



FRONTIER DESIGN
STRATEGY · RESEARCH · IMPACT

STRATEGIC PREVENTION PROJECT

Assessing the Role of Foreign Assistance in Preventing
Violent Conflict in Fragile States | 2019



OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE RESOURCES
*Strategic, Coordinated, Effective Foreign Assistance
on Behalf of the American People*

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Under what circumstances does foreign assistance best contribute to the goal of making fragile states more secure and resilient against risks of violent conflict and instability?
2. How can we measure the extent to which foreign assistance being provided to fragile states is contributing to this goal?
3. What reforms would enable a greater proportion of foreign assistance to fragile states to contribute to this goal (or at least not inhibit it)?

THE STRATEGIC CASE FOR PREVENTION



Aid to fragile states has grown by 26% since 2009, while the number of countries experiencing violent conflict increased by 22% during that time.

[OECD, UCDP](#)



In 2018, the UN & World Bank estimated that donors would save \$16 over the long run for each \$1 invested in prevention-related activities.

[Pathways for Peace](#)



Overall respect for the rule of law has decreased in most states for the second straight year. Indicators of authoritarianism, corruption, and repression have also increased.

[World Justice Project, Freedom House](#)



“...even modest preventive investments – if they strategic, coordinated, and well-timed – can reduce the risk that extremist will exploit fragile states.”

[USIP Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States](#)



Malign actors exploit host nation's fragility to subvert political institutions, gain economic and infrastructure access, and increase military influence.



Preventing conflict in strategic locations is essential to protect U.S. investments and alliances and mitigate the need for costly interventions.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Phase 1: Literature review and Interviews of over 100 experts on best practices on preventing conflict and instability in fragile states

Phase 2: Mixed-method pattern analysis of historic assistance spending for 11 case study fragile countries in light of best practices

Phase 3: Development of recommendations to improve future foreign assistance to high-risk fragile states

EFFECTIVE COMPONENTS OF PREVENTION (PHASE 1)



Promote inclusive and just political systems that foster **social cohesion**.

- Enhance capacity for equitable access to security and justice as public goods.
- Support social and economic linkages across different communities.
- Elevate addressing the needs of marginalized groups, especially ethnic and religious minorities, women, and youth.
- Support institutional reforms in governance functions to increase legitimacy.



Increase institutional **resilience** to shocks and threats.

- Strengthen election administration, management, and monitoring.
- Promote government “checks and balances” (e.g., government parliament capacity, independent judiciary, media, civil society watchdogs).
- Advocate for and invest in the role of women in political, economic, and security institutions.
- Leverage disaster risk reduction strategies and mechanisms.



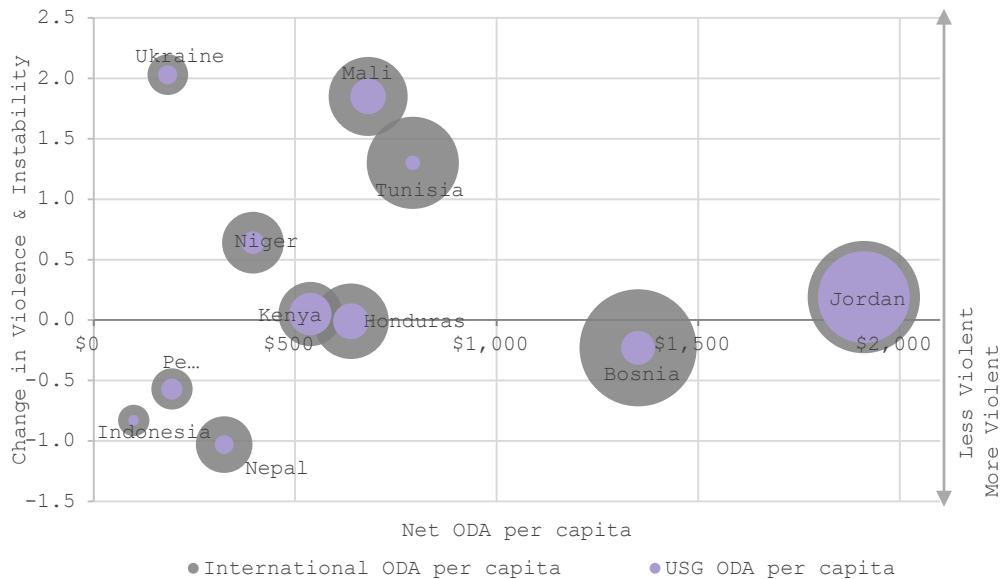
Strengthen **pro-peace constituencies and mechanisms**.

