



CONCILIATION  
RESOURCES

**PUBLIC SUPPORT  
FOR PEACEBUILDING:  
PUBLIC ATTITUDES  
IN JAPAN TOWARDS  
PEACEBUILDING  
AND DIALOGUE WITH  
ARMED GROUPS**

Report



# **PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PEACEBUILDING: PUBLIC ATTITUDES IN JAPAN TOWARDS PEACEBUILDING AND DIALOGUE WITH ARMED GROUPS**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Conciliation Resources and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

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The Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) is one of the largest non-profit private foundations in Asia. SPF's main activities revolve around policy recommendations, international cooperation, people-to-people exchange programmes to facilitate peace, mutual understanding and knowledge sharing with Japan and internationally.

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# INTRODUCTION

## **In December 2019, Conciliation Resources and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation undertook a national public opinion survey in Japan on public attitudes to peacebuilding and dialogue with armed groups.**

As peacebuilding organisations, our aim was to identify the extent to which the Japanese public understand and support peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is a conflict resolution approach distinct from, but complementary to development and humanitarian assistance – fields in which Japan has made significant contributions. It focuses on understanding and tackling the long-term and underlying causes and drivers of conflict through non-violent means.

Given increasing levels of global conflict and insecurity, the survey offers valuable insight into public views on the potential for peacebuilding to be a more prominent tool in Japan's foreign and development policy in response to these challenges.

The results of the survey are encouraging. A significant majority – 77% of survey respondents – agreed that peacebuilding plays a vital role in ending conflict around the world; 63% expressed support for traditional peacebuilding measures, such as facilitating dialogue between parties to conflict. Only 43% of respondents supported the view that Japan should contribute to peace through military means. Furthermore, people recognised the need for various stakeholders, including the Japanese government, to actively engage with armed groups in the pursuit of peace.

The findings may have significant implications for Japan's long-standing debate on whether to revise provisions under Article 9 of the Constitution, which renounces war as a means to settle international disputes involving the state. The survey suggests that there is considerable public sympathy for non-military options, and for peacebuilding policies and programmes; there is also scope for more public information and education about what this work involves and can achieve.

The findings reflect a pattern of public support for peacebuilding across other countries; the Japan survey results are similar to those of public opinion surveys in the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and Germany, commissioned by Conciliation Resources and the Alliance for Peacebuilding in June and July 2017.

### **KEY FINDINGS**

- 1. People in Japan recognise the vital role of peacebuilding.**
- 2. Support for peacebuilding is motivated predominantly by moral considerations.**
- 3. People prefer civilian peacebuilding activities to military responses to conflict.**
- 4. People support engagement with armed groups as part of a strategy to end conflict.**

# BACKGROUND

**Today's conflicts are increasingly complex and protracted, involving a huge array of different groups. The number of active conflicts around the world has grown over recent years, and the number of those forcibly displaced by violence and insecurity is at a record high. There is an urgent need to find and prioritise effective ways to build sustainable peace.**

Peacebuilding is an approach which focuses on understanding and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict. It aims to prevent the outbreak, continuation and recurrence of violence. It recognises the need to include non-traditional actors with interests in the outcome – including marginalised groups in society and non-state armed groups. Importantly, peacebuilding is built on the premise that sustainable peace requires more than signed agreements. It is a long-term process of rebuilding relationships, changing attitudes and establishing fairer institutions.

## Why understanding public attitudes matters

Data about what the public understands peacebuilding to be, and how strongly they feel about it, is vital information for politicians and policymakers deciding on the best responses to violent conflict. The complexity of political, social and economic factors driving the majority of conflicts cannot be solved by, and in fact can be further complicated by military or security intervention. Instead, a transition to lasting peace requires sustained engagement at grassroots, political and international levels, involving tools such as analysis, mediation, dialogue and diplomacy. Public support for long-term political and economic investment in such approaches is important.

An informed understanding of the public's knowledge and opinions about peacebuilding can also help governments, international institutions and civil society build popular demand for peacebuilding as a distinct activity within international development. In its Development Cooperation Charter, Japan highlights peacebuilding as a priority alongside urgent humanitarian assistance, post-conflict reconstruction, conflict prevention and nation building.

Japan ranks among the top four Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

countries for disbursements of official development assistance (ODA). Almost half of this investment goes to economic infrastructure and services (particularly transport, storage and energy) and a smaller proportion to social infrastructure (in particular water and sanitation).<sup>1</sup> Beyond contributions to multilateral institutions, only around 0.6% of Japan's bilateral ODA is spent on peacebuilding, of which the majority goes toward mine action and public security.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that investments in development projects can easily be undone by violent conflict, and that 'conflict, peace and security' is an international policy priority, there has been no corresponding global rise in the level of resourcing. Spending on 'conflict, peace and security' represents on average 2% of total aid from OECD donors<sup>3</sup> – and less than 1% of the cost of war.<sup>4</sup>

Public opinion also has a bearing on the scope for one of the most sensitive areas of peacebuilding: contact aimed at encouraging armed groups to abandon violence and engage in a peace process. Engagement involves risks, but it can often be a necessary strategy to make the transition to peace. The survey shows public understanding of this. However, national governments and international institutions are understandably nervous about how a decision to engage with an armed group, if publicly known, will be perceived by their own populations. Will it be interpreted as legitimising violence, as giving credibility to unreasonable or non-negotiable demands, or as a sign of weakness?

When an armed group is officially cited by governments as a 'terrorist organisation', politicians and policymakers become even less inclined to undertake or support engagement. Peacebuilders have to navigate complex counter-terrorism regulations and sanctions, and manage the potential for political and public backlash. Getting a sense of the level of public support for this work, and of who people feel should engage with armed groups and why, is crucial to build strategies for this essential component of peacebuilding.

## THE SURVEY

The findings presented in this survey are an analysis of the data collected in an online public opinion survey, which took place in Japan in December 2019. The survey was commissioned by Conciliation Resources and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and carried out by data research agency Dynata. In total, 2149 adults in Japan were interviewed and results weighted by the known demographic profile of all adults.

