MEASURING PEACE UNDER ARMED CONTROL: CIVILIAN SECURITY AFTER LOCAL AGREEMENTS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Research Problem: *Local agreements in northwest Nigeria may reduce attacks while civilians remain subject to armed demands and restrictions. This study examines how the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) can assess civilian security under these conditions.*
Methods/Theory: *Qualitative documentary analysis examines research on northwest Nigeria and IPCR's published institutional arrangements, drawing on Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace and scholarship on everyday peace.*
Results: *The analysis proposes six assessment dimensions: physical safety and threats; coercion and extraction; mobility; livelihoods and essential services; voice and remedy; and the distribution of protection. Separate reporting is intended to retain differences in outcomes and uncertainty without a composite score.*
Conclusion: *Fewer reported attacks alone cannot establish improved civilian security. Assessment must examine the terms of compliance and differences in protection.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The framework distinguishes agreement commitments, implementation and civilian protection, linking assessment to documented institutional responsibilities and follow-up within IPCR's existing functions.*
Recommendation: *IPCR should conduct a limited pilot developed with affected communities, with methodological autonomy, protected participation and independent review. The approach requires validation; this study does not establish agreement effects or programme effectiveness.*

1. Introduction

A local agreement may reduce attacks without settling the conditions under which civilians live. A farmer may regain access to land while remaining subject to a payment demand; a trader may return to a market but avoid a neighbouring settlement; a displaced household may decline to return despite public assurances. These are analytical possibilities, not findings about a particular agreement. They identify the question pursued here: what

evidence would allow the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) to distinguish reductions in visible violence from wider improvements in civilian security?

For this article, a local agreement is a geographically bounded understanding, oral or written, involving reciprocal undertakings intended to affect violence or civilian access. It involves an armed actor and civilian or public representatives. Coercive circumstances do not exclude an arrangement from assessment; they are part of what the assessment should examine. A unilateral levy demand or an announcement of negotiations is insufficient to establish such an agreement. Where the existence of reciprocal undertakings is uncertain, the record should retain that uncertainty.

Research in three Zamfara villages shows why protection payments require attention to coercive bargaining and changing demands (Buba, 2023). Such evidence raises a problem for assessment: an arrangement may reduce immediate harm while preserving the conditions through which armed actors influence ordinary life. The question is how to document these different outcomes without either dismissing negotiated relief or treating restraint as proof of wider security.

IPCR's statutory functions include conflict research, publication of findings, practical mediation and policy advice (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (Establishment) Act, 2007, s. 8(1)(b), (c), (f), (i)). The Institute describes itself as a semi-autonomous government agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution [IPCR], n.d.-b). Its published structure includes the National Conflict Early Warning and Early Response System (NCEWERS) and the production of National Conflict Watch (IPCR, n.d.-a). These provide an organisational basis for examining civilian conditions after agreements.

This article argues that IPCR should institutionalise periodic assessment of civilian security after local agreements through its existing conflict-monitoring work, beginning with a bounded and independently reviewed pilot. This requires evidence about the agreement, its implementation, the conditions experienced by different civilians, and institutional responses to continuing harm. IPCR would coordinate assessment and convene follow-up. Its credibility would depend on acknowledging uncertainty and findings that complicate claims of success, including claims associated with agreements it helped to support.

The contribution is a specified application of peace measurement to continuing armed coercion, linked to institutional responsibility. The study does not introduce multidimensional peace measurement or validate a new index. It develops a way to distinguish agreement commitments, implementation and civilian protection while documenting what responsible institutions do with the findings. The study has three objectives:

1. To clarify how continuing armed control changes the interpretation of civilian security after a local agreement.

2. To identify the existing IPCR functions that could support assessment of these conditions.

3. To propose civilian-informed measures that distinguish agreement implementation from protection outcomes and connect findings to institutional follow-up.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Local agreements and coercive accommodation

The merits of local agreements cannot be assessed by treating the decision to negotiate as evidence of either successful peacebuilding or civilian surrender. An argument for dialogue in northwest Nigeria presents negotiation as

one element of a wider response involving security and economic measures (Wiehler & Malefakis, 2024). Where an agreement reduces immediate exposure to killing or abduction, that reduction matters even if broader political problems remain unresolved. An assessment designed around unattainable short-term conditions would obscure real gains and provide little guidance to people confronting urgent danger.