- Improve the “ease of doing business” climate for small and medium sized enterprises.
- Foster sustainable government investments in education, especially secondary education.
- Support local civil society capacities, especially for mediation and alternative dispute resolution
- Augment regional early warning and early action mechanisms.

The literature shows that both the kind of approach taken toward conflict prevention and the quality and method of intervention matter for impact. How assistance is delivered can either reduce or reinforce group divisions.

ANALYSIS OF ASSISTANCE SPENDING (PHASE 2)

ODA per Capita and Changes in Levels of Violence, 2007-2016



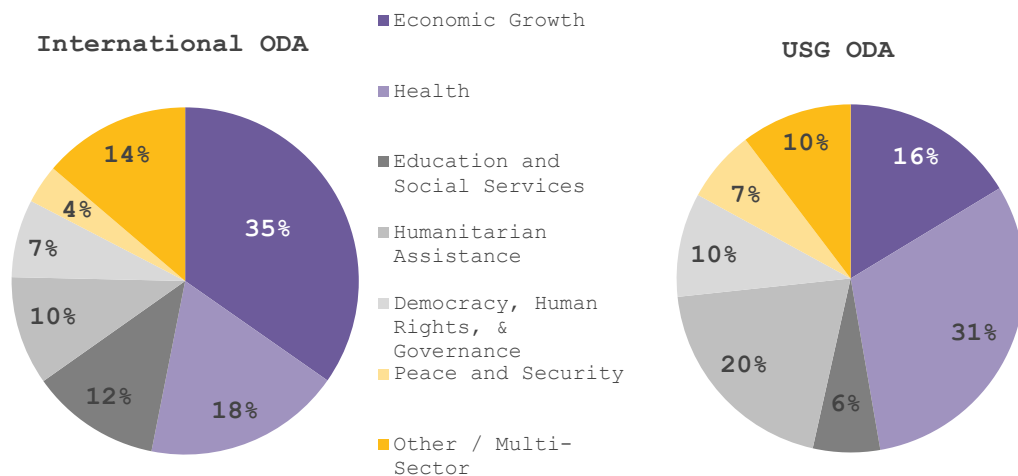
Source: OECD DAC Development Finance Data; World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators



In most fragile states, the United States and other international donors have not identified prevention of violent conflict and instability as an **explicit goal** for assistance.

A significant proportion of foreign assistance to fragile states has been devoted to economic growth, education and social services, and health, **without stated links to prevention.**

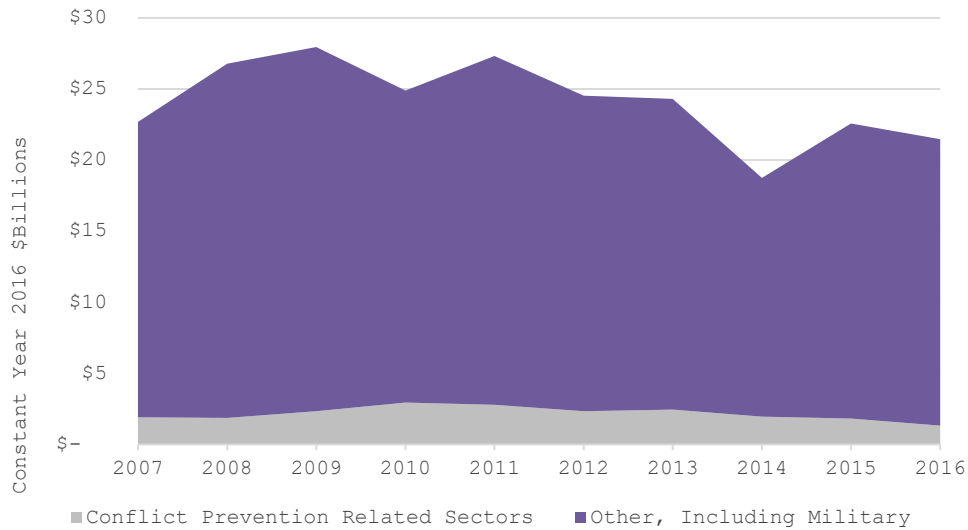
Net ODA to Select Fragile States by Sector 2007-2016