# FINDINGS IN DETAIL

## 1. PEOPLE IN JAPAN RECOGNISE THE VITAL ROLE OF PEACEBUILDING

Respondents were asked if they agreed with the following two statements:

*Peacebuilding plays a vital role in ending violent conflicts around the world.*

And

*In Japan we should be investing more resources in peacebuilding.*

### Support is strong across all demographic groups

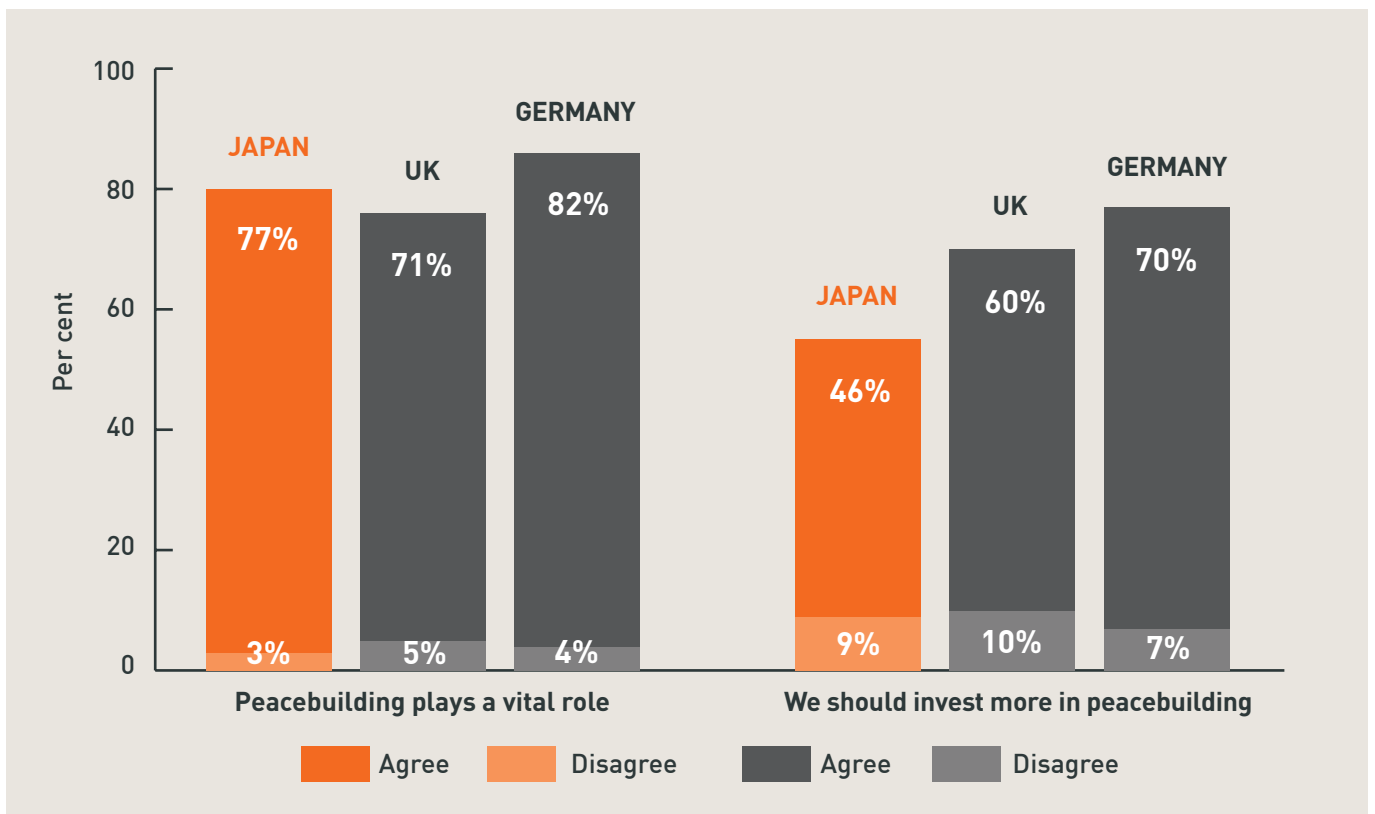
As in responses to surveys in the UK, US and Germany, respondents in Japan acknowledged the importance of peacebuilding. A significant majority – 77% of those polled – agreed that peacebuilding plays a vital role in ending conflict, and more than a quarter of respondents strongly agreed with this statement (27%). Only 3% disagreed with the statement. These results indicate a mandate for peacebuilding as a policy tool.

Comparisons between different demographic groups did not show significant differences. Variation between men and women and between different age groups was negligible, with men and older people only marginally more likely to support this statement. A comparison of salary groups showed slightly more variance: 86% of those earning between 6-8 million Yen (about £45,000-£60,000) supported the statement, falling to 71% among those earning less than 2 million Yen (about £15,000) – still a high level of support.

### Few people disagree with increased investment in peacebuilding

Support for greater investment in peacebuilding varied. Overall, 46% of respondents agreed that Japan should be investing more (8% strongly agreed). While this represents a good level of support, the figure is 31 percentage points lower than the percentage of respondents who agreed with the first statement about the value of peacebuilding.

CHART 1: SUPPORT FOR PEACEBUILDING



This is in contrast to an 11-12 percentage point difference between the two statements in previous national surveys in US, UK and Germany.

However, only 9% of respondents actively disagreed with the statement; more than a third (39%) remained undecided, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the idea of greater investment [See Box 1 - The undecided]. The relatively large proportion of neutral responses may point to a lack of public knowledge of current levels of investment in peacebuilding in relation to other forms of responses to conflict. It suggests there is scope for more information and advocacy in the public and policy domain about peacebuilding.

The demographic breakdown of the responses shows that men were more likely to agree with greater investment than women, and there was a general trend of higher levels of support among older people than among younger age groups. The exception was the 18-24-year old age group who displayed slightly higher than average support (47%), making them the third most likely age group to agree with this statement. The highest and lowest income brackets represented the highest and lowest support for greater resources respectively (61% and 39%), but there was no discernible pattern for other salary groups.

## There is a good understanding of what peacebuilding is

In order to test how well the term peacebuilding is understood in Japan, respondents were shown a number of statements and asked to select up to three that they felt best described peacebuilding. They were asked to say how confident they felt in their choices [see Box 2 - Peacebuilding statements]. To test whether the term 'conflict resolution' affected their choice, half of the respondents were asked to select up to three statements from the same list that best describes 'conflict resolution'. The results for both terms were similar: respondents understand efforts to build peace as long-term, people-centred and inclusive.

The top three descriptions selected were:

### Peacebuilding...

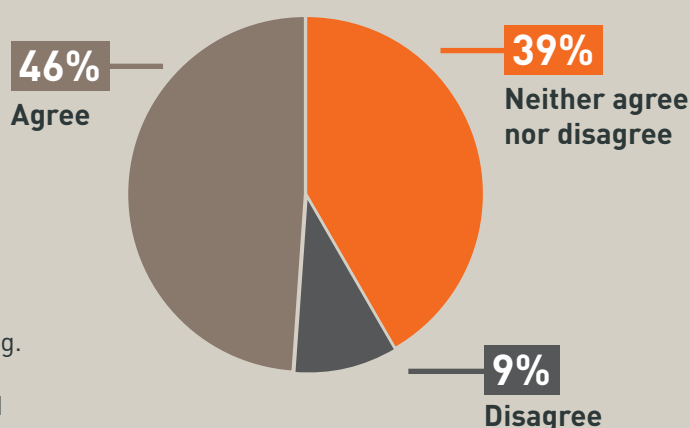
- 1. ... involves understanding and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict, not its symptoms.**  
[52% of respondents selected, 57% confidence in selection]
- 2. ...is the long term process of rebuilding relationships, changing attitudes and establishing fairer institutions.**  
[40% of respondents selected, 57% confidence in selection]
- 3. ...involves providing aid to people who have been displaced or harmed by violent conflict.**  
[33% of respondents selected, 56% confidence in selection]

### BOX 1: THE UNDECIDED

In comparison to survey results for the UK, US and Germany, participants in the Japan survey were much less decisive in their responses. For example, 39% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with increased investment in peacebuilding.

