

Knowledge production on mediation: practice-oriented, but not practice-relevant?

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Mediation is defined as ‘a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties’ own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider ... to change their perceptions or behaviour, and to do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law’.¹ Thus, mediation, at a minimum, denotes the assistance given by a third party in a negotiation between two or more conflict parties to find a peaceful agreement. Mediation has found application in a variety of domains, including divorce cases, public sector and labour management issues.² This article focuses specifically on international mediation in armed conflicts. Indeed, in 2017, UN Secretary-General António Guterres characterized mediation as an ‘essential, flexible and effective tool which is utilized for conflict prevention, management and resolution by the United Nations and a wide range of other organizations and actors’.³

While some international mediation endeavours were conducted during the Cold War,⁴ mediation has become a standard response to armed conflicts in its aftermath.⁵ Indeed, more mediation attempts took place during the 1990s than in

* This article is part of the special section in the September 2023 issue of *International Affairs* on ‘Knowledge production on peace: actors, hierarchies and policy relevance’, guest-edited by Sara Hellmüller, Laurent Goetschel and Kristoffer Lidén. My heartfelt thanks to Marie Lobjoy for her research assistance and to Xiang-Yun Rosalind Tan, Flavia Keller and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

¹ Jacob Bercovitch, ‘Mediation and conflict resolution’, in Jacob Bercovitch, Victor Kremenyuk and I William Zartman, eds, *The SAGE handbook of conflict resolution* (London: SAGE, 2009), p. 343.

² James A. Wall, ‘Review section: Mediation: an analysis, review, and proposed research’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 25: 1, 1981, pp. 157–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200278102500107>; James A. Wall and Ann Lynn, ‘Mediation: a current review’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37: 1, 1993, p. 161, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002793037001007>; James A. Wall, Jr, John B. Stark and Rhett L. Standifer, ‘Mediation: a current review and theory development’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45: 3, 2001, pp. 370–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045003006>; James A. Wall and Timothy C. Dunne, ‘Mediation research: a current review’, *Negotiation Journal* 28: 2, 2012, pp. 217–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2012.00336.x>.

³ UN Secretary-General, *United Nations activities in support of mediation* (New York: United Nations, 2017).

⁴ Examples include mediation by the United States in the Middle East and Southern Africa, by the Soviet Union in Tashkent (in Uzbekistan) and between India and Pakistan (over Kashmir), and by the UN between Iran and Iraq as well as in Cyprus. See Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela R. Aall, ‘Introduction’, in Chester A. Crocker et al., eds, *Herding cats: multiparty mediation in a complex world* (Washington DC: USIP, 1999), p. 6.

⁵ Richard Gowan and Stephen John Stedman, ‘The international regime for treating civil war, 1988–2017’, *Daedalus* 147: 1, 2018, pp. 171–84, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00482; Lise Morjé Howard and Alexandra Stark, ‘How civil wars end: the international system, norms, and the role of external actors’, *International*

the 44-year period between 1945 and 1989.⁶ Mediation has since become a crowded field, with different states, non-governmental, regional and international organizations offering their peacemaking services.⁷ This growing importance of mediation is reflected in an expanding academic research agenda.⁸ However, scholars point to a gap between scholarly research and practice on mediation, with research remaining 'remote from the world in which actual mediators find themselves'.⁹ This article examines this disconnect by focusing on academic knowledge production on mediation.¹⁰ It analyses articles on mediation published in the highest-ranked journals and provides insights on *who* produces academic knowledge on mediation, *how* this knowledge is produced and *what* knowledge is produced. It highlights three points. First, western male authors produce the vast majority of scholarly research on mediation. Second, these analyses are dominated by positivist approaches employing rationalist conceptual frameworks and quantitative methodologies. Third, mediation research mostly theorizes about reasons for effectiveness, situating them in different supply- and demand-related factors. Through this analysis, the article demonstrates that while high-impact academic research on mediation is practice-oriented in that most contributions examine how to make it more effective, its practice-relevance could be enhanced by complementing it in three ways: increasing the diversity of perspectives, adding more interpretive and qualitative approaches and producing more critical research. The article shows that these gaps are filled by contributions in more specialized and thus lower-ranked journals, books and the policy literature. It therefore shows that the disconnect between mediation research and practice mostly applies to publications in high-impact journals.

The article makes two contributions. First, it provides a thorough review of the knowledge produced on mediation. By analysing mediation research published in the highest-ranked academic journals and contrasting it to other spheres of knowledge production on mediation, it shows the differences between them and relativizes the presumed knowledge–practice gap. Second, the article adds to the discussion on knowledge production in the wider field of peace studies. Existing research provides insights on knowledge production on peace, for instance by analysing the focus on negative or positive peace or trends in the collection of

⁶ *Security* 42: 3, 2017/18, pp. 122–71, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00305.

⁶ J. Michael Greig and Paul F. Diehl, *International mediation* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

⁷ Siniša Vuković, *International multiparty mediation and conflict management: challenges of cooperation and coordination* (London: Routledge, 2015); David Lanz, 'Envoy envy? Competition in African mediation processes and ways to overcome it', *International Negotiation* 26: 3, 2021, pp. 499–526, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10039>.

⁸ Isak Svensson, 'Mediation of interstate conflicts and civil wars', *Oxford research encyclopedia of international studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 1–28; Peter Wallensteen and Isak Svensson, 'Talking peace: international mediation in armed conflicts', *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 2, 2014, pp. 315–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313512223>.

⁹ Wallensteen and Svensson, 'Talking peace', p. 324.

¹⁰ I focus on the supply side of knowledge production on mediation, analysing what knowledge is produced by whom and on what, rather than the demand side, which analyses the knowledge mediation practitioners require. The latter is analysed in other scholarly contributions, such as Laurie Nathan, Carl DeRouen and Marie Olson Lounsbury, 'Civil war conflict resolution from the perspectives of the practitioner and the academic', *Peace & Change* 43: 3, 2018, pp. 344–70, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12301>.

disaggregated conflict data.¹¹ The article complements these studies with a focus on mediation knowledge, and thereby contributes to broader discussions about diversity and the critical potential of peace studies.¹²

In the following sections, I first describe the methodology used in this article. Then, I analyse academic knowledge production on mediation by looking at the three questions of *who* produces knowledge on mediation, *how* this knowledge is produced and *what* knowledge is produced in the highest-ranked journals. Finally, I outline the limitations of the most impactful mediation research and the implications for its practice-relevance. I show how more specialized and thus lower-ranked journals, books and the policy literature have filled the gaps. I conclude with reflections on future research agendas on mediation in view of keeping its relevance in a changing world order.

Methodological approach

Data and sampling

The main data source for this article consists of journal articles on mediation. Using journal articles as an indicator of the academic knowledge produced in a given research area is a common approach.¹³ To be sure, academic knowledge production also happens in other spheres, such as textbooks, conferences or teaching. However, journal articles provide a representative indication of the state of a research area, because they have gone through a competitive peer-review process that indicates what editors and reviewers consider as scientific knowledge worthy of dissemination.¹⁴

To identify the sample of articles to be studied, I proceeded in two steps. First, I compiled a list of the highest-ranked journals in the mediation field. I chose this approach because I wanted to analyse the most impactful—and hence presumably visible—knowledge on mediation. Mediation being a sub-field of International Relations (IR), I first listed the 13 most influential IR journals as identified in a

¹¹ Nils Petter Gleditsch, Jonas Nordkvelle and Håvard Strand, 'Peace research—Just the study of war?', *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 2, 2014, pp. 145–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313514074>; Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Nils W Metternich and Andrea Ruggeri, 'Data and progress in peace and conflict research', *Journal of Peace Research* 51: 2, 2014, pp. 301–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313496803>.

¹² Keith Krause, 'Emancipation and critique in peace and conflict research', *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4: 2, 2019, pp. 292–8, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogyo49>; Burak Toygar Halistoprak, 'Knowledge production and its politicization within International Relations and Peace Studies', in Briony Jones and Ulrike Lühe, eds, *Knowledge for peace: transitional justice and the politics of knowledge in theory and practice* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2021), pp. 21–36; Isak Svensson, 'Letter to the editors: emancipation and critique in peace and conflict research', *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5: 4, 2020, pp. 703–7, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogao37>.