Village-level research gives a more differentiated account of protection payments. In Keku, payments were followed by multiplying demands around farming; Gada moved from collective payment to resistance; Furfuri rejected collective levies and residents organised relocation (Buba, 2023). These trajectories justify examining changing terms and population movement alongside incidents. They do not establish a uniform outcome across agreements. Research on peace purchases also examines the movement from government-led initiatives towards community-based arrangements in Zamfara (Idris et al., 2025). A further study examines everyday negotiations over protection in rural Zamfara (Ogbozor, 2026). These works establish the relevance of accommodation while leaving its consequences open to agreement-specific enquiry.

Reuters reported that an agreement involving Doma in Katsina was followed by a deadly raid on 3rd February 2026 (Kingimi & Ibrahim, 2026). Such reporting establishes a reason to examine continuity and breach; it does not provide a complete account of civilian conditions during the intervening period. Continuing payment obligations, selective access and fear of complaint would require different evidence.

A study by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) conducted a telephone survey of 2,947 community members between January and March 2024 and examined experiences of violence alongside effects on everyday activity and livelihoods (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Its geographical and recruitment limits matter: most respondents came from three local government areas, and insecurity constrained access to some populations (Kleffmann et al., 2024). These findings offer evidence for the relevance of civilian experience; they are not a representative measure of every community in northwest Nigeria or an evaluation of local agreements.

This article therefore treats northwest Nigeria as the setting of the research problem, rather than as a single agreement system. The agreement under assessment must have an identifiable territorial and social reach. Its parties, obligations and duration require documentation. A bargain that concerns access to farmland may have different terms from one addressing abduction, cattle recovery or the movement of armed actors. These examples identify distinctions that a future agreement register should investigate; the present study does not claim to have compiled such a register.

2.2 Civilian experience and the measurement of peace

Locally generated peace indicators are an explicit concern of the Indicators+ proposal (Mac Ginty, 2013). Subsequent work examines how measures developed from below can complement wider systems of comparison (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2017). These approaches make civilian priorities relevant to assessment while raising questions about the comparability of locally meaningful observations. Work with the Pasto Indigenous group in Colombia examines that tension in practice (Levy & Firchow, 2021). Recent research compares everyday peace preferences with formal commitments in the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement (Firchow et al., 2025). These studies provide a basis for distinguishing what an agreement promises

from what people consider meaningful change; they do not establish how a Nigerian institution should assess fragmented bargains under continuing armed control.

A locally meaningful account cannot be reduced to the views of agreement signatories. Residents who leave, women whose journeys are restricted, pastoralists excluded from a bargain and people who avoid public meetings may have different experiences. These are possible differences for investigation, not findings of disadvantage in every location. The assessment must establish whether an agreement changes the distribution of exposure and practical choice, and whether its evidence can detect those differences.

2.3 The research gap

The reviewed literature supplies evidence about protection bargaining and methods for eliciting everyday peace priorities. The problem addressed here is how to bring these resources into a repeated assessment of specified local agreements, while distinguishing safer civilian conditions from compliance secured by continuing threats. The article develops that connection for IPCR's existing research and conflict-reporting functions. It adds an explicit relationship between civilian assessment, responsible institutions and documented follow-up. This is a conceptual and institutional contribution whose feasibility requires testing, rather than a claim that earlier scholarship ignored coercion or that no relevant framework exists.

3. Materials and Methods

The article uses qualitative documentary analysis to develop a conceptual and institutional proposal. Document analysis involves selecting, appraising and interpreting written material with attention to its production and evidential scope (Bowen, 2009). The enquiry asks what selected sources establish about civilian security under armed control and which published IPCR functions could support its assessment. It does not estimate agreement effects or compare mediation programmes.

The source selection was purposive, using targeted searches on civilian protection payments and local agreements in northwest Nigeria, everyday peace indicators and IPCR's institutional arrangements. The evidence cutoff is 17 October 2026. Inclusion depended on direct relevance to the conflict problem, measurement approach or institutional proposal. Foundational theoretical literature was retained alongside recent Nigerian research. This is a focused documentary enquiry, not an exhaustive systematic review. Table 1 distinguishes the substantive documentary material from the theory and methods literature used to interpret it.

