, Ramtane, 281b, 290 landlocked or island nations, 35, 233-34 land reform, 162, 257 land-use issues, 230–31, 232b Large Cash Transaction Reports, 242n43 Las Madres de la Plaza, 123-24, 140n26 Latin America. See also specific countries coordinating political, security, and development responses to violence, 148b court reform, 155b employment and security as most pressing needs in, 128 women's human rights activism, 123-24 Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), 33, 203b law enforcement personnel army vs. police, unclear roles of, 149, 200 community policing, 152 prioritizing reform of, 274-76 UN standardized training of, 199 U.S. vs. EU structures, 213n107 vetting of, 151 women participating as, 151-52, 174n25, 188

layered approach to problem solving, xii, 2 leadership agreements between strong leaders. See elite pacts confidence-building and, 106, 119 initiatives to recognize, 37, 288 qualities of effective leadership, 139n9 seizing opportunities to prevent violence, 252 Lebanon camps for displaced populations, 61 electricity restored during civil war, 13, 160, 160b UN peacekeeping operation, 221 women's courts, 155 legalization of drugs, 222, 224–25b legal reform. See justice and fairness legitimacy defined, xvi, 84 functioning of, 95n67 lack of legitimate institutions and risk of recurring violence, 85-89,85b trust and, 151 Le Roy, Alain, 281b, 290 lessons learned from Central Asia's regional cooperation institutions, 239-41 (feature) from Colombia, 113–14 (feature) from international support, 205, 271 from national reformers, 119 Levi, Margaret, 41n49, 116n1 Liberia anti-corruption initiatives, 19, 126, 126b, 156, 260, 262b assistance programs, 206-8 community-driven development (CDD), evaluations of effectiveness of, 141n49 confidence-building, quick, visible results for, 130b coordination between humanitarian and development partners, 193 dual key authority in revenue earning and expenditure, 42n61 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 economic goals met through security intervention, 132b electricity assistance from Ghana, 32 (feature), 191b Emergency Employment Plan, 161 Governance and Economic Management Action Plan, 252 Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), 18, 188-89, 202, 262b international support and government planning for transition, 193, 206-7 (feature), 250 mass rape, 60 qualified contractors not interested in bidding on projects, 197 refugees from, 66 spillover effects on neighboring countries, 65 success in preventing violence, 11 transition moment, 22 women economic empowerment of, 19 peace negotiations, role of, 123 security tasks, participation in, 152 World Bank/IMF Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, 206 (feature)

Liberian Women's Initiative, 13 Liberian Women's Mass Action for Peace movement, 123 Libya uprising (2011), effect on oil prices, 5, 66 Linn, Johannes, 240 (*feature*) local confidence building, 14, 122, 122*b* Lockhart, Clare, 42*n*71, 193, 211*n*67 Lomé Agreement (1999), 121 Lomé Declaration (2000), 36, 51, 287 Lord's Resistance Army (Uganda), 67 (*feature*), 218 low-income countries civil wars in, 78 labor-intensive programs, 161 reasons why change becomes so difficult for, 99 Loya Jirga (Afghanistan), 165*b*, 177–78*n*103

#### Μ

Macmillan Limited, 227b macroeconomic policy, 168 Madagascar community monitoring in health sector, 157 land-use issues, 230-31 Mali AU Border Program pilot project, 219 land dispute resolution, 155 nongovernmental interventions for peace, 139n21 success in preventing violence, 120 violence, 54t Mandela, Nelson, 14, 120 marginalized groups. See exclusion of groups Matveeva, Anna, 240 (feature) MDGs. See Millennium Development Goals MDTFs. See multidonor trust funds media, role of, 124 mediation, increased support for, 182-83, 186, 187b heavy mediation start-up budget (HMSB), 209n23 light mediation start-up budget (LMSB), 209n23 links to sustained mediation, 272t mediators and special envoys, 29, 187b, 213n96 Mehta, Pratap, 168 Melanesia gang violence associated with ethnic groups, 54 ritualized warfare, 68-69n14 men, impact of violent conflict on, 60-61, 61t, 138 (feature) Mérida Initiative, 57, 192 Mesnard, Alice, 119 Meteoro program (Colombia), 15 methodological note, xix-xx, 341 Mexico economic costs of violence, 65b violence levels, 10 Middle East and North Africa institutional capacity vs. accountability, 84 peace processes involving neighboring countries, 233 violence in, xi, 5, 53 middle-income countries aid and support for fragile countries from, 183, 269 consumption patterns in food and energy, 230 as examples of recent successful transitions, xii