¹³ Jonathan Bright and John Gledhill, 'A divided discipline? Mapping peace and conflict studies', *International Studies Perspectives* 19: 2, 2018, pp. 128–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekx009>; Peter Marcus Kristensen, 'Dividing discipline: structures of communication in International Relations', *International Studies Review* 14: 1, 2012, pp. 32–50, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2012.01101.x>; Ole Waever, 'The sociology of a not so international discipline: American and European developments in International Relations', *International Organization* 52: 4, 1998, pp. 687–727, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2601355>.

¹⁴ Waever, 'The sociology of a not so international discipline'; Kjell Goldmann, 'Im Westen nichts Neues: seven International Relations journals in 1972 and 1992', *European Journal of International Relations* 1: 2, 1995, pp. 245–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066195001002005>.

cross-ranking list comparison by Wiegand.¹⁵ I completed the list with nine other generalist journals¹⁶ as well as nine specialist publications of peace and conflict studies identified by Bright and Gledhill.¹⁷ This led to the following list of 22 journals (in alphabetical order): *American Journal of Political Science (AJPS)*, *American Political Science Review (APSR)*, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations (BJPIR)*, *Cooperation and Conflict (CoCo)*, *European Journal of International Relations (EJIR)*, *Global Governance*, *International Affairs (IA)*, *International Organization (IO)*, *International Peacekeeping*, *International Relations*, *International Security (IS)*, *International Studies Quarterly (ISQ)*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution (JCR)*, *Journal of Peace Research (JPR)*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Millennium*, *The Review of International Organizations (RIO)*, *Review of International Political Economy (RIPE)*, *Security Dialogue*, *Security Studies*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* and *World Politics (WP)*.¹⁸

Second, I identified the journals with the most articles on mediation. I searched each journal for articles with titles containing keywords linked to international mediation published since the creation of the journal until the end of 2021.¹⁹ I then analysed each article to check whether it indeed treated a topic linked to mediation as defined in the introduction to this article. This excluded, for instance, articles on mediation of industrial or public sector conflicts, or articles with an unrelated use of the term (e.g. ‘mediating’ effects of variables). I also excluded book reviews. I then chose the two journals with the most articles on mediation. The distribution of articles on mediation is shown in figure 1.

Overall, *JPR* and *JCR* had the highest number of articles on international mediation—34 and 30 respectively. Together, they produced 43 per cent of all mediation articles published by the 22 journals. This is not surprising, as these are the oldest and the flagship journals of peace and conflict studies.²⁰ Being the highest-ranked journals with the most articles on mediation, I argue that they provide the most impactful academic knowledge on mediation.

¹⁵ Krista Wiegand, ‘Can IR have its own “big 3” journals?’, *The Duck of Minerva*, 30 Nov. 2020, <https://www.duckofminerva.com/2020/11/can-ir-have-its-own-big-3-journals.html>. In her blog post, Wiegand cross-compared five lists (InCites JCR—IR Journals; InCites JCR—PS Journals; Scimago—IR and PS; Google Scholar; and TRIP Survey). (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 24 Feb. 2023.)

¹⁶ As I only included peer-reviewed journals, I excluded *Foreign Affairs* despite it being on Bright and Gledhill’s list.

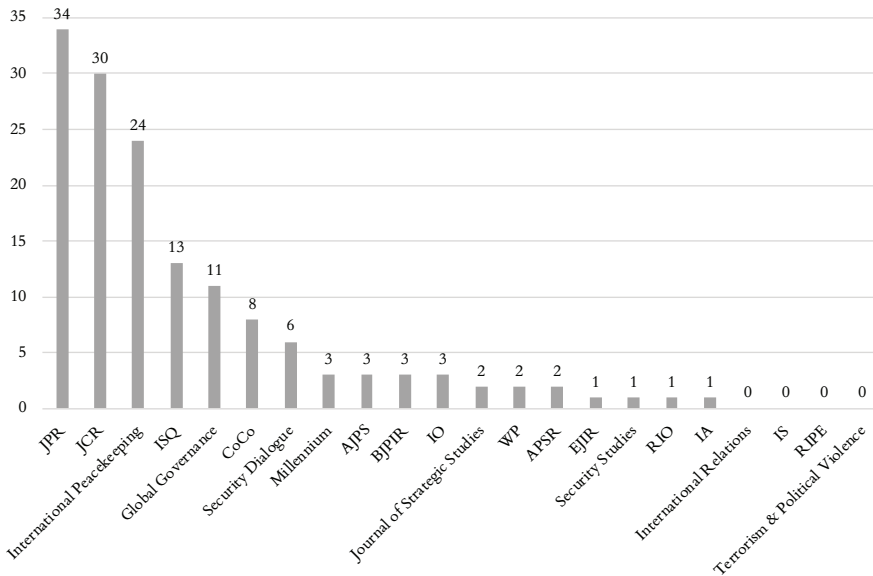
¹⁷ Bright and Gledhill, ‘A divided discipline?’.

¹⁸ The following journals were on both lists: *EJIR*, *IA*, *IO*, *IS*, *ISQ*, *JCR*, *JPR*, and *WP*.

¹⁹ The following words were searched: mediation, mediator, mediating, mediate, peacemaker/peace-maker/peace maker, peacemaking/peace-making/peace making, making peace, make peace. Some articles may treat the topic of mediation without reflecting it in the title, using, for instance, the terms ‘conflict management’ or ‘third-party interventions’. For example, see Dylan Balch-Lindsay, Andrew J. Enterline and Kyle A. Joyce, ‘Third-party intervention and the civil war process’, *Journal of Peace Research* 45: 3, 2008, pp. 345–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343308088815>; Kyle Beardsley and Nigel Lo, ‘Third-party conflict management and the willingness to make concessions’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58: 2, 2014, pp. 363–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002712467932>. I consider them in the broader analysis of mediation research beyond the sample.

²⁰ *JCR* was founded in 1957 and *JPR* in 1964.

Figure 1: Number of mediation articles per journal



Coding

The 64 articles in *JPR* and *JCR* were manually coded according to *who* produces knowledge on mediation, *how* knowledge is produced and *what* knowledge is produced. For the *who* question, I coded the author’s gender²¹ and their host university’s location at the time the article was published. For the *how* question, I coded the main approach of the article, distinguishing between rationalism, inductive theorizing, review, descriptive analysis and qualitative theory-building. I specifically analysed whether the article used game theory, and particularly bargaining theory, to check the commonly made argument about its pervasiveness in the mediation literature.²² I also coded the method, distinguishing between qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods and other approaches.²³ For the *what* question, I summarized the main argument of each article in a few sentences and noted the independent and dependent variables (if available).

Contextualizing the sample

It is important to note that while the 64 articles represent the most impactful academic research on mediation, they do not constitute the only source of written knowledge on mediation. Three other sources are particularly noteworthy. First,

²¹ To identify the authors’ gender, I looked at the pronouns they used (for instance in their biographies). If this information was not available, I coded what I perceived as the authors’ gender based on their names. I remained in the male–female binary as all authors were identifiable according to it.

²² Wallensteen and Svensson, ‘Talking peace’.

²³ Mostly literature reviews.

more specialized and thus lower-ranked journals also produce important knowledge on mediation. These include thematically-focused journals, such as *International Negotiation* or *Negotiation Journal*,²⁴ or area-studies journals, such as *African Affairs*, *Critical Asian Studies*, *Latin American Perspectives* or *Middle Eastern Studies*.²⁵ Second, mediation research is also published in books.²⁶ In particular, memoirs or biographies of mediators are a central source of mediation insights.²⁷ Third, NGOs and think tanks contribute to a vast policy literature on mediation. For example, the member organizations of the Mediation Support Network, a global network of primarily non-governmental institutions that support peace processes, regularly publish insightful reports on mediation.²⁸ To account for these other spheres of knowledge production, I compared the findings based on the 64 journal articles with the broader mediation literature and analysed where they overlap and where they diverge.

Knowledge production on mediation

In terms of general trends, it is noteworthy that the number of articles on mediation in *JPR* and *JCR* has increased drastically since the end of the Cold War. As shown in figure 2, the ten-year period between 1992 and 2001 marks a peak in mediation articles being published, underlining the growing research focus on the topic in that period.

