Liberal and Digital Peace-building: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

Patterns and trends keep changing with the commencement of each global political era, and peacebuilding is an evolving and continuous phenomenon. In the post-Cold War era, liberal peacebuilding entered the discourse of peace studies and conflict resolution as a bandwagon. Critical accounts of the limitations of liberal peacebuilding frequently reveal striking parallels between the inadequacy of peace processes and peace agreements. The threat is no longer confined within the designated territorial borders. Data theft, cyber-crimes and attacks, various biological and chemical agents through pandemics, etc., are posing a substantial challenge to liberal peacebuilding approaches and traditional methods. As each conflict has unique and divergent characteristics and dynamics, implementing liberal peace is not always pragmatic. The paper illustrates instances in which the liberal peace was not as fruitful as it ought to have been through five case studies. Liberal peacebuilding may be considered insufficient to address the emerging trends of conflict. In light of globalization and digitalization, the need to digitalize the peacebuilding process has become increasingly important. Subsequently, peacebuilders and conflict transformation practitioners are using digital technology to impact processes that can minimize violent conflict and improve sustainable human development. In terms of digitalizing peace processes, there is a dire need to include technology and innovative digital initiatives within peacebuilding. This qualitative study attempts to present a futuristic perspective by investigating the causes behind the insufficiency of the traditional approach and how digital peacebuilding methods might be used effectively to resolve conflicts in the future.

Keywords
digital peacebuilding, liberal peacebuilding, conflict transformation, resolution

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Introduction

Peacebuilding is both a concept and an approach, with its practical dimension and scope ranging from being utilized before a conflict has risen to during an active violent conflict to a post-war or post-conflict resolution time period. This approach involves reconstruction, rebuilding, rehabilitation, reconciliation, and reintegration. In a nutshell, the process of peacebuilding involves establishing and restoring relationships between or among adversaries. The ultimate goal of this approach is to bring about sustainable, durable, and positive peace. Where the term 'peacebuilding' is generalized, the prefix of 'Strategic' gives it definition. Strategic Peacebuilding is a long-term plan, put into place by experienced and relevant actors, that not only proves to be the most effective but also reaches every stratum of the social pyramid, as told by John Paul Lederach in his book Building Peace (Lederach, 2005; Cox, 2021).

"Every conflict is unique. But it is fundamental to all conflicts that their long-term solution involves dialogue, trust, and goodwill" (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Former President of Indonesia). As every conflict is unique, so are the peace-building approaches. No single approach can fully settle each case. Where political reforms worked in Mozambique (1977-1992), they failed miserably in China (1989) (Wu, 2015). Every approach is tailored to the specificities of the conflict. They can be broadly categorized as either a bottom-up (the Lowest level of Lederach's pyramid) or a Top-down approach (the Highest Level) (Maiese, 2016). It depends on which actors are involved in the process and how they take the lead in managing or resolving, or escalating, a conflict. The actors may include, but are not limited to, state authorities, law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Inter-governmental Organizations (IGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), local civil society, the United Nations, etc. (Michelle, 2024).

Another concept that is closely associated with Strategic Peacebuilding is the liberal model of peacebuilding. Post-World War II had internecine struggles and civil wars. The end of the Cold War marked the end of the international order. The Cold War confined the states at the time to intervene in humanitarian and political crises without showing support to the opposing power blocs. Intra-state conflicts were seen as 'proxy competitions' (Kalinovsky & Daigle, 2014). The disintegration of the USSR led to an increase in civil wars (Kollontai, 1994). Given this, the end of the bipolar world marked the victory of liberal and Western ideology over communism. From here onwards, it was evident that the spread of liberal ideology would encapsulate the world.

The end of the Cold War gave way to a new vision of American leadership, which paved the way for a major paradigm shift in global politics (Boutros-Ghali, 1996, p. 86). International peace, stability, and the fulfilment of liberal values were required to attain 'liberal peace'. Post-Cold War times stressed the management and resolution of the conflicts at hand. Liberal peace frameworks began to emerge with the support of policymakers, scholars, and non-governmental actors as a response to conflicts and post-conflict situations.