labor-intensive programs, 161 lessons for, 22 lessons from recent transformations of, 197 reasons why change so challenging for, 99 socioeconomic consequences of violence in, 63 migration, 163, 258, 259 Miguel, Edward, 6, 81 military expenditures, 338 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) job creation as low priority, 200 low-income countries or countries engaged in conflict and, xi, 1, 5, 50, 63, 277 monitoring results, 21, 259 poverty reduction, 348-49t violence as constraint on meeting, 61-63, 62f, 70n57 Min, Brian, 81 Miron, Jeffrey A., 225b mistrust, need to eliminate. See trust mobile phones, 110, 158b, 214n132 money-laundering. See corruption monitoring results, 21, 204-5, 259, 260t Montaño, Jorge, 10, 76b MONUC (UN Peacekeeping Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo), 192, 194 Mozambique anti-corruption initiatives, 19, 260, 262b civil liberties rating of, 208n1 corruption crack down, 156 development progress, 51 duration of donor projects in, 196 Feeder Roads Program, 161 international support, benefits of, 182b macroeconomic reforms, 168 MDG progress, 6 peace agreement, 182b security goal met by economic intervention, 132b signal of break with past, 125 success in preventing violence, 11 Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program, 218, 219b multidonor trust funds (MDTFs), 33, 202, 203b, 212n79 Multilateral Development Banks supporting private sector development, 200 multisectoral approaches community programs, 29, 255 transforming institutions, 148-49 Myanmar Cyclone Nargis (2008) disaster situation, 186, 233, 234b, 271 devolution and decentralization, 166 drug trafficking, 57 Internet use, effect on governance, 117n26 regional cooperation with Thailand, 233

#### Ν

Naidoo, Jay, 14, 115*b* Namibia, Women and Child Protection Unit within police force, 152 natural disasters effect on institutional transformation of Haiti, 103 food insecurity and, 230*b* 

Myanmar disaster situation (2008), 186 number of, 339 South-South exchanges and, 186 World Bank rapid response to crisis and emergencies, 208n10 Natural Resource Charter, 34, 188, 210n39, 285, 291-92n14 natural resources exploitation of, 10, 67 (feature) external stresses, 229-32 standards for responsible use of, 188, 285-86 wealth of, and civil wars, 54, 78, 81 World Resources Outlook, 285 neighborhood as factor in conflict risk, 40n33 Nepal community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 55, 91–92 (feature) economic empowerment, 163, 258 educational responsibility decentralized to local level, 135b interlinked security, economic, and political stresses leading to warfare, 90-92 (feature) PBF funding to, 192 Peacebuilding Commission, 33 value chain projects, 176n67 women's economic empowerment, 19, 163b, 258 Nestlé, 213n111 Netherlands duration of aid for Burundi, 193 security sector reform, 185 New Partnership for Africa's Development, 233 Nicaragua deportation rate from U.S., 78b "Esquipulas Process," ending war (1987), 218 transition moment, 22, 125, 173 (feature) violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 4f women economic empowerment, 19 security tasks, participation in, 152 Nigeria anti-corruption initiatives, 20, 264b corruption, 227 Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, 264b oil trafficking from, 241n15 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) vigilantism, 135, 136b war with Biafra, 166 Nilsson, Desirée, 119 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). See also civil society aid programs in fragile countries, 25, 134 data collection and analysis, role in, 280 donor risk management and, 202 government misgivings about working with, 131 health system reform, role of, 169 local coalition building and, 122 proliferation of international NGOs, 183 time frames for support from, 193 NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), 229 Norconsult, 227b North, Douglass, 86, 105b

Northern Ireland criminal gangs supporting political activities, 5 multisectoral community approaches, 260 political transitions and peacemaking, 13 social inequalities and civil war, 83 success in preventing violence, 11, 259 trafficking financing rebels, 54 violence, 54*t* 

# 0

**OECD** countries security and development assistance from, 26 terrorist threats in, 55 OECD Handbook on Security System Reform, 175n37 Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (U.S.), 185, 209n14, 212n86 oil prices, effect of terrorist attacks, 5, 66, 94n39 revenues, wealth-sharing arrangements for, 127 trafficking in, 220t, 241n15 opportunity for change. See transition moments optimism, 110, 110b, 116n3 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 25. See also OECD countries Anti-Bribery Convention, 226 anti-corruption initiatives, 229 International Network on Conflict and Fragility, 26 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC), 149, 166, 282b, 291n4 Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires, 236b Organization of American States (OAS), 51, 190 organized criminal violence data gaps for studying. See data gaps for studying violence defined, xv, 39n1 drug-related violence and, 10 inequality between rich and poor and, 22 nature of modern organized violence, 67-68 (feature) rise of in post-conflict countries, 2, 4f stress posed by, 76b Oshima, Kenzo, 273b Otpor movement, 117n25 oversight mechanisms, 31. See also civilian oversight of security