This indecision was a pattern throughout the survey results, with the highest abstention (47%) on the question of whether religious obligation would justify Japan's involvement in peacebuilding. Respondents were also undecided on questions about who should engage with armed groups and proscribed terrorist organisations, and how. This was apparent in answers to questions about how informal institutions, such as charities and local communities, should engage. Respondents were also non-committal on questions about whether governments should formally engage with armed groups.

Demographically, men and women were equally likely to express that they neither agree nor disagree with a given statement. Older people, particularly in the 45-54 age bracket, were slightly more undecided than younger people.



## BOX 2: PEACEBUILDING STATEMENTS

### Peacebuilding...

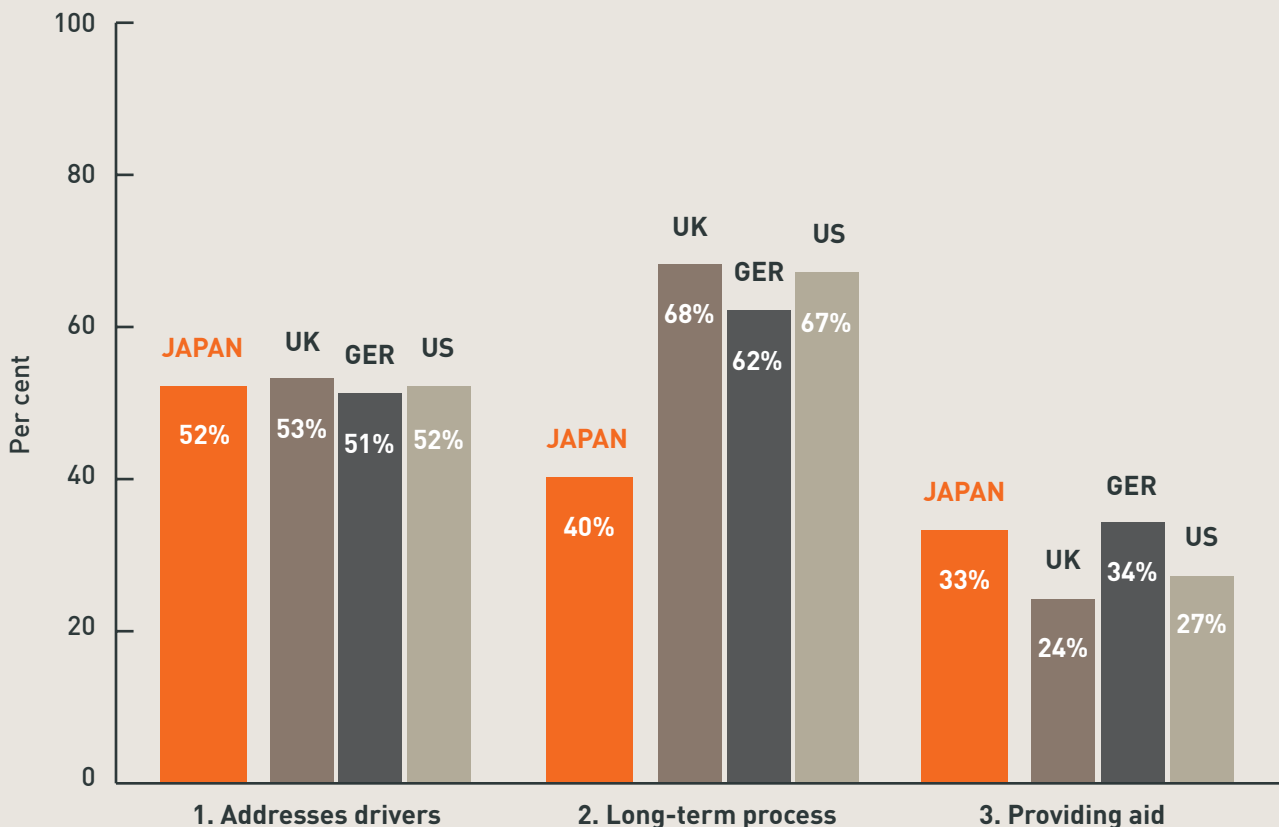
1. *involves understanding and addressing the underlying drivers of conflict, not its symptoms.*
2. *is the process of reconstruction after a war has ended.*
3. *involves everyone from communities to governments working to end fighting and prevent the recurrence of violence.*
4. *involves the military intervening to stop the different sides of a conflict from fighting.*
5. *involves providing aid to people who have been displaced or harmed by violent conflict.*
6. *is the long-term process of rebuilding relationships, changing attitudes and establishing fairer institutions.*
7. *involves diplomats brokering deals to end violent conflict.*
8. *is about ensuring justice for abuses committed during violent conflict and ensuring human rights.*

The top two responses – ‘addressing drivers’ (52%) and peacebuilding as a ‘long-term process’ (40%) – reflect what practitioners would consider to be core tenets of peacebuilding. Respondents expressed high levels of confidence in their selections, suggesting a good level of awareness of the fundamental requirements for building peace.

The third most popular option (33%), ‘providing aid to people’, better describes humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian aid plays an important role in conflict response but is typically focused on the physical needs of those affected by conflict, and as such addresses the symptoms rather than the social, political, economic and structural drivers of conflict. Humanitarian aid has been a prominent feature of Japan’s overseas assistance. However, overall the difference was marginal in relation to the fourth most popular selection, that peacebuilding ‘involves everyone’ (31%), reflecting the inclusive nature and scope of peacebuilding practice.

Both men and women chose the same two top statements in their responses but differed in their third choice; for men the third most popular option was that ‘peacebuilding involves everyone’, whereas female respondents selected ‘providing aid’. Overall, on average men were 5% more

CHART 2: WHAT IS PEACEBUILDING?



likely than women to select statements more aligned with common descriptions of peacebuilding. Women, inversely, were on average 5% more likely to select statements around aid, justice and post-conflict reconstruction.

