

# *Legitimacy in conflict: concepts, practices, challenges*

Article

Accepted Version

von Billerbeck, S. B. K. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0154-1944> and Gippert, B. (2017) Legitimacy in conflict: concepts, practices, challenges. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11 (3). pp. 273-285. ISSN 1750-2985 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2017.1357701> Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/71417/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2017.1357701>

Publisher: Taylor and Francis

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online



## **Legitimacy in Conflict: Concepts, Practices, Challenges – Introduction to Special Issue**

Sarah B. K. von Billerbeck & Birte Julia Gippert

s.b.k.vonbillerbeck@reading.ac.uk  
Department of Politics and International Relations  
University of Reading  
Edith Morely Building, Whiteknights Campus  
Reading, RG6 6AA

birte\_julia.gippert@kcl.ac.uk  
Department of War Studies  
King's College London  
Strand, WC2R 2LS, London

### **Introduction**

The study of legitimacy in situations of conflict and peacebuilding has increased in recent years. Not only do scholars point to the important role that legitimacy plays in ending wars and building peace, but policymakers and donors have started to incorporate legitimacy considerations into their strategies and policies (Department of Peacekeeping Operations 2008; OECD-DAC 2010; DFID 2012). Both local and international actors and institutions view legitimacy as critical to the achievement of their objectives in the conduct of war and the construction of peace and therefore actively seek and use it in these settings.

However, there are two problems with current work on the topic. First, many assumptions, definitions, and understandings of legitimacy are adopted wholesale from classical legitimacy theory, which centers on the relationship between the nation-state and its citizens (Zelditch 2001; Weber 1978). While this literature provides many useful insights, the context in which it considers legitimacy differs markedly from situations of interstate and civil war and international intervention in fragile or post-conflict countries. These settings are characterized by a number of conditions not captured in other treatments of legitimacy: the absence or weakness of the state, the fluidity of power relations, rapidly changing contextual factors, and a constantly evolving set of actors. These factors imply that the actors interested in legitimacy, the sources of legitimacy, and its uses will be different as well. What legitimacy is and how it is generated,

maintained, and lost—that is, legitimation; what role it plays; and who uses or invokes it in active wars and post-conflict settings deserve specific investigation in light of these factors.

Second, legitimacy in conflict has thus far not been studied in a systematic fashion. Individual contributions have been valuable to, for example, our understanding of local legitimacy in peace operations (Whalan 2013; Gippert 2016), how international organizations view legitimacy (Zaum 2013; Coleman 2007), or how they use legitimacy narratives in conflict and post-conflict situations (von Billerbeck, 2016). But we lack detailed analyses of the spectrum of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical legitimacy issues in and after conflict, the relevant audiences for legitimacy, its sources, and its impact (or lack thereof) on war and peace. In particular, we lack awareness and understanding of the trade-offs and dilemmas that legitimacy introduces in conflict and post-conflict settings. Far from constituting a panacea, legitimacy in these contexts is a contradictory and potentially conflictual concept with real implications for the possibilities for and strategies of peace and reconstruction, and indeed, nearly all such settings exhibit legitimacy deficits in some way.

This special issue on legitimacy in conflict addresses these two problems. In bringing together analyses of the various facets of legitimacy during and after conflict, it provides a comprehensive look at how legitimacy works in these settings and how it differs from the nation-state context; how stakeholders and policymakers instrumentalize legitimacy in the pursuit of their goals; and how legitimacy can be assessed. In doing so it invariably highlights the dilemmas and associated trade-offs faced by policymakers and actors who use or seek legitimacy in the domestic or international context. It also makes a particular contribution in introducing wide-ranging empirical data to back up its questioning of how traditional legitimacy theories work—or do not work—in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In this introduction, we provide a detailed critical overview of current theories of legitimacy and legitimation and why they have only limited applicability in conflict and post-conflict contexts. We then summarize the three main areas in which the articles included in this special issue challenge and contribute to those theories: audiences for legitimacy, sources of legitimacy, and legitimation. This introduction thus serves to bind the articles together and show the red lines of analysis that run through all contributions. It does not, however, prescribe one particular conceptualization of legitimacy. On the contrary, because the authors here each use their own conceptualizations of legitimacy and legitimation and address different audiences,

sources, and strategies of legitimacy, the issue as a whole is able to present a comprehensive picture of the diversity and special challenges of understanding legitimacy in conflict and post-conflict settings, thus helping to expand and add subtlety to existing theories of legitimacy.

