

2. Measuring Peace

Serge Stroobants¹

ABSTRACT

By drawing on insights from the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) and its various indices, this chapter explores the multifaceted nature of peace. It investigates the methods used to quantify peace, the core principles and the Positive Peace framework, and emerging patterns in global peace and conflict. Through its analysis, it reveals the intrinsic connection between peace, societal stability and global prosperity, and highlights the role that trade, through multilateral agreements, institutions, and policies, can play in fostering long-term, sustainable peace.

1. Introduction

Peace is a concept notoriously difficult to define. Multi-faceted by nature and subject to interpretation across cultures, societies and individuals, peace can be understood as both a state of being and an ongoing process, characterized by the absence of violence and the presence of justice, fairness and the fulfilment of needs. The concept of peace was first introduced into academic literature by the Norwegian pioneer of peace research Johan Galtung. He distinguished between two types of peace: Negative Peace, which is defined as the absence of war and violence, and Positive Peace, which is a more durable and constructive framework built on sustainable investments in economic development and institutions, as well as the societal attitudes that foster peace (Galtung, 1964).

While the quest to characterize peace as a concept and a set of values is age-old, the effort to provide a systemic definition informed by best-practice methodologies and quantifiable metrics for analysis is a more contemporary enterprise. As humanity grapples with imminent and complex global challenges such as climate change, escalating population pressures, and growing societal divisions and conflicts, peace emerges not just as an ideal but as a fundamental prerequisite for the trust and cooperation needed for survival and progress. Trade, through multilateral agreements, institutions and reforms, can serve as an efficient tool, not only to address the risks and threats posed to peace, but also ensure its maintenance and sustainability in the long term.

The IEP aims to create a paradigm shift in the way the world thinks about peace as a positive, tangible and achievable measure of human well-being and development. It does this by moving the lens through empirical research away from the negative to the positive aspects that create the optimal conditions for societies to flourish.

The IEP has developed various global and national indices and reports, calculating the economic cost of violence, analysing country-level risk and fragility, and understanding Positive Peace. This research and focus on Positive Peace, combined with a unique approach to understanding societal systems, provides a new transformational approach for understanding the dynamics that influence not only peace but also the advancement of human societies.²

This chapter, drawing on insights from the IEP and its various indices, delves into the multifaceted nature of peace, exploring its measurement, the underpinnings of the Positive Peace framework, and the observable

trends in global peace and conflict. Through this, it analyses the interconnected relationship between peace, societal resilience and global prosperity, and highlights the potential for trade to play a role in alleviating the risks and creating incentives to maintain peaceful relations.

2. Measuring Negative Peace: the Global Peace Index

2.1 How is Negative Peace quantified?

The Global Peace Index (GPI) was a project launched in 2007 by the IEP's founder Steve Killelea, and was the first study to rank the nations of the world by their levels of peacefulness (Luxembourg Peace Prize, 2016). It gauges global Negative Peace using three domains of peacefulness: the level of safety and security in society; the extent of domestic or international conflict; and the degree of militarization (see Figure 2.1). It is composed of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators derived from highly respected sources, and ranks 163 independent states and territories which makes for over 99 per cent of the world's population.

- The first domain, Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict, uses six statistical indicators to investigate the extent to which countries are involved in internal and external conflicts, as well as their role and duration of involvement in conflicts. These indicators include the number and duration of internal and external conflicts, the number of deaths from internal and external organized conflict, the intensity of organized internal conflict, and relations with neighbouring countries.
- The second domain evaluates the level of harmony or discord within a nation; 11 indicators broadly assess Societal Safety and Security. The assertion is that low crime rates, minimal terrorist activity and violent demonstrations, harmonious relations with neighbouring countries, a stable political scene and a small proportion of the population being internally displaced or made refugees can be equated with peacefulness. These 11 indicators are: level of perceived criminality in society; number of refugees and internally displaced people as a percentage of the population; political instability; political terror scale; impact of terrorism; number of homicides; level of violent crime; violent demonstrations; number of jailed population; number of internal security officers and police; and ease of access to small arms and light weapons.

Figure 2.1 Three domains of peacefulness and Global Peace Index indicators



Source: IEP.

Box 2.1 Trends according to the Global Peace Indicators 2024

- The world has become less peaceful over the past 16 years, with the average country score deteriorating by 4.5 per cent.
- Of the 163 countries of the GPI, 95 recorded deteriorations, while 66 recorded improvements and two recorded no change, marking the highest number of countries to deteriorate in peacefulness in a single year in the past 16 years.
- Conflicts are becoming more internationalized, with 92 countries engaged in conflict beyond their borders. External conflicts fought and internal conflicts fought had the largest deteriorations.
- The gap between the most and least peaceful countries in the world is wider than it has been at any point in the last 16 years. Compared to 2008, the 25 most peaceful countries were 1 per cent more peaceful in 2024, while the 25 least peaceful countries were 7.5 per cent less peaceful.
- Although conflict is now much more common than 17 years ago, most countries have become less militarized.
- However, the increase in global violence has been accompanied by a stronger commitment to UN peacekeeping operations, which recorded the biggest improvement of all GPI indicators.