Liberal Peacebuilding has struggled to deliver sustainable and context-specific peace in many post-conflict societies, as seen in cases like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Iraq, and Mozambique, where top-down liberal reforms failed to address the deeper social, political, and digital-era drivers of conflict. At the same time, contemporary conflicts increasingly involve cyber threats, digital manipulation, and technologically enabled forms of violence that traditional peacebuilding frameworks are not equipped to manage. This creates a critical gap that liberal peacebuilding has not evolved to meet the demands of modern conflict environments, making it necessary

to explore how digital peacebuilding tools and approaches can address these limitations and strengthen future peacebuilding efforts.

As global conflicts evolved, liberal peacebuilding has struggled to keep up, leading to a reconsideration of its effectiveness. To address these challenges, this study raises two critical questions: Why could liberal peacebuilding not evolve to offer adequate mechanisms to deal with the emerging trends of conflict? How can the digital peacebuilding approaches fill the gaps left by liberal peacebuilding? To discover the answers to these concerns, this study first examines the notion of peacebuilding, including its critique, then dives deeper into the concept of digital peacebuilding and its potential benefits that address the gaps in liberal peacebuilding.

Defining Peacebuilding

The term 'peacebuilding' was initially coined by Professor Johan Galtung, the founding father of the discipline of peace studies and conflict transformation. It was Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was the head of the United Nations at that time, who established the concept in his *Agenda for Peace* document in 1991. Agenda for Peace was considered as the preliminary step to establish a framework to deal with issues in the post-conflict peacebuilding phase of violent conflict zones. It is characterized as the establishment of circumstances to construct enduring peace by tackling the political, economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian challenges that may contribute to the recurrence of the conflict. It emphasized the need to tackle the underlying factors of violence, namely economic distress, social inequity, and political suppression. The text also called for the involvement of national and international actors in addressing these factors to avoid any resumption of conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992).

One of the central aims behind the introduction of peacebuilding was the belief that developed states have a responsibility to support weaker and conflict-affected states that are highly vulnerable to security threats. In practice, this rationale also became a catalyst for the interventionist policies pursued by major powers, particularly during the 1990s. As a result, peacebuilding efforts involved a wide range of actors, including states, international institutions, and international non-governmental organizations (Jason, 2014).

Galtung defines peacebuilding in two ways: liberal peacebuilding and sustainable peacebuilding (Indira Gandhi National Open University, n.d.). Liberal peacebuilding draws its philosophical foundation from Immanuel Kant's Perpetual Peace, also known as Democratic Peace Theory, which emphasizes that democracies do not wage war against one another because they are part of collective security arrangements, are accountable to their constituencies through electoral processes, and establish liberal democratic institutions that promote peace, economic cooperation, and free market economies. As a result, liberal peacebuilding emerged through doctrines of liberal economic reforms, rule of law, democracy, human rights development, humanitarian assistance, and institutional involvement, with modern states positioned as the central actors in post-conflict peacebuilding (Zambakari, 2017).

Post-war peacebuilding processes, such as institutional rebuilding, reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation, and reintegration, are time-consuming and rely heavily on international funding, where accountability becomes a major prerequisite and is most effectively ensured within democratic regimes. Sustainable peacebuilding, on the other hand, is grounded in John Paul Lederach's discourse on sustainable peace and focuses on long-term structures and processes for peace development, including the training of actors from grassroots to ruling elites, inclusive

institutional and civil society engagement, and policy-oriented efforts that involve all segments of society. During the 1990s, the United Nations initiated peacebuilding missions in countries such as Nicaragua, Namibia, El Salvador, and Cambodia, reflecting the prevailing liberal ideology of the period and aligning with Boutros-Ghali's peacebuilding framework, which emphasized political and economic liberalization as foundational conditions for durable and sustainable peace after civil wars.