Table 1

Documentary sources and their analytical contributions

Material	Sources	Contribution and evidential limits
Research on northwest Nigeria	Buba (2023) Idris et al. (2025) Ogbozor (2026) Kleffmann et al. (2024) Etc	Protection bargaining, civilian experience and activities affected by insecurity. Local or bounded evidence; no regional estimate of agreement effects.

Material	Sources	Contribution and evidential limits
IPCR legislation and institutional records	IPCR Establishment Act (2007) IPCR (n.d.-a) IPCR (n.d.-b) IPCR (2024) IPCR (2025) IPCR (2026)	Statutory functions, organisational arrangements and reported monitoring activity. Institutional accounts do not independently establish effectiveness.
Coordination records	ECOWAS (2024) OSPRE (n.d.)	Stated coordination roles and an institutional assessment initiative. Used to identify relevant arrangements, not programme outcomes.
Policy analysis and reporting	Wiehler and Malefakis (2024) Kingimi and Ibrahim (2026) Etc	Arguments for dialogue within a wider response and a reported agreement breakdown. Neither constitutes a comparative evaluation.

Note. Each row identifies the selected records used for that analytical purpose. Theoretical and measurement literature and Bowen's methodological account provide interpretive support separately; the bibliography is not treated as a set of independent empirical observations. ECOWAS = Economic Community of West African States; OSPRE = Office for Strategic Preparedness and Resilience.

The analysis compared claims about violence and coercion, descriptions of civilian activity, evidence of agreement implementation and statements about institutional responsibilities. Interpretation retained each source's geographical reach, observation period and provenance. A reported demand was distinguished from payment; an institutional announcement from an evaluated outcome; and an agreement provision from civilian experience. Sources reproducing the same account were not treated as independent corroboration. No coding frequency, statistical reliability estimate or independent field corroboration is claimed.

The proposed dimensions arise from this interpretive comparison. Coercion and extraction respond to the protection-payment problem analysed in Zamfara (Buba, 2023). Mobility and livelihood enquiry draw on the activities considered in the UNIDIR study (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Participatory indicator research informs the proposed development of locally meaningful questions (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2020). Voice, remedy and distribution develop the article's argument about whose security is assessed and how findings connect to public responsibility.

Access to the literature was uneven. Relevant original text was examined for the documentary-method source, Galtung's article, the participatory-method study, Buba's study, the UNIDIR and ETH Zürich reports, the Colombia studies, cited institutional documents and Reuters reporting. Use of the Indicators+ proposal was limited to its abstract and publication record (Mac Ginty, 2013). The everyday peace article was consulted through its abstract (Mac Ginty, 2014). The indicator-comparability study was also used at abstract level (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2017). For the peace-purchases study, access was limited to the publication record and publisher abstract (Idris et al., 2025). The protection-negotiations article was used within the scope of its publisher abstract and publication record (Ogbozor, 2026).

The study contains no interviews conducted for this article, household panel, complete collection of agreements or validated security

scale. It cannot establish the prevalence of post-agreement coercion or the effectiveness of the proposed IPCR approach. Institutional documents establish stated responsibilities and reported activities. News reporting supplies a bounded illustration, not an incident dataset. Proposed fieldwork and validation procedures remain distinct from the documentary analysis completed here.

4. Theoretical Framework

Galtung distinguishes negative peace, understood as the absence of personal or direct violence, from positive peace, understood through the absence of structural violence and the presence of social justice (Galtung, 1969). This distinction cautions against treating a narrow incident measure as the whole condition of peace. Fewer reported killings do not establish that negative peace has been achieved: threats, assault and coercive confinement may remain. The present framework concerns civilian security after agreements and does not attempt to measure every component of positive peace.

Everyday peace scholarship directs attention to the practices through which people manage insecurity in ordinary interactions (Mac Ginty, 2014). It helps interpret civilian accommodation as action within constrained circumstances. A household may consider payment the least dangerous available option. Recognising that judgement does not require the analyst to regard the surrounding conditions as freely accepted or durable. The assessment should preserve both the immediate benefit sought and the constraint under which it is pursued.

For this article, armed control means a capacity to shape civilian conduct through credible threats or the use of force. This is an analytical definition. Armed presence alone would not establish that such control is exercised. The definition does not require that one organisation exercise complete territorial government, or that every person experience the same degree of control. Civilian security is understood as protection from direct harm and coercive interference, together with a practical ability to undertake necessary activities and seek assistance without retaliation.