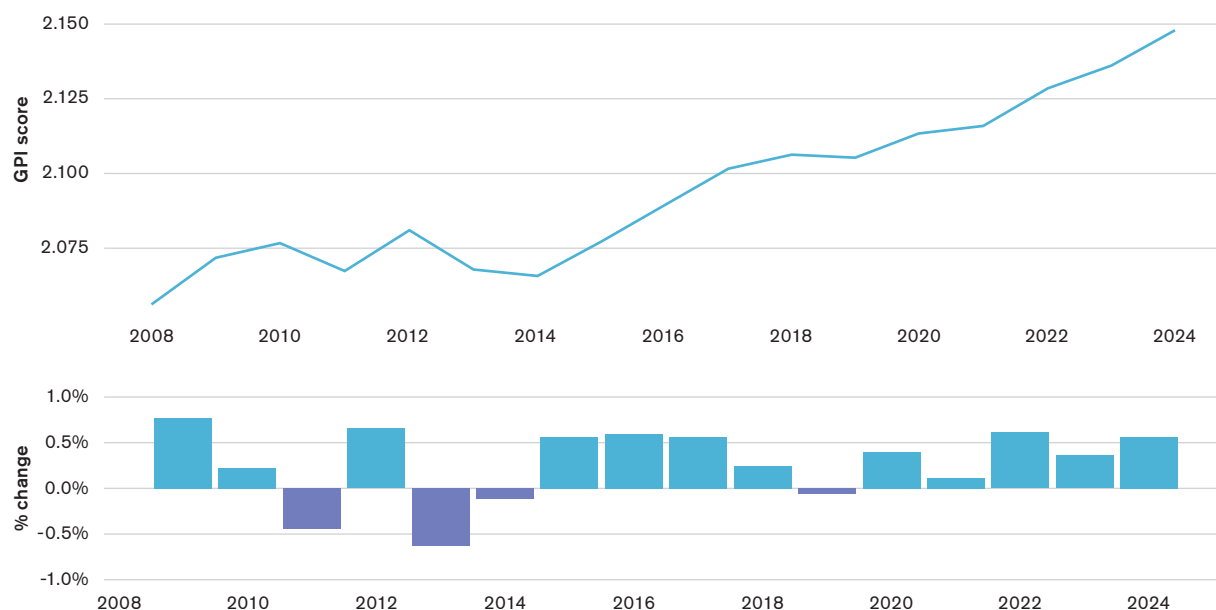
Source: IEP, 2024a.

- Militarization, the third domain, has six indicators that reflect the link between a country's level of military build-up and access to weapons and its level of peacefulness, both domestically and internationally. Comparable data on military expenditure as a percentage of GDP and the

number of armed service officers per head are gauged, as are financial contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, import and export of major conventional weapons, and nuclear and heavy weapons capabilities.

Figure 2.2 Peacefulness since 2008

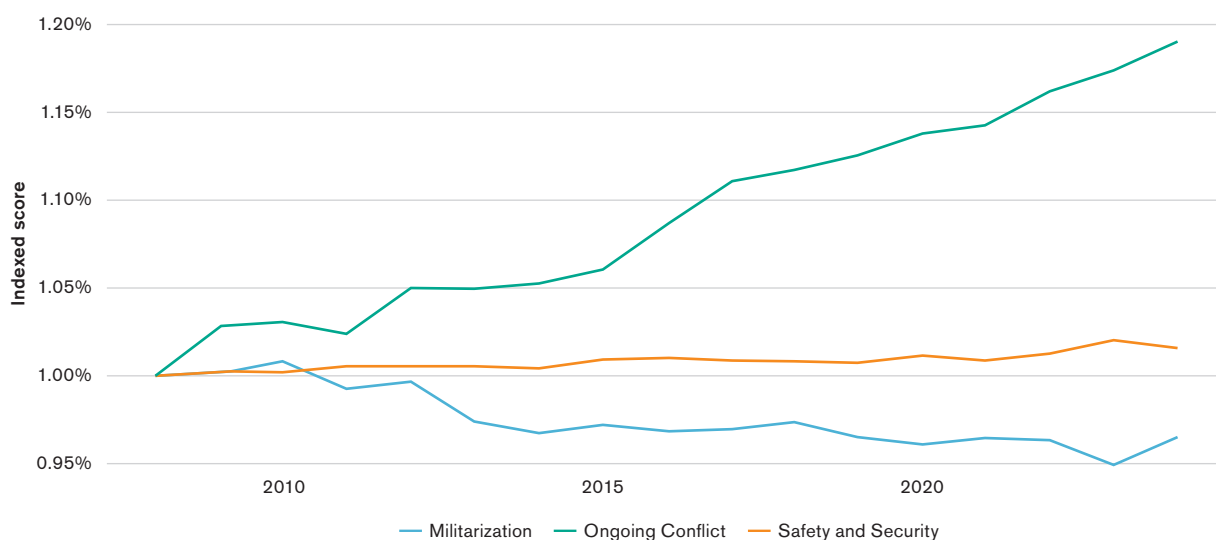
Peacefulness has declined year-on-year for 12 of the last 16 years.



Source: IEP.