### **Legitimacy in Conflict**

An inherently contested and nebulous concept, legitimacy is usually considered a characteristic of a hierarchical relationship between two actors marked by an inequality in their relative power. Most commonly, this is the relationship between rulers and ruled, usually in a state setting, and legitimacy in these terms relates to the accepted right of the ruler to rule or the duty of the ruled to obey (Coicaud 2002; Hurd 2007, 1999; Franck 1990; Hurrell 2007; Bukanovsky 2002; Gilley 2009). This judgment on the right of an actor to hold and exercise power and to demand compliance is based upon shared general norms of what is right or good in a particular state or society, and it is usually granted by a majority of the population, rather than an elite or any particular socio-economic group within the polity (Beetham 1991).

Legitimation, however, is not a concern reserved to states alone, despite the fact that most legitimacy research has been done on states and most legitimacy theory built around them, and recent years have seen an increase in studies on legitimacy *beyond* the state. International organisations such as the United Nations (UN) or the European Union (EU) are concerned with their legitimacy standing in the eyes of their member states (Zaum 2013; Hurd 2007; Beetham and Lord 1998; Lord and Magnette 2004). Similarly, international peace operations seek to legitimize themselves in the eyes of several audiences, including domestic publics in the states seconding staff or providing funds, local populations in the host states, and key states who mandate the missions (often the UN Security Council) (Coleman 2007; Whalan 2013; von Billerbeck 2016; Gippert 2016b). While the recent shift in legitimacy studies away from a focus exclusively on the state shows an appreciation of the wider applicability of this relational characteristic, many of the theoretical and conceptual assumptions born out of the state-focused literature survive.

Some of these features travel unproblematically between different legitimacy loci. For example, both the state-focused and wider legitimacy literatures can be broadly divided into two strands: those that assess subjective views of the legitimacy of an institution or actor (Weber's *Legitimitätsglaube*, 1978) and those that evaluate the justification of that institution or actor's

claim to legitimacy (Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Bodansky 1999). The first strand sees legitimacy as relational and subjective: an actor's legitimacy depends on the perceptions of a relevant target audience and is based on that audience's individual and collective normative benchmarks. The second strand holds that legitimacy can be objectively evaluated from outside of the legitimacy relationship itself: an actor's legitimacy depends on whether it meets certain pre-determined standards. While of course any 'objective' standard for evaluating an institution's legitimacy is based on certain normative benchmarks, often Western democratic ones (Zaum 2013), how we define, understand, and conceptualize legitimacy still matters for how we evaluate it empirically. One of the papers in this special issue uses an objective standard for evaluation (Coleman, in part), while the other four papers employ a subjective understanding (von Billerbeck, Gippert, Whalan, Weigand).

However, other key assumptions from the state-focused legitimacy literature do not travel into the other legitimacy contexts, particularly conflict and post-conflict ones. We highlight two: first, that power is institutionalized in the state and, second, that power is indivisible (Beetham 1991; Zelditch 2001; Coicaud 2002). While both assumptions make sense in the case of a strong Western state, they are severely curtailed on numerous fronts in weaker states and, as is the concern of this special issue, in the context of war and post-conflict peacebuilding.

First, an institutionalized view of power does not hold in most conflict and post-conflict settings, where power is not associated exclusively with the state, but is, instead, personalized and subjective. Florian Weigand's article on domestic governance in Afghanistan exemplifies this dynamic. He shows how the Taliban have gained legitimacy among the local population by exploiting the government's weaknesses and providing better local services. In particular, he demonstrates how the introduction of alien rule of law procedures into rural and tribal Afghanistan and the corruption and ineffectiveness of local government resulted in local openness towards alternative power structures.

Easton calls this kind of support *specific* as opposed to *diffuse* (Easton 1965, 1975). While diffuse support is built over the long term as a result of socialization processes within polities, specific support is more short-term and changeable. In stable state settings, diffuse support predominates, and it is often taken for granted that power is distinct from the incumbent and from the personal views of the individual or party in office. Individual leaders and governments do not have to convince the population of their right to rule or the duty to obey, but

are instead accorded legitimacy by the fact that they acceded to the office following accepted and established procedures, act within the powers granted by the office, and fulfill the duties of the office (Beetham, 1991). Institutionalization thus fosters stability and continuity; equally, the stability and continuity of the state setting reinforces the view of power as institutionalized.