²⁴ See, for example, Karin Aggestam, 'Peace mediation and the minefield of international recognition games', *International Negotiation* 20: 3, 2015, pp. 494–514, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341318>; Elodie Convergne, 'UN mediators' collaboration with scholars and expert NGOs: explaining the need for knowledge-based communities in today's conflicts', *International Negotiation* 21: 1, 2016, pp. 135–64, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341327>; Timea Spitka, 'Mediating among mediators: building a consensus in multilateral interventions', *International Negotiation* 23: 1, 2018, pp. 125–54, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-2301132>; David A. Hoffman, 'Mediation and the art of shuttle diplomacy', *Negotiation Journal* 27: 3, 2011, pp. 263–309, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2011.00309.x>; Saadia Touval, 'Ethical dilemmas in international mediation', *Negotiation Journal* 11: 4, 1995, pp. 333–7, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.1995.tb00749.x>; Joshua N. Weiss, 'Trajectories toward peace: mediator sequencing strategies in intractable communal conflicts', *Negotiation Journal* 19: 2, 2003, pp. 109–15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2003.tb00770.x>.

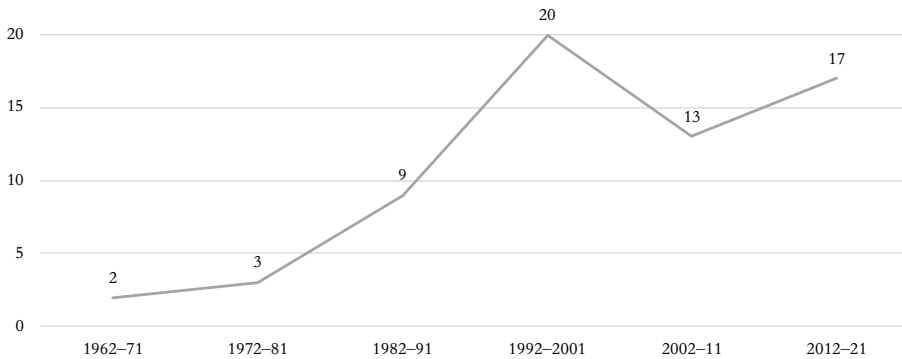
²⁵ See, for example, Abdelwahab El-Affendi, 'The impasse in the IGAD peace process for Sudan: the limits of regional peacemaking?', *African Affairs*, 100: 401, 2001, pp. 581–99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/100.401.581>; Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, 'Humanitarian NGOs and mediations of political order in Sri Lanka', *Critical Asian Studies* 40: 1, 2008, pp. 113–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710801959166>; Susan D. Burgerman, 'Building the peace by mandating reform: United Nations-mediated human rights agreements in El Salvador and Guatemala', *Latin American Perspectives* 27: 3, 2000, pp. 63–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X0002700304>; Juan Romero, 'Discourse and mediation in the Lebanese crisis of 1958', *Middle Eastern Studies* 48: 4, 2012, pp. 567–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2012.682300>.

²⁶ See, for example, Kyle Beardsley, *The mediation dilemma* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011); Vuković, *International multiparty mediation and conflict management*; José Pascal Da Rocha, *The international mediator: a handbook* (Chisinau: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2017).

²⁷ George J. Mitchell, *Making peace* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); Richard Holbrooke, *To end a war* (New York: Modern Library, 1999); Katri Merikallio, *The mediator: a biography of Martti Ahtisaari* (London: Hurst, 2015); Harriet Martin, *Kings of peace; pawns of war: the untold story of peacemaking* (London: Continuum, 2006).

²⁸ See <https://mediationsupportnetwork.net/member-organizations/> for a list of member organizations.

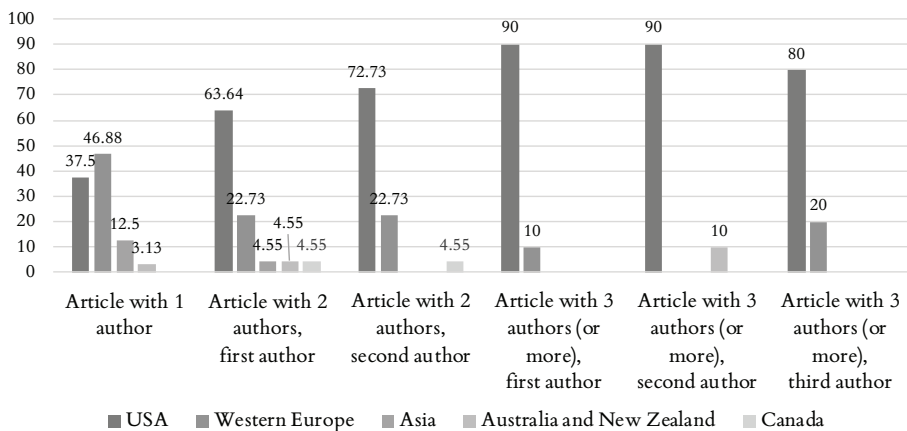
Figure 2: Number of mediation articles per ten-year period



Who produces mediation knowledge?

Looking at the question of who produces knowledge on mediation, the sample unequivocally shows the domination of authors at western institutions publishing mediation articles in *JPR* and *JCR*. As depicted in figure 3, among first, second and third authors of single- and co-authored articles, the majority are at an institution in the US or western Europe. Only 12.50 per cent of the single authors come from Asia, while only 3.13 per cent are from Australia or New Zealand and no scholar from an institution in Africa, eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East or any other region has published on mediation in the two journals so far. This domination of western views in academic knowledge production on mediation reflects similar trends in the broader fields of IR and peace research.²⁹

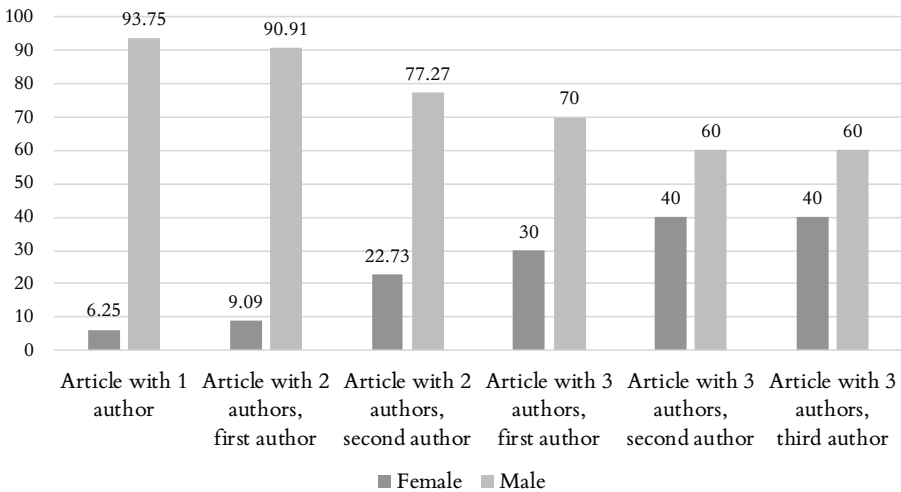
Figure 3: Geographical distribution of authors (per cent of each article type and author listing)



²⁹ Andreas Velthuizen, ‘Community sites of knowledge: knowledge creation and application for sustainable peace in Africa’, *African Sociological Review* 16: 2, 2012, pp. 2–21; Waever, ‘The sociology of a not so international discipline’.

In terms of authors' gender, mediation knowledge in the examined journals is mainly produced by male scholars who constitute the majority in single- and co-authored articles, as shown in figure 4. While remaining at a high level, the percentage decreases when moving from single- to co-authored contributions: males represent 93.75 per cent of authors in single-authored articles, and 90.91 per cent and 70 per cent of first authors in articles with two and three (or more) authors respectively. Moreover, women only started to have first authorships in either single- or co-authored publications in 1992, and while the share of all first authorships taken by women accounted for 15 per cent during the periods 1992–2001 and 2002–11, it dropped to 11.76 per cent in 2012–21. Academic knowledge production on mediation thus remains dominated by male scholars.