Figure 2.3 Peacefulness by domain (indexed trend)

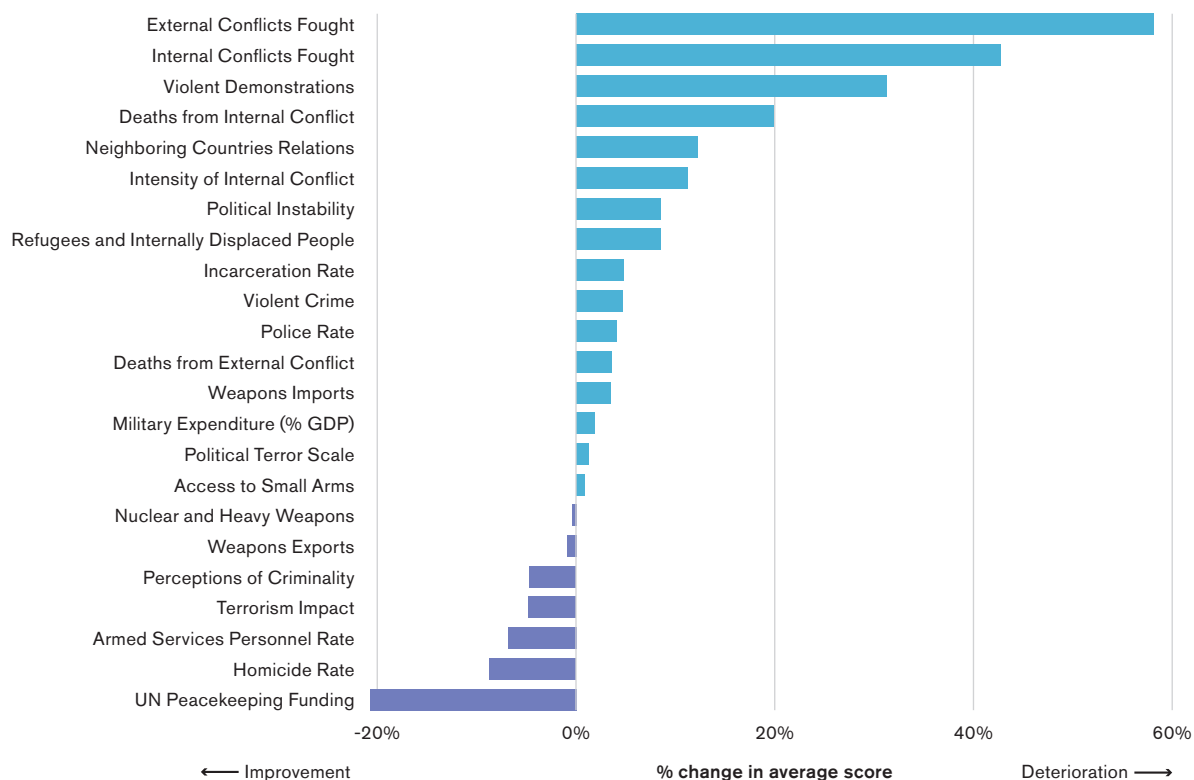
Militarization was the only domain to improve since 2008. However, that trend has begun to reverse. Ongoing conflict deteriorated substantially since the mid-2010s.



Source: IEP.

Figure 2.4 Changes in indicator scores, 2008-2024

External Conflicts Fought, Internal Conflicts Fought, and Violent Demonstrations all deteriorated by more than 30%



Source: IEP.

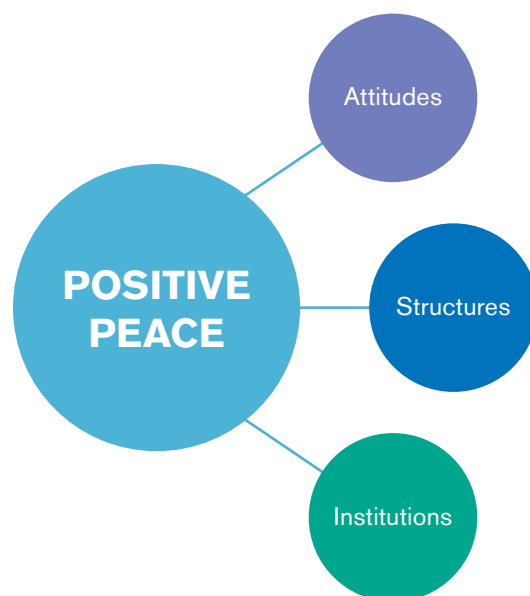
3. The Positive Peace framework

3.1 What is Positive Peace?

The IEP defines Positive Peace as the “attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies” (IEP, 2024b) (see Figure 2.5). It is conceptually and empirically related to many constructive aspects of social development and is a framework to understand and address the complex challenges facing humanity. Positive Peace is a transformational concept in that it is a cross-cutting facilitator of progress, making it easier for businesses to sell, entrepreneurs and scientists to innovate, individuals to produce, and governments to effectively regulate.

Positive Peace has been empirically derived by the IEP through the analysis of tens of thousands of cross-country measures of socio-economic development, including surveys and expert assessments, to determine which economies have statistically significant relationships with actual peace as measured by the GPI. It provides a measure for policymakers,

Figure 2.5 Positive Peace domains



Source: IEP.

Figure 2.6 Eight Pillars of Positive Peace



Source: IEP.

researchers and corporations to use for effective interventions, design, monitoring and evaluation.

Positive Peace can also be used as the basis for empirically measuring a country's resilience — its ability to absorb, adapt and recover from shocks, such as climate change or economic transformation. It can also be used to measure fragility and help predict the likelihood of conflict, violence and instability. It is measured by the Positive Peace Index (PPI) which contains three domains – Attitudes, Institutions and Structures – as well as eight Pillars of Positive Peace (see Figure 2.6).