Conceptualization of Positive Peace

In this study, peace is understood not merely as the cessation of open hostilities but as a broader transformation of relationships and structures. Drawing on Johan Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace, negative peace refers to the absence of direct, organized violence, whereas positive peace entails the presence of just and equitable social, political, and economic arrangements that reduce the likelihood of violence recurring (Galtung, 1969, 1996). Therefore, positive peace includes accountability, fairness, justice, legitimate institutions, social inclusion, respect for human rights, and fair access to resources and opportunities for everyone. This conceptualization is also emphasized by later scholars advancing structural and relational approaches to peace (Lederach, 1997; Richmond & Tellidis, 2020). Within the context of this research, positive peace is conceptualized as a sustainable and context-sensitive condition in which underlying drivers of conflict, such as exclusion, structural inequality, and governance deficits, are addressed, rather than merely suppressed. The critique of liberal peacebuilding developed in this paper is based on the argument that many liberal interventions have produced, at best, a fragile form of negative peace (Paris, 2004), while the exploration of digital peacebuilding investigates how technology-enabled approaches might better contribute to the conditions of positive peace by enhancing participation, local ownership, and conflict-sensitive decision-making (Richmond & Tellidis, 2020).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, multiple–case study design grounded in secondary data with an aim to critically examine the limitations of liberal peacebuilding, while also exploring the potential of digital peacebuilding as a complementary and corrective framework. Instead of testing a formal hypothesis, the research follows exploration and interpretive logic, using theory-driven case selection and comparative analysis to highlight patterns, variations, and gaps in existing peacebuilding practices.

Five post-conflict examples were selected as case studies, which include Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Iraq, and Kosovo. The rationale for this purposive selection was based on the following criteria:

- Intensive liberal peacebuilding interventions
- Relevance to the core research questions
- Diversity of contexts and conflict dynamics
- Chronological extent and digital-era relevance

The cases span the post-Cold War period into the 21st century, allowing the study to trace how liberal peacebuilding has interacted with evolving global trends, including globalization, digitalization, and the growing salience of cyber and information-related threats. Furthermore, the cases are not presented as an exhaustive

list of all liberal peacebuilding experiences, but as analytically rich examples that collectively highlight recurring structural shortcomings.

Challenges in Peacebuilding Processes

Many theorists, scholars, and academicians in peacebuilding consider political and economic reforms complementary to each other. However, with time, rebuilding war-torn societies became a challenge as the limitations of these strategies became more pronounced. Efforts like fair elections, power sharing, and instilling capitalist systems did not identify the roots of conflict. Many times, it just addressed the surface causes. This further resulted in undermining the fragile peace. Angola experienced a return to conflict after democratic elections following a war between belligerents: the communist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the anti-communist National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) (John, 1999).

Despite attempts at peace and democracy in the 1990s, violence between the MPLA and UNITA resumed in 1992, ushering in a second era of civil war that lasted until 2002. In Rwanda, too, power-sharing plans through elections were marred by the horrific genocidal crimes committed by the Hutus. Cambodia's elections resulted in political instability, violence, massive protests, and a failure to implement economic reforms. Similarly, Nicaragua and El Salvador faced issues with implementing economic policies, leading to problems. In Bosnia, the economic policies implemented after the 2005 Bosnian Accords created difficulties. Additionally, in Liberia, Charles Taylor, who was democratically elected, instigated fighting by suppressing the opposition. In Kosovo, it reignited the conditions for conflict rather than for peace (Killingsworth, 2013). The cited examples demonstrate the challenges of liberal peacebuilding, as evidenced by its failure to maintain long-term peace in these conflict-affected areas. This highlights the critical need for alternative approaches to peacebuilding.

Critical Analysis of Liberal Peacebuilding

Liberal peacebuilding has had a significant impact on violent conflict zones and post-war societies. However, there has been immense criticism of certain aspects of peacebuilding mechanisms under the liberal order:

1. **Illiberal Practices**

   Each aforementioned conflict served as an example of how short-lived initiatives led to a resurgence of violence. Furthermore, it demonstrated that democratic elections and the reconstruction of devastated regions were insufficient to establish sustainable peace. To reinstate enduring harmony, grassroots efforts were required. As opposed to a top-down approach to state development, a bottom-up strategy or a combination of the two would be more achievable. Furthermore, as local conditions vary by country, it is important to consider social conditions by involving the local population. A lack of negotiated, contextualized, grassroots, and situation-specific peace initiatives in conflict-affected areas may exacerbate the current fragile peace and spark new hostilities.

2. **Pragmatic Realpolitik**

   International actors strive to prevent conflicts through the holistic transformation of societies in order to establish stability and harmony. However, there is evidence that these processes foster self-governance. From its inception, the liberal peacebuilding paradigm was doomed due to its biased ideals and vested interests.