Source: OECD DAC Development Finance Data

ANALYSIS OF ASSISTANCE SPENDING (PHASE 2)

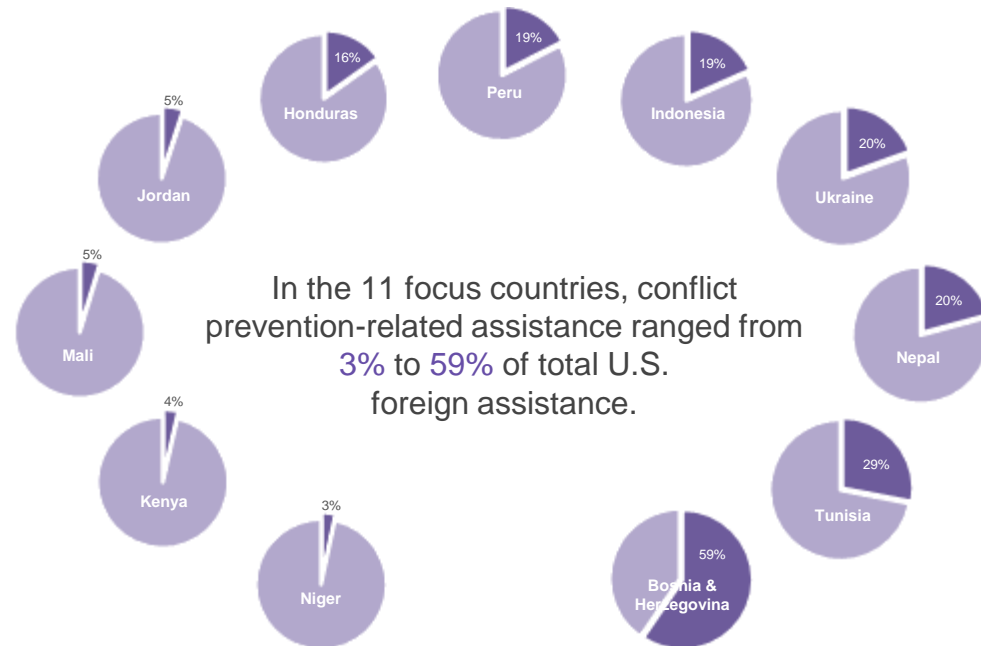
U.S. Foreign Assistance to Fragile States, 2007-2016



Source: USAID Foreign Aid Explorer

Levels of assistance to program areas directly linked to prevention of violent conflict have varied considerably across fragile states but have **remained constant** overall.

Foreign assistance is most effective as a tool of prevention when it is **closely coordinated with diplomacy and incentivizes host-nation reform agendas.**