3.2 The eight Pillars

The framework components interact systemically to support society's attitudes, institutions and structures that underpin development and peacebuilding. High levels of Positive Peace occur where attitudes make violence less tolerated, institutions are resilient and more responsive to society's needs, and structures create the environment for the non-violent resolution of grievances. Positive Peace Pillars include:

- **Well-functioning government:** A well-functioning government delivers high-quality public and civil services, engenders trust and
- **Sound business environment:** The strength of economic conditions as well as the formal institutions that support the operation of the private sector. Business competitiveness and economic productivity are both associated with the most peaceful countries.
- **Acceptance of the rights of others:** Peaceful countries often have formal laws that guarantee basic human rights and freedoms, and the informal social and cultural norms that relate to the behaviour of citizens.
- **Good relations with neighbours:** Peaceful relations with other countries are as important as good relations between groups within a country. Countries with positive external relations are more peaceful and tend to be more politically stable, have better functioning governments, are regionally integrated and have lower levels of organized internal conflict.
- **Free flow of information:** Free and independent media disseminates information in a way that leads to greater knowledge and helps individuals,

participation, demonstrates political stability and upholds the rule of law.

businesses and civil society make better decisions. This leads to better outcomes and more rational responses in times of crisis.

- **High levels of human capital:** A skilled human capital base reflects the extent to which societies educate citizens and promote the development of knowledge, thereby improving economic productivity, care for the young, political participation and social capital.
- **Low levels of corruption:** In societies with high levels of corruption, resources are inefficiently allocated, often leading to a lack of funding for essential services and civil unrest. Low corruption can enhance confidence and trust in institutions.
- **Equitable distribution of resources:** Peaceful countries tend to ensure equity in access to resources such as education, health, and to a lesser extent, equity in income distribution.

3.3 Positive Peace as a fortifier of societal resilience

The same factors that create lasting peace also lead to many other positive outcomes to which societies aspire. Higher levels of Positive Peace are statistically linked to greater income growth, better environmental outcomes, higher levels of wellbeing and happiness, superior developmental outcomes and stronger social cohesion and resilience (IEP, 2024b). Social systems that operate with higher degrees of resilience are capable of offering more effective protection to their citizens against adverse shocks, whether political, environmental or economic.

High-resilience societies are also more likely to take advantage of positive disruptions or opportunities arising from the creation of new economic paradigms and technological innovation. After experiencing shocks, it is common that societies high in Positive Peace evolve systemically to be stronger and more capable of recovering from future shocks. In this way, data centred on the Positive Peace framework can also serve as an accurate measure of a society's resilience and adaptability.

Positive Peace can be also used as a predictor of future substantial declines in peace many years in advance, thereby giving the international community forewarnings and time to act. Through the modelling of the relationship between the PPI and the actual peace of a country, as measured through the GPI, it is possible to predict large declines in peace. The IEP's Positive Peace deficit model shows that 80 per cent of the countries predicted to decline substantially

in peace did so. Additionally, nations with a surplus of Positive Peace generally record substantial improvements in peace in the subsequent decade.

This underscores the importance of Positive Peace as a gauge of societal resilience and the predictive role it plays in assessing future societal development. It is also important for business, as countries with better Positive Peace outcomes register superior economic performance than their peers. The GDP per capita in countries that improve in the PPI outgrew that of their peers by 2.7 percentage points per year over the past decade.

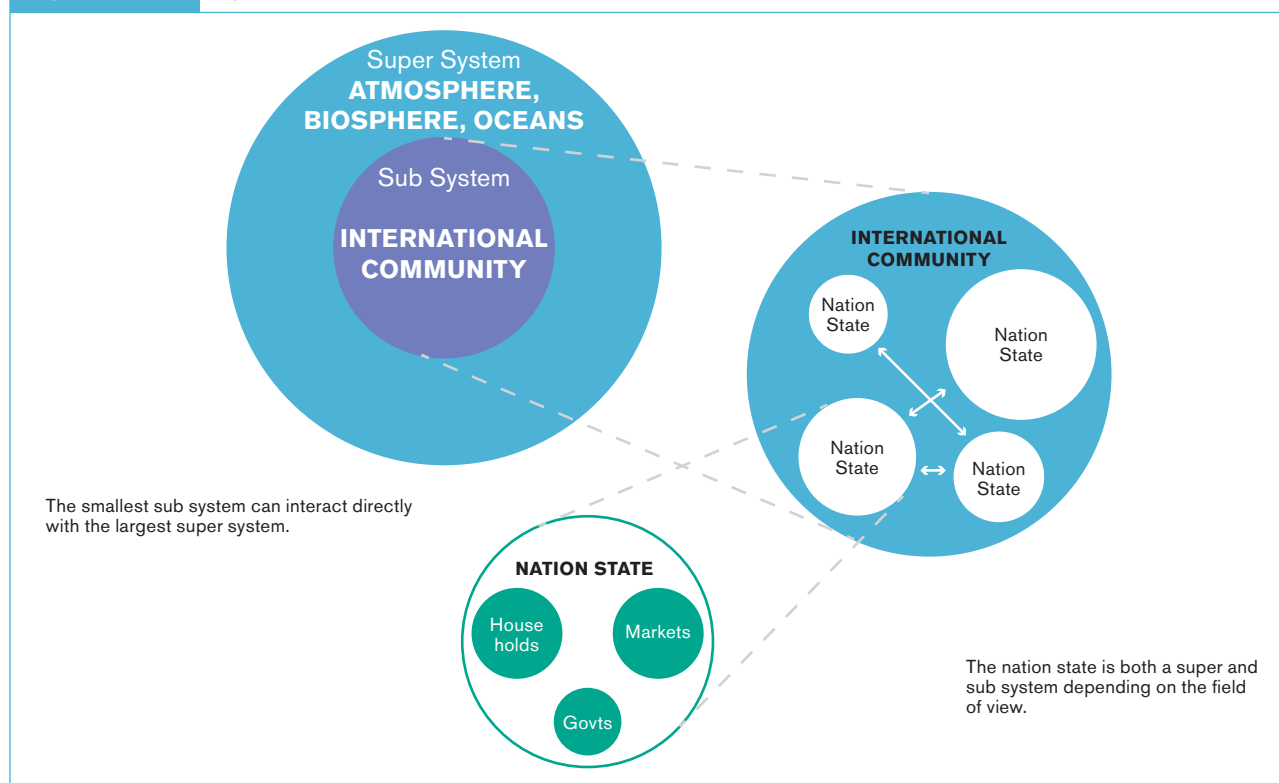
3.4 Implementation through “systems thinking”