Responses across age groups varied with few discernible patterns. However, one group stood out: 18-24-year olds. This group gave the same top three responses as other survey respondents; however, for each statement associated with a common understanding of peacebuilding, they expressed lower levels of agreement than all other age groups. They were also more likely than other age groups to select statements relating to the provision of aid and post-conflict reconstruction.

The results overall suggest a good level of understanding of peacebuilding. People see the need to undertake long-term strategies that focus on the underlying drivers of conflict. While the third most popular option, the provision of aid, is not considered a facet of peacebuilding, the results as a whole show that support for peacebuilding is based on an understanding that it is primarily inclusive and people-focused, rather than interventionist and elite; military intervention and diplomatic deal-brokering were the least popular responses at 13% and 12% respectively.

## 2. SUPPORT FOR PEACEBUILDING IS MOTIVATED PREDOMINANTLY BY MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

In order to determine on what grounds the Japanese public might support Japan's involvement in peacebuilding activities, we asked respondents:

***To what extent do YOU PERSONALLY agree or disagree with each of the following as justifications for Japan engaging in peacebuilding activities?***

Respondents could then choose from a list of 11 arguments [see Chart 3 - Justifications for peacebuilding support]. The top four responses were:

- 1. Because human beings have the right to live in peace; free from the threat of conflict.***  
[80% agreed, 25% strongly]
- 2. Because we are all citizens of the world.***  
[75% agreed, 20% strongly]
- 3. Because migration and flows of goods and information mean that conflict is a shared problem.***  
[64% agreed, 11% strongly]
- 4. Because we should help those less fortunate than ourselves if we have the ability to do so.***  
[61% agreed, 10% strongly]

As in previous surveys, the Japanese respondents were largely motivated by moral, rights-based justifications for peacebuilding – this being especially prevalent in the over 65s, who were the most likely group to agree with all four of the top statements.

The most popular selection among all respondents was that people have 'the right to live in peace; free from the threat of conflict' with 80% in agreement, and a full quarter of respondents agreeing strongly with this statement. This was followed closely by the universal justification that 'we are all citizens of the world'; three quarters of respondents agreed with this statement, 20% of these agreed strongly.

The third most popular justification for Japan engaging in peacebuilding acknowledges the reality of globalisation and the inter-connectedness of people's lives: 'because migration and flows of goods and information mean that conflict is a shared problem'. 64% of respondents agreed with this statement, of which 10% agreed strongly. The fourth most popular statement was that there is an obligation to help those less fortunate when one has the ability to do so; 61% of respondents agreed with this statement, of whom 11% were in strong agreement.

In contrast to recent surveys in Japan on public attitudes to foreign policy – where respondents justify extending development cooperation primarily on strategic grounds, for example, as a way to secure a stable supply of resources such as energy – these survey responses suggest that most people are motivated primarily by a moral responsibility to address conflicts beyond their borders.<sup>5</sup>

### Very few people believe that there is no obligation to address conflict

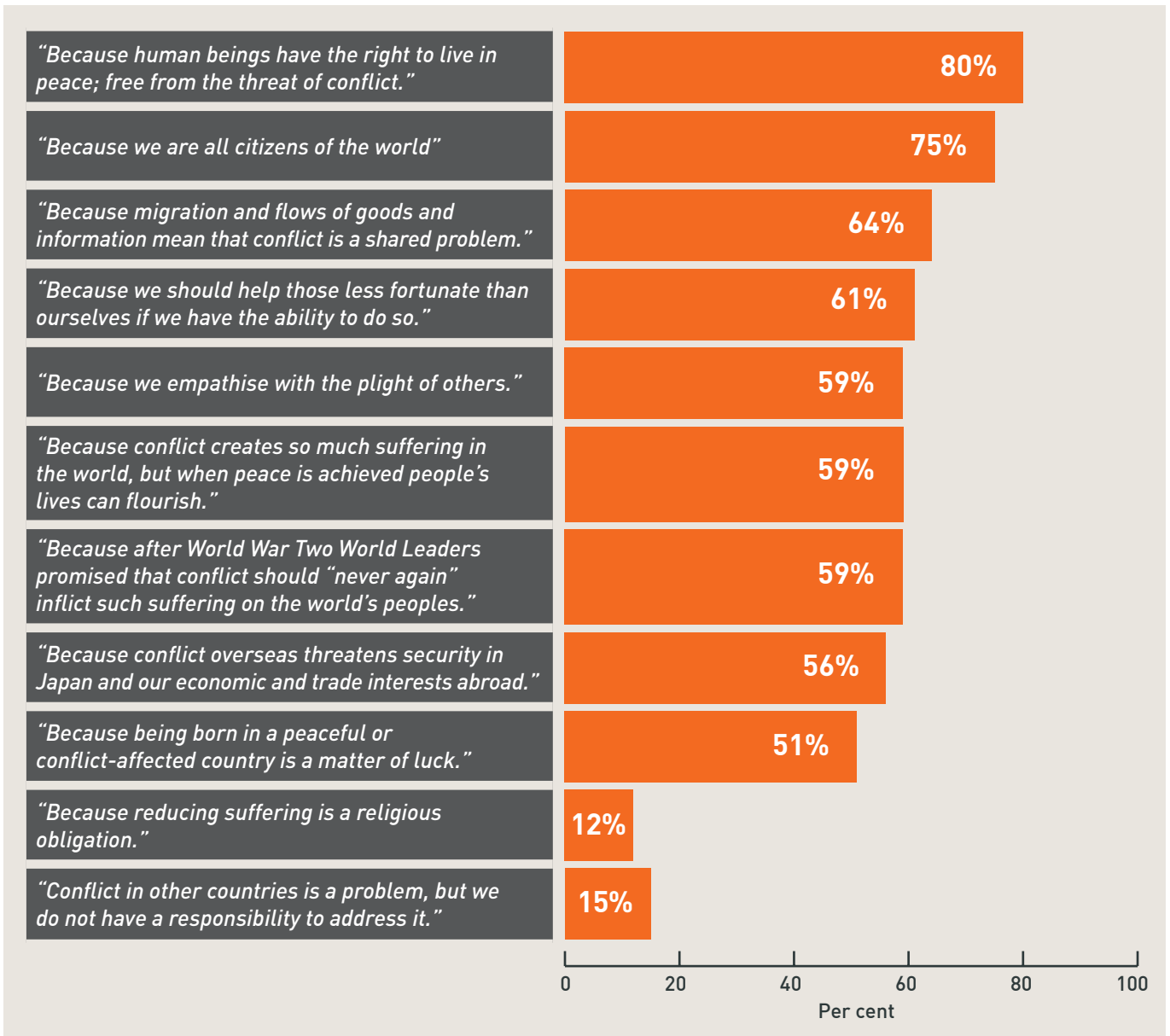
Further evidence of this moral imperative can be seen in the responses to the following statement:

***Conflict in other countries is a problem, but we do not have a responsibility to address it.***

Only 15% of people agreed that there was no obligation to address conflict in other countries, with 44% in direct disagreement. Men were 5 percentage points more likely to express agreement than women (18% and 13% respectively) and figures were also higher among younger people than the older generation (21% in agreement among the 18-24, 25-34 and 35-44 age categories, compared with 10% among the over 65s). Respondents' income appeared to influence responses, with those on higher incomes more inclined to agree than those on lower incomes. For example, 22% of respondents earning over 10 million Yen (about £75,000) agreed, compared with 13% for those earning under 2 million Yen (about £15,000).