However, as Jeni Whalan's and Florian Weigand's papers in particular demonstrate, this institutionalized view of power does not hold in many war or post-conflict settings. In the latter, the state may consist of fragmented elites and may not have meaning independent of its incumbent government, either because the state and its institutions are seen as alien constructs at odds with tribal, clan-based, or other social structures (Englebert and Tull 2008; Menkhaus 2006) or because it is viewed as a prize to capture in order to seek rents. Under these conditions, legitimacy evaluations are not necessarily attached to the state but often to the numerous groups and individuals vying for power, in what Easton calls specific support. As this specific support is more short-lived and changeable than diffuse support, it negatively affects the stabilizing role that legitimacy can play in such contexts. Further, it means that we cannot equate the specific legitimacy of an incumbent group with that of the office they are currently holding. A weak group or individual that takes office during or after conflict may gain power but does not necessarily benefit from the diffuse legitimacy of the office; similarly, where a strong and legitimate group or individual takes office, it does not mean that their specific legitimacy 'rubs off' on the office of the state. This dynamic extends into the post-conflict period where again, the state may be weak or non-existent and linked strongly to the individuals who govern it rather than the office itself. In particular, even when a post-conflict government has been installed and fighting subsides or ceases, the personalized nature of power means that one cannot assume that there has been a wider acceptance of the legitimacy of the office.

Second, traditional legitimacy theory assumes that power is indivisible (Beetham 1991) and attributes all power to the state (and equally, all obedience to the population), leaving little room for competing power holders or the division of different types of power among actors. However, power in most conflict and post-conflict settings is fleeting and fragmented, as Katharina Coleman's and Whalan's papers show with regards to international interventions. Indeed, conflict usually arises precisely because various groups are seeking to claim some or all of the state's power, meaning that power is no longer contained exclusively within the state. As a result, the binary hierarchical relationships that are assumed in traditional understandings of

legitimacy do not usually exist. Political actors and alliances among them are fragmented, as is the population, and hierarchies are fluid, contested, and often unclear. The state may be so weakened that it cannot be assumed to hold greater relative power than other actors, and there is likely to be a plethora of parties asserting their right above others to legitimately hold power.

While the limited applicability of state-based theories of legitimacy in turbulent conflict and post-conflict settings may not itself be surprising, to date few studies have provided empirical evidence to demonstrate this mismatch or to suggest where legitimacy theory needs further development. The contributions to this issue, however, do just that, and they employ a wide array of case studies and rich empirical data to demonstrate how several of the central tenets of traditional legitimacy theory often do not apply or lack nuance to adequately capture legitimacy relationships in these settings. Here, we draw out three of the main areas to which the articles in this issue make particular contributions in this regard: audiences for legitimacy, sources of legitimacy, and legitimation strategies.

### **Legitimacy Audiences**

As described, legitimacy is a relational attribute, one judged to exist by one actor as a characteristic of another, but the binary relationships assumed by most legitimacy theories do not exist in the same way in conflict and post-conflict settings, thus complicating the way actors ascribe and seek legitimacy. Three broad categories of relationship are examined in this special issue: domestic, local-international, and international. Weigand looks at how legitimacy is generated and ascribed domestically in conflict settings, examining whether it is concrete actions by or the ideological orientation of the Taliban in Afghanistan that constitutes the basis for legitimacy judgments by the local population. Von Billerbeck, Gippert, and Whalan look at the local-international relationship, focusing on whether it is outputs—what international actors do—or procedures—how they do it—that garner the most legitimacy. Whalan stresses that the fragmentation of local actors makes it difficult for international interveners to generate legitimacy, while von Billerbeck notes that though local actors constitute one of the most important legitimacy audiences for international actors, the latter face multiple legitimacy imperatives and also need to satisfy other constituencies, such as donors and domestic publics in the home countries of states. Gippert zeros in on how the use of force affects legitimacy judgments. Coleman zooms out farther to look at all three audience groups, examining how



coalition composition legitimizes or delegitimizes interveners differently in the eyes of these different audiences.