The mechanism requiring attention is the relationship between threatened force and observed restraint. Consider a hypothetical agreement under which attacks become less frequent while households continue to meet enforced demands. The event count registers one improvement. It does not establish whether residents have gained greater freedom from coercion. If refusal remains dangerous, the threat may continue to organise behaviour even when force is used less often. This is a proposition to investigate through independent evidence about demands, sanctions and civilian choices. It is not a causal finding established by the documentary analysis.

The two approaches perform different analytical tasks. Galtung's distinction cautions against inferring wider peace from reduced incidents (Galtung, 1969). Everyday peace directs attention to the activities and judgements through which civilians experience security (Mac Ginty, 2014). Neither supplies a ready-made test for the terms of a particular local agreement. Positive peace encompasses conditions beyond this study's scope. Locally generated indicators may also differ across groups and places, limiting direct comparison (Levy & Firchow, 2021). The proposed framework therefore uses defined dimensions, civilian-developed questions and separate reporting of outcomes. Local preferences inform interpretation without allowing majority priorities to erase severe harm to others.

The conceptual contribution is to connect these perspectives through the distinction between agreement commitments, implementation and civilian protection. A promise of access, evidence of access and

access secured without coercion are separate propositions. Assessing their relationship makes the terms of compliance visible alongside incident change. The institutional extension connects that interpretation to responsibility and follow-up: a report or referral documents activity, whereas improved civilian conditions require separate evidence. This study therefore develops an application of existing theory to an assessment problem; it does not establish a new causal theory or claim that the framework has been validated.

5. Results and Presentation of Data

The documentary analysis yields an institutional basis for assessment and six proposed dimensions of civilian security. These results concern the design and interpretation of assessment, rather than observed effects of particular agreements. They address the objectives by identifying how armed control complicates outcome judgements, locating relevant IPCR functions and specifying what civilian-informed enquiry should examine.

IPCR reports an early-warning situation room established with partners in October 2024 (IPCR, 2024). Its March 2026 account of NCEWERS describes connections between national, state and community reporting and response (IPCR, 2026). The March 2025 National Conflict Watch discusses displacement and agricultural disruption while acknowledging verification limits (IPCR, 2025). These records support extending existing work; they do not establish sufficient staffing, complete coverage or effectiveness after agreements. The assessment would require a practical capacity review.

The unit of assessment should be a specified agreement, civilians within and connected to its reach, and a defined observation period. A register should distinguish negotiations, corroborated or disputed terms, reported implementation and subsequent breach or revision. Written instruments should be retained where available; oral arrangements require explicit recording of what can be corroborated. A promise to permit farming is a commitment. Entry onto farmland concerns implementation. Whether different households can farm without threats concerns civilian security.

Table 2 presents the six dimensions. They are analytical headings for testing with residents, not a validated scale. Indicator development should begin with open questions about meaningful changes in safety and ordinary life. Distribution is assessed across the other dimensions, and the categories should remain open to revision.

Table 2
Proposed dimensions for an IPCR assessment

Dimension	Assessment question	Illustrative evidence
Physical safety and threats	Has exposure to violence and threats changed?	Attacks, abductions, injuries and threats, with dates and source confidence.
Coercion and extraction	What demands condition safety or access?	Demands, payments, labour, threatened sanctions and constrained choices.
Mobility	Which journeys are possible, and under what conditions?	Completed and forgone journeys, restrictions and coerced payments.
Livelihoods and essential services	Who can use land, markets, schools and care safely?	Actual use, interrupted activity, imposed conditions and exclusion.

Dimension	Assessment question	Illustrative evidence
Voice and remedy	Can people seek remedy without retaliation?	Safe reporting, retaliation risks and civilian accounts of resolution.
Distribution of protection	Who benefits, remains exposed or bears displaced harm?	Differences across groups, displaced households and connected localities.

Note. This table is the article's proposed framework. It contains no observed scores or tested thresholds. Indicators require local development, safe collection and validation.