This model has failed numerous times because of its enforcement. The peace processes are further impeded by the sponsors of international state-building initiatives failing to demonstrate sufficient political will and attention towards the completion of work.

3. *Liberal Imperialism*

Furthermore, there is criticism aimed at Western intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. This kind of engagement erodes the sovereignty of a nation and transforms peacekeeping missions into the expansion of liberal imperialism. The more dominant Western nations endeavor to *colonize* the less influential and non-democratic nations by imposing their cultural, normative, and value systems. This paradigm embodies a sense of elitism and hierarchy. David Chandler characterized the practice as an *'Empire in Denial'* (Bindi, Tamba, & Tufekci, 2018). The United States' actions in Iraq and Afghanistan provide prominent illustrations of this phenomenon.

Comparative Case Studies of Liberal Peacebuilding Interventions

Afghanistan

The Taliban's refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden to the United States and its allies following the September 11 attacks prompted the invasion of Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban regime. While the intervention succeeded in removing the Taliban from power, the subsequent state-building effort was heavily shaped by an externally driven liberal peace framework that emphasized elections, institutional engineering, and centralized governance (Kamal,2021). Over time, the conflict became protracted due to the involvement of multiple actors, and the US-backed democratic government was widely viewed as lacking sovereignty, legitimacy, and credibility, as it primarily served Western interests. The continued conflict between US and Taliban forces exposed the limitations of the liberal peacebuilding model, which failed to account for Afghanistan's historical, cultural, and political context. This failure became evident in August 2021, when the Taliban regained control of the country despite an estimated US expenditure of $2.313 trillion between 2001 and 2022. Scholars have consistently argued that liberal peacebuilding in Afghanistan overlooked the country's decentralized authority structures and indigenous mechanisms of dispute resolution, thereby undermining the prospects for sustainable peace (Zyla,2025).

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone, a small state in West Africa, experienced a prolonged and violent civil war that formally ended in 2002, followed by immediate peacebuilding efforts, yet peace has remained precarious (Akhaze,2015). Together with the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the UN sent out one of its largest peacekeeping deployments. However, the underlying reasons of war were not addressed because formal state-building methods paid little attention to the history of Sierra Leone, with a particular emphasis on liberal institution-building in the post-conflict scenario (Ikpe et al., 2021). Over time, it has maintained a severely divided society that is plagued by injustice and corruption. Inequality and corruption were the primary causes of the dispute between the main parties in Sierra Leonean society. The foreign intervention did not alleviate these social and economic concerns.

Mozambique

Years of violence and conflict have tarnished the history of Mozambique. Since gaining independence seventeen years ago, the African nation has been embroiled in conflict. The parties in conflict inked a peace agreement in 1992. Under the supervision of the United Nations, hostilities ceased, and a peace agreement was ratified with the intention of fostering an enduring peace (Maker, 2022). The initial democratic elections brought an end to the United Nations' mandate. Furthermore, the United Nations adhered to the fundamental principles of its peacebuilding endeavors, which included democratization, demilitarization, and market privatization, among others (Vines, 2020).

The reliance of liberal nations on international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank exacerbated economic conditions. As a result of the liberal policies, destitution, desperation, and rage increased. Before 2019, the nation was exceptionally dependent on loans and aid from abroad. Moreover, armed strife reemerged in 2013, which was subsequently resolved in 2019 via a peace accord. Mozambicans, however, have doubts about its durability (Waller, 2021). The lack of success observed in both domestic and international peacebuilding initiatives can be attributed to the limited duration of time invested by different actors

Iraq

Following the regime change and 2003 invasion of Iraq, the United States attempted to establish a liberal democratic political system, much like it had in Afghanistan. To bolster this transition from an authoritarian regime, novel institutions were established. Following the aforementioned examples, Iraq, too, encountered legitimacy concerns after the 2005 elections. The number of individuals participating in the mass demonstrations grew over time. High levels of institutional incoherence and corruption plague the Iraqi political system

Iraq's political system underwent a period of instability after the establishment of a liberal democratic framework. This was the result of unsuitable institutional engineering that transpired throughout the transitional period of state-building. The disregard for locally proficient technocrats contributed to the downfall of institutions and, ultimately, the failure of state building. An additional noteworthy element that contributed to the instability that ensued after the implementation of liberal principles was their inadequate consideration of context and situation specificity (Mako & Edgar, 2021; Sari,2019).

