



ROLE OF WOMEN TO RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT: A CASE OF ISRAEL- PALESTINE CONFLICT

Namrata Sharma

Lecturer in Political Science, Kishorenagar College Cuttack

Email: namratasharma72222@gmail.com

Paper Received On: 21 APRIL 2026

Peer Reviewed On: 25 MAY 2026

Published On: 01 JUNE 2026

Peace agreements fail all too frequently, and recidivism for civil war is alarmingly high. New strategies to advance security are needed. Despite the historical exclusion of women from the peace table, a growing body of evidence shows women's contributions to conflict prevention and resolution reduce conflict and improve stability. Learn about the ways that women have contributed to peace efforts around the world and explore statistical research demonstrating the relationship between gender equality and the security of states.

Work Across Lines

Women often take a collaborative approach to peacemaking and organize across cultural and sectarian divides. Research suggests that such an approach—which incorporates the concerns of diverse demographics (e.g., religious, ethnic, and cultural groups) affected by a conflict and with an interest in its resolution—increases the prospects of long-term stability and reduces the likelihood of state failure, conflict onset, and poverty.

- Israeli and Palestinian women have long built coalitions across national, ethnic, and religious lines to lead nonviolent efforts to promote security and access to basic services.
- The Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which includes members from a range of ethnic, political, and religious backgrounds, finds consensus on many contentious issues.

Act as Honest Brokers

Including women at the peace table can also increase the likelihood of reaching an agreement because women are often viewed as honest brokers by negotiating parties. This perception is rooted in the reality of women's exclusion: because women often operate outside existing

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power structures and generally do not control fighting forces, they are more widely perceived to be politically impartial mediators in peace negotiations, compared to men.

- Women from Northern Ireland were respected as “honest brokers” who represented both communities, which allowed them to lead back-channel conversations with opposing parties, including when Sinn Fein was temporarily barred from the talks.
- An evaluation of negotiations in the Philippines found that women were more likely to be trusted and were better able than men to preserve interethnic alliances as tensions in the Mindanao conflict escalated.

Stage Mass Action

Women often advance peacemaking by employing visible and high-profile tactics to pressure parties to begin or recommit to peace negotiations, as well as to sign accords. Women’s groups have successfully staged mass actions and mobilized public opinion campaigns in many countries to encourage progress in peace talks. In recent times, women’s groups have organized more mass action campaigns in support of peace deals than any other social group.

- In 2003, Liberian women led by activist and future Nobel Peace laureate Leymah Gbowee led marches, organized weekly rallies in central fish markets, and staged nationwide women’s strikes and sit-ins.
- Women’s groups in Guatemala led public marches that gathered thousands of people to protest the military’s brutal insurgency campaign and urge progress in peace talks.
- Women in Sudan were at the forefront of protests in 2019 that led to the overthrow of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in a coup d’état, making up 70 percent of protestors by some estimates. Women again stepped up to protest forcefully after military leaders staged a second coup d’état in 2021 and put an authoritarian leader in charge, derailing the country’s progress toward democratic governance.

Access Critical Information

Because women tend to have different social roles and responsibilities than men do, they have access to information and community networks that can inform negotiating positions and areas of agreement.

- In Northern Ireland, female negotiators held regular meetings with the public to learn more about the needs and concerns of both the Catholic and Protestant communities.

- In Afghanistan, a network of women activists in Kabul and Ghazni noticed Taliban fighters smuggling weapons—local security personnel failed to heed their reports, resulting in an attack on a nearby prison.

Broaden the Agenda

Women are more likely to raise social issues in negotiations that help societies reconcile and recover. Evidence suggests that women frequently raise issues in conflict resolution processes beyond military action, power-sharing arrangements, and territorial gains, instead introducing political and legal reforms, social and economic recovery priorities, and transitional justice concerns that can make agreements more durable.

- Women on Israeli and Palestinian technical committees in negotiations provide critical expertise on issues like water access and legal and human rights concerns.
- In Colombia, women successfully facilitated the inclusion of provisions in the final agreement on the rights of women and girls, access to property for rural and indigenous communities, women’s political participation, gender-based violence, and post-conflict accountability for sexual violence.