Positive Peace implementation is predicated on “systems thinking”. Systems theory first originated while attempting to better understand the workings of biological systems and organisms, such as cells or the human body (Bertalanffy, 1968). Through such studies, it became clear that understanding the individual parts of a system was inadequate to describe a system as a whole, as systems are much more than the sum of their parts. For example, with human beings, one's consciousness is more than the sum of one's physical parts.

Extending these principles to societal systems is a paradigm shift, allowing for a more complete understanding of how societies work, how to better manage the challenges they face and how to improve overall well-being. This approach offers alternatives to traditional understanding of change.

All systems are considered open, interacting with the sub-systems within them, other similar systems and the super-system within which they are contained (see Figure 2.7). A societal system is made up of many actors, units and organizations spanning the family, local communities and public and private sectors. As all of these operate individually and interact with other institutions and organizations, each can be thought of as their own open system within the societal system. Sub-systems may, for instance, include companies, families, civil society organizations, or public institutions, such as the criminal justice, education or health systems. All have differing intents and encoded norms.

Similarly, nation states interact with other nations through trade relations, regional body membership and diplomatic exchanges, such as peace treaties or declarations of war. Positive Peace uses the concepts of societal systems to guide the design of intervention programmes and organizations dedicated to building resilience in fragile regions as well as developed states.

Figure 2.7 Systems and the nations

Source: IEP.

3.5 Trends according to the Positive Peace Index 2024

Changes in Positive Peace generally occur slowly and may take many years for the benefits to show because institution building and changes in social norms are long-term processes. As such, global changes in the PPI Pillars happen relatively slowly, and even slight changes in global Positive Peace can be considered important.

Figure 2.8 highlights the global trend in Positive Peace. Positive Peace improved almost continuously from 2013 until 2019, largely on the back of greater technological and economic development. It then declined because of COVID-19 and the global recession created by the policy responses to the pandemic. Although Positive Peace improved in 2021 and 2022 it is not back to the levels of 2019.

Although the progression of Positive Peace seems to be almost uniform from year to year, the changes for each of the three domains vary considerably. While Structures have been improving each year and by 8 per cent since 2013, Attitudes have deteriorated almost every year, declining by 1.8 per cent since 2013. Institutions have slightly improved by 1.4 per cent. Figure 2.9 shows the 2013 to 2022 trends in each of the three domains.

Figure 2.10 shows the percentage change from 2013 to 2022 for all eight Pillars of Positive Peace. These scores reflect gradual changes within complex social systems and typically do not fluctuate drastically year to year. As such, since 2013, the average Pillar score has changed by just 2.3 per cent and, except for Free Flow of Information, no Pillar score has changed by more than 5 per cent. The slow-moving nature of Positive Peace calls for long-term planning and sustained investment to improve the Pillars.

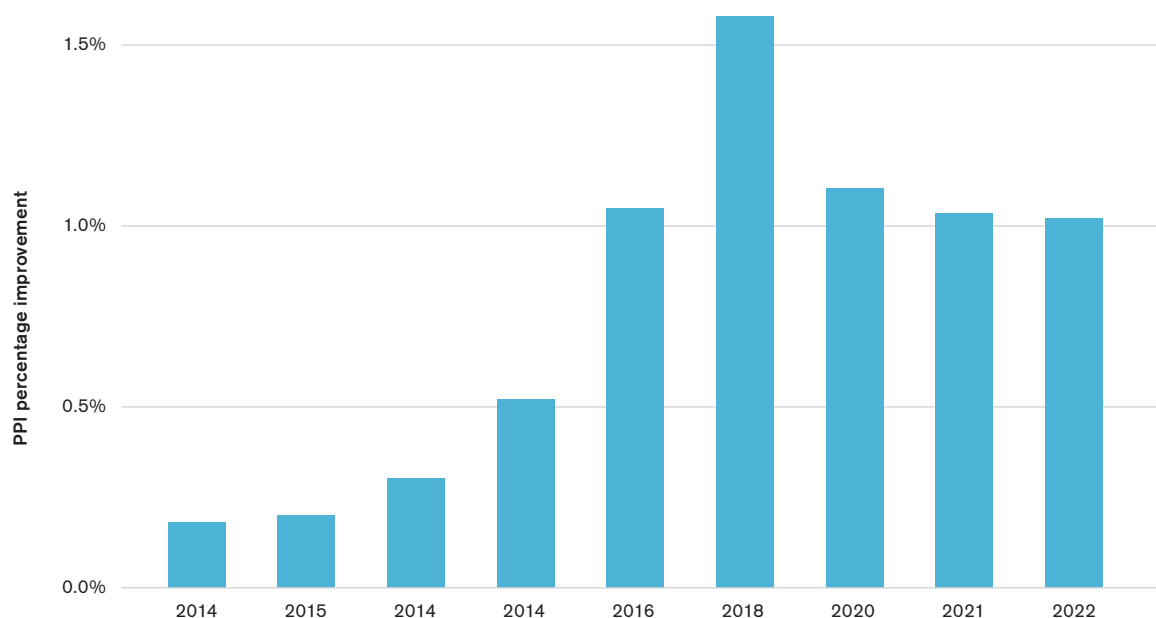
4. The economic value of peace: calculating the cost of violence