## Ρ

Pacific Islanders' migration, 163
Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Plan for Regional Integration and Cooperation, 235
Pakistan

assessment tools, use of, 23
budget allocations as signals of political reform, 127, 128b
confidence-building, visible results for, 130–31b
cross-border violence, 67 (*feature*)
devolution and decentralization, 166
Frontier Crimes Regulation, 127
IFC programs for small and medium entrepreneurs, 213n111
international ideological movements and local grievances, 5

Pakistan (continued) international long-term support for local initiatives, 194 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) Pashtun tribal areas on Afghanistan border, 219 post-crisis needs assessment, 250 violence, 53, 54t Palestinian territories Holst Fund, 33 Palestinian Authority, accountability and transparency of, 157 security forces, 149 spillover effect of military operations in West Bank and Gaza, 78 Panama, violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 4f Papua New Guinea nongovernmental interventions for peace, 139n21 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) violence, 54t women's role in peace process, 123 parenting behavior and training, 169 partisanship of state institutions, 7 Pashtun tribal areas (Afghanistan-Pakistan border), 219 past crimes, justice for, 166-67 patronage dismantling of, 8, 123 regimes using to maintain their power, 8, 258 state legitimacy and, 95n67 PCNAs (Post Conflict Needs Assessments), 192-93 peacekeeping, global system of, 2, 28, 183. See also United Nations flexible peacekeeping arrangements, 281b performance legitimacy, defined, 84 Peru drug trafficking and, 10, 223b mass rape, 60 Philippines, violence in, 54, 54t Physical Rights Integrity Index, 64, 339 physical terrain features making rebellion easier, 40n33, 93n2 Pidufala, Oksana, 240 (feature) pirates costs on trade and economic activity, 5, 65 Somalian, 1, 67 (feature), 263 Pitsuwan, Surin, 38 (feature), 234b police. See law enforcement personnel policy options. See practical policy and program tools political legitimacy, defined, 84 political stresses. See inequality; justice and fairness Political Terror Scale, 82b political theories of violence, 75-76b Portillo, Alfonso, 190b Post Conflict Needs Assessments (PCNAs), 192-93 post-conflict phase, 2, 3t failure to address repeated cycles of violence, 23 international support in, 184, 184f organized violence rising in, 2, 4f recovery and lingering risk for violence, 64 security forces in, 149-51 poverty key indicators of, 346-47t rising in countries affected by violence, 4f, 5, 60, 60f

practical policy and program tools, 16-23, 246-67 basic principles, 247-48 basic tools for confidence-building, 17 (feature), 250-55, 251t for early results, 255-58 core tools, 17 (feature) country-specific strategies, framework for, 248-50, 249t framework for tailoring country-specific strategies, 248-50 lessons of what succeeds, 18-19 linking early results to transforming institutions, 255-60 failure to use tools to full potential, 192-93 fitting program design to context, 259-60, 261b managing trade-offs, 258-59 monitoring results, 259 reducing external stresses and mobilizing external support, 262-65 in WDR framework, 47t pragmatism, 171 preemptive strike as accepted risk, 74 "premature load-bearing" of institutions, 100, 101b prevention of violence. See also specific countries and regions international support's focus on recovery instead of prevention, 183-85 as part of transition, 108 repeated cycles of violence, 270-76 through citizen security, justice, and jobs, 28, 29f. See also citizen security, justice, and jobs "Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment that Respects Rights, Livelihoods and Resources," 232b prioritization of institutional transformation. See sequencing and prioritizing reforms prisoner's dilemmas, 116n9 private sector anti-corruption mechanisms, 157, 158b crime and violence prevention initiatives, 152, 200 jobs, 157-58 outreach to, in coalition building, 122 private security companies, 135, 136b privatization of state assets, 168 procurement procedures, 198-99, 198b proposers/responders and bargainers, 82b publication of cost estimates for projects, 198b public attitudes toward excluded groups, 168-69 public finance for employment, 161-63 public financial management (PFM) reviews, 174n14 public-private partnerships, 13, 253 public services, quality of, 235, 236t