This deficiency hindered grassroots efforts that sought to promote reconciliation and inclusion. Another significant factor was the successful attainment of influence by ethnic elites over the political trajectory of Iraq, which gave rise to novel forms of marginalization. Furthermore, the ruling class persisted in its longstanding practice of preferential treatment. The active participation of local advocates in tailored efforts, rather than one-size-fits-all ones, together with actual tangible financial support, is essential, considering that Iraqi culture is not receptive to liberal ideas (Mako & Edgar, 2021). Liberal peacebuilding in Iraq had its own shortcomings since it did not reflect Iraqi culture, identity, ethnicity, or history, posing a substantial obstacle to the adoption of peaceful and durable peace measures as the state–society relationship did not conform.

Kosovo

Kosovo represents another conflict-ridden case of peacebuilding that followed the transitional administration model led by the United Nations, European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), yet revealed significant flaws and limitations (Tziarras, 2012). More than twenty years after the Kosovo War and fourteen years after independence, peacebuilding remains overseen by the EU mission in Kosovo and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, while ethnic tensions persist internally and with neighboring states (Emous, 2023) Kosovo continues to face challenges such as power-sharing disputes, legitimacy issues, social exclusion of minorities, corruption, a weak judicial system, elite-driven politics, and political instability, raising questions about the effectiveness of liberal peacebuilding despite sustained international involvement (Visoka, 2020). Limited and non-inclusive local and civil society participation, combined with top-down institution-building approaches, has resulted in superficial reforms and limited progress toward durable peace. More broadly, Western interventions in fragile states such as Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Iraq have often imposed liberal norms while overlooking local realities, highlighting the need for alternative peacebuilding frameworks, particularly in an era of growing technological reliance (Balthasar, 2017; Garrido, 2019).

Conflict and Digital Technology

Rapid global industrialization and advances in information and communication technologies have transformed the world into a global village, enabling widespread participation in information production and consumption while reducing the state's ability to control the flow of information across borders (Srinivasan, 2018). The evolving nature of digital technology has significantly reshaped contemporary conflict dynamics. Stakeholders in conflict now use a wide range of digital tools to enhance their access to information, improve situational awareness, develop new strategic capabilities, and reframe conflict narratives in ways that advance their objectives (Druet, 2021). These technologies are strategically leveraged to support various aspects of conflict operations, such as enabling faster and more secure communication among individuals and groups, accelerating the speed, scale, and global reach of dissemination, including the spread of narratives by conflicting parties.

Digital technologies generate new data on conflict dynamics and public sentiment but are also increasingly weaponized through disinformation, polarization, hate speech, propaganda, psychological operations, and influence campaigns, particularly via social media, posing serious challenges to peace, justice, and social cohesion (Cherry, 2024). Subsequently, as such threats are coercive, digital technologies have also empowered peacebuilders and peacekeepers to impact processes that may help in mitigating violent conflict while also enhancing sustainable human development (Pauwels, 2021). With regards to the digitalization of peace processes, there is a strong drive to use technology and innovative digital initiatives in peacebuilding efforts. To comprehend how peacebuilding has adapted to the digital world, we must first understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this space.

Impact of COVID-19 on Ongoing Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping Operations

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented disruptions to peacebuilding operations worldwide. Its impact was not limited to public health but extended directly into conflict-affected environments where peacebuilding processes rely heavily on mobility, face-to-face engagement, and the steady flow of resources. The pandemic intensified pre-existing structural inequalities, strained weak health systems, and heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities, as well as conditions that often correlate with increased risks of tension and violence (Peace Direct, 2020; United Nations Peacekeeping, 2022).

For peacebuilding practitioners, lockdowns and travel restrictions severely limited fieldwork, community engagement, and mediation efforts. Many mechanisms vital to reconciliation, such as dialogue forums, confidence-building activities, trauma healing sessions, and local conflict resolution meetings, were postponed or moved online (Makosso, 2020). While digital tools enabled some continuation of activities, they also amplified unequal access to technology, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, thereby excluding precisely those groups most vulnerable to conflict escalation.