### CHART 3: JUSTIFICATIONS FOR PEACEBUILDING SUPPORT



In relation to surveys in the UK, US and Germany, respondents in Japan were the least likely to feel no responsibility to address conflicts in other countries. In Germany 24% of respondents agreed with the statement, and in the UK and US, respondents were more than twice as likely to agree with the statement than in Japan, at 31% and 37% respectively. Respondents in Japan were also the least likely to agree that national security and economic and trade interests were justifications for peacebuilding, with 56% in agreement, compared to 70% in Germany, 72% in the UK and 76% in the US.

The results for this survey question demonstrate that peacebuilding has widespread appeal for the Japanese public, and show how greater prioritisation or investment by Japanese policymakers could be justified and presented with public backing.

### 3. PEOPLE PREFER CIVILIAN PEACE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES TO MILITARY RESPONSES TO CONFLICT

We asked all respondents to consider ‘the historical and cultural background of Japan’ and, with that in mind, how best Japan might contribute to building peace. We issued a split test, in which half the respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that Japan should contribute through the following ways:

***...through military means, such as contribution to UN peacekeeping operations.***

The other half were asked to what extent they agreed that “Japan should contribute...”:

***...through civilian peace promotion, such as facilitating dialogue between groups in conflict.***

63% of respondents agreed that Japan should contribute through civilian peace promotion, while 43% agreed with support through military means. In terms of strength of public feeling, 12% of respondents strongly supported civilian peace promotion and only 5% of respondents disagreed. For the statement on military responses,

only 6% agreed strongly, and 16% disagreed that this was how Japan should best contribute to peace. This suggests a clear public preference for peacebuilding activities, such as dialogue and mediation – fields in which Japan has played an important role [see Box 3: Japan’s role in the Mindanao peace process].

Across gender, age and income, every demographic group displayed a preference for civilian peace promotion over military responses. A breakdown of the results for military means shows that those who expressed strongest agreement were male (47%), those between the ages of 55 and 64 (52%), and those earning between 6-8 million Yen (54%). However, all three groups still expressed greater support for civilian peace promotion (70% for men, 64% for the 55-64-year olds and 65% for those earning between 6-8 million Yen).

Of those who were asked about civilian peace promotion, 70% of men agreed with this statement, compared to 56% of women. The highest support was found among those who were over the age of 65, with 78% agreeing, and among those in the highest income bracket, earning over 10 million Yen (over £75,000), with 80% agreeing.

#### BOX 3: JAPAN’S ROLE IN THE MINDANAO PEACE PROCESS

Conflict in the region of Mindanao in the Philippines began in 1969, caused more than 120,000 deaths and forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Peace negotiations spanned 17 years. Japan became involved in the peace process at the invitation of the Government of the Philippines in 2005, when it joined the International Monitoring Team to monitor a ceasefire agreement reached two years earlier between the government of Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

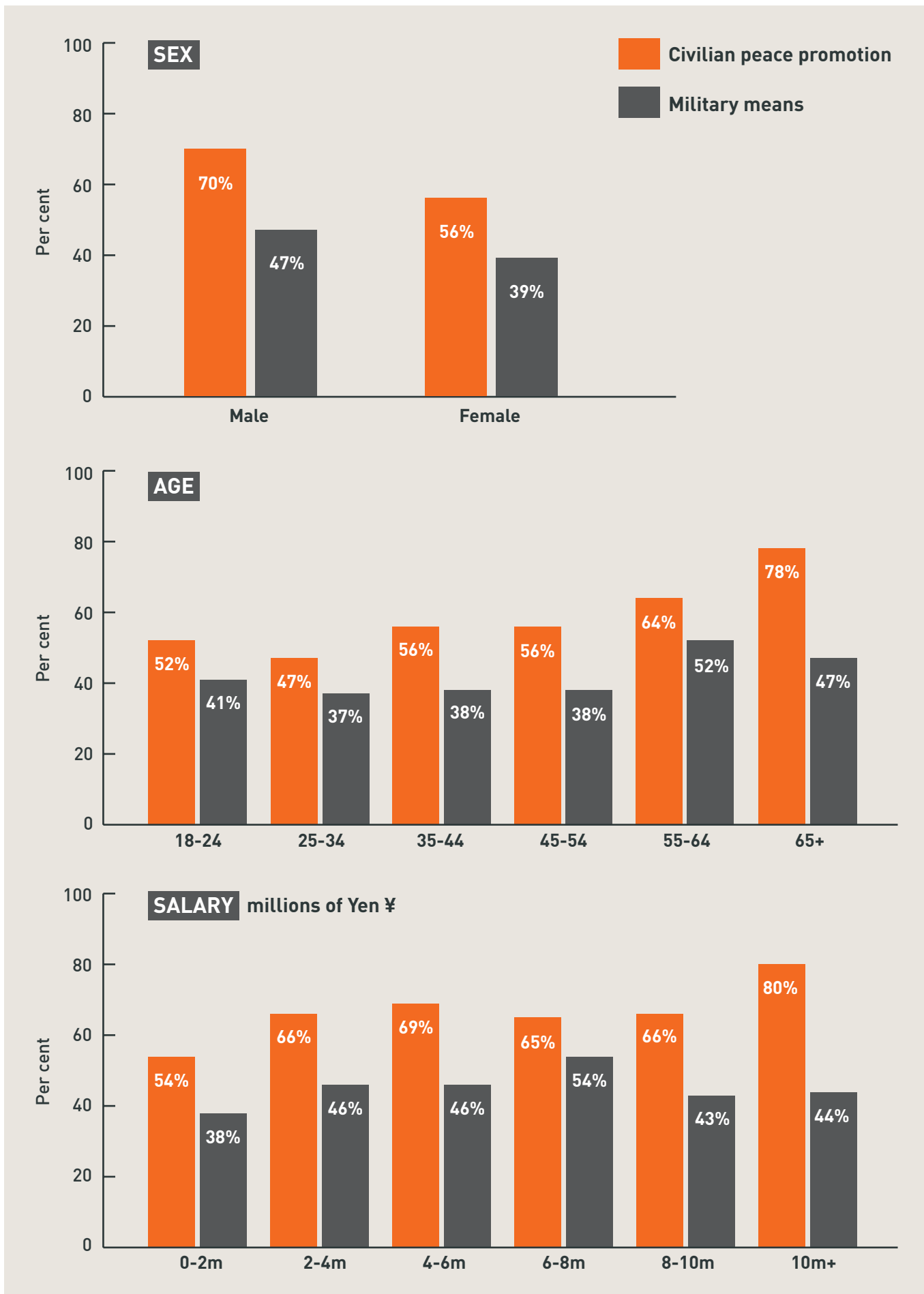
When talks broke down in August 2008, armed conflict reignited. This breakdown prompted the establishment of a new mechanism, the International Contact Group (ICG), designed to support talks which started in February 2010. Japan and Conciliation Resources were members of the ICG along with three other states and international non-governmental organisations (NGO). Their role was to observe the talks, maintain trust between the parties, and ensure the implementation of mutually agreed approaches.