#### R

racial inequality. See justice and fairness rainfall shocks and violence, 6, 81 Ramirez de Rincon, Marta Lucia, 15, 150b RAMSI (Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands), 153, 185 rape, 60–61 rapid economic and social change as drivers for conflict, 75b rapid-results approach, 170, 196 recovering countries, defined, 70n50 reducing risks of violence, 23-39. See also practical policy and program tools citizen security, justice, and jobs, 28-31 external stresses and international support, 34-35 international support, 35-38 tracks for, 28-39 transforming institutions, 31-34 refugees. See displaced populations and refugees regional and cross-border initiatives aligning international assistance behind, 37-38, 38 (feature), 190, 210n48, 288 complementing global level to reduce external stresses, 25, 281-86 cooperation to manage public goods, 212n90, 236b, 291n4 cross-border trade, 283-84 development programming, 35, 219-20 layered approach to problems, xii, 2, 20 reaffirming consensus on international norms and standards, 39 (feature) regional norms, essential in preventing violence, 117n25, 289b regional stresses, 216-18, 233-37 security support, 283 shared regional technical and administrative capacity, 283-84 Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), 153, 185 "regional subsidiarity," 233 reintegration of ex-combatants, 100b, 132b, 138 (feature), 142n70, 149, 162, 192, 202 religious differences. See justice and fairness RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance), 125 reparations for victims of political violence, 125-26, 140nn33-34 repeated cycles of violence, 2-8, 3-4f, 3t, 57-71 decline in wars, 51-53, 52b defined, xv developmental consequences of, 60-66. See also developmental consequences of violence failure to address in post-war assistance, 23 global effects of, 66 international support for preventing, 270-76 modern violence and, 53-58 need to address, 252 in WDR framework, 46t repeated spiral in transforming institutions, 12, 12f, 107-8 research needs. See data gaps for studying violence resilience of institutions, 98, 103-8. See also confidence-building; transforming institutions in WDR framework, 45*f*, 46–47*t*, 103*f* "Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict Affected and High-Risk Areas," 220 restoring confidence. See confidence-building Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. See FARC road maintenance, 132b, 161, 206 (feature) roadmap for breaking cycles of violence, 8-23 citizen security, justice, and jobs, 13. See also citizen security, justice, and jobs collaborative coalitions, 16-18 confidence-building, 12-13, 18-20. See also confidence-building

differentiating strategy and programs to country context, 21-23, 111-12 external stresses and international support, 15-16 international support, 20-21. See also international support monitoring results, 21 practical policy and program tools, 16-23. See also practical policy and program tools regional and cross-border initiatives, 20 transforming institutions, 8-12. See also transforming institutions "rules of warfare," nations observing, 109 Russia aid for post-conflict Tajik regime, 163, 177n93 increased violence due to government transformation, 101, 102*b* Rwanda anti-corruption institutions, 158b "back to basics" job creation programs, 19 community-based programs, 24 (feature), 261b contract enforcement regime, 157 development progress, 51 equality for women, 177n98 fears of oppression and civil conflict, 74 justice system, 167 mass rape, 60 MDG progress, 6 participation of previously excluded groups, 127, 162 transition moment, 22 value chain development in coffee industry, 158, 159b, 257 Rwanda-DRC agreement (2007), 218

## S

SALW (small arms and light weapons), trade in, 221, 241*nn*19–22 Sambanis, Nicholas, 93n9, 210n35 sanctions, effectiveness of, 189, 190, 210n41, 226 Santiago Principles, 286, 292n20 Satyanath, Shankar, 6, 81 schools. See education "second best" solutions, 107b, 117n17, 248, 289 second-chance programs, 161 secrecy jurisdictions, 228, 242n44 security. See citizen security "security dilemma," 74 self-employment, 162 sequencing and prioritizing reforms, 145-48 after security, justice, and jobs, 164 as core tool, 255-56 defined, xvii investment in citizen security and justice reforms, 273b, 282b "too fast" process, effect of, 144, 145-46 "too slow" process, effect of, 144 Sergenti, Ernest, 6, 81 sexual violence, 60-61, 61t shared regional administrative capacity, 35 Sharif, Sheikh, 263 shura (Arabic word for "consultation" or "council"), 134b, 141n54 Siemens Group, 227b

Sierra Leone coordination of aid programs, 196 devolution and decentralization, 166 justice reform, 154 lootable natural resources of, 54 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) reintegration budget, 202 Revolutionary United Front (RUF), 255 success in preventing violence, 11, 120-21 women economic empowerment, 19 victims of domestic violence, 152 signaling, 137-38 (feature), 251. See also commitment mechanisms defined, xvii need to address crisis situations, 186 Singapore confidence building, 14 housing programs, 257 local level, trust of, 122, 122b post-independence development, 13 security, justice, and jobs, 148b Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson, 32 (feature), 79, 126, 126b, 197 small arms and light weapons (SALW), trade in, 221, 241nn19-22 smuggling. See trafficking social accountability, 157, 258 social audits of government records, 175n61 social cohesion. See also inclusive-enough coalitions creating sense of fairness and social justice, 127, 140n41 firearms and illicit drugs, effect of, 7 jobs and, 6 value chains and, 176n67 Social Cohesion Program—a joint UNDP-UNDPA program, 188 social inequality. See inequality; justice and fairness Solomon Islands militants and gangs, 54 organized criminal violence, 67 (feature) Somalia low conflict interludes in, 8 outreach to Ethiopia, 263 peacekeeping missions in, 281b pirates off shore of, 1, 65, 67 (feature), 263 Somaliland, nongovernmental interventions for peace, 139n21 South Africa apartheid and strong state capacity, 116n4 assessment tools, use of, 23 confidence-building, 14, 115b, 254b constitutional reform and development of trust, 22 early results crucial to confidence-building, 253 elections, 164, 251 expertise for reconstruction and development, 250 guaranteeing employment to former adversaries, 100b, 127 international assistance from to Burundi, Rwanda, and Southern Sudan, 212n90 to Guinea-Bissau, 207 (feature) National Peace Accords, 251 nongovernmental interventions for peace, 139n21 security services, 151 signals on political reform, 125, 127