Importantly, all of the articles agree on two points. First, not only is there a particular proliferation of legitimacy audiences in conflict and post-conflict settings, but those legitimacy audiences are also exceptionally fragmented and variable about what constitute legitimate goals, actions, procedures, and norms, making it difficult for actors to both ascribe legitimacy and seek or claim it. As described, relevant audiences in conflict and post-conflict settings include the incumbent government, the often multiple parties to the conflict, the local population, international interveners like the UN or other coalitions, and the domestic publics of intervening states; each of these audiences is often further fragmented, particularly the national ones. As a result, as Whalan notes, even basic issues like whom international interveners like the UN speak to can be controversial, and agreement on appropriate goals and benchmarks is likewise fraught; the same is true of domestic power holders and government officials. This means that ‘there will be no one, single legitimacy’ in conflict and post-conflict settings (Whalan, this issue), and it may be more appropriate to speak of *legitimacies*. While most legitimacy theory relies on the idea of a common set of values or expectations governing the exercise of power (Coicaud 2002; Hurrell 2007), this shared basis for legitimacy clearly does not exist in conflict and post-conflict settings—in fact, it may be one of the root causes of conflict—thus underscoring the limits of those theories in these settings.

Second, the contributions are aligned in their conclusion that the various audiences present in these turbulent contexts differ in how they ascribe and rescind legitimacy and the fact that legitimacy-seekers, in particular international actors, often struggle to gain legitimacy. This is, first, because they often have little knowledge of ‘how each [audience] conceives of legitimacy’ (von Billerbeck, this issue) and, second, because they have to juggle between the demands of multiple audiences or even the multiple demands of a single audience. As Coleman points out, most actors in conflict and post-conflict settings ‘fac[e] multiple legitimacy audiences simultaneously – and [are] constrained in how they accommodate each,’ because ‘the preferences of various legitimacy audiences may be incompatible’ (this issue). Von Billerbeck adds that even single audiences, like domestic elites for example, can have conflicting legitimacy demands. Even more basically, local actors may, as Whalan notes, have entirely different ideas of what constitutes a legitimate goal for an intervening force than the interveners themselves.

Gippert and Whalan, for example, both show that the link between effectiveness and legitimacy judgments is not clear cut: while Whalan points out that effectiveness can boost local legitimacy (and legitimacy can in turn boost effectiveness), Gippert demonstrates that the use of force can both boost and obstruct local legitimacy. More broadly, this implies that actions to seek legitimacy therefore may be completely misguided or at the very least fraught with trade-offs, as we discuss below.

### **Legitimacy Sources**

In addition to demonstrating how conventional legitimacy theory fails to adequately capture the issue of audiences in conflict and post-conflict settings, this special issue also shows that those theories insufficiently explain how sources of legitimacy function in these settings. Numerous typologies of legitimacy sources exist. Weber identified three sources of legitimate authority—traditional, charismatic, and bureaucratic authority (Weber 1978). Others differentiate between procedural legitimacy and output legitimacy, where procedural legitimacy stems from the observance of known and accepted principles in decision-making (Hurd 2007; Tyler 1990, 2006) and output legitimacy derives from the achievement of stated objectives or the fulfillment of specific needs (Scharpf 1999). Still others discuss source legitimacy and legal legitimacy (Whalan 2013, Roberts 2003).

The contributions to this issue assess a variety of sources from the perspectives of a variety of audiences to determine which are most relevant in conflict and conflict settings, in particular exploring procedural and output legitimacy and the trade-offs between them. Weigand and Whalan establish similar typologies at the outset of their articles, namely, coercion, instrumental or output legitimacy, and substantive or procedural legitimacy, and, like von Billerbeck, they focus on the latter two. While there are slight differences in how they define these categories, they are in agreement that they only take on substantive meaning when they are contextualized in particular settings with particular actors and it is only possible to assess them within such an empirical framework. For example, in the context of peace operations, Whalan points out that legitimacy in the eyes of local populations often derives from the effectiveness of the international interveners and that this effect is so powerful that it can in turn boost effectiveness, thus leading to a virtuous cycle; she cautions, however, that while this effect

makes sense theoretically, in practice, local legitimacy is extremely hard-won, and thus jump-starting such a virtuous cycle is rare indeed.