COVID-19 also reshaped operational priorities. Peacekeeping missions and local organizations were forced to shift resources toward crisis management, humanitarian support, and pandemic response, often at the expense of long-term peacebuilding objectives (Clark & Alberti, 2021). The pandemic demonstrated that effective peacebuilding requires both adaptable digital mechanisms and strategies that anticipate how global crises can undermine fragile progress. Studies on the pandemic have analyzed its many dynamics in various lenses and arenas. The fast spread of the virus targeted two major fault lines in Peacebuilding operations. The first is that it affected the baseline of conflicts and directly contributed to inequality. The economic hits that every state took didn't leave peacebuilding operations unscathed. Local peacebuilders came forward to report that their funding had started to dwindle, directly threatening the 'sustainability' aspect of their mission.

The second issue is that, as peacebuilding is primarily done in conflict-prone areas or in traumatized communities, the setting of the entire mission is fragile, and upheaval as massive as a pandemic deconstructed much of the progress of some missions. Connecting to the issue of inequality, it was noted that there was a significant revival of racist sentiments. The polarization of societies and parties renewed in several peacebuilding missions. On its own, there is seemingly little that joins racism with the virus, but as the coronavirus was globally dubbed as the *'Chinese Virus',* it becomes clear that it takes little to nothing to polarize people; when you add previous grievances to the mix, it is relatively easy to visualize how easily any progress made by the peacebuilding missions could be unraveled. The Government of South Sudan asked the United Nations not send troops to it that had recently served in high-risk countries such as China, Spain, and Italy (Day, 2019). Covid led to class exploitation and further promoted poor living conditions in the already sensitive conflict zones and further directly affected the troops too, as their rotation tours had to be rearranged and often stopped.

Several missions had to shift to crisis management mode while some had to cease completely, e.g., Colombia. The crisis also had a negative impact on the already vulnerable mental health of the people living in the conflict zones, with already repressed/unaddressed trauma. However, the pandemic has definitely brought about a change in the way we view peacebuilding. It has evolved into a digital space now,

giving more room for partnership and remote access with little to no cost in comparison to before. The focus has been on 'keeping communication channels open and retaining conflict sensitivity. Overall, COVID-19 did not create new conflicts but exposed and deepened the structural weaknesses already present in conflict-affected societies, underscoring the need for resilient, inclusive, and technologically adaptive peacebuilding approaches.

Digital Peacebuilding

Digital peacebuilding depends upon the corresponding nature of new and older technology. This will allow people to report and react to violent instances more quickly, given the early warning and response mechanism it entails. In this regard, context-specific digital tools are required, ranging from complex mechanisms such as blockchain cash distribution to simpler technologies such as SMS messaging. Moreover, peacebuilders make use of phones, internet bundles, laptops, cameras, email, websites, databases, and social media platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Facebook to hold conferences and seminars, using radio and other digital platforms to connect people across borders in sharing critical information and spreading awareness regarding a conflict (Hirblinger, 2023)

The utilization of these tools has enabled peacebuilders to leverage the power of technology to eradicate conflict. They can improve capacity building programs, streamline conflict analysis, establish online communities, advocate for conflict resolution, influence public attitudes, protect marginalized groups, and use the internet and social media for social justice. Beyond the positive outcomes of technology for peacebuilding, individuals worldwide can become agents of change within their own societies by launching social media campaigns against corrupt and authoritarian regimes and by sharing firsthand reports of violence, social unrest, election fraud, and political instability. In this regard, the wave of social media protests heralded by the Arab Spring in 2010 allowed individuals to voice their complaints publicly against totalitarian regimes of several of the dominant Middle Eastern countries, such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Algeria, Iraq, and Jordan (Kundt, 2014).

Tools of Digital Peacebuilding

In line with the assessment of digital peacebuilding, a concise taxonomy of its core functions is outlined below.

Data Processing / Data Management

Digital peacebuilding extensively relies on technology-enabled data collection and analysis to support early warning systems and conflict prevention. Tools such as FrontlineSMS, Magpi, and KoBoToolbox enable real-time data gathering and big data analysis, while crisis-mapping platforms like Google Crisis Map and MapsData help visualize conflict hotspots through descriptive, predictive, and diagnostic functions. (Gangopadhyay, 2024; Panic, 2020). Platforms such as Ushahidi and UNICEF's RapidPro further demonstrate how digital tools support interactive mapping and real-time information flows in conflict-prone settings (Omowon, 2024).