success in preventing violence, 11, 108, 115b, 120, 121 systematic and gradual reform, 259 violent crime arising in post-conflict state, 2 Southern African Development Community (SADC), 230b Southern Sudan, emergence of, 53 Southern Sudan Multidonor Trust Fund, 202, 203b, 204 South-North exchanges, xii, 36, 287-88 South-South exchanges benefits of, 197, 292n23 increases in, xii, 36, 208n6, 287-88 natural disaster situations and, 186 technical assistance, 44n104, 212n90, 292n23 Soviet Union (former) and increased violence due to government transformation, 101, 102b special independent agencies, 252 spillover effects, 65-66, 67 (feature) in Central Africa, 77b regional cooperation to deal with, 218, 284-85 in South America, 220 spiral. See repeated spiral in transforming institutions Sri Lanka school programs and UNICEF aid, 192 social inequalities and civil war, 83 stakeholders types of, 249 understanding urgency of action, 252 Statistics 40 (poll barometer), 280 Stedman, Stephen, 119 Stewart, Frances, 168 Stolen Assets Recovery Initiative (StAR), 34, 229, 284 stop-go aid in fragile states, 27f strategic communication, need for, 252 stresses. See also external stresses; internal stresses defined, xv types of, 249 vulnerability to violence and, 9f, 73-95 economic stresses, 78-81 justice, 81-84 reducing risks of violence, 34-35 roadmap for breaking cycles of violence, 15-16 Sub-Saharan Africa's regional infrastructure challenge, 235m subsidiarity, 233, 271 Sudan Agreement on Wealth Sharing, 127 camps for displaced populations, 61 devolution and decentralization, 166, 178n106 multidonor trust funds for, 202, 203b, 204 peacekeeping missions in, 281b qualified contractors not interested in bidding on projects, 197 slow deployment of UN Mission, 192 women's role in peace process, 123 Suspicious Transaction Reports, 242n43 SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) banking system, 229b

#### **T** Tajikistan

international long-term support for local initiatives, 194

regional cooperation and stresses, 238–40 (feature) violence, 54t Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan, 83, 134 Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, 83 tax deduction for bribes, 226 Taylor, Charles, 65, 67 (feature), 156 technical assistance, 29, 196, 212n90, 292n23 technology advances, effect on governance, 109-10, 252 Teleco, 264b temporary labor migration, 162-63 temporary pacts in conflict areas, 8 terminology, 342 terrorism and terrorist attacks bilateral counterterrorism and counter-crime programs, 184, 222 costs of incidents within a country, 65 costs of transnational attacks on economic growth, 5, 66 definition of terrorism, 69n18, 241n29 financing, 228, 241n38 global threat of, 53, 55, 55f hijacking and kidnapping in Colombia, 15 ideology-based groups, support for, 83, 83f, 222-23, 226, 241n30 media coverage of, 53, 53f social inequalities and injustice and, 83 UN General Assembly comprehensive strategy for counterterrorism, 222 Thailand indirect vs. direct costs of violence, 65b regional cooperation with Myanmar, 233 theories of violence prevention and WDR framework (2011), 105b, 289 third-party guarantors and assistance, 100b, 188, 235-36, 252 Timap for Justice (nonprofit in Sierra Leone), 154 timber industry, 156, 220, 220t, 241nn16-17, 285 time for transition to institutional resilience, 13, 110, 247 speed. See transforming institutions Timor-Leste army vs. police, unclear roles as source of violence, 149 ASEAN role, 233, 234b budget debates, 251 building inclusive-enough coalitions, 12, 120, 122, 187 health system reform, 20, 169, 179n137, 192 humanitarian aid, phasing from international to local institutions, 266b international support and government planning for transition, 193 justice system, 156, 257 outreach to Indonesia, 263 participation of previously excluded groups, 127, 140n27, 162 Petroleum Law, 156 signal of break from past, 125 success in preventing violence, 11 transfers to victims of violence, 258 transition moment, 22 Tinbergen, Jan, 282b Tinbergen's rule, 282b Togo evidence of deteriorating situation in, 186 refugees from, 66