Figure 4: Gender distribution of authors (per cent of each article type)



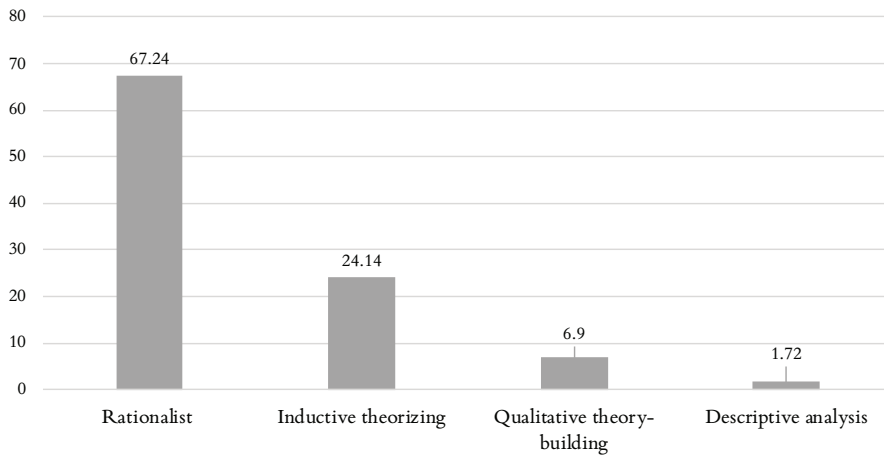
The above does not imply, of course, that non-western or non-male scholars do not produce knowledge on mediation, but it shows that their research is not frequently published in the most impactful journals. Such a skewed representation implies that the methodological and theoretical frameworks used to understand mediation reproduce mostly western and male approaches to knowledge production.³⁰ This will be analysed in the following sections.

How is mediation knowledge produced?

When analysing how mediation knowledge is produced, the sample shows a dominance of rationalist approaches in *JPR* and *JCR*, as shown in figure 5. The other approaches—inductive theorizing, qualitative theory-building and descriptive analysis—represent less than 35 per cent of the entire sample.

³⁰ Halistoprak, 'Knowledge production and its politicization', p. 30.

Figure 5: Main approaches (per cent of total)



This has led to a specific conceptual and methodological focus. Conceptually, a common approach is game theory and, particularly, bargaining theory, with 48.44 per cent of the publications in the sample using it. This trend reflects the academic literature beyond the sample. As Wallensteen and Svensson note, mediation studies show ‘a clear and present domination of bargaining theory’.³¹ The theory is based on the assumption of rational actors pursuing their self-interests.³² Conflict is understood as a bargaining failure and mediation can be attractive for conflict parties because it helps overcome bargaining problems.³³ Mediators can manipulate the relative benefits of conflict and peace,³⁴ provide options for political cover when conflict parties take unpopular decisions implying high domestic audience costs,³⁵ or reduce commitment problems by agreeing to monitor and enforce the implementation phase of agreements.³⁶

Methodologically, quantitative studies dominate the sample, as shown in figure 6. In the sample, 50 per cent of articles have a quantitative focus, 31.25 per cent a qualitative focus, 9.38 per cent use mixed methods and 9.38 per cent are literature reviews. It is interesting to note that out of the 64 articles analysed, only 14 (21.88 per cent) are qualitative small-N case-studies. Moreover, the last qualitative paper on mediation was published in 2008; and between 2010 and 2021, 85.95 per cent of the articles published were quantitative and the rest were mixed methods or reviews. This shows that while there are some case-studies and focused compari-

³¹ Wallensteen and Svensson, ‘Talking peace’, p. 324.

³² James D. Fearon, ‘Rationalist explanations for war’, *International Organization* 49: 3, 1995, pp. 379–414, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300033324>.

³³ Andrew H. Kydd, ‘When can mediators build trust?’, *American Political Science Review* 100: 3, 2006, pp. 449–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055406062290>; Robert W. Rauchhaus, ‘Asymmetric information, mediation, and conflict management’, *World Politics* 58: 2, 2006, pp. 207–41, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2006.0027>.

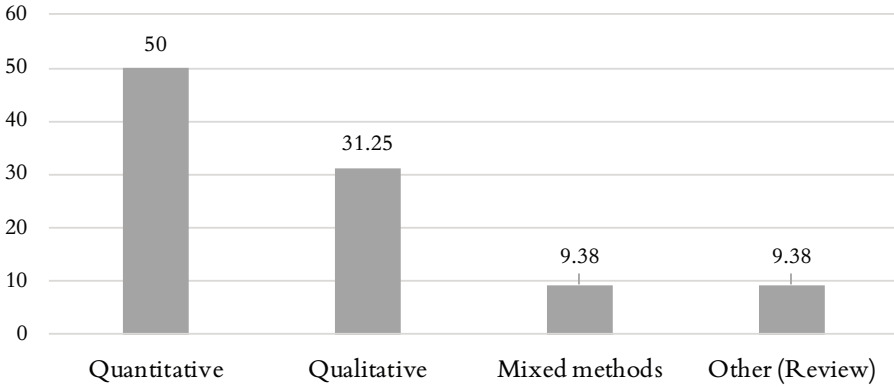
³⁴ Kyle Beardsley and Nathan Danneman, ‘Mediation in international conflicts’, in Robert A. Scott and Marlis C. Buchmann, eds, *Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences* (New York: Wiley, 2015), p. 5.

³⁵ Beardsley and Lo, ‘Third-party conflict management’.

³⁶ Isak Svensson, ‘Bargaining, bias and peace brokers: how rebels commit to peace’, *Journal of Peace Research* 44: 2, 2007, pp. 177–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343307075121>.

sons in the sample,³⁷ qualitative research on mediation remains the exception rather than the rule.

Figure 6: Methodological approaches (per cent of total)



What mediation knowledge is produced?

In terms of what knowledge is produced on mediation, the purpose of most publications in the sample is to reflect on how to make mediation more effective. As shown below, most articles take the effectiveness of the mediation process as the dependent variable. In terms of the independent variables, authors examine a variety of aspects, which can be grouped into supply- and demand-related factors depending on whether they concern the mediation process itself (what is supplied or the conflict context (what is demanded)).³⁸

Dependent variable: effectiveness

The majority of articles in the sample (78.13 per cent) take mediation effectiveness as the dependent variable. They show a variety of definitions of success. Some authors analyse the factors that lead to mediation *occurrence*, where the very onset of mediation is considered a form of success.³⁹ More common, however, is the focus on mediation *outcomes*. Most scholars focus either on the signature, credi-

³⁷ Louis Kriesberg, 'Mediation and the transformation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict', *Journal of Peace Research* 38: 3, 2001, pp. 373-92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038003006>; Ronald J. Fisher, 'Cyprus: the failure of mediation and the escalation of an identity-based conflict to an adversarial impasse', *Journal of Peace Research* 38: 3, 2001, pp. 307-26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038003003>; Perry Mars, 'Ethnic politics, mediation, and conflict resolution: the Guyana experience', *Journal of Peace Research* 38: 3, 2001, pp. 353-72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038003005>.
³⁸ Marieke Kleiboer, 'Understanding success and failure of international mediation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40: 2, 1996, p. 361, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002796040002007>.
³⁹ Tobias Böhmelt, 'The importance of conflict characteristics for the diffusion of international mediation', *Journal of Peace Research* 53: 3, 2016, pp. 378-91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316628827>; J. Michael Greig, 'Nipping them in the bud: the onset of mediation in low-intensity civil conflicts', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59: 2, 2013, pp. 336-61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713503807>; Lesley G. Terris and Zeev Maoz, 'Rational mediation: a theory and a test', *Journal of Peace Research* 42: 5, 2005, pp. 563-83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343305056231>.

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bility and quality of a peace agreement⁴⁰ or on the reduction of fatalities.⁴¹ This tendency is linked to the dominance of quantitative methods that require easily measurable indicators as dependent variables. Some authors also examine conflict prevention or transformation as mediation outcomes, although such studies remain rare.⁴² For instance, perceptual changes resulting from mediation are studied in terms of how disputants' adversarial frames or issue perceptions shifted, but no such article has been published since 1997.⁴³ Studies involving dependent variables other than effectiveness relate to the choice of mediators⁴⁴ or their role in norm development,⁴⁵ but they constitute a minority in the sample (3.13 per cent).