Though he examines a slightly different legitimacy relationship—between the local population and domestic authority figures in Afghanistan—Weigand similarly finds that it is the efficiency and perceived fairness of the quotidian interaction between these groups that leads to legitimacy judgments. Importantly, he observes that judgments about the efficiency and perceived fairness of authority are largely divorced from ideological considerations, but is based rather on consistency and equality, thus questioning the normative basis for much legitimacy theory, as described above. This contrasts somewhat with von Billerbeck’s finding that local actors often demand both norm compliance *and* effectiveness from the UN in the context of its peace operations and that the UN thus pursues legitimation strategies that emphasize both. Still, the norms in question in the case of peacekeeping relate to how the UN interacts with local actors and thus to fairness, equality, and participation, rather than a particular ideology, thus aligning with Weigand’s findings.

In addition, von Billerbeck finds that sources of legitimacy can contradict one another. In particular, she notes that the legitimation strategies entailed by procedural and output legitimacy in the context of UN peacekeeping often come into conflict with one another, leaving legitimation strategies unclear or ineffective. Similarly, Gippert and Whalan note that international actors are forced to ‘choose between’ legitimacy sources, much in the same way that they have to ‘choose between’ audiences, and thus they end up compromising on all sources. Gippert and Coleman also introduce a temporal element to the question of sources. The initial legitimacy, to use Gippert’s term, of an external intervener may not be maintained by its actions further down the line, and Coleman notes that actors take enormous risks when they neglect particular legitimacy considerations early on based on the assumption that they will remain robust over time.

There are three important broader implications of these analyses. First, unlike most legitimacy theories, which treat sources as discrete or at least not in conflict with one another, this special issue finds that legitimacy sources both overlap and contradict one another. As mentioned, both procedures and effectiveness may relate to the perceived fairness of actions and objectives, thus blurring the distinction between them, and leading, as von Billerbeck points out, to contradictions between sources of legitimacy. Because of this, those seeking legitimacy, be

they domestic elites or international peacekeepers, are often faced with trade-offs about how to legitimize themselves, and they often risk losing one kind of legitimacy by focusing on another (see below). In addition, actors may also lose legitimacy by ignoring potential variations in legitimacy perceptions over time. The overlaps, contradictions, and tensions in legitimacy that the authors in this special issue explore suggest that legitimacy is, while never easy to generate, even harder to generate in conflict and post-conflict contexts. More broadly, this sheds light on why nearly all such settings display legitimacy deficits among nearly all actors present and may be one explanatory variable in why they struggle to rebuild stable authority and power structures.

Second, and relatedly, rather than finding that one source is valued more than another, the contributions to this issue find that the value of a legitimacy source depends on the audience, thus inextricably linking these two elements. Indeed, while much of the empirical data presented in the articles here suggest that local actors value output legitimacy above other sources, the authors all note that this may not be the case with other legitimacy constituencies. In other words, it is impossible to weigh the relative importance of various legitimacy sources without taking into account the empirical element of legitimacy—that is, the perspective of those to whom legitimacy matters and by whom it is judged.

Third, as already suggested in our discussion of audiences, the relative importance of norms to legitimacy in post-conflict settings is more variable than traditional legitimacy theory suggests. Coleman recommends moving away from only the logic of appropriateness in understanding legitimacy to include *both* the logics of appropriateness and consequences (to use March and Olsen's well-known distinction), and both she and von Billerbeck demonstrate how legitimation strategies are dependent on both normative and rationalist considerations. The variable utility of norms to understanding and assessing legitimacy does not imply that norms are not important, but rather suggests that, as described previously, they constitute a less reliable basis for understanding legitimacy in conflict and post-conflict societies because they are so fractured and contested in these settings. Outputs, including effectiveness and consistency of action, appear to constitute a more reliable and less subjective basis for understanding legitimacy, with norms and ideology constituting a secondary basis.

## **Legitimation**

Finally, the contributions to this special issue unpack how legitimation presents particular challenges in conflict and post-conflict settings that existing theories do not capture. Legitimacy is not an attribute inherent to actors or institutions, it is something that needs to be claimed, justified, and accepted in a process of legitimation (Suchman 1995; Hurrell 2007; Clark 2005; Beetham 1991). Actors and institutions may follow different strategies of legitimation depending on the audience they seek to convince (see above) and the resources they have at their disposal. While legitimation presents difficult choices in nearly all contexts, the authors here highlight two particular challenges relating to legitimation in conflict and post-conflict settings: using force and effectiveness.