Beyond mediation support, Japan helped the peace process through economic and cooperation projects, such as the Japan-Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development, and by hosting informal talks in Japan in 2011 between the President of the Philippines and the MILF Chairman.

Peace talks continued until 2014 when a Comprehensive Peace Agreement on the Bangsamoro was signed. It was the first significant peace agreement worldwide in ten years, and the creative support mechanisms have become a reference point for other contemporary peace processes.

Over the years, Japan has played important mediation support roles in other contexts, including in Cambodia, Indonesia during the Aceh peace process, and Sri Lanka, where it acted as co-chair of the peace talks.

**CHART 4: HOW JAPAN SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE EFFORTS**



## 4. PEOPLE SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT WITH ARMED GROUPS AS PART OF A STRATEGY TO END CONFLICT

We asked people whether they supported governments, including Japan, and international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), engaging in different ways with armed groups in order to seek an end to violent conflict. We also asked whether they supported engagement by charities/NGOs/non-profit organisations (NPOs) and local communities. The different forms of engagement we tested were 'talk with', 'mediate between' and 'negotiate with'.

### International organisations

There was very high support for international organisations, such as the UN, to further peace through engagement with armed groups. Respondents were particularly in favour of international organisations being able to 'talk with' armed groups, with 75% agreeing. There was also high support for international organisations being able to 'negotiate with' armed groups (69%) and to 'mediate between' them (67%).

In all cases, the oldest age group (those 65 and over) were the most inclined to agree with engagement by international organisations (85% supported 'talking to', 82% supported 'mediating between' and 75% supported 'negotiating with'). Younger people were slightly less inclined to agree, particularly 25-34-year olds: 64% supported 'talking to', 54% supported 'mediating between', and 58% supported 'negotiating with'. Men were more supportive than women, with the biggest percentage difference in the support for international organisations 'negotiating with' armed groups (75% of men agreed, compared to 65% of women).

### Governments

There was also a good level of support for governments, including Japan, 'talking with' armed groups (59% agreed), but a slightly lower response for 'mediating between' and 'negotiating with', at 49% and 48% respectively. However, those who directly disagreed with engagement were few: only 7% of respondents disagreed that governments should 'talk with' armed groups, 11% disagreed with 'mediating between' and 13% with 'negotiating with'.

Many respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with government engagement with armed groups: 28% in the case of 'talking with', 31% for 'mediating between' and 33% for 'negotiating with'.

With so few directly disagreeing with engagement, the results suggest potential for the Japanese government to engage more proactively with armed groups, with public support. A potential way to increase support among those who remain undecided may be to provide evidence that it works [see Box 4 - Does it work?].

### BOX 4: DOES IT WORK?

As well as establishing whether people felt various actors should engage with armed groups or proscribed terrorist organisations, we wanted to know whether people felt that engagement actually *worked*. We asked to what extent people agreed that:

***...peace processes that engage with [armed groups/terrorists] can help to end violent conflict?***

38% of respondents agreed that engagement with armed groups can help to end violent conflict. This was substantially lower than the results in the UK (64%), US (56%) and Germany (50%). Furthermore, only 31% of Japanese respondents felt that engaging with terrorists could help to end violent conflict, and there was an almost equal level of disagreement with this statement (28%).

A third of respondents (33%) answered that they neither agreed nor disagreed with government engagement with armed groups. In the case of engagement with proscribed groups, this was 30%.

One possible explanation for these responses, including the high number of those who were undecided, may be that Japan has few concrete examples on which respondents could draw when considering this question.

### Charities/NGOs/NPOs

Responses on the role of charities/NGOs/NPOs were similar to those for government engagement: 54% supported 'talking with', 50% supported 'mediating between', and 43% supported 'negotiating with' armed groups. In the case of mediation, respondents demonstrated marginally more support for charities/NGOs/NPOs engaging than governments. There was very little disagreement that these informal institutions should engage at all; 9% of respondents disagreed that charities/NGOs/NPOs should 'talk with' or 'mediate between' armed groups, and 14% disagreed that they should 'negotiate with' them.

The public do not typically associate charities with sensitive, political efforts to end conflict, including with armed groups; they are more likely to think of NGOs providing domestic or international charitable services. Yet NGOs can and do play vital and expert roles in helping to mediate conflict and encourage a move away from violence [see Box 5 – NGO engagement with armed groups]. It is encouraging to see from the survey results that respondents have some understanding of the role that charities/NGOs/NPOs can play in the more politically sensitive areas of peacebuilding and that they feel their contribution can be as valuable as that of national governments.

## BOX 5: NGO ENGAGEMENT WITH ARMED GROUPS

### Conciliation Resources' work in the Horn of Africa

For more than two decades, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has fought for self-determination for Somalis in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia. When peace talks began between government of Ethiopia and the ONLF in 2012, peacebuilding NGO Conciliation Resources was invited to support the Kenyan government's facilitation team. Over the course of six years Conciliation Resources accompanied the process, providing advice and training to prepare for negotiations, advising on the wider peace process and helping to draft the final peace deal. By being present, listening and developing relationships, Conciliation Resources provided space for reflection on contentious issues such as the constitution and self-determination. This investment meant that in 2018, when there was a change in leadership in Ethiopia, the ONLF and other parties were prepared to seize the opportunity positively.

In October 2018 a peace agreement was signed in Asmara, Eritrea. The agreement brought an end to hostilities and paved the way for the ONLF to return to the region and pursue its political objectives through peaceful means. Since then, Conciliation Resources has been supporting the conflict parties in the implementation of the peace deal and transition to peace. This includes learning trips to Northern Ireland, the Basque Country and Mindanao, so that ONLF leaders can learn from other conflicts about transitioning to a political organisation. In November 2019, the ONLF was legally registered as a political party in Ethiopia and is now preparing to participate in the national and regional elections (due in 2020/21).