Independent variables: supply and demand

In terms of what leads to successful outcomes, the articles in the sample mention different supply- or demand-related factors as independent variables.⁴⁶ Regarding supply factors, authors study various aspects related to the characteristics of the mediation process. Some scholars analyse mediation *tout court* as the independent variable, in that they examine how mediation, compared to other methods,

- ⁴⁰ Isak Svensson, 'Who brings which peace? Neutral versus biased mediation and institutional peace arrangements in civil wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53: 3, 2009, pp. 446–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709332207>; Tony Addison and S. Mansoob Murshed, 'Credibility and reputation in peacemaking', *Journal of Peace Research* 39: 4, 2002, pp. 487–501, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343302039004007>; Marc A. Levy, 'Mediation of prisoners' dilemma conflicts and the importance of the cooperation threshold: the case of Namibia', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 29: 4, 1985, pp. 581–603, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002785029004002>.
- ⁴¹ Constantin Ruhe, 'Impeding fatal violence through third-party diplomacy: the effect of mediation on conflict intensity', *Journal of Peace Research* 58: 4, 2021, pp. 687–701, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343320930072>; Allard Duursma, 'Making disorder more manageable: the short-term effectiveness of local mediation in Darfur', *Journal of Peace Research* 58: 3, 2021, pp. 554–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319898241>; Kyle Beardsley, David E. Cunningham and Peter B. White, 'Mediation, peacekeeping, and the severity of civil war', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63: 7, 2018, pp. 1682–709, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002718817092>.
- ⁴² Gerald Eisenkopf and André Bächtiger, 'Mediation and conflict prevention', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57: 4, 2013, pp. 570–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002712448910>; Kriesberg, 'Mediation and the transformation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict'.
- ⁴³ R. William Ayres, 'Mediating international conflicts: is image change necessary?', *Journal of Peace Research* 34: 4, 1997, pp. 431–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343397034004005>; Sanda Kaufman and George T. Duncan, 'A formal framework for mediator mechanisms and motivations', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36: 4, 1992, pp. 688–708, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002792036004004>; Jerome E. Podell and William M. Knapp, 'The effect of mediation on the perceived firmness of the opponent', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13: 4, 1969, pp. 511–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200276901300408>.
- ⁴⁴ Jacob Bercovitch and Gerald Schneider, 'Who mediates? The political economy of international conflict management', *Journal of Peace Research* 37: 2, 2000, pp. 145–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343300037002002>.
- ⁴⁵ Brian S. Mandell and Brian W. Tomlin, 'Mediation in the development of norms to manage conflict: Kissinger in the Middle East', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 1, 1991, pp. 43–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001006>.
- ⁴⁶ Some studies combine the two. See, for example, Jacob Bercovitch and Allison Houston, 'Why do they do it like this? An analysis of the factors influencing mediation behavior in international conflicts', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44: 2, 2000, pp. 170–202, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002700044002002>; Jacob Bercovitch, J. Theodore Anagnoson and Donnette L. Wille, 'Some conceptual issues and empirical trends in the study of successful mediation in international relations', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 1, 1991, pp. 7–17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001003>; J. Michael Greig, 'Moments of opportunity: recognizing conditions of ripeness for international mediation between enduring rivals', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45: 6, 2001, pp. 691–718, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002701045006001>; Mars, 'Ethnic politics, mediation, and conflict resolution', Kyle Beardsley, 'Pain, pressure and political cover: explaining mediation incidence', *Journal of Peace Research* 47: 4, 2010, pp. 395–406, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309356384>; Tobias Böhmelt, 'Why many cooks if they can spoil the broth? The determinants of multiparty mediation', *Journal of Peace Research* 49: 5, 2012, pp. 701–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312437774>.

influences conflict resolution. They do so mostly with regard to its ability to reduce battle-related deaths.⁴⁷ Moreover, some more recent publications study interaction effects between mediation and other conflict resolution tools, with a particular focus on peacekeeping.⁴⁸ Other authors are interested in the specific type of mediation being provided in terms of a mediator's perceived ability,⁴⁹ the role of insider-partial mediators⁵⁰ or the role of international organizations.⁵¹ Overall, however, two main supply-related factors stand out in the sample: bias⁵² and leverage.⁵³ They also constitute the most-studied mediator characteristics in the broader academic literature.⁵⁴

Concerning bias, there is an ongoing debate in the literature on how it relates to mediation effectiveness. For a long time, mediators' impartiality was considered as a core definitional element of mediation based on the assumption that only unbiased mediators could be successful.⁵⁵ Yet, recent studies argue that bias towards one of the conflict parties can increase the probability of mediation success, because the party not aligned with the mediator hopes that the latter will influence the adversary party, so as to 'entice the partner party to accept a solution that would not have been accepted otherwise'.⁵⁶ The debate on the link between bias and mediation effectiveness is ongoing, partly because authors use different definitions of the term 'bias' which makes their arguments not directly comparable.⁵⁷

⁴⁷ Beardsley et al., 'Mediation, peacekeeping, and the severity of civil war'; Ruhe, 'Impeding fatal violence through third-party diplomacy'; Duursma, 'Making disorder more manageable'; Govinda Clayton and Han Dorussen, 'The effectiveness of mediation and peacekeeping for ending conflict', *Journal of Peace Research* 59: 2, 2022, pp. 150–65, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343321990076>.

⁴⁸ Clayton and Dorussen, 'The effectiveness of mediation and peacekeeping for ending conflict'; Beardsley et al., 'Mediation, peacekeeping, and the severity of civil war'.

⁴⁹ David A. Brookmire and Frank Sistrunk, 'The effects of perceived ability and impartiality of mediators and time pressure on negotiation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24: 2, 1980, pp. 311–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200278002400209>.

⁵⁰ Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach, 'Mediating conflict in Central America', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 1, 1991, pp. 85–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001009>.

⁵¹ Holley E. Hansen and Stephen C. Nemeth, 'IO mediation of interstate conflicts: moving beyond the global versus regional dichotomy', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52: 2, 2008, pp. 295–325, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002707313693>.

⁵² Svensson, 'Who brings which peace?'; James D. D. Smith, 'Mediator impartiality: banishing the chimera', *Journal of Peace Research* 31: 4, 1994, pp. 445–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343394031004006>; Jerry M. Wittmer, Peter Carnevale and Michael E. Walker, 'General alignment and overt support in biased mediation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 35: 4, 1991, pp. 594–610, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002791035004002>.

⁵³ Efraim Inbar, 'Great power mediation: the USA and the May 1983 Israeli–Lebanese agreement', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 1, 1991, pp. 71–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001008>; Lindsay Reid, 'Finding a peace that lasts: mediator leverage and the durable resolution of civil wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61: 7, 2017, pp. 1401–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715611231>; Bercovitch and Schneider, 'Who mediates?'; Kriesberg, 'Mediation and the transformation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict'.

⁵⁴ Magnus Lundgren and Isak Svensson, 'Leanings and dealings: exploring bias and trade leverage in civil war mediation by international organizations', *International Negotiation* 19: 2, 2014, pp. 315–42, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341280>; Kleiboer, 'Understanding success and failure of international mediation'.

⁵⁵ Paul Wehr, *Conflict Regulation* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979); Hizkias Assefa, *Mediation of civil wars: approaches and strategies—the Sudan conflict* (London: Westview, 1987); Hugh Miall, *The peacemakers: peaceful settlements of disputes since 1945* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

⁵⁶ Siniša Vuković, 'Soft power, bias and manipulation of international organizations in international mediation', *International Negotiation* 20: 3, 2015, p. 419, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341315>. See also Svensson, 'Bargaining, bias and peace brokers'; Katja Favretto, 'Should peacemakers take sides? Major power mediation, coercion, and bias', *American Political Science Review* 103: 2, 2009, pp. 248–63, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409090236>.

⁵⁷ Allard Duursma, 'A current literature review of international mediation', *International Journal of Conflict*

A similar debate concerns mediator leverage and its impact on mediation success.⁵⁸ Beardsley and Danneman distinguish between short-term and long-term effects, and argue that leverage enhances the probability of finding an agreement in the short term, while a lack of leverage increases the prospects of violence reduction in the long term.⁵⁹ Reid further disaggregates this argument, showing that mediators with capability leverage, that is economic resources and power, are more likely to achieve short-term success, whereas mediators with credibility leverage, that is historical and cultural ties that increase a mediator's contextual knowledge, generate more durable settlements.⁶⁰ However, as with the discussion on bias, different definitions of leverage have produced a rather disjointed debate. There is thus no conclusion on how mediator bias and leverage influence mediation effectiveness.

Regarding the demand side, authors study different aspects pertaining to the characteristics of the conflict context. For instance, Bercovitch et al. developed a dataset in 1991 on how various factors, including the nature of the disputing parties and the dispute, influence mediation outcomes.⁶¹ Two years later, Bercovitch and Langley published a seminal study on how dispute characteristics affect mediation outcomes.⁶² They show that dispute intensity in terms of high fatalities encourages further hostility and contentious behaviour, and thus diminishes the likelihood of mediation effectiveness; that dispute complexity also appears to be incompatible with successful mediation; and that dispute duration has a strong inverse relationship with effectiveness, but only when combined with fatalities and complexity.