The global economic impact of violence is defined as the "expenditure and economic effect related to containing, preventing and dealing with the consequences of violence" (IEP, 2024a) (see Box 2.2). The economic impact of violence provides an empirical basis to better understand the economic benefits resulting from improvements in peace.

Violence and the fear of violence create significant economic disruptions. Violent incidents generate costs in the form of property damage, physical injury or psychological trauma. Fear of violence also alters economic behaviour, primarily by reducing the propensity to invest and consume. Expenditure on preventing,

Figure 2.8 Cumulative improvement in Positive Peace (2014-2022)

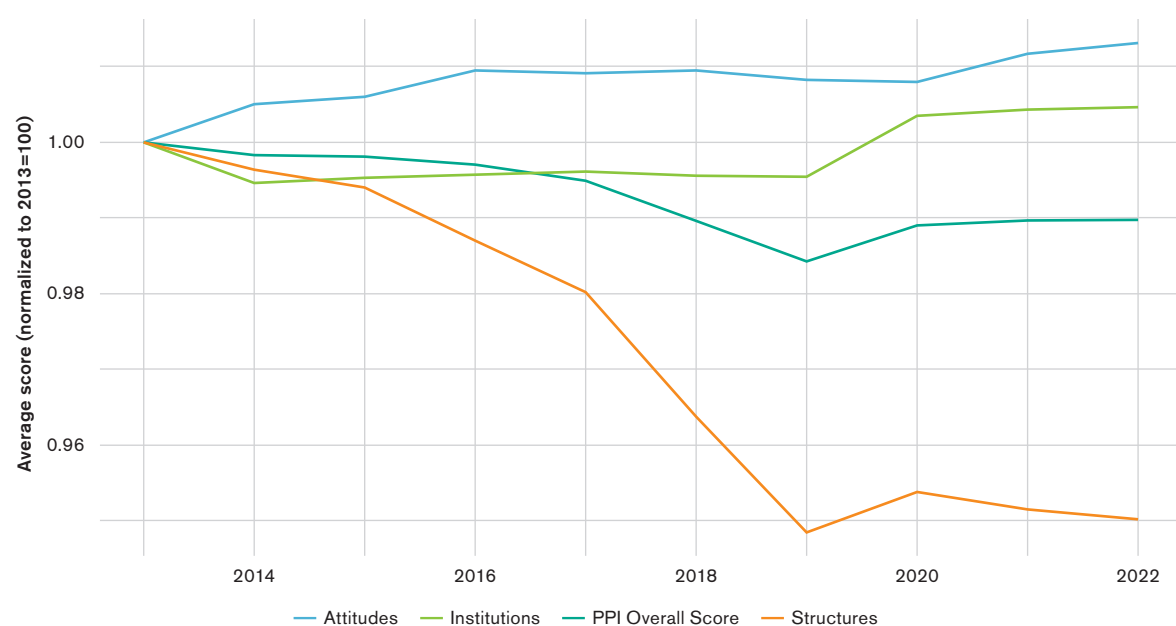
The global average Positive Peace score had improved by one per cent over the 2014-2022 period.



Source: IEP.

Figure 2.9 Changes in the Attitudes, Institutions and Structures of Positive Peace, 2013-2022

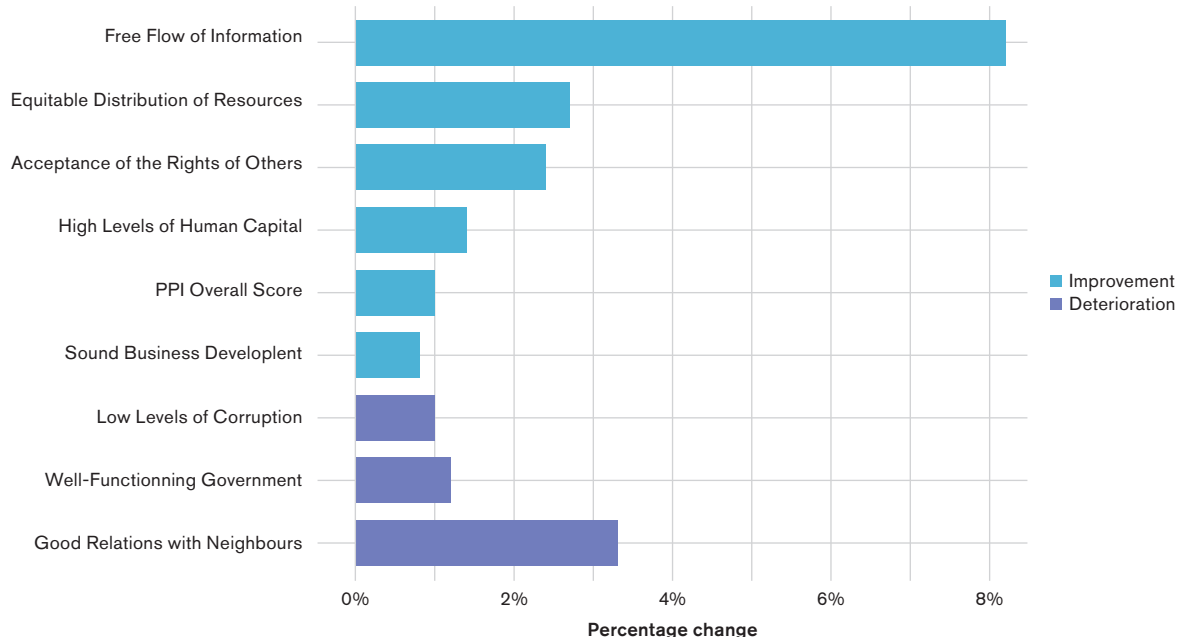
Globally, the improvement in PPI over the past decade was largely driven by structural improvements. Institutional functioning has slightly deteriorated over the period, while Attitudes have deteriorated noticeably.