### The work of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) in Southern Thailand

Since the 19th century, the southernmost provinces of Thailand bordering Malaysia have experienced violence and conflict. The Patani people, a Malay-Muslim ethno-religious group, make up 80% of the region's population and claim a distinct history and identity to the majority of Thailand's population who are Thai-speaking Buddhists. Conflict has centred on self-determination, fought by Patani armed groups against the Thai military. Since 2004 the conflict has resulted in the death of around 7000 people. 'Peace dialogue' between the Thai government and the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, the largest of the Patani armed opposition groups, started in 2013. Both parties continue to explore workable solutions, although many attempts have failed.

The SPF has been involved in supporting peace initiatives in southern Thailand since 2010, engaging with the conflict parties at multiple levels to promote 'peace dialogue' and its benefits to the Thai government, military and Patani armed groups. SPF has supported backchannel communications between both parties' technical teams. They have provided training to local communities and facilitated inclusive discussions with communities, journalists, religious leaders and others, to provide a channel for ongoing peace dialogue and spaces to air views.

### Local communities

Support for local communities' engagement with armed groups was lower than for the other institutions. While just under half of respondents agreed that local communities should be able to 'talk with' armed groups (48%), this figure dropped to 41% for 'mediating between' and 37% for 'negotiating with'.

Although local communities may often not be the most visible actors in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, they have the greatest insights into conflict causes, dynamics and possible solutions, as well as the greatest stake in peace. Individuals within communities affected by violence are often the 'pioneers of peace talks'.<sup>6</sup>

They often take huge risks to engage with and influence armed actors, be it to negotiate hostage release, convey community demands or negotiate local ceasefires. Many local mediators are women. Raising public awareness of their roles can broaden the options for engagement with armed groups to promote peace, and support and help protect individuals and their efforts.

## Labels matter

To see the effect that the 'terrorism' label has on public perceptions, we tested responses to the idea of engagement when an armed group is a 'proscribed terrorist organisation'. As for the previous question, we asked respondents whether governments, international organisations, NGOs and local communities should engage with 'proscribed terrorist organisations'. Once again, the types of engagement were to 'talk with', 'mediate between' and to 'negotiate with'.

Prior to responding, survey participants were asked to read the following context statement:

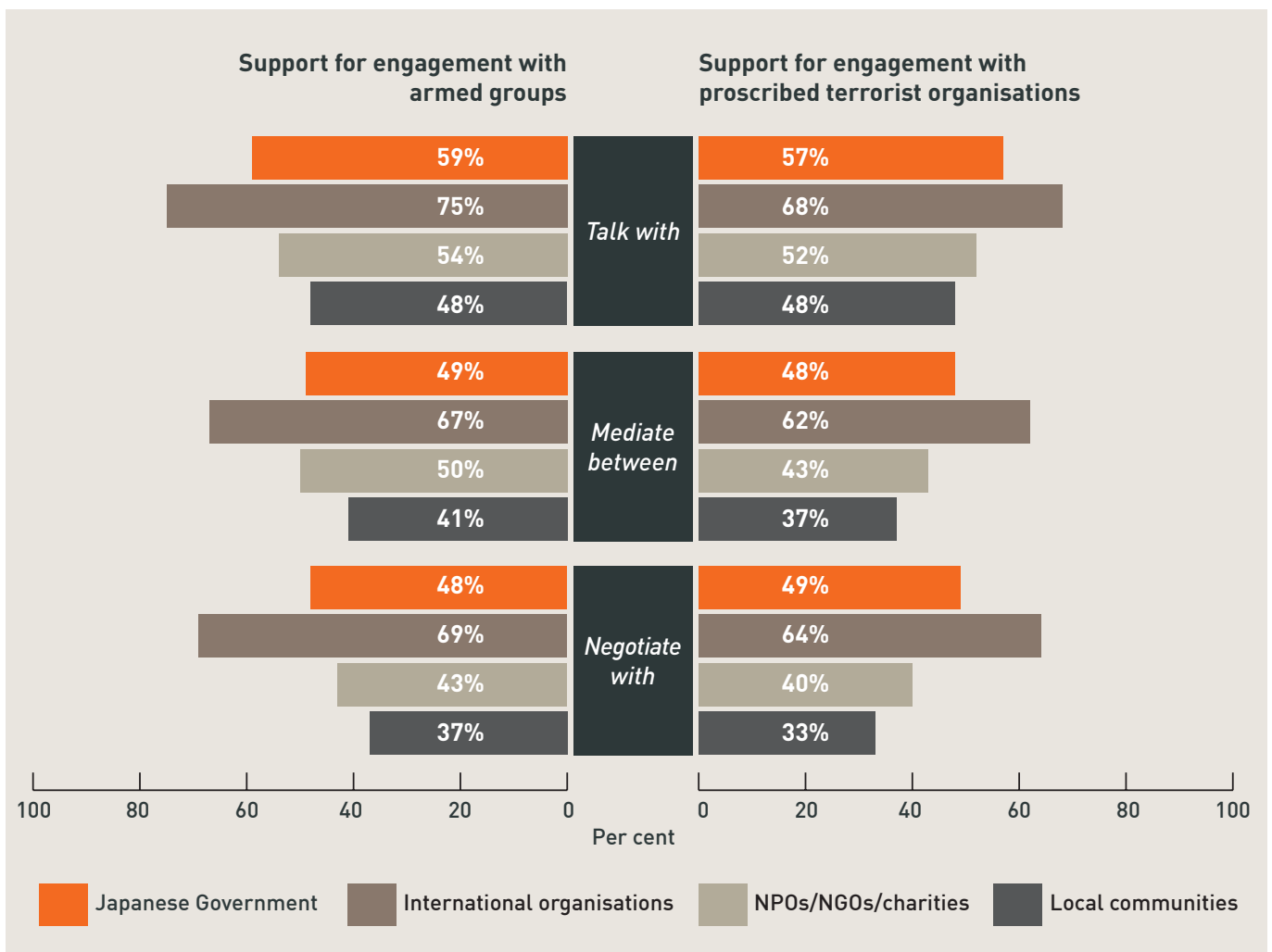
***Peacebuilders play a role in reducing deaths and ending violence in communities affected by conflict, by helping to mediate with and between groups involved in violence. For example, helping adversaries to put down arms and reach peace in Northern Ireland, and supporting conversations leading to a peace agreement between armed groups and the government in Colombia.***

***The UN, the EU and some national governments officially identify some armed groups as 'proscribed terrorist organisations' because they are proven to have a connection to terrorist activity. Armed groups in Northern Ireland and Colombia were 'proscribed', for example. Proscribing an armed group can affect interaction with the group, including peacebuilding activities.***

Levels of support for engagement declined in most cases. When the term 'proscribed terrorist organisations' was used, support for international organisations, such as the UN, 'talking with' armed groups dropped by 7 percentage points. Similarly, there was a 2 percentage point decrease in support for both governments and for charities/NGOs/NPOs to engage in this way.