"too much, too soon" syndrome. See sequencing and prioritizing reforms Touré, Amadou Toumani, 120 trade cross-border trade, 283-84 key indicators of, 352-53t losses due to violence, 6, 64, 71n73 piracy, costs of, 5, 65 trade-offs for confidence-building, 253-55, 258-59 for international delivery capacity, 265 risk of action vs. risk of inaction, 277 tradition and state legitimacy, 95n67 trafficking. See also conflict diamonds; drug trafficking counter-trafficking initiatives, 283, 284-85 financing rebel groups, 54 global rise of, 53f stress posed by, 76b, 217, 220-22, 220t, 240-41nn13-22 transforming institutions adaptability, 110-12, 111b. See also best-fit approaches bottom-up and top-down programming, 255 breaking cycles of violence through, 8-12 challenges for, 99-103, 105b communication technologies and, 110 complementary programs for, 18-19 continuous process of, 169-71 core tools, 17 (feature), 256t corruption, 156-57 criminal justice functions and dispute resolution, 153-56 defined, xvii delivering citizen security, justice, and jobs, 13, 272t. See also citizen security, justice, and jobs devolution and decentralization, 164-66 dual accountability and managing risks of action, 200-205 economic reforms, 167-68 education reform, 169 elections, 164 escaping violence and developing resilience, 98, 103-8, 103f confidence-building, 104-6. See also confidence-building external support and resistance to external stresses, 106-7. See also external stresses repeated spiral, 12, 12f, 107-8 as essential for stability, xii expectations for, 99-101, 108-10 health reform, 169 infrastructure investment, 158-61 international support for, 193-200, 272t lack of legitimate institutions and risk of recurring violence requiring solutions of, 86 past crimes, justice for, 166-67 "premature load-bearing" of institutions, 100, 101b prioritization of. See sequencing and prioritizing reforms private sector jobs, 157-58 public attitudes toward excluded groups, 168-69 public finance for employment, 161-63 security and, 13, 148-53 speed of, 10, 11t, 15, 101, 105b, 108-10, 109b. See also sequencing and prioritizing reforms

transforming institutions (continued) supporting, 193-200 adapting to local context, 196-97 time and patience, 193-96 track for reducing risks of violence, 31-34 transitions from humanitarian aid, 19 trust issues and rising expectations, 99-101 vulnerability to external stress, 101-3 in WDR framework for building resilience to violence, 45f, 46 - 47twomen's economic empowerment, 163-64 transition moments breaking away from fragility and conflict, 107, 115b defined, xvii differences among types of, 22 taking advantage of, 249 transparency of budget and expenditures, 156-57, 251 at grassroots, 127 trade-offs with collusion, 198b Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 126b, 226 treaties working in concert with UN missions, 210n35 triangular cooperation, 197 trust. See also confidence-building civil wars and, 64 defined, 41n49, 116n1 early policy announcements and, 22, 125 lack of visible improvements and, 124 legitimacy and, 151 regional services sharing and, 235 transforming institutions and, 8, 98, 99-101 unrealistic due to levels of mistrust, 100b violence prevention through establishing, 149 truth-telling process, 126, 166, 178n117, 178n119 Turkmenistan, regional cooperation and stresses, 238–40 (feature) Twitter revolution, 109

#### U

Uganda cross-border violence, 67 (feature) mass rape, 60 Public Expenditure Tracking Survey on education funds, 127 Veterans Assistance Program, 202 Ultimatum Game, 82b UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 30, 154, 191-92 UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 34, 232b, 286 UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) confidence-building programs, 186 innovative programs, 271 mediation budget, 209n23 peace and development advisers, 213n96 regional offices, 25 violence reduction programs, 23 UN Development Programme (UNDP) adapting community-level programs to country context, 24 (feature)

citizen security, justice, and jobs, delivery of, 199 humanitarian aid, 30 innovative programs, 271 multisectoral approaches, 132b peace and development advisers, 213n96 preventive tools of, 23 South-South facilities, 197 UNDP-UNDPA Social Cohesion Program, 188 unemployment linked to violence, 7, 30-31, 78, 79, 79b, 252 UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), 188 United Kingdom anti-money laundering laws, 227 Department for International Development (DFID) duration of aid from, 193 Program Risk Assessment Matrix, 213n97 Stabilization Unit, 185, 209n14 direct costs of violence, 65b Multilateral Agency Review, 185 Serious Organized Crime Agency (SOCA), 242n42 United Nations Children's Fund. See UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Conference on Trade and Development. See UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Convention Against Corruption, 26, 226 Convention Against Genocide, 26 criminal justice, need to play leadership role in, 276 crisis prevention and recovery experience, 271 Department of Disarmament Affairs, 221 Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), 192, 199 Department of Political Affairs. See UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) Development Programme. See UN Development Programme (UNDP) General Assembly comprehensive strategy for counterterrorism, 222 High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 154 Independent Review of Civilian Capacities, 197, 199 integrated missions, 208–9n11, 270 interagency initiative on Ecuador-Colombia border, 219 Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, 194 Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH), 151 Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), 152 Mission in Sudan, 192 Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 280, 285 operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ), 182 Peacebuilding Commission, 37, 184, 288 Peacebuilding Committee and Peacebuilding Support Office, 209n14 Peacebuilding Fund, 192 Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS), 207 (feature) Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, 194 Peacekeeping Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), 192, 194 peacekeeping missions, 18, 28, 152, 182, 194, 200, 210n35, 218, 271, 281b, 338 peacekeeping operation in Lebanon, 221 Regional Center for Conflict Resolution, 239 (feature)