Source: IEP.

Figure 2.10 Changes in the Pillars of Peace, 2013-2022

Five of the eight Pillars have improved over the past decade.



Source: IEP.

containing and dealing with the consequences of violence diverts public and private resources away from more productive activities and towards protective measures. Violence generates economic losses in the form of productivity shortfalls, foregone earnings and distorted expenditure.

The total economic impact of violence has three components that represent different ways in which violence impacts economic activity: direct costs; indirect costs; and a multiplier effect.

The direct costs of violence include the immediate consequences to the victims, perpetrators and public systems, including health, judicial and public safety.

The indirect cost refers to longer-term costs, such as lost productivity resulting from the physical and psychological effects and the impact of violence on the perception of safety and security in society.

The multiplier effect represents the economic benefits that would be generated by the diversion of expenditure away from sunk costs, such as incarceration spending, and into more productive alternatives.

In changing the cost and impact of economic violence, the multilateral trading system has the potential to play a significant role, notably by fostering stability, reducing conflict, and promoting long-term, sustainable peace. The interdependence created by mutually beneficial

trade agreements can act as a peace guarantor, as the deep interconnection of economies increases the costs of conflict for all parties, thereby incentivizing states to maintain peaceful relations.

Additionally, institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) can help mitigate the risks of conflict by creating “commitment mechanisms” (United Nations and World Bank, 2018). They might, moreover, encourage acceding countries to adopt policies aimed at reducing poverty and fostering peace when aiming to integrate into the global economy.

Finally, multilateral trade agreements can allow economies to co-operate and jointly tackle collectively faced crises. For instance, during conflicts or pandemics, they can ensure the maintenance of essential trade flows, thereby reducing the economic disruptions caused by such crises. The multilateral trading system, through its actors, structures, and institutions, therefore, has the potential to limit the cost and economic impact of violence and create efficient incentives for improved governance and more peaceful relations.

5. The peace-ecological crises nexus

The IEP’s research has shown a strong connection between levels of peace, societal resilience and

Box 2.2

Statistics on the cost of violence from the Global Peace Index 2024

- The global economic impact of violence was US\$ 19.1 trillion in 2023, equivalent to 13.5 per cent of global GDP, or US\$ 2,380 per person.
- The 2023 result represented an increase of 0.83 per cent – or US\$ 158 billion – from the previous year, largely driven by a 20 per cent increase in GDP losses from conflict.
- The largest increase in the economic costing model occurred in the armed conflict domain, which increased by 184 per cent since 2008.
- Expenditure on peacebuilding and peacekeeping was US\$ 49.6 billion in 2023, less than 0.6 per cent of total military spending.
- In the ten countries most affected by violence, the economic cost of violence averaged 37.4 per cent of GDP in 2023, compared to just 2.9 per cent for the ten least-affected countries.
- Military and internal security expenditure accounts for over 74 per cent of the total economic impact of violence.

Source: IEP, 2024a.

ecological threats. The multilateral trading system can play a role, for instance by advocating environmentally sustainable practices and climate resilience. Indeed, the promotion of green trade through trade policies and practices, and the access to and use of green technologies, can allow economies to foster economic growth while reducing their carbon emissions.

Moreover, trade can foster climate resilience. For instance, multilateral trade systems can help improve the distribution of critical resources and ensure access to essential goods and services (CSIS, 2023). Such mechanisms allow economies to mitigate climate shocks and reduce the likelihood of conflicts caused by climate-induced displacement and resource scarcity. This nexus is underscored and detailed by the data shown in the IEP's Ecological Threat Report (IEP, 2023).

5.1 The Ecological Threat Report

The Ecological Threat Report (ETR) aims to provide a data-driven foundation for the debate about ecological threats, and to inform the design of resilience-building policies and contingency plans. It does this by analysing ecological threats globally and assessing the regions and countries most at risk from conflict, civil unrest and displacement caused by ecological degradation and climate-related events. In particular, the Report focuses on four key domains: food risk; water risk; rapid population growth; and natural disasters.

The ETR covers over 3,594 sub-national areas and over 99 per cent of the world's population. This extensive coverage enables precise geolocation of data points, allowing for a precise mapping of how various elements, such as the relationship between

food scarcity and terrorism, converge to affect peace and security. This approach offers a deeper understanding of the nexus between peace and ecological challenges, not only on a national scale but with granular specificity at the community level and, indirectly, reveals the role that trade can play in it.