Support also declined for other types of engagement. Support for charities/NGOs/NPOs to 'mediate between' proscribed terrorist organisations declined by 7 percentage points in comparison with the term 'armed group'. Likewise, there was a 5 percentage point drop in support for international organisations to do so,

**CHART 5: SUPPORT FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH ARMED GROUPS TO FURTHER PEACE**



a 4 percentage point decline for local communities to do so, and a 1 percentage point drop for governments. We also found an average 4 percentage point decrease in support for 'negotiating with' a group when the term 'proscribed terrorist organisation' was used, with the sole exception of support for governments to do so, which was 1 percentage point higher.

Overall, however, it should be noted that engagement with 'proscribed terrorist organisations' was still relatively popular. 68% of respondents were in favour of engagement with proscribed terrorist organisations when this was carried out by the UN, which also proved the most popular choice of actor to undertake mediation and negotiation.

Furthermore, more than half of respondents still supported their government engaging with proscribed terrorist organisations in more informal ways (i.e. 'talking with'), and just under half still favoured 'mediating between' (48%) and 'negotiating with' (49%). While support for engagement by informal institutions – charities/NGOs/NPOs and local communities – was lower, more than half (52%) of respondents still felt that charities should play informal roles in talking with proscribed terrorist organisations in order to end violent conflict.

The findings demonstrate that the act of proscribing and labelling an armed group as 'terrorist' has both legal and strategic consequences. The label generates a highly emotive response from the public, exacerbated by the liberal use of the word in the media [See Box 6: Emotional responses]. By extension the results suggest that proscribing an armed group may remove some scope and space for policymakers, NGOs and local communities to pursue mediated solutions to violent conflict.

## BOX 6: EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

We wanted to understand more about the emotional response people have to the idea of peacebuilding engagement with armed groups. We asked respondents how they would feel if they knew that the Japanese government had played a key role in negotiating peace between armed groups somewhere else in the world.

The results were mostly positive. The top 3 responses were 'proud' (38%), 'hopeful' (34%) and 'happy' (29%). These were very similar to the findings of the previous surveys in the UK, US and Germany. However more than a quarter of respondents in Japan (26%) felt 'uneasy', which was the fourth most popular response.

There were some clear demographic differences across gender and age. Although women felt positive overall, they were more ambivalent than men, and more women expressed feeling uneasy than men (30%, compared with 22% for men), making it their second most popular response. Younger people too were more cautious. For 18-24-year olds the most popular response was 'uneasy', with 36% selecting this. 27% of 18-25-year olds said that they would feel 'hopeful' but 26% also indicated that they would feel 'afraid'.

# CONCLUSIONS

The survey findings suggest that peacebuilding has a universal appeal to the Japanese public and that greater prioritisation and investment by the Japanese government would receive public backing. The results indicate that most Japanese people agree that peacebuilding has a vital role to play in the ending of violent conflict. Many also have a good understanding of what peacebuilding involves and support Japan investing more in it, primarily on moral grounds, over and above military responses. Viewed alongside the results of public surveys in the US, UK and Germany in 2017, the survey provides useful data to encourage active public support for and more confident investment in peacebuilding by governments and multilateral organisations.

The level of uncertainty in responses to some of the questions show that there is also potential for greater public information and education in Japan about peacebuilding, including who is involved and what it can achieve. Attitudes to engagement with armed groups, including proscribed terrorist organisations, in the pursuit of peace show that the public tolerate engagement by governments and civil society. However, there is scope to raise awareness of what engagement entails in order to broaden public and policymakers' acceptance of the range of ways to support a peace process. Conversely, the findings show that labelling groups as 'terrorist' can limit the potential to do so.

Recommendations to Japanese government and civil society:

- **Prioritise peacebuilding policy and approaches nationally and internationally**, supporting approaches such as dialogue, mediation and reconciliation. More respondents supported civilian peace promotion than military responses. Use moral arguments over national interests to justify investment in peacebuilding; rights-based arguments were the most popular among the public.
- **Invest in public information and education about peacebuilding and Japan's role in it.** A proportion of respondents confused reconstruction and development projects with peacebuilding, were unsure whether more or less investment was required, and showed uncertainty on questions about engagement with armed groups. Address this information and knowledge gap, for instance through the media, in universities and schools.

- **Make long-term commitments to building peace.** People understand that peacebuilding requires long-term commitment to address the root causes of conflict and rebuild relationships. Respond through sustained political engagement and funding commitments, rather than short-term, stop-gap interventions.
- **Explore all options for engagement with armed groups to further peace.** Respondents understood the need for governments to be in contact with armed groups as part of a peace process. Respondents also supported engagement by multilateral organisations, like the UN, as well as NGOs and local communities. The Japanese government should provide political and legal cover for such efforts and communicate more openly about them as part of peace support strategies.
- **Use the 'terrorist' label sparingly in public communications:** The survey showed the negative effect of the word 'terrorist' on public appetite for contact with armed groups. Communications accompanying any peace support should limit the use of the terrorist label so as not to trigger public and media opposition.




## Methodology

This report presents the findings of a national survey conducted in Japan in December 2019. Dynata interviewed a random sample of 2149 adults aged 18+ from an online panel between 4-12 December 2019. Surveys were conducted across the country and the results were weighted by the known demographic profile of adults in Japan. Data was disaggregated by sex, age, income, location (prefecture) and political affiliation.

## ENDNOTES

1. Just under 2% of ODA is for 'government and civil society'. See 'Distribution of Bilateral ODA by Sector (2017)' in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's International Cooperation*, White Paper on Development Cooperation 2018: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2018/html/reference/02\\_3.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2018/html/reference/02_3.html)
2. Calculated from figures in Chart 20: Achievements in the field of peacebuilding, Development Cooperation Reference Materials (2018), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/press/shiryo/page22\\_001203.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/press/shiryo/page22_001203.html) and 'ODA by Type of Assistance and Currency (2017)' in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's International Cooperation*, White Paper on Development Cooperation 2018: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2018/html/reference/02\\_1.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2018/html/reference/02_1.html)
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6. Haspeslagh Sophie & Zahbia Yousuf (eds), *Accord Insight 2: Local engagement with armed groups: In the midst of violence* (London: Conciliation Resources, 2015) <https://www.c-r.org/accord/engaging-armed-groups-insight/midst-violence-local-engagement-armed-groups>



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