5.1 Physical safety and threats

The assessment of physical safety should address direct harm without relying solely on death counts. Threats should be recorded separately from completed attacks and interpreted with evidence about their credibility. Relevant harm attributed to public security actors or vigilantes should also remain within the assessment. The record should identify event dates and uncertain attribution. Several media accounts that reproduce one witness statement should not be counted as independent corroboration. Where the number of people at risk cannot be estimated credibly, the report should provide bounded counts and coverage information rather than an apparently precise rate.

5.2 Coercion and extraction

Coercion and extraction require distinctions between a demand, compliance with that demand and the consequences of refusal. Payment should not be inferred from a threat. Nor should every community contribution be classified as extortion without evidence about sanctions and choice. Questions should address experiences and perceived consequences retrospectively and privately. No assessment should ask a resident to test an armed actor's response by refusing a demand. Recording both the benefit sought and the pressure experienced would allow IPCR to recognise constrained accommodation without mistaking it for unrestricted consent.

5.3 Mobility

Mobility should include necessary journeys abandoned or never attempted. Counting completed journeys alone selects people willing and able to travel. Questions should establish the intended purpose, whether the journey was possible and what affected it. Public outputs should not disclose individual routes or patterns that expose respondents. The distinction between restored movement and movement conditional on enforced payment is central to interpreting improvement.

5.4 Livelihoods and essential services

An open market, school or clinic is relevant, but the assessment must establish who can use it safely and who remains excluded. Questions should address actual use, interrupted activity, imposed conditions and the consequences of forgoing access. Farming access deserves attention to season and household circumstances. These proposed enquiries extend the distinction between provision and civilian experience; the documentary study does not supply measured changes in access.

5.5 Voice and remedy

The voice and remedy dimension links civilian experience directly to IPCR's proposed institutional purpose. It should examine whether a person can raise a concern, whether the relevant body responds and what changes afterwards. Complaint totals require interpretation. More complaints may indicate increased harm, improved access to reporting, greater confidence in a response, or several

processes at once. A lower total could have similarly different meanings. The assessment should record the reporting conditions and follow-up evidence alongside the number of complaints.

5.6 Distribution of protection

Distribution applies across the other dimensions. Sampling and interpretation should consider gender, age, livelihood and displacement where relevant and safe, without treating any category as internally uniform. Analysts should not infer ethnicity from names or assign collective responsibility for armed activity. People outside the agreement's named constituency should be considered where livelihoods, movement or threats connect them to it. Small groups should not be rendered identifiable through excessively detailed public disaggregation.

6. Discussion of Findings

6.1 Interpreting improvement under armed control

The dimensions connect the theoretical argument to practical judgements. Reduced attacks remain a meaningful gain, but their interpretation depends on reporting conditions and the terms governing ordinary activity. This applies Galtung's distinction by refusing to treat one incident trend as evidence of the whole condition of peace (Galtung, 1969). Attention to civilians' negotiated choices draws on everyday peace scholarship while retaining the pressures surrounding those choices (Mac Ginty, 2014). The framework therefore records gains and continuing exposure together.

IPCR should report a profile of outcomes rather than combine these dimensions into an arbitrary weighted total. A gain in market access should not cancel a serious threat or make an excluded population disappear within an average. A profile permits a more exact conclusion: particular activities became safer for a defined group, while coercive demands continued or evidence about another group remained insufficient. The narrative judgement should explain the relative importance of those findings without disguising normative choices as a mathematical result.

Consider a hypothetical locality with fewer reported attacks and renewed farming after an agreement. If access remains conditional on coerced compliance and displaced households cannot return, assessment would record limited improvement with continuing exposure. If reporting access also deteriorates, confidence in the apparent decline in attacks must be qualified. This is an illustration of interpretation, not a case finding. Each observation should retain its period, coverage, relevant denominator and confidence. A refusal, inaccessible locality, unasked question and explicit report of no event must remain separate. Missing evidence cannot become a zero.

A decline in reports could accompany safer conditions, restrictions on reporting, the departure of exposed households or changed willingness to approach public agencies. An incident series alone cannot distinguish these explanations. Comparisons should therefore document observation periods, population coverage and reporting conditions. Among available accounts, a report may be corroborated, disputed or unresolved. Data availability and confidence are different judgements. Where collection would expose people, insufficient evidence should remain an acceptable outcome. The capacity to report safely is both a requirement of credible research and an aspect of civilian security.