Aid Post-conflict Recovery

Ensuring diversity—including through women’s participation—in post-conflict recovery and rebuilding processes advances stability. Studies show that commissions charged with delivering on specific aspects of a peace agreement—such as monitoring disarmament and demobilization, establishing a truth and reconciliation process, or drafting a constitution—are more effective when women participate. Women are also more likely to direct post-conflict resources to the reconstruction of public institutions and provision of services critical to long-term stability, including schools, healthcare services, clean drinking water, and judicial systems.

- To promote rule of law during Myanmar’s democratic transition, women’s groups documented and publicized human rights violations perpetrated by the military and armed ethnic groups.
- Women in Guatemala organized campaigns for disarmament and developed strategies to help former fighters move into productive work.

Statistical Research

Explore statistical findings on how gender equality advances a country’s security interests.

Parties are more likely to reach sustainable peace agreements.

Women's participation strengthens the security sector.

Countries are more prosperous and stable as the gender gap closes.

Gender inequality and violence against women increase the risk of instability.

How Women Contribute to Conflict Resolution

Evidence shows that security efforts are more successful and sustainable when women contribute to conflict prevention and early warning, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and postconflict resolution and rebuilding. Furthermore, higher levels of gender equality are associated with a lower propensity for conflict, both between and within states. Read more in an original CFR report by Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein: *How Women's Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution advances U.S. Interests*.

Israel and the Palestinian Territories Case Study

In decades of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, relatively few women have participated in leading roles. Still, notable women have held prominent positions, such as Tzipi Livni, who served as Israel's chief negotiator in multiple rounds between 2007 and 2014, and Hanan Ashrawi, a negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1990s. Women do play a role in both governments, although they remain underrepresented. Within the Israeli government, only five of the current thirty-two ministers are women, and none of its political parties are currently led by a woman. The Palestinian cabinet includes only four women out of twenty-three ministerial-level posts. The Palestinian Authority established a Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2003.

Civil Society Efforts

Civil society groups—many bridging national, ethnic, and religious divides—have long played critical roles, leading nonviolent efforts to promote human security, equality, and access to services, and staging public demonstrations to call for progress in the peace process.

The Conflict

The seemingly intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict is rooted in a dispute over the land that makes up present-day Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. In 1917, British forces occupied Palestinian territory from Ottoman Syria and were then granted a dual mandate in 1920 that instigated a cycle of violence between the Jews and Arabs within the land. Following World War II, the United Nations proposed a partition plan for the British-controlled Palestinian territory, exacerbating violence between religious groups that spiraled

into a series of regional conflicts between 1948 and 1973. By the 1980s, significant Israeli and Palestinian peace movements had emerged. Palestinian civil society groups, with women academics at the forefront, mobilized a primarily nonviolent [PDF] mass movement known as the first intifada in 1987. These women came from every facet of society and participated in mass demonstrations, labor strikes, and boycotts of Israeli goods. This economic pressure, as well as the first intifada's inclusivity, played a central role in strengthening the durability of the movement and building momentum for the 1991 Madrid Conference, which brought all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict together to negotiate for the first time.

The subsequent Oslo Accords, meant to quell public discontent and form a Palestinian state, failed to resolve the conflict. The second intifada, beginning in September 2000, was far bloodier than the first and included a spate of suicide attacks on civilians before an informal ceasefire was reached in 2005. Waves of violence and instability have followed, and diplomatic efforts by the Middle East Quartet (the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations) have made little progress. There have been no direct talks since 2014, when a U.S. effort was derailed in part by Israel's settlement expansion and the Palestinian formation of a unity government between Fatah and Hamas. In January 2017, world leaders met in Paris to underscore their support for a negotiated two-state solution; no official representative from Israel or the Palestinian territories attended. In August 2020, following U.S. mediation between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, wherein the two countries agreed to normalize relations, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan announced similar U.S.-brokered deals, known as the Abraham Accords. In early 2023, after nearly a decade of silence, Israeli and Palestinian representatives held meetings in Egypt and Jordan to address growing violence in the occupied West Bank. Israel agreed to temporarily halt new settlement expansion in the West Bank, and both representatives affirmed the need for lasting peace. Despite these talks, tensions remain high between the parties.