Different demand-related factors were woven into the famous 'ripeness' theory developed by Zartman.⁶³ He states that two conditions must be reunited for a conflict to be ripe for resolution. First, a mutually hurting stalemate. This means that the parties consider themselves to be in a situation that implies high costs for them (hurting) and in which they cannot unilaterally escalate the conflict to win it militarily (stalemate). Second, parties must consider mediation as a way out of the conflict, meaning that it must provide them with a valuable alternative to fighting. Several authors in the sample refer to aspects of the ripeness theory. For instance, Mooradian and Druckman compare the effectiveness of six efforts to mediate the conflict over the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh between 1990 and 1995 and show with a time-series analysis that a mutually hurting stalemate is a condition for negotiating a ceasefire and reducing violence.⁶⁴ Greig

Management 25: 1, 2014, p. 89, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-02-2012-0020>.

⁵⁸ Reid, 'Finding a peace that lasts'; Saadia Touval and I. William Zartman, eds, *International mediation in theory and practice* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1985); Andrew H. Kydd, 'Which side are you on? Bias, credibility and mediation', *American Journal of Political Science* 47: 4, 2003, pp. 597–611, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5907.00042>; Burcu Savun, 'Information, bias, and mediation success', *International Studies Quarterly* 52: 1, 2008, pp. 25–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00490.x>.

⁵⁹ Beardsley and Danneman, 'Mediation in international conflicts', p. 3.

⁶⁰ Reid, 'Finding a peace that lasts'.

⁶¹ Bercovitch et al., 'Some conceptual issues and empirical trends'.

⁶² Jacob Bercovitch and Jeffrey Langley, 'The nature of the dispute and the effectiveness of international mediation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 37: 4, 1993, pp. 670–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002793037004005>.

⁶³ I. William Zartman, *Ripe for resolution: conflict and intervention in Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁶⁴ Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman, 'Hurting stalemate or mediation? The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, 1990–95', *Journal of Peace Research* 36: 6, 1999, pp. 709–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343399036006007>.

examines ripeness theory and its influence on short- and long-term mediation success, arguing that the factors relevant for short-term success differ fundamentally from those promoting long-term success.⁶⁵ Schrodt and Gerner analyse how the costs of conflict influence the level of violence and argue, with Greig, that the factors conducive to the achievement of short-term mediation success differ from those that promote an extended-term improvement in the rivalry relationship.⁶⁶ Finally, Ruhe asks whether ripe moments for conflict prevention can be anticipated and argues that the short-term conflict history provides a good predictor of the probability of mediation onset in low-intensity conflicts.⁶⁷ Overall, in contrast to research on supply-related factors, there is higher agreement on the demand-related argument that ripeness is an important condition for mediation success.

Gaps in knowledge production on mediation

The above analysis shows that the most impactful academic research on mediation is dominated by western male authors; that it is characterized by rationalist conceptual frameworks and quantitative methodologies; and that it mostly produces theories that explain mediation effectiveness by looking at different supply- and demand-related factors. It also demonstrates that academic mediation research is oriented towards practice as it focuses on how to make mediation more effective. Yet, despite this practice-orientation, it has not reached its full potential in terms of its practice-relevance. As Wallensteen and Svensson note, 'mediation research seems to remain remote from the world in which actual mediators find themselves'.⁶⁸ I argue that this distance is accentuated by three main gaps in the mediation literature: in perspectives, in concepts and methods as well as in theories. The following overview illustrates how overcoming these gaps could help increase the practice-relevance of high-impact academic research on mediation, and how contributions published in more specialized and thus lower-ranked journals, books and the policy literature have stepped in to provide the knowledge required by mediation practitioners.⁶⁹

Perspectives: higher diversity

The first gap in the mediation literature reviewed above is perspectival: If males at western universities produce most high-impact academic knowledge on mediation, the diversity of perspectives to analyse peace processes is limited. Given that the majority of recent conflicts have taken place outside of the US and western Europe, it means that most mediation knowledge is produced from an outside

⁶⁵ Greig, 'Moments of opportunity'.

⁶⁶ Philip A. Schrodt and Deborah J. Gerner, 'An event data analysis of third-party mediation in the Middle East and Balkans', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48: 3, 2004, pp. 310–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704264137>.

⁶⁷ Ruhe, 'Impeding fatal violence through third-party diplomacy'.

⁶⁸ Wallensteen and Svensson, 'Talking peace', p. 324.

⁶⁹ To provide for a focused analysis of the mediation policy literature, I focus on publications by the member organizations of the Mediation Support Network.

perspective.⁷⁰ This is somewhat mirrored in the focus of scholarly research on mediators, rather than on the conflict parties.⁷¹ As shown above, a large share of mediation research analyses how mediator traits, such as bias or leverage, influence mediation effectiveness and how mediators can change the incentives of conflict parties towards finding an agreement. The aim of most studies is thus to find ways of improving mediator strategies. Thereby, the conflict parties' perspectives, roles and agency remain relatively understudied.⁷² Indeed, as Nathan et al. show, many studies do not sufficiently take into account the 'power, character, objectives and deliberations of the conflict parties' when studying the link between mediation strategies and outcomes.⁷³ As mentioned above, no article on changes in parties' adversarial frames or issue perceptions resulting from mediation was published after 1997 in the sample.⁷⁴ Moreover, feminist perspectives on mediation remain virtually absent.⁷⁵ None of the sample articles has a title that includes words related to feminism or gender.⁷⁶

While diversity is a challenge beyond the sample, parts of the broader mediation literature has started to fill this gap. Some of the more specialized journals, for instance, have a more diverse authorship. In the journal *International Negotiation*, 33.78 per cent of the mediation articles have females as single authors or first authors in co-authored publications, and in the journal *African Security*, 45.45 per cent of the articles were written by authors located at universities in Africa.⁷⁷ Moreover, female authors have contributed seminal books on mediation.⁷⁸ Finally, two important producers of policy literature on mediation, the US Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Berghof Foundation, have 36 per cent and 37.14 per cent respectively of female first authors in their reports tagged with the keyword 'mediation'.⁷⁹ The Berghof Foundation also publishes many case-studies written

⁷⁰ Esther Meininghaus, 'A new local turn for track one peace process research: anthropological approaches', *Negotiation Journal* 37: 3, 2021, p. 326, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nej.12371>.

⁷¹ Nathan et al., 'Civil war conflict resolution', p. 362.

⁷² An exception in the sample is Oliver Richmond, 'Devious objectives and the disputants' view of international mediation: a theoretical framework', *Journal of Peace Research* 35: 6, 1998, pp. 707–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343398035006004>.

⁷³ Nathan et al., 'Civil war conflict resolution', p. 362.

⁷⁴ Ayres, 'Mediating international conflicts'; Kaufman and Duncan, 'A formal framework for mediator mechanisms and motivations'; Podell and Knapp, 'The effect of mediation'.

⁷⁵ Authors have started to apply feminist perspectives to broader peace research. See, for example, Stefanie Kappler and Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, 'From power-blind binaries to the intersectionality of peace: connecting feminism and critical peace and conflict studies', *Peacebuilding* 7: 2, 2019, pp. 160–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2019.1588456>.

⁷⁶ Two articles touch upon gender dimensions in mediation: Benjamin L. Read and Ethan Michelson, 'Mediating the mediation debate: conflict resolution and the local state in China', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52: 5, 2008, pp. 737–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002708318920>; Neil J. Diamant, 'Conflict and conflict resolution in China: beyond mediation-centered approaches', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44: 4, 2000, pp. 523–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002700044004006>.

⁷⁷ I identified the list of articles for journals analysed in this section in the same way as outlined above under 'Data and sampling'.

⁷⁸ Martin, *Kings of peace; pawns of war*; Susan H. Allen, *Interactive peacemaking: a people-centered approach* (London: Routledge, 2022); Barbara F. Walter, *Committing to peace: the successful settlement of civil wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

⁷⁹ For Berghof Foundation, I used the filter 'mediation' to search their publications on <https://berghof-foundation.org/library>. For USIP, I used the filter 'mediation, negotiation & dialogue' in their PeaceBriefs and Peaceworks reports on <https://www.usip.org/publications>. For both, I only included publications in English and until 2021.

by authors based in the context they study.⁸⁰ Finally, mediation organizations from the global South, such as Accord in South Africa, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia or Cinep in Colombia, all contribute to diversifying the authorship of publications on mediation.

