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A Study of Mediation Attempts for Long-Term Peace A Comparative Analysis between the Northern Ireland Troubles and the Sri Lankan Ethnic Conflict

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Background: This study conducts a comparative analysis of mediation efforts in two protracted ethnopolitical conflicts: the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and the Northern Ireland Troubles. Both cases were marked by deep ethnic divisions, prolonged violence, and the involvement of third-party mediation. Despite these similarities, outcomes diverged: Norwegian-led mediation in Sri Lanka failed to achieve lasting peace, whereas the U.S.-facilitated Good Friday Agreement, supported by the British and Irish governments, secured relative stability in Northern Ireland.

Objective: The study aims to identify the factors that contributed to the divergent outcomes of these two conflicts, using the Contingency Model of Mediation as the analytical framework.

Methods: A qualitative cross-case study design was employed, drawing on peace process documents, secondary literature, and key informant interviews with practitioners and scholars. Thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, was used to examine contextual and process variables highlighted in the Contingency Model of Mediation.

Results: The findings reveal that while the Contingency Model helps explain mediation dynamics, it does not fully capture structural and political complexities. Success in Northern Ireland was facilitated by strong political will, inclusive frameworks, sustained external support, and robust institutional mechanisms. In contrast, the Sri Lankan process was hindered by fragmented political commitment, stakeholder exclusion, and weak implementation capacity.

Conclusion: Mediation in ethnopolitical conflicts is shaped not only by strategies but also by the surrounding political and structural environment. The study provides insights for policymakers and practitioners by emphasising the importance of contextual conditions in designing mediation processes.

Keywords: Mediation, Contingency Model, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Conflict Resolution