On October 7, 2023, the Palestinian militant group Hamas, which governs Gaza, carried out a surprise attack on southern Israel, killing approximately 1,200 Israelis and taking roughly 250 hostages. Israel subsequently launched a counteroffensive aimed at destroying Hamas, leading to a formal declaration of war by Israel and a complete siege of the Gaza Strip. Over 50,000 civilians have been killed, and an estimated 1.9 million Gazans have been displaced. In January 2025, the United States, Egypt, and Qatar—who have been serving as mediators to help end the crisis—announced that terms for a three-part ceasefire had been reached. The

two parties worked through phase one of the deal, which saw the release of twenty-five living hostages by Hamas and the return of the bodies of eight deceased hostages; Israel returned thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange. The deal also initially led to a pause in fighting and allowed for the delivery of humanitarian aid. But in mid-March 2025, Hamas and Israel failed to reach an agreement on phase two of the deal, and Israel resumed a blockade of Gaza , as well as heavy bombardment of the territory. The humanitarian crisis is dire, and hundreds of thousands of Gazans are without shelter or healthcare and are facing the risk of famine.

Israeli and Palestinian Women at the Table

Although Israeli and Palestinian women have been underrepresented in formal negotiations, they have played critical roles in civil society for decades, advising negotiators and building grassroots support for the peace process. Nevertheless, only a handful of women have served as official negotiators and technical advisors in the last thirty years, and even fewer women have participated in leading roles in negotiations. Although the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution processes has been enshrined in policy by both the Israeli and Palestinian governments, both parties have fallen short in achieving inclusive representation. Women's advocacy groups and civil society continue to advocate for negotiating delegations that include more women and representatives from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

Effects of Women's Participation

Resolve impasses

When women have participated in formal negotiations, they have been lauded by other negotiators and third-party mediators as being critical to resolving impasses between parties and coaxing their own teams out of obstruction. In the U.S.-led negotiations from 2013 to 2014, for example, Tzipi Livni reportedly advocated for all parties to ignore political distractions and continue to discuss concrete agenda items , even while other members of her negotiating team appeared ready to filibuster talks over procedural matters.

Inform negotiating positions. Though agenda issues that are typically viewed as hard security concerns—such as the division of territory and military cooperation—overwhelmingly have been led by male negotiators and technical advisors, women have exercised leadership on both Israeli and Palestinian technical committees to provide critical expertise on issues such as water access and legal and human rights concerns.

Work across divides

Israeli and Palestinian women leaders have long built coalitions across national, ethnic, and religious lines in physical and digital spaces, which they have used to lead nonviolent efforts [PDF] to promote human security, equality, and access to basic services. For example, a women's contingent helped unite Palestinian political parties and mobilize support from Israeli civil society to successfully protect a Palestinian village from destruction. Civil society groups have formed to facilitate dialogue and promote peace by uniting people from both sides—from parents who have lost family members in the conflict to soldiers and freedom fighters.

Lead mass action campaigns

Women have mobilized mass action campaigns calling on political leaders to make progress in peace negotiations. In 2014, for example, roughly one thousand women staged a protest aboard a train to the Gaza border town of Sderot to call for the immediate restart of peace talks. In 2016, the Israeli organization Women Wage Peace staged a massive peace rally in Jerusalem. The organization has fifty thousand Israeli members and collaborates with the Palestinian women's peace movement, Women of the Sun, which was established in 2021. Just days before the October 2023 attack, 1,500 Israeli and Palestinian women gathered in Jerusalem and by the Dead Sea to advocate for peace and inclusion of women in the negotiation processes. In July 2024, the group helped organize a peace rally in Jerusalem attended by over five thousand Israeli and Palestinian participants to call for an end to the war. Women Wage Peace has also played an active role in calling for the return of the hostages held by Hamas, including by holding vigils.

“We [women] are getting involved in the war without anybody asking us if we want to, because we are paying the price of this war, we deserve to be on the negotiation table.”

— Member of Women of the Sun.