Geographic Information Systems and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

Geographic Information Systems, satellite imagery, and drones are increasingly used to overcome access constraints, security risks, and high data-collection costs in conflict zones. These technologies support surveillance, humanitarian delivery, and emergency

response, and advances in crowdsourcing have made them accessible to both international organizations and smaller peacebuilding actors (Quamar et al., 2023).

Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain Technology
Artificial Intelligence enhances peacebuilding by enabling rapid analysis of large datasets through machine learning, natural language processing, and pattern recognition. Institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union employ AI-driven early warning systems to monitor conflict dynamics and generate real-time indicators for prevention and peacebuilding (Salisu & Samuel, 2025).

Gamification of Peacebuilding
Gamification integrates game mechanics into peacebuilding to encourage positive social behavior, civic engagement, and conflict-sensitive attitudes. While still limited in formal peacebuilding programs, examples such as *PeaceMaker* and *Acts of Kindness* illustrate how games can promote dialogue, empathy, and prosocial action in divided societies (Darvasi, 2019; Nicolaidou & Kampf, 2025).

Social Media Platforms
Social media analytics tools play a critical role in monitoring public sentiment, misinformation, and early warning signals during crises. Platforms such as Geofeedia, Hootsuite, GroundTruth, Aggie, MapBox, and Keshif enable location-based monitoring, real-time data aggregation, and analysis of propaganda and misinformation in volatile environments (Firmansyah, 2025; Thurman, 2018; Kelsey, 2017; Yao et al, 2007; Roberts & Marchais, 2018; Yalçın et al., 2017).

Impacts of Digital Peacebuilding

Engagement
Digital tools can also be used to strengthen communities to provide timely help in response to an uprising in a conflict. They can envisage civic engagement and social cohesion amongst people, thus helping communities to act and enforce certain initiatives during times of crisis. An example can be 'RYNDA.ORG', a platform that allows people to ask for or offer help to families struck by the Russian wildfire in 2010 (Asmolov, 2014). The platform was later transformed into a wider network for community help. Moreover, tech-enabled citizen engagement could help peacebuilders in fomenting platforms and spaces focusing upon social issues, thus directing the local populace to participate in social reform and change processes (Larrauri & Kahl, 2013). An example can be the emergence of Crowdfunding, another area to foster engagement through not only individual funding campaign platforms such as Kickstarter or Indiegogo but also through spaces that focus on funding for social causes.

Fostering Collaboration
Networking and experience-sharing through online platforms have indeed allowed peace practitioners to collaborate with communities to foster increased information sharing and enhance understanding between them. Virtual communication tools can be applied to support dialogue between warring factions by strengthening coordination and synergies important in conflict prevention. For example, in Cyprus, civil society organizations created a platform called 'Mahallae' in 2014, which allowed peace practitioners to exchange knowledge and experience generated over 15 years of peacebuilding and conflict prevention practices to contribute towards the capacity

building with regard to the Cypriot context. It also encouraged regional civil society organizations to collaborate in formulating innovative peacebuilding initiatives for future discourse (Kanol, 2016).

Promoting Peaceful Attitude

As conflict is a dynamic process that undergoes changes in attitudes, structures, and behaviors of participants, conflict management and peacebuilding encapsulate the very essence of making sure that such attitude change may not become the prime factor in escalating any violence. In this regard, digital peacebuilding allows digital platforms to magnify civil society efforts to change behaviors and attitudes that can be leveraged for conflict prevention and forming longer-term narratives that shape identities more positively. An example in this regard can be an organization called 'Soliya' which uses online tools to impact attitudes by helping communities resolve their differences from a confrontational approach towards one defined by mutual harmony, compassion, and cooperation (Elliot-Gower, 2016).