More diversity in the community of researchers who produce knowledge on mediation does not automatically translate into a change of focus of mediation research. It does however produce more 'situated knowledge', acknowledging that all knowledge reflects the conditions under which it is produced.⁸¹ It also enables a stronger focus on intersectionality when analysing peace processes, drawing attention to the multiple and overlapping identities of actors engaged in the dynamic endeavour of making peace.⁸² Ultimately, such higher diversity increases the practice-relevance of mediation knowledge as it accounts for a greater variety of people's lived experiences and hence more adequately reflects the daily challenges mediators face in their work.

Concepts and methods: more interpretive and qualitative approaches

A second gap in the mediation literature reviewed above is that the theoretical models used are often not inductively built, but are based on rationalism derived from bargaining theory and tested through quantitative methods. Such approaches have significantly contributed to theory-building on mediation. Yet, in mediation where politics and context play an important role, both a conceptual and a methodological complement are needed.

Conceptually, an interpretive complement is required. The assumption in bargaining theory that actors are rational and driven by self-interest leaves ideational factors largely unexplored.⁸³ Although some studies have been conducted on the role of culture and norms in mediation, they remain rare.⁸⁴ Yet, ideational factors affect mediators and conflict parties, as both are influenced by questions around their reputation, their normative socialization and the core values they hold.⁸⁵ In contrast to rationalist assumptions, interpretive approaches

⁸⁰ I took this information from the author biographies in the publications. For example, Abdullah Baabood, *Omani perspectives on the peace process in Yemen* (Berlin: Berghof, 2021); Willy Peter Nindorera, *Interactions between peacemaking and constitution-making processes in Burundi* (Berlin: Berghof, 2019); Mushtaq Muhammad Rahim, *Peace prevails: a review of the process to peace and reconciliation between the Afghan Government and Hezb-e Islami* (Berlin: Berghof, 2019).

⁸¹ Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', *Feminist Studies* 14: 3, 1988, pp. 575–99; Marcel Stoezler and Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Standpoint theory, situated knowledge and the situated imagination', *Feminist Theory* 3: 3, 2002, pp. 315–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146470002762492024>.

⁸² Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1: 8, 1989, pp. 138–67, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

⁸³ Duursma, 'A current literature review of international mediation', p. 84.

⁸⁴ Mandell and Tomlin, 'Mediation in the development of norms'; Molly Inman et al., 'Cultural influences on mediation in international crises', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58: 4, 2013, pp. 685–712, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713478565>.

⁸⁵ Herbert C. Kelman, 'Building trust among enemies: the central challenge for international conflict resolution', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29: 6, 2005, pp. 639–50, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.011>; Stuart J. Kaufman, 'Escaping the symbolic politics trap: reconciliation initiatives and conflict resolution in ethnic wars', *Journal of Peace Research* 43: 2, 2006, pp. 201–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713478565>.

do not divorce cost-benefit calculations from their social and historical contexts.⁸⁶ They can therefore help to re-embed mediation processes in the social environments in which they take place.

Methodologically, a qualitative complement is needed to generate more disaggregated findings. Quantitative theorizing requires a certain level of aggregation.⁸⁷ Therefore, mediation by individual, state, regional, non-governmental and international organizations are often lumped together and only a few studies in the sample focus on specific types of mediators.⁸⁸ Moreover, many contributions fail to distinguish between different phases and forms of mediation processes (e.g. pre-negotiation or negotiation, proximity or direct talks, inclusive or exclusive mediation) and hence do not specify the mediation phase or form to which their insights apply. Finally, quantitative studies of mediation outcomes often measure effectiveness either as the signature of a peace agreement or as fatalities reduction.⁸⁹ This does not provide any information on other outcomes, for instance on the parties themselves, or on progress towards peace *during* a mediation process.⁹⁰

Complementing rationalist and quantitative approaches with interpretive and qualitative ones increases the practice-relevance of mediation research, as it allows for nuanced and disaggregated insights that are closer to the empirical reality of policy-makers and practitioners in mediation. As Nathan et al. mention, mediators 'have little confidence in generalization based on aggregated data that ignore the challenges and specificities of mediation in different cases', but appreciate research that acknowledges 'variations between cases and the intricacies of each case'.⁹¹

The mediation literature beyond the sample contributes to filling this gap. While only 21.88 per cent of the sample articles contained in-depth case-studies, 45 per cent of the mediation articles published in *International Negotiation* were case-studies. This number is even higher in area-studies journals, reaching 81.82 per cent in *African Security* and 100 per cent in *African Affairs*. Important insights into specific mediation processes are also provided in books,⁹² and particularly in (auto)biographies.⁹³ Finally, the policy literature publishes many in-depth case-

org/10.1177/0022343306060622; Sara Hellmüller, Julia Palmiano Federer and Jamie Pring, *Are mediators norm entrepreneurs? Exploring the role of mediators in norm diffusion* (Bern: swisspeace, 2017).

⁸⁶ Lisa Wedeen, 'Reflections on ethnographic work in political science', *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 13, 2010, pp. 255–72, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.052706.123951>.

⁸⁷ Of course, the level of appropriate disaggregation depends on the research question (K. S. Gleditsch et al., 'Data and progress in peace and conflict research').

⁸⁸ Hansen et al., 'IO mediation of interstate conflicts'; Wehr and Lederach, 'Mediating conflict in Central America'; Inbar, 'Great power mediation'; Kjell Skjelsbæk, 'The UN secretary-general and the mediation of international disputes', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 1, 1991, pp. 99–115, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001010>.

⁸⁹ Svensson, 'Who brings which peace?'; Addison and Murshed, 'Credibility and reputation in peacemaking'; Levy, 'Mediation of prisoners' dilemma conflicts'; Ruhe, 'Impeding fatal violence through third-party diplomacy'; Beardsley et al., 'Mediation, peacekeeping, and the severity of civil war'.

⁹⁰ An exception is Louis Kriesberg, 'Formal and quasi-mediators in international disputes: an exploratory analysis', *Journal of Peace Research* 28: 19, 1991, pp. 19–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343391028001004>.

⁹¹ Nathan et al., 'Civil war conflict resolution', p. 355.

⁹² Stephen John Stedman, *Peacemaking in civil war: international mediation in Zimbabwe, 1974–1980* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991); Tetsuro Iji, *Multiparty mediation in violent conflict: peacemaking diplomacy in the Tajikistan civil war* (London: Routledge, 2019); Martin, *Kings of peace; pawns of war*.

⁹³ Isak Svensson and Peter Wallensteen, *The go-between: Jan Eliasson and the styles of mediation* (Washington DC: USIP, 2010); Mitchell, *Making peace*, Holbrooke, *To end a war*, Merikallio, *The mediator*.

studies, with 60 per cent being published by the Berghof Foundation, 75 per cent by Accord and 78.67 per cent by USIP.⁹⁴ Based on more interpretive and qualitative approaches, the mediation literature beyond the sample provides studies on ideational factors,⁹⁵ as well as disaggregated insights on mediators,⁹⁶ different phases and forms of mediation processes,⁹⁷ and mediation outcomes beyond the signature of a peace agreement and battle-related death tolls.⁹⁸ These in-depth analyses of peace processes and detailed insights into specific aspects of mediation are more likely to be picked up by practitioners working on these contexts or themes than aggregated analyses.

Theories: more critical research

The third gap in the mediation literature reviewed is that its focus on effectiveness has led to mostly problem-solving rather than critical theories. Problem-solving approaches are defined by Cox as a 'guide to help solve problems posed within the terms of the particular perspective which was the point of departure'.⁹⁹ Critical approaches, in turn, have the objective 'to become clearly aware of the perspective which gives rise to theorizing [...] and to open up the possibility of choosing a different valid perspective'.¹⁰⁰

This problem-solving focus is particularly manifested in an insufficient questioning of the impact of the broader international context on mediation approaches. As in the case of peacebuilding more generally, the liberal international order has influenced mediation since the 1990s. Indeed, mediation has often been used to advance human rights, democracy and the rule of law based on the belief that 'strengthening them will contribute to the development of a

⁹⁴ For Accord, I searched for 'mediation' in their reports in English and until 2021 on <https://www.accord.org.za/reports/>.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Ole Elgström and Jacob Bercovitch, 'Culture and international mediation: exploring theoretical and empirical linkages', *International Negotiation* 6: 1, 2001, pp. 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718060120848937>; Kevin Avruch, *Culture and conflict resolution* (Washington DC: USIP, 2004); Hellmüller et al., *Are mediators norm entrepreneurs?*; Sara Hellmüller et al., *The role of norms in international peace mediation* (Bern: swisspeace, 2015).