Secretariat procurement systems, 197 Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, 69n18 Security Council. See UN Security Council Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia, 239 (feature) Standing Police Capacity and Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, 199, 275 United Nations-World Bank-European Union post-crisis needs assessment, 23, 250 University of the South Pacific, 236b UN Security Council conflict settlement provisions on democratic processes, 187 drug trafficking, threat of, 220 GEMAP, agreement to, 126b international tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, 167 peacekeeping functions under mandate of, 30, 200 urbanization, effect of, 7

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), 159*b*, 191 Famine Early Warning System Network, 230*b*, 286 Office of the Transition Initiatives, 213*n*97 Uzbekistan, regional cooperation and stresses, 238–40 (*feature*)

#### V

value chains, support for, 157-58, 159b, 176n66, 257 vetting of personnel judges and prosecutors, 154 law enforcement and security personnel, 151 vicious cycle of conflict, 6-8, 72. See also repeated cycles of violence vicious cycle of weak institutional legitimacy, 10, 84-89, 85b, 89f vigilantism, 135, 136b violence aid volatility increases and, 27f breaking cycles of. See roadmap for breaking cycles of violence civil wars. See civil wars combination of stresses resulting in, 7 cycles of. See repeated cycles of violence data gaps. See data gaps for studying violence economic and political theories of, 75-76b effects of, generally, 50 global conversation on, xix-xx interlinked, 54-55 21st century version of, 2, 53, 54t types of threat, 249 vulnerability to, 73-95. See also vulnerability to violence Violence and Social Orders (North, Wallis, & Weingast), 105b violence prevention theories and WDR framework (2011), 105b virtuous cycle in WDR framework, 46t, 98, 108 Viva Rio (NGO), 197, 213n92 Voices of the Poor project, 78-79, 147 von Billerbeck, Sarah, 84 vulnerability to violence, 73-95 domestic stresses. See internal stresses external stresses. See external stresses multiple stresses raising risks of, 73-84 vicious cycle of weak institutional legitimacy, 10, 84-89, 85b in WDR framework, 46t

# W

WACI (West Africa Coast Initiative), 44n99 Wallis, John, 86, 105b Walter, Barbara, 10, 82b, 84, 85b war crimes amnesty for, 187 justice for, 166-67 recognition of, 166 reparations. See reparations for victims of political violence wars. See also civil wars interstate wars, number of, 51, 52b water availability and riparian conflict, 230, 231b water treaties, 230 WDR Advisory Council (2011), xx, xxib on anti-corruption mechanisms, 158b on civilian oversight of defense, 150b on confidence-building, 14–15, 115b, 129b on economic reform in China, 146b on external stresses, 10 on flexible peacekeeping arrangements, 281b on international agency reform, 32 (feature) on local-level politics, 122b on mediation as cost-effective approach, 187b on organized crime and drug trafficking, 76b on pacing institutional transformation, 165b on prioritizing investment in citizen security and justice reforms, 273b on regional initiatives and norms and standards, 38 (feature), 234b, 289b on security, justice, and jobs, 148b on South African transition, 115b on uneven international support in West Africa, 208b WDR framework (2011), 45-48 as roadmap for WDR report, 46-47t spiral of, repeated cycles to bolster institutional resilience, 45f, 46, 103-4, 103f theories of violence prevention and, 105b, 289 weak institutions as factor in repeated cycles of violence, 10, 84-89, 85b, 89f vulnerability to external stress, 101-3 wealth-sharing arrangements, 127 Weingast, Barry, 86, 105b Weinstein, Jeremy, 141n49 West Africa anti-drug initiatives, 44n99, 285 corruption, 34 coups d'état and failure of local mechanisms to resolve, 16 cross-border cooperation on trafficking and economic integration, 35 cross-border violence, 67 (feature) donor support to social and poverty reduction programs in countries with recent coups d'état, 44n105 drug trafficking, 10, 34, 56b, 57, 76b, 285 instability and political violence, 56b international support in post-conflict phase, 184, 184f organized crime, 67 (feature) traditional community meetings, 252