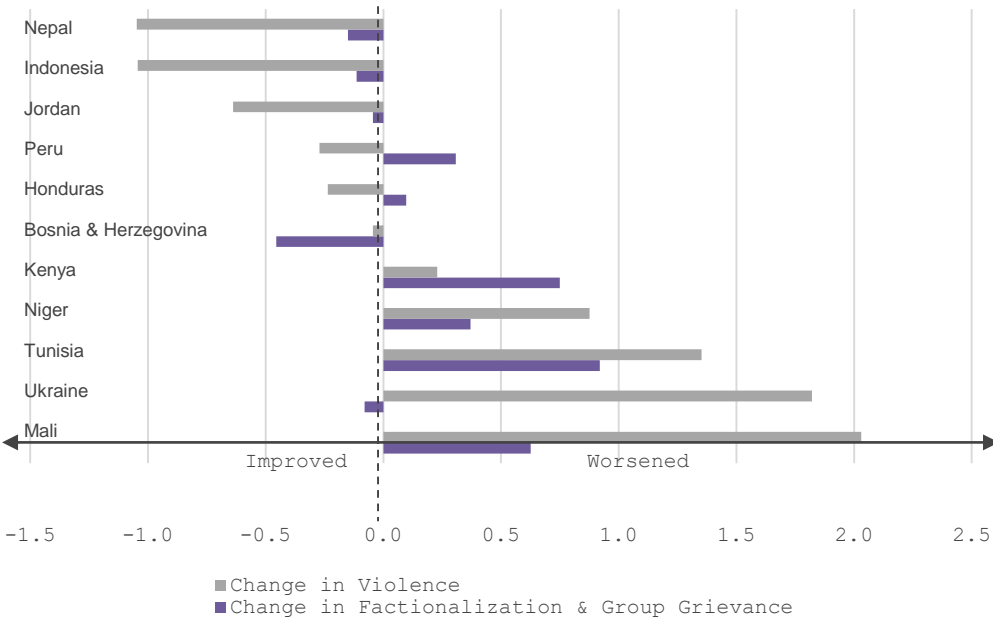


In the 11 focus countries, conflict prevention-related assistance ranged from **3% to 59%** of total U.S. foreign assistance.

ANALYSIS OF ASSISTANCE SPENDING (PHASE 2)

The United States and other international donors have **incorporated some strategic prevention principles** in assistance to fragile states, but other key principles have been seldom applied (e.g., political inclusion, social cohesion).

Intergroup Cohesion and Patterns of Violence



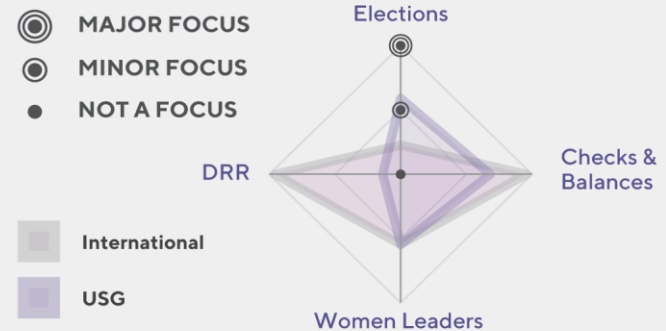
Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators; Fragile States Index

Focus on Prevention Principles: Alignment of U.S. and International Assistance Plans, 2007-2016

POLITICAL INCLUSION & COHESION



RESILIENCE TO SHOCKS



PRO-PEACE MECHANISMS



Source: Charts are based upon an analysis of U.S. and international partner strategic documents from 2007-2016, averaged across the eleven focus countries.

DEEP DIVE: KENYA (PHASE 2)

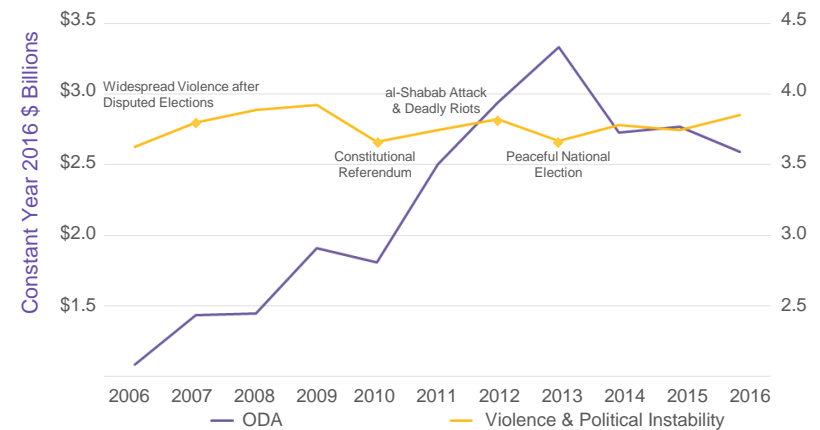
Assistance Trends

International assistance to Kenya increased dramatically following the 2007 elections and remained at high levels in subsequent years until it dropped off after the 2013 elections. An estimated 8% of international development assistance was related to areas most associated with conflict prevention.