Force and legitimacy, not surprisingly, can be close comrades in situations of war and conflict, but scholars have taken different approaches to this question. Weber brought the two together, arguing that the use of force had to be legitimate (Weber 1978), while Arendt, by contrast, claimed that the use of force demonstrated that legitimacy does not exist, making any interaction between them impossible (Arendt 1958). The authors in this special issue take yet a different angle, demonstrating, paradoxically, that during and after conflict, force and legitimacy can both complement and undermine one another. Indeed, the consensus between the different empirical approaches and the different cases discussed by the articles shows that force and legitimacy are not simply parallel power mechanisms. While Gippert's and Coleman's articles focus on the local-international and the international level of legitimation, Weigand's article shows the same applicability of the challenges identified at the domestic level in Afghanistan.

Gippert's article highlights how an international intervention's use of force can reduce its legitimacy in the eyes of the local host state population; at the same time, the failure of interveners to use their coercive power to achieve their stated goals may also weaken their local legitimacy. In this way, international interveners face a dilemma, as it is not always clear in which direction the relationship between legitimacy and coercive force runs. Coleman's article further elaborates on this dilemma in the context of the two international interventions in Afghanistan in 2001. She shows that in designing coalitions for both Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Stabilization Force (ISAF), the United States was concerned with making the missions strong (in terms of coercive force) but not so strong that they would undermine local actors' legitimacy perceptions (Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 2008). In this way, similarly to Gippert, Coleman demonstrates that the over-

emphasis of coercive strength can undermine local legitimacy (OEF), but equally the ineffective use of coercive strength may also undermine local legitimacy (ISAF). The relationship between coercive force and legitimacy is therefore not necessarily unidirectional.

Weigand's article demonstrates that the same dilemma applies to the domestic context. He shows that the use of force by the Taliban in their ideologically fuelled insurgency is considered illegitimate by much of the local population; at the same time, the effective, fast, and cheap justice dispensed by the Taliban contributes to local people's legitimacy views of the group, rendering the relationship between legitimacy and coercion ambiguous.

The second challenge raised by legitimation in contexts of war and post-war peacebuilding concerns effectiveness. There is a plethora of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of governance institutions, domestic or international, but legitimacy plays a particularly important role (Zelditch, 2011; Walker and Zelditch, 2003; Beetham, 1991). Von Billerbeck, Coleman, Gippert, and Whalan's articles assess the effectiveness of international peacebuilding operations, while Weigand's analyses the effectiveness of domestic institutions.

Much of the literature on the effectiveness of international operations has focused on international factors, including the institutional constraints of missions themselves, their mandates, and the political will of the deploying states (Harland 2004; Stedman and Downs 2002; Doyle and Sambanis 2006). Only recently has this focus broadened to include local factors such as the agency of local partners, local spoilers, and dynamics between local factions (Fortna 2008; Stedman 1997; Whalan 2013; Gippert 2016; Pouligny 2006), showing the impact of local actors' actions and attitudes on mission effectiveness. According to this more recent work, it is local actors' compliance and cooperation with the mission's activities that shape how effectively the operation can implement its objectives, and an international operation must be perceived as legitimate by key local actors in order for this cooperation and compliance to occur.

However, the articles by von Billerbeck, Coleman, and Whalan demonstrate that local legitimacy and effectiveness are linked in a more circuitous way than some of this literature implies. Whalan shows that recognizing the importance of local cooperation and compliance is only the tip of the iceberg and actually securing them in practice is extremely difficult. She identifies three factors that contribute to the challenges of legitimation in post-conflict settings: the fragmentation of the local population and elites, as described above; contradictions between

how local and international legitimacy audiences understand and judge legitimacy and the need for international operations to satisfy both; and the foreignness of international interventions. In her article, von Billerbeck finds that the two sides of the dual character of the UN, as both an operational actor and a normative institution, require different legitimization strategies: the operational side of the UN needs to demonstrate its ability to deliver outcomes to legitimize itself (output legitimacy), while its normative side must show its adherence to specific procedures in its actions (procedural legitimacy). These two strategies often clash because efficiency may require cutting normative corners and vice versa and because different audiences have different expectations of the UN's peacebuilding operations. Ultimately, international interventions will likely face trade-offs regarding which legitimization strategies to employ vis-à-vis which audiences. Coleman's paper reaches a similar conclusion in her analysis of the Afghan context, showing how legitimacy perceptions of relevant local and international actors towards OEF and ISAF made them more likely to support the operation, which in turn increased the missions' effectiveness. At the same time, she describes how actions taken by ISAF to increase its local legitimacy—specifically increasing the number of contributing states to the coalition—negatively impacted the mission's effectiveness, demonstrating that the relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy is not necessarily positive and instead, legitimacy can both increase and decrease effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