Indeed, trade can be a significant actor in addressing the risks related to the four key domains that the ETR focuses on. Firstly, it helps tackle food insecurity by stabilizing food supplies and allowing imports from areas less affected by ecological threats, through the reduction of tariffs for instance. Moreover, it can alleviate risks linked to water security by easing access to infrastructure, such as desalination plants, or green technologies used for wastewater treatment and purification. The reduction of trade barriers, by increasing access to goods and services, also contributes to alleviate the pressure that rapid population growth puts on resources. Finally, by enabling access to humanitarian aid and critical resources, multilateral trade agreements enable economies to better cope with natural disasters (World Economic Forum, 2022b).

5.2 Findings of the ETR 2023

The main takeaway from the ETR 2023 is that ecological threats (rapid population growth, water risk and food insecurity) will be compounded by climate change, causing mass displacement of people and conflict (see Box 2.3). Multiple stressors are also more likely to lead to negative societal outcomes, such as political instability, social unrest and violent conflict. In turn, this may cause more damage to physical

infrastructure and further deplete already-scarce resources, thus creating intensified food insecurity and water stress. This interplay between ecological threats and socio-economic dynamics may lead a country into a vicious cycle of progressively greater adversity. Without concerted action, current levels of ecological pressures will worsen, intensifying existing conflicts, and becoming a catalyst for new conflicts, thereby resulting in increases in forced migration.

In that view, trade can play a key role in alleviating the impact of ecological threats. On top of easing the distribution of and access to resources, trade policies can effectively contribute to the diversification of supply chains, thereby reducing the reliance on ecologically stressed regions and ensuring the resilience of global supply networks (World Economic Forum, 2022b). Additionally, trade reforms can help support the capacity building of countries that are most vulnerable to environmental threats, for instance by promoting green technologies and sustainable practices to help reduce the conflicts induced by local ecological stresses (World Economic Forum, 2022a).

6. Conclusion

The factors affecting levels of peace and conflict are complex and interconnected. Consequently, there are no quick and easy solutions for the multitude of social, political, economic and ecological global challenges facing the modern world. Building and sustaining societal development requires a large number of society-wide improvements progressing in parallel with one another over long periods of time. Having an acute understanding of the interplay of factors affecting peace and security is paramount to building proactive policies and strategies for resilience and sustainable peace.

The GPI and ETR serve as critical tools in this endeavour, offering quantifiable metrics that reveal the economic costs of violence and the delicate interplay between societal stability and ecological well-being. The GPI's sobering statistics on the growing gap between peaceful and conflict-ridden nations serve as a clear call for action. In parallel, the ETR's analysis of imminent threats related to food and water security and natural disasters highlights the urgency of building resilient systems capable of withstanding the pressures of the changing world.

Box 2.3

Findings of the Ecological Threat Report 2023

- Countries ranking higher in the PPI have strong societal mechanisms and resilience. This means that they are better prepared to deal with ecological threats.
- Shifts in ETR scores are associated with increased risk of conflict. A shift in indicator score of 25 per cent for food insecurity, natural disasters, and water risk increases the risk of conflict by 36 per cent, 21 per cent, and 18 per cent, respectively.
- Ecological threats have the biggest impact on conflict in regions like the Sahel, which face major deficiencies in governance and rule of law, high levels of poverty, and short-term climatic variations.
- The primary way that ecological threats increase conflict is by increasing competition for resources. However, countries with high levels of resilience and strong institutions are better able to deal with increased resource competition.
- Food insecurity is strongly linked to armed conflict. Areas of high food production are often also areas of significant conflict.
- Ecological shocks that damage livelihoods can increase opportunities for armed extremist groups to recruit new members.
- Interstate conflict becomes more likely following rising temperatures or rainfall shocks, especially where states stand to lose from existing agreements on water sharing.
- Countries with very low levels of Positive Peace have a fatality rate seven times higher than those with very high levels of Positive Peace after experiencing a natural disaster.

Source: IEP, 2023.

When analysing the relation between environmental threats and peace and taking into consideration the costs and consequences of violence as extensively studied in the IEP's various reports and indices, trade appears as a viable way to mitigate the various risks threatening the maintenance of long-term sustainable peace. From the reduction of trade barriers to expand access to goods and services, to the promotion of green technologies, and through the commitment mechanisms imposed by multilateral trade systems and institutions, trade provides efficient – if not indispensable – tools to tackle the impacts of violence and to promote peaceful relations.

In this context, the framework of Positive Peace and its eight Pillars play a fundamental role, both as a measure as well as a predictor and builder of peace that is the cornerstone for societal advancement and global prosperity. This framework illustrates that stopping or averting conflict is not an end in itself; resilience should be the priority. The IEP's findings reveal that the pursuit of peace, far from being an altruistic endeavour, is intrinsically linked to practical outcomes such as economic growth, environmental sustainability, and societal well-being. In essence, the journey towards Positive Peace is not just a path to conflict resolution but a roadmap for sustainable development and human flourishing in the 21st century and beyond.

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Endnotes

- 1 Director of Europe and the MENA region at the IEP.
- 2 The data, rankings and analysis provided in this chapter were sourced from the IEP's research publications, including the GPI, the Positive Peace Report and the Ecological Threat Report.