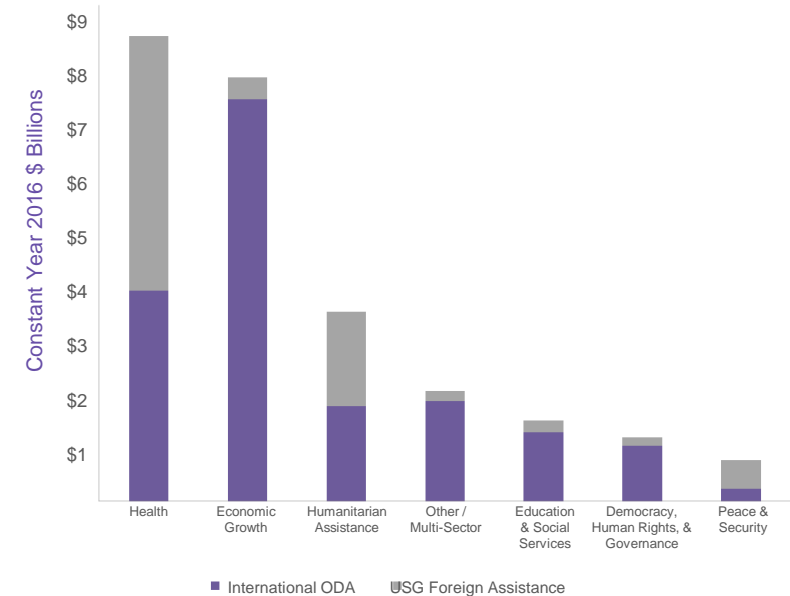
Findings

1. In the lead-up to elections and other transition periods, coordinated diplomacy at both the capital and sub-national levels can help monitor flashpoints and provide a critical link between political messaging and assistance.
2. The business community can be a powerful and far-reaching force for peace but in many contexts is often an underutilized resource.
3. Operational efforts to prevent conflict in the short term should be balanced with longer-term efforts to address group grievances.

International Assistance and Assessed Risk of Instability



Total Assistance Spending to Kenya 2006-2016



DEEP DIVE: INDONESIA (PHASE 2)

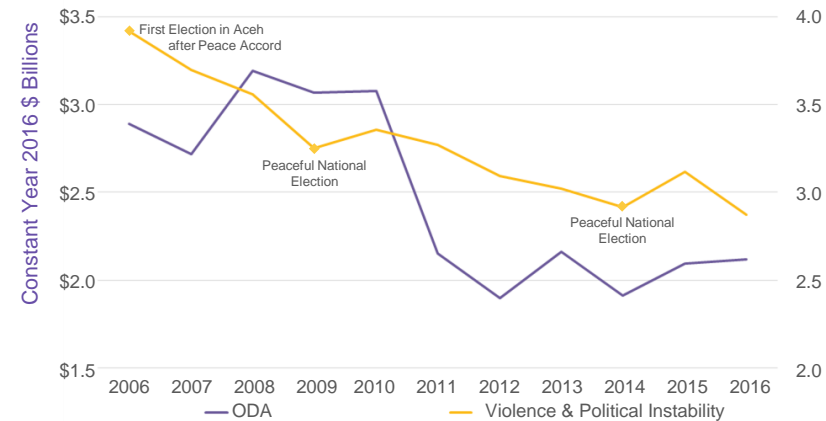
Assistance Trends

International assistance to Indonesia has decreased as the country has become more secure and self-reliant. An estimated 11% of international development assistance was related to areas most associated with conflict prevention.