As this Introduction has described, the articles in this special issue make innovative and important contributions to our understanding of legitimacy in conflict and post-conflict settings. They challenge the applicability of current theories of legitimacy and legitimation, which usually take the nation-state and ruler-ruled relationships as their starting point, to the special circumstances of war and peace. In particular, they confront assumptions relating to the audiences of legitimacy, sources of legitimacy, and legitimation; they demonstrate how legitimacy and legitimation are fraught with trade-offs and dilemmas in these contexts; and they provide a wealth of empirical data to back up their claims. The authors bring diverse conceptions of legitimacy to their analyses, and they examine a variety of actors, including domestic publics, belligerents, governments, the UN, and other intervening coalitions; a number of sources of

legitimacy, both normative and output-oriented; and several different legitimation strategies, all across a variety of geographic settings, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Yet despite the wide-ranging nature of the cases examined, the authors are remarkably unified in their findings that legitimacy functions in less explicit and often counterintuitive ways in conflict and post-conflict settings and, as a result, that it is a resource that is particularly difficult to come by in these contexts. The fact that the empirical data is diverse only lends greater weight and wider applicability to the overarching conclusion that current theories of legitimacy and legitimation require further development to hold up in conflict and post-conflict spaces.

In this way, this special issue provides an empirical launch pad for further theoretical work. Indeed, as both scholars and policymakers continue to incorporate legitimacy considerations into their analysis of and strategic planning for conflict and post-conflict settings, as we described at the outset of this Introduction, a fuller theory of how legitimacy can—or cannot—be created in these contexts is increasingly important. By exploring the fragmented and conflictual characteristics of legitimacy audiences, the dilemmas and surprises relating to sources of legitimacy, and the often unexpected effects of legitimation strategies, these articles help to better explain the legitimacy outcomes observed in war and its immediate aftermath, most notably the fact that legitimacy remains remarkably scarce, whether in the eyes of domestic or international actors, despite explicit efforts to the contrary. In this way, this special issue constitutes a significant first step towards refining and developing current knowledge on legitimacy.



## Bibliography

- Beetham, David. 1991. *The Legitimation of Power*. Macmillan.
- Bellamy, AJ, and PD Williams. 2005. "Who's Keeping the Peace? Regionalization and Contemporary Peace Operations." *International Security* 29 (4): 157–95.
- von Billerbeck, Sarah. 2017. "UN Peace Operations and Conflicting Legitimacies". *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:3
- von Billerbeck, Sarah B. K. 2016. *Whose Peace? Local Ownership and United Nations Peacekeeping*. Oxford University Press.
- Bodansky, Daniel. 1999. "The Legitimacy of International Governance: A Coming Challenge for International Environmental Law?" *The American Journal of International Law* 93 (3): 596.
- Buchanan, Allen, and Robert O. Keohane. 2006. "The Legitimacy of Global Governance Institutions." *Ethics & International Affairs* 20 (04): 405–37.
- Bukanovsky, Mlada. 2002. *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in Political Culture*. Princeton University Press.
- Coicaud, Jean-Marc. 2002. *Legitimacy and Politics: A Contribution to the Study of Political Right and Political Responsibility*. Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, Katharina P. 2017. "The Legitimacy Audience Shapes the Coalition: Lessons from Afghanistan, 2001." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11:3
- . 2007. *International Organisations and Peace Enforcement: The Politics of International Legitimacy*. Cambridge University Press.
- de Waal, Alex. 2009. "Mission without End? Peacekeeping in the African Political Marketplace." *International Affairs* 85 (1): 99–113.
- Department of Peacekeeping Operations. 2008. "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines."
- DFID. 2010. "Building Peaceful States and Societies. A DFID Practice Paper."
- . 2012. "State-Building, Peace-Building and Service Delivery in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States."
- Donais, Timothy. 2009. "Inclusion or Exclusion? Local Ownership and Security Sector Reform." *Studies in Social Justice* 3 (1): 117–31.
- Duerr, Benjamin. 2016. "Ivory Coast's Gbagbo Trial to Begin at The Hague." *AlJazeera*.
- Easton, D. 1975. "A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support." *British Journal of*