West Africa (continued) trafficking and economic integration initiatives, 284 on uneven international support in, 208b West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI), 44n99 West Africa Telecommunications Regulatory Agreement, 236b West Bank and Gaza Facility for New Market Development (FNMD), 176n68 foreign troops and security stresses, 218 international aid for, 183, 212n79 multidonor trust funds for, 202, 212n79 Palestinian security forces, 149 WFP (World Food Programme), 30, 192 WGI. See Worldwide Governance Indicators "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-systems" initiatives, 25, 185, 209nn12-13, 270 Wilkinson, Steven I., 178n112 Wimmer, Andreas, 81 wishful thinking, 110, 110b women economic empowerment of, 19, 163-64, 163b, 258 equality for, 168-69, 170b, 177n98, 258 peace accords requiring, 209n29 international approaches to coalition building excluding, 188 political reform, participation in, 123-24 security tasks, participation in, 151-52, 174n25, 188, 258 as victims of violence, 60, 175n35 women's courts, 155-56 World Bank Aceh Reintegration and Livelihood Survey, 138 (feature) anti-corruption initiatives, 227b, 229 collaboration with UN peacekeeping missions, 271 Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) frameworks, 87b, 95n65 Department of Institutional Integrity, 227, 227b diplomatic support for negotiations, 186 duration of aid for post-conflict countries, 193 Environmental, Health and Safety General Guidelines, 292n19 on foreign investment in land, 231 imprimatur of good financial practice from, 188 indicators of institutional strength used by, 85 on labor-intensive programs in low- and middle-income countries, 161

land-use issues, 231, 232, 232b legal and judicial issues, support for, 199 Liberia and planning for transition, 206 (feature) publication of cost estimates for projects, 198b public financial management (PFM) reviews, 174n14 rapid response to crisis and emergencies, 208n10 regional lending by, 25 road maintenance in Liberia, 132b South-South facilities, 197 Statebuilding and Peacebuilding Fund (SPF), 192 World Bank Group's Enterprise Surveys, 160 World Bank/IMF Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, 206 (feature) World Bank Institute Rule of Law rating (2008), 235 World Bank/UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)/Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) initiative, 34 World Development Indicators 2010, 341 World Development Report (2009), 234 World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation, 78 World Food Programme (WFP), 30, 192 World Health Organization (WHO), 30 Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), 78, 85b, 95n65 Wu Jianmin, 146b Wunlit Covenant (Sudan), 123

#### Y

Yemen, conflicts within, 55, 68 *(feature)* Yeo, George, 14, 122*b*, 148*b* YouthBuild International, 162 youth population, 339 youth unemployment, 6, 30, 79, 274

## Ζ

Zemun gang (Balkans), 67 (*feature*) Zimbabwe evidence of deteriorating situation in, 186 in-kind support from bilateral donor for, 202 travel restrictions imposed by EU on, 189 Zoellick, Robert B., xii

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With more than 1.5 billion people living in countries affected by conflict, the *World Development Report 2011 (WDR)* looks into the changing nature of violence in the 21st century. Interstate and civil wars characterized violent conflict in the last century; more pronounced today is violence linked to local disputes, political repression, and organized crime. The Report underlines the negative impact of persistent conflict on a country's or a region's development prospects, and notes that no low-income, conflict-affected state has yet achieved a single Millennium Development Goal.

The risk of major violence is greatest when high levels of stress combine with weak and illegitimate national institutions. Societies are vulnerable when their institutions are unable to protect citizens from abuse, or to provide equitable access to justice and to economic opportunity. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated in countries with high youth unemployment, growing income inequality, and perceptible injustice. Externally driven events such as infiltration by foreign combatants, the presence of trafficking networks, or economic shocks add to the stresses that can provoke violence.

The WDR 2011 draws on the experiences of countries that have successfully managed to transition away from repetitive violence, pointing to a specific need to prioritize actions that build confidence between states and citizens, and develop institutions that can provide security, justice, and jobs. Government capacity is central, but technical competence alone is insufficient: institutions and programs must be accountable to their citizens if they are to acquire legitimacy. Impunity, corruption, and human rights abuses undermine confidence between states and citizens and increase the risks of violence. Building resilient institutions occurs in multiple transitions over a generation, and does not mean converging on Western institutional models.

The WDR 2011 draws together lessons from national reformers escaping from repetitive cycles of violence. It advocates a greater focus on continuous preventive action, balancing a sometimes excessive concentration on post-conflict reconstruction. The Report is based on new research, case studies, and extensive consultations with leaders and other actors throughout the world. It proposes a toolkit of options for addressing violence that can be adapted to local contexts, as well as new directions for international policy intended to improve support for national reformers and to tackle stresses that emanate from global or regional trends beyond any one country's control.

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