Influencing Policy

Digital peacebuilding also encourages projects and initiatives aimed at influencing policy through technological tools in conflict settings. Hence, a non-profit organization called 'Turning Tables' allows young people in marginalized communities and conflict-prone settings to express their grievances and societal and political views through music. Such projects engage young people in intercultural dialogue. Thus, conditioning underprivileged youth to express their political perspective for the coming years in the spirit of nonviolence (Larrauri & Kahl, 2013).

Risks and Limitations

A bigger dilemma revolving around digital peacebuilding is the access of such technology to people living in remote areas, where limited human resources and the absence of long-range finance often degrade the viability of tech-related efforts. The spread of communication is thus limited to urban areas where the economically well-off population takes the desired share of benefit, while those in rural areas are excluded. On the contrary, if the information does reach out, certain rogue elements are quick to manipulate the population to further their repressive political agendas.

In addition to this, there are risks of data breaches present even if high cybersecurity standards are put into place. Evaluating fragile contexts, such risks are intensified due to the fact that, as data security barriers are difficult to implement, sensitive information is hard to protect and may be jeopardized in one way or another. In these cases, if such data falls into the hands of rogue elements (warring factions or repressive governments), they can easily manipulate it to further their political agenda and hence inflict more harm on the vulnerable population.

Additionally, it substitutes for in-person engagement with people, a crucial element in fostering trust. Hence, there is a general possibility that trust may be lost between peacebuilders and warring communities as digitized processes such as online mediation and remote gathering capacities are brought in place of field visits. Moreover, if their expectations are not met, the local populace may turn against the procedure and abandon it entirely, resulting in no progress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the examples mentioned above reveal that international liberal peacebuilding has failed to attain lasting peace in post-conflict societies. The

consideration of democratization and marketization as cures for conflicts in these societies is destructive. The striving for universalizing liberal model of peacebuilding by international actors has been chastised. All the explanations connote that rather than creating conditions for positive peace, liberal peacebuilding builds results more in negative peace. It has done more harm than good. Therefore, to manage the shortcomings of liberal peacebuilding, other approaches need to be introduced. With increased digitization in our lives, work on peacebuilding can be pursued in this domain. This paper demonstrates that liberal peacebuilding, despite its prominence in the post-Cold War era, has often struggled to produce sustainable and context-sensitive outcomes in conflict-affected societies. Across the cases of Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Iraq, and Kosovo, the evidence reveals that externally driven liberal reforms frequently resulted in fragile forms of negative peace marked by weak institutions, limited local ownership, and inadequate attention to structural inequalities and socio-political realities.

Digital peacebuilding oversees long-term and permanent peace by effectively evaluating the underlying dynamics and root causes of a conflict. It consolidates a broad post-conflict agenda by strengthening internal and external security, promoting economic and social reconstruction amongst conflicting parties through inclusive dialogue and interaction. It prevents the outbreak of violent conflict by establishing certain operational, structural, and systematic measures aiming towards nation-building and state-building. In this regard, the above tools, such as data processing, geographic information systems, artificial intelligence, gamification of peacebuilding, and lastly social media platforms, provide an in-depth analysis of how digital peacebuilding can be leveraged in monitoring conflict for real-time awareness and timely interventions. Aside from this, the transformative potential of the technologically powered network society has reinforced four key areas of digital peacebuilding, i.e., through effective engagement, fostering collaboration, promoting peaceful attitudes, and influencing policy.

In contrast, the emergence of digital peacebuilding presents opportunities to address some of these shortcomings by improving early warning capabilities, strengthening community engagement, facilitating inclusive dialogue, and supporting conflict-sensitive decision-making. Digital tools enhance the ability of peacebuilders to gather and analyze data, monitor emerging threats, and adapt interventions in real time. At the same time, these approaches introduce new risks related to exclusion, privacy, cybersecurity, and the erosion of face-to-face trust, emphasizing the need for responsible, ethical implementation. Concluding the analysis, peacebuilders and decision makers at the local, regional, and international levels must integrate technology into peacebuilding initiatives to facilitate a channel of information for impact evaluation and assessment necessary to prevent and manage conflict.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the need for a hybrid approach that integrates the strengths of digital innovation with contextually grounded, locally led peacebuilding strategies. By aligning technological tools with the lived realities of conflict-affected communities, future peacebuilding efforts can better promote the positive peace structures of justice, inclusion, and equitable governance that reduce the likelihood of violence and support long-term stability.

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