- Political Science* 5 (4): 435–57.  
<http://journals.cambridge.org/production/action/cjoGetFulltext?fulltextid=3332892>.
- Easton, David. 1965. *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. Wiley.
- Easton, David, and Jack Dennis. 1969. *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Englebert, Pierre, and Denis Tull. 2008. “Postconflict Reconstruction in Africa: Flawed Ideas about Failed States.” *International Security* 32 (4): 106–39.
- Franck, Thomas M. 1990. *The Power of Legitimacy among Nations*. OUP USA.
- Gilley, Bruce. 2009. *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy*. Columbia University Press.
- Gippert, Birte Julia. 2016. “The Sum of Its Parts? Sources of Local Legitimacy.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 51 (4): 522–538
- . 2016. “Exploring Local Compliance with Peacebuilding Reforms: Legitimacy, Coercion and Reward-Seeking in Police Reform in Kosovo.” *International Peacekeeping* 23 (1): 52–78.
- Gray, Christine. 1996. “Host-State Consent and United Nations Peacekeeping in Yugoslavia.” *Duke Journal in Comparative and International Law* 7: 241–70.
- Hurd, Ian. 1999. “Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics.” *International Organization* 53 (02): 379–408.
- . 2007. *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council*. Princeton University Press.
- Hurrell, Andrew. 2007. *On Global Order: Power, Values, and the Constitution of International Society*. Oxford University Press.
- Mac Ginty, Roger. 2011. *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Menkhaus, Ken. 2006. “Governance without Government in Somalia Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping.” *International Security* 31 (3): 74–106.
- Menon, A. 2009. “Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten.” *International Affairs* 85 (2): 227–46.
- Mühlmann, Thomas. 2008. “The Police Mission EUPM IN Bosnia 2003–05.” In *European Security and Defence Policy: An Implementation Perspective*, edited by Michael Merlingen

- and Rasa Ostrauskaite, 43–59. Routledge.
- OECD. 2010. “Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Priorities and Challenges.”
- OECD-DAC. 2010. “The State’s Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity.”
- Raz, Joseph. 2010. *Between Authority and Interpretation: On the Theory of Law and Practical Reason*. Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, Adam. 2003. ‘Law and the Use of Force After Iraq,’ *Survival* 45 (2): 31-56.
- Scharpf, Fritz. 1999. *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford University Press.
- Sending, Ole Jacob. 2011. “The Effects of Peacebuilding: Sovereignty, Patronage and Power.” In *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, edited by Susanna Campbell, David Chandler, and Meera Sabaratnam. Zed Books.
- Tyler, T. 1990. *Why People Obey the Law*. Princeton University Press.
- . 1997. “The Psychology of Legitimacy: A Relational Perspective on Voluntary Deference to Authorities.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 1 (4): 323–45.
- . 2006. “Psychological Perspectives on Legitimacy and Legitimation.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 57 (January). Annual Reviews: 375–400.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. University of California Press.
- Whalan, Jeni 2017. "The Local Legitimacy of Peacekeepers" *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 11:3.
- . 2013. *How Peace Operations Work: Power, Legitimacy and Effectiveness*. Oxford University Press.
- Weigand, Florian. 2017. ‘Afghanistan’s Taliban – Legitimate Jihadists or Coercive Extremists?’ *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 11:3
- Wiharta, Sharon. 2009. “The Legitimacy of Peace Operations.” *SIPRI Yearbook 2009: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*.
- Zaum, Dominik. 2013. *Legitimizing International Organizations*. Oxford University Press.
- Zelditch, Morris Jr. 2001. “Theories of Legitimacy.” In *The Psychology of Legitimacy*, edited by Brenda Major and John Jost. Cambridge University Press.

## **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### **Notes on Contributors**

Sarah B. K. von Billerbeck is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Reading, UK.

### **Notes on Contributor**

Birte Gippert is a Teaching Fellow at the Department of War Studies, King's College London. She holds a PhD from the University of Reading.