The strongest objection is that this approach asks too much of local agreements. Communities facing immediate danger may reasonably prioritise an end to attacks over other gains. The framework should recognise that priority. It does not require the abolition of

every source of insecurity before acknowledging improvement. It requires a precise statement of what improved and what remains dangerous. Recording continuing coercion can help explain the fragility and cost of an arrangement without denying the value of temporary restraint or judging civilians for choosing it.

6.2 Institutional responsibility and methodological autonomy

IPCR's role would be to coordinate credible assessment and convene follow-up within its stated functions. Its structure identifies research and policy analysis, internal conflict prevention, defence and security studies, and peacebuilding training (IPCR, n.d.-a). These functions provide possible contributions to the proposed process, not evidence of an already authorised programme. Operational decisions involving policing, humanitarian assistance or adjudication remain with the bodies holding those responsibilities.

Coordination must also account for OSPRE's stated early-warning and response role (Office for Strategic Preparedness and Resilience [OSPRE], n.d.). ECOWAS reported OSPRE's involvement in a country resilience and human security assessment initiative in 2024 (Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], 2024). IPCR should agree referral and information-sharing arrangements with relevant institutions to avoid duplicate demands on communities and uncertainty about responsibility.

Public sponsorship creates a credibility question that a mandate alone cannot settle. Residents may be uncertain about who will see information collected through a government-linked process. This is a design risk to investigate through consent discussions and a pilot, rather than a finding about present trust in IPCR. The arrangement should separate identifiable research material from routine operational reporting. Participants should be told the actual limits of confidentiality before deciding whether to contribute, and public outputs should use disclosure controls appropriate to local risk.

Methodological autonomy would require a published assessment protocol, external technical review and a correction procedure that retains a record of substantive changes. Where IPCR helped mediate the agreement, the assessment team should disclose the Institute's involvement and include independent external assessors. Assessment personnel should be distinct from staff who negotiated or publicly promoted the agreement. Reviewers should be able to record substantive methodological disagreements in the published account, with any redactions needed to protect participants and affected communities. A commitment to release unfavourable findings should form part of the assessment arrangement. Officials and agreement representatives should be able to identify factual errors and provide supporting evidence. The assessment team should decide any corrections; disagreement alone should not remove a finding. Unresolved differences should be visible with the evidence supporting each interpretation.

Locating the process within IPCR could connect evidence with public responsibility, but the documentary analysis does not establish institutional superiority. Independent partners could lead collection and interpretation while IPCR convenes response. The pilot should compare these arrangements through safe participation, disclosure patterns and external review. Better measurement cannot guarantee protection: a responsible agency may still fail to act. Assessment quality, response performance and civilian outcomes must therefore be evaluated separately, with nonresponse and unsuccessful action remaining visible.

6.3 Evidential and conceptual limits

A second objection concerns the reliability of accounts gathered under pressure. Locally developed indicators do not remove fear, strategic reporting or disagreement. Nor is a public meeting necessarily an inclusive setting. The proposed protections, mixed sources and explicit uncertainty can reduce some interpretive errors, but they cannot guarantee disclosure. IPCR should be willing to conclude that the available evidence is insufficient. The assessment would lose credibility if pressure to fill every category encouraged staff to fill gaps with assumptions or silence difficult testimony because it could not immediately be confirmed.

Civilian preferences should inform what is measured, yet majority priorities should not erase severe harm to a minority. Agreement signatories should not determine whether exclusion counts as insecurity. Retaining direct harm, coercion and access to remedy as minimum concerns is a normative commitment of this framework. It should be stated and examined with affected communities, rather than hidden within an allegedly neutral aggregate score.

Causal attribution remains a separate problem. A change after an agreement may coincide with security operations, changes among armed actors, seasonal activity, population movement or altered reporting. The present documentary study cannot determine which explanation applies. A future evaluation would need a design that addresses the timing and selection of agreements and assesses competing explanations. Nearby settlements may experience consequences of the same bargain and should not automatically be treated as unaffected comparison sites. Repeated observation can describe change more credibly without, on its own, identifying the agreement's causal effect.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study argues that IPCR can assess civilian security after local agreements more precisely by examining the terms under which ordinary life becomes possible. Its three objectives lead to a connected conclusion: continuing armed control complicates incident-based judgements; IPCR's existing research and reporting functions offer an institutional basis for enquiry; and six dimensions can organise civilian-informed assessment linked to public responsibility. Reduced violence matters, but claims of wider improvement require evidence about coercion, access, remedy and the distribution of protection.