⁹⁶ See, for example, Julian Bergmann, 'Sisters in peace: analyzing the cooperation between the United Nations and the European Union in Peace Mediation', *International Negotiation* 27: 3, 2014, pp. 418–47, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10041>; Kasajja Phillip Apuuli, 'IGAD's mediation in the current South Sudan conflict', *African Security* 8: 2, 2015, pp. 120–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2015.1036671>; Kruschen Govender and Kapinga Yvette Ngandu, *Towards enhancing the capacity of the African Union in mediation* (Durban: Accord, 2009); David Lanz, Jamie Pring, Corinne von Burg and Mathias Zeller, *Understanding mediation support structures* (Bern: swisspeace, 2017).

⁹⁷ See, for example, Kasajja Phillip Apuuli, 'The competing mediations in the post-Qaddafi Libyan political crisis', *International Negotiation* 27: 1, 2022, pp. 261–84, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10019>; Hoffman, 'Mediation and the art of shuttle diplomacy', Weiss, 'Trajectories toward peace'; Elizabeth Cousens, *It ain't over 'til it's over: what role for mediation in post-agreement contexts?* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2008).

⁹⁸ See, for example, Zuzana Hudáková, 'Success in the shadow of failure: UN mediation in Yemen (2011–2015)', *International Negotiation* 27: 1, 2021, pp. 71–102, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10042>; Eemeli Isoaho and Suvi Tuuli, *From pre-talks to implementation: lessons learned from mediation processes* (Helsinki: Crisis Management Initiative, 2013).

⁹⁹ Robert W. Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium* 10: 2, 1981, p. 128, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298810100020501>.

¹⁰⁰ Cox, 'Social Forces, States and World Orders', p. 128.

more peaceful and stable international order'.¹⁰¹ For instance, most peace agreements mediated under UN auspices foresee the holding of elections.¹⁰² In some contexts, UN Security Council resolutions called for elections before negotiations even started.¹⁰³ However, unlike in the broader peacebuilding literature, no article in the sample presents a critique to the liberal approach to mediation and its underlying assumptions. This is especially surprising in light of challenges to it by so-called illiberal approaches in an increasingly multipolar world order.¹⁰⁴

A critical approach to mediation would question some of its epistemological assumptions that are based on a liberal paradigm and explore to what extent they require adaptation in a changing structural context. Such an inquiry would help increase the practice-relevance of mediation research. Eriksson and Sundelius point to the fact that research influences policy most in times of major changes when practitioners are in need for solutions to understand and respond to the changes.¹⁰⁵ Yet, given its problem-solving orientation, academic research on mediation has not managed to provide guidance on how mediators should adapt to current changes in world politics. It is, again, the broader mediation literature that has driven a more critical discussion. This includes contributions that question the liberal paradigms underpinning mediation,¹⁰⁶ as well as reflections on mediation in a changing international context.¹⁰⁷ Of particular note is the seminal book series edited by Crocker et al., which analyses peacemaking in different periods.¹⁰⁸ These critical approaches provide insights on new approaches to mediation and the adaptations that may be needed to retain its relevance in a changing world order.

¹⁰¹ Crocker et al., 'Introduction', p. 7; Sara Hellmüller et al., 'How norms matter in mediation: an introduction', *Swiss Political Science Review* 26: 4, 2020, pp. 345–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12425>.

¹⁰² Marina Ottaway, 'Promoting democracy after conflict: the difficult choices', *International Studies Perspectives* 4: 3, 2003, pp. 314–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1528-3577.403007>.

¹⁰³ In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, UN Security Council Resolution 1234, which was adopted three months before a ceasefire agreement was signed, stressed the importance of holding 'democratic, free and fair elections'.

¹⁰⁴ Sara Hellmüller, 'Peacemaking in a shifting world order: a macro-level analysis of UN mediation in Syria', *Review of International Studies* 48: 3, 2022, pp. 543–59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021052200016X>; Samer Abboud, 'Making peace to sustain war: the Astana Process and Syria's illiberal peace', *Peacebuilding* 9: 3, 2021, pp. 326–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2021.1895609>; David Lewis, 'Contesting liberal peace: Russia's emerging model of conflict management', *International Affairs* 98: 2, 2022, pp. 653–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab221>.

¹⁰⁵ Johan Eriksson and Bengt Sundelius, 'Molding minds that form policy: how to make research useful', *International Studies Perspectives* 6: 1, 2005, p. 65, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3577.2005.00193.x>.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Julia Palmiano Federer, 'We do negotiate with terrorists: navigating liberal and illiberal norms in peace mediation', *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 12: 1, 2019, pp. 19–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1472727>; Abboud, 'Making peace to sustain war'; Mikael Eriksson and Roland Kostić, *Mediation and liberal peacebuilding: peace from the ashes of war?* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Sean William Kane, 'Making peace when the whole world has come to fight: the mediation of internationalized civil wars', *International Peacekeeping* 29: 2, 2022, pp. 177–203, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2020.1760718>; Martin Wählisch and Catherine Turner, *Rethinking peace mediation* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2021); Teresa Whitfield, *Mediating in a complex world* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2019); Matt Waldman, *Falling short: Exploring mediation effectiveness* (Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2021).

¹⁰⁸ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela R. Aall, *Managing global chaos: sources of and responses to international conflict* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 1996); Crocker et al., eds, *Herding cats*; Chester A. Crocker et al., eds, *Turbulent peace: the challenges of managing international conflict* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2001); Chester A. Crocker et al., *Taming intractable conflicts: mediation in the hardest cases* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2004); Chester A. Crocker et al., eds, *Leashing the dogs of war: conflict management in a divided world* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2007); Chester A. Crocker et al., eds, *Rewiring regional security in a fragmented world* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2011); Chester A. Crocker et al., eds, *Managing conflict in a world adrift* (Washington DC: USIP Press, 2015).

Conclusion

Mediation has become a standard tool of international conflict resolution. This is reflected in research on mediation, which has produced knowledge that helps to understand it. Based on an analysis of the most impactful journal publications on mediation, this article provided an in-depth analysis of *who* produces academic knowledge on mediation, *how* such knowledge is produced and *what* knowledge is produced. It showed that western male scholars publish the vast majority of research on mediation in these journals, that the analyses are dominated by rationalist conceptual frameworks and quantitative methods and that most theories focus on identifying reasons for effectiveness situated in both supply- and demand-related factors of mediation. Through this analysis, the article demonstrated that while academic research on mediation is practice-oriented in that most contributions analyse how to make it more effective, its practice-relevance could be strengthened. Indeed, mediation practitioners are likely to be more interested in situated knowledge that draws on a higher diversity of perspectives, since it is closer to their lived experiences; they look for disaggregated insights that are mostly found in interpretive and qualitative contributions because they can more directly apply it to their specific situations; and they are in need of critical theories to provide guidance in a quickly changing structural environment. The article shows that such knowledge is produced in more specialized and thus lower-ranked journals, books and the policy literature. It thus nuances the supposed gap between knowledge and practice on mediation by demonstrating that it mainly pertains to the highest-ranked journal articles. Overall, the article makes two contributions. First, it provides a thorough and updated review of the knowledge produced on mediation. Second, it contributes to discussions about diversity and the critical potential of broader peace studies.

Future academic research on mediation should complement the literature along the three dimensions outlined above to increase its practice-relevance. This is particularly relevant in current times when we see a questioning of mediation and a difficulty of resolving conflicts through negotiated approaches, such as in Syria or Ukraine. In a context of increasingly internationalized armed conflicts and challenges to a rules-based international order, belligerents may increasingly opt not to engage in mediation at all and to enforce military victory. To maintain the relevance of negotiated settlements to armed conflicts as a valid option for conflict parties, mediation actors need to adapt to the current structural changes. Academic research on mediation can provide guidance in these turbulent times. But it needs to change.