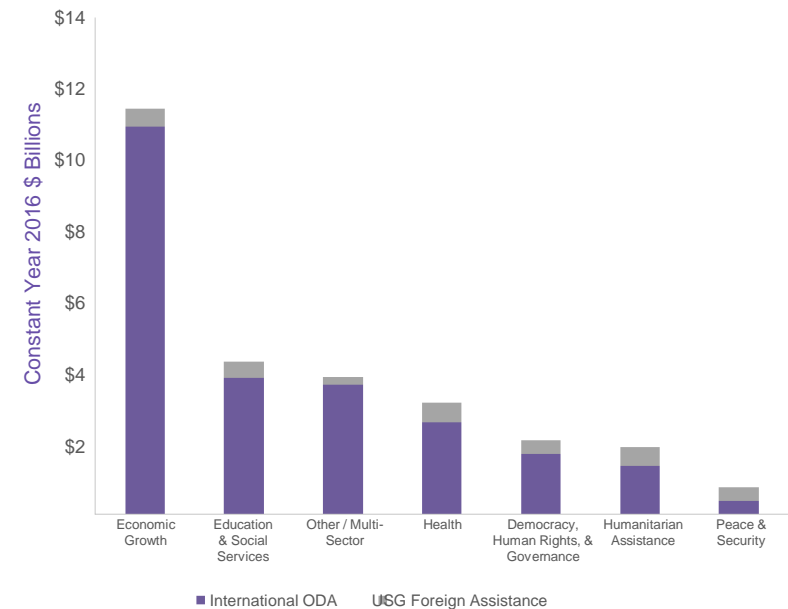
Findings

1. Reform-minded leaders can be found at every level of governance. Sustainable conflict prevention is aligned with the priorities of national and/or local agendas.
2. Transparency and trust between government and civil society are foundational to peaceful elections, especially in contested environments.
3. Regular assessments lay the foundation for context-specific, conflict-sensitive programming across sectors in the USG assistance portfolio.

International Assistance and Assessed Risk of Instability



Total Assistance Spending in Indonesia 2006-2016



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Establish Agreed Principles for Strategic Prevention:** Elevate and mainstream the concept of “strategic prevention” and associated principles in assistance planning for relevant fragile states.

Strategic Prevention involves deliberate efforts to reduce fragility, strengthen institutions, and increase cohesion in priority countries to disrupt likely pathways to violent conflict, instability, and/or political subversion.

Strategic Prevention efforts should be:

1. Prioritized in geostrategic locations;
2. Targeted based on rigorous and recurring analysis;
3. Scaled for impact, focusing on larger and more consolidated programs;
4. Fully supported by U.S. country teams, who are key to successful implementation;
5. Inclusive of the full array of foreign policy tools and capabilities – across diplomacy, defense, foreign assistance, and private sector investment and trade; and
6. Oriented to incentivize host-nation political will.

RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

- 2. Apply Strategic Prevention Principles across Assistance Planning and Implementation:** Elevate, expand, and mainstream tools and practices for conflict-sensitive assistance analysis, planning, and design across sectors and across the U.S. Government.
- 3. Promote Greater Coherence between Assistance and Diplomacy for Strategic Prevention:** Establish mechanisms and processes to ensure programmatic interventions in relevant countries are better coordinated with preventative diplomatic efforts.
- 4. Mobilize Data to Track Strategic Prevention Assistance in Fragile States:** Design meaningful metrics for tracking prevention-related assistance as well as conflict and violence trends and risks in relevant fragile states over time.
- 5. Engage Congress and Other Donors to Augment Strategic Prevention Programming:** Work with Congress and other donors to promote programs that directly advance Strategic Prevention principles across priority countries, particularly to promote political inclusion, strengthen “checks and balances,” and enhance civil society mechanisms.

CONTACT – FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Peter J. Quaranto

Senior Advisor

Office of US Foreign Assistance (F)
US Department of State

+ 1 (202) 647-2613

quarantopj@state.gov



Alexa Courtney

CEO & Founder
Frontier Design

+ 1 (571) 275-3259

alexa@fdg-llc.com