The theoretical contribution is an application of negative and positive peace and everyday peace scholarship to the distinction between agreement commitments, implementation and civilian protection. Its institutional contribution is to link that assessment with documented responsibility and follow-up. The documentary analysis supports this design and its rationale. It does not establish agreement effects, validate the dimensions or demonstrate the effectiveness of an IPCR programme. The following recommendations specify how that proposal could be tested.

7.1 Authorise a limited and independently reviewed pilot

IPCR should first review staffing, access, costs, data protection and prospective responders' commitments. Approval of research programmes falls within the Governing Council's functions (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (Establishment) Act, 2007, s. 7(2)(a)). The pilot should assign responsibility for supervision and decisions to pause or stop collection. Selection should seek variation in agreement content, duration and reported experience, while documenting locations excluded by insecurity. The present

study supplies no verified budget or staffing estimate.

A proposed division of work should accompany approval. Research and Policy Analysis could oversee definitions, documentation and quality review; Defence and Security Studies could examine armed-actor relations; Internal Conflict Prevention and Resolution could support safe engagement and referral; and the National Peace Academy could develop training. These proposed assignments draw on IPCR's published structure (IPCR, n.d.-a). They would require agreement within the pilot and would not confer operational command on IPCR.

7.2 Develop and validate measures with affected civilians

IPCR and independent research partners should define the population for each agreement, including safe ways to reach displaced households. Open questions and private consultation should test the six dimensions, local meanings and translation. Where a defensible sampling frame exists, selection and replacement rules should be specified. Otherwise, purposive accounts should retain their limits and should not become population percentages. Participatory indicator and mobile-survey research offers practical approaches whose transfer requires attention to local conditions (Firchow & Mac Ginty, 2020).

A common question about safe access may need different examples for farmers, herders and traders. Translation should be tested with participants rather than assuming literal equivalence. Community review should examine experiences that public representatives are unlikely to raise, and revisions to questions should be documented so that changed wording does not manufacture apparent change. Group discussions, telephone calls and visits may create different risks under continuing armed control. The pilot should test comprehension, burden and safe modes of participation before expanding collection.

Validation should use a written coding guide, independent coding of a subset and a record of disagreements. It should test whether questions distinguish restored access from access conditional on coerced compliance. Agreement between coders concerns consistent interpretation, not the truth of reports. Corroboration should compare evidence with different origins; repeated enquiry should review comprehension, missingness and attrition. An initial pilot could follow selected settings through an agricultural cycle, with intervals determined by feasibility and local conditions. Recollections of earlier conditions must remain labelled retrospective.

7.3 Agree a response protocol before field collection

IPCR should negotiate responsibilities with relevant public institutions and partners before collecting information that creates expectations of action. Each concern should have a record of receipt, verification, referral, responsible body, agreed review point, action and subsequent civilian conditions. Acknowledgement establishes receipt; an activity record does not establish improved protection. Urgent concerns should permit prompt referral with uncertainty stated and only the information needed for a safe response disclosed.

7.4 Protect participants and make follow-up assessable

Independent ethical review, consent procedures, distress referral arrangements and stopping rules should precede sensitive collection. Participation and refusal must not affect assistance or access to mediation. Consent to research should not automatically authorise identifiable referral; disclosure requires a separate consent and risk-assessment process, subject to applicable

obligations explained in advance. Identifiable records need restricted access and an agreed retention period. Routine operational sharing of research identities should not be assumed.

IPCR should maintain a protected case process alongside public reporting of patterns, methodological limits, institutional commitments and follow-up. Residents should receive accessible feedback in a form they consider safe. External review should examine whether participation is protected, findings withstand scrutiny and responses address the reported concern. These are proposed accountability conditions, not guarantees that reporting will produce protection.

7.5 Direct future research towards unresolved questions

Subsequent research should test whether the dimensions capture meaningful differences across agreements and groups, and trace selected concerns from initial report through institutional action to civilian outcomes. Comparative evaluation should address the timing and selection of agreements, alternative explanations and effects on connected settlements. These questions would establish when the framework is useful, when it fails and whether institutional arrangements need revision. A credible assessment must remain able to report limited gains, continuing harm and insufficient evidence.

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