

GLOBAL INITIATIVE  
*on* POLARIZATION

# Global Convening *on* Polarization

BARCELONA - NOVEMBER 29-30, 2022



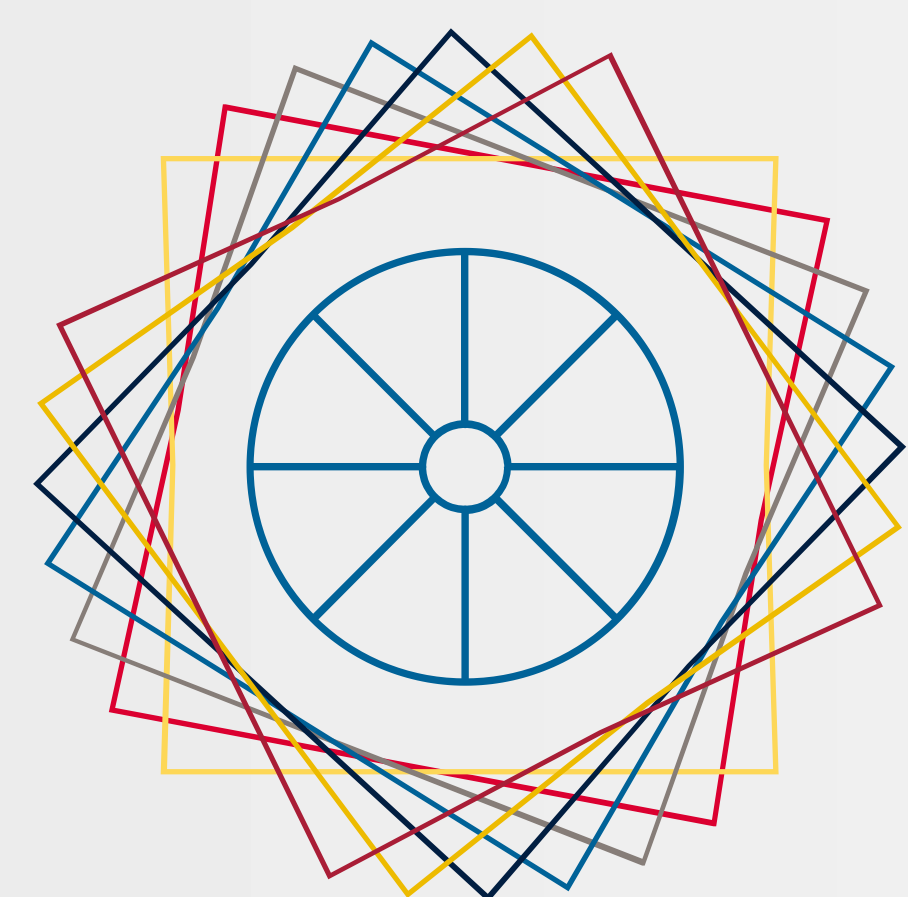
FORD FOUNDATION



INSTITUTE FOR INTEGRATED TRANSITIONS

10 YEARS OF PEACEBUILDING INNOVATION





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# Project Overview

## What

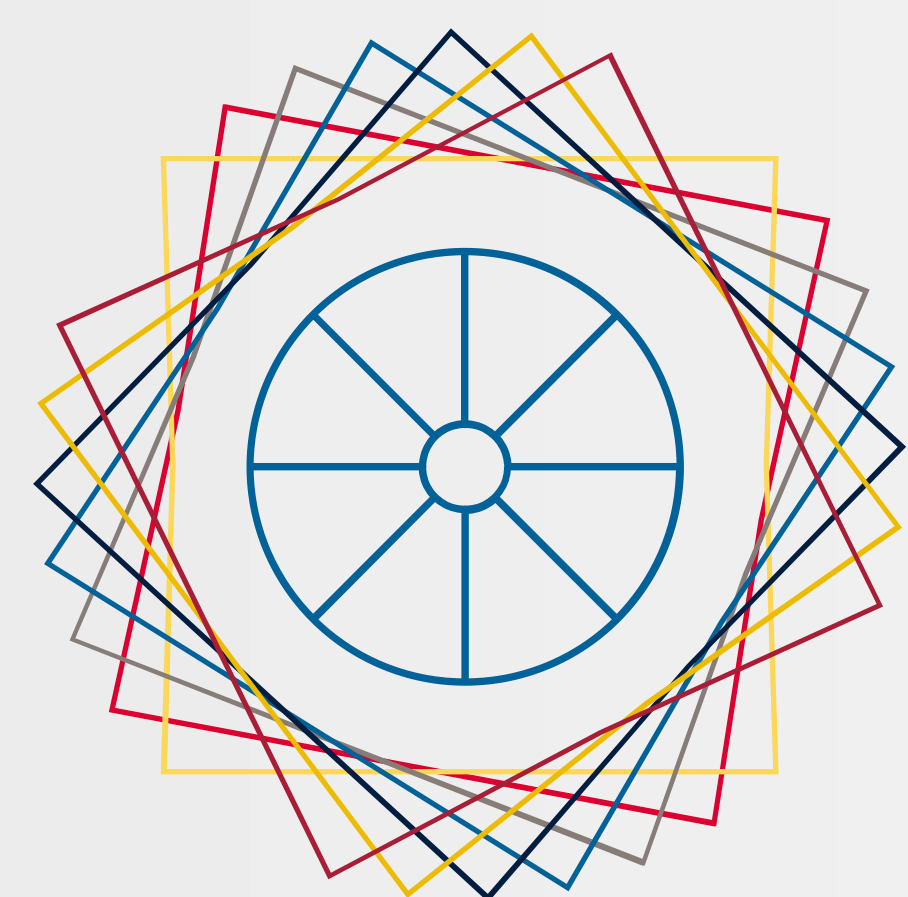
- Four-year collaboration between Ford and IFIT to foster a more global and practice-informed understanding of the diverse causes, consequences and solutions to growing polarization

## Why

- Joint assessment that P is dangerous, complex and growing
- At best, P results in paralysis that complicates major social change; at worst, P results in mass violence

## How

- Thematic and geographic research, convenings, testing, publications, etc.
- Promoting debate, alliances, joint problem solving and field development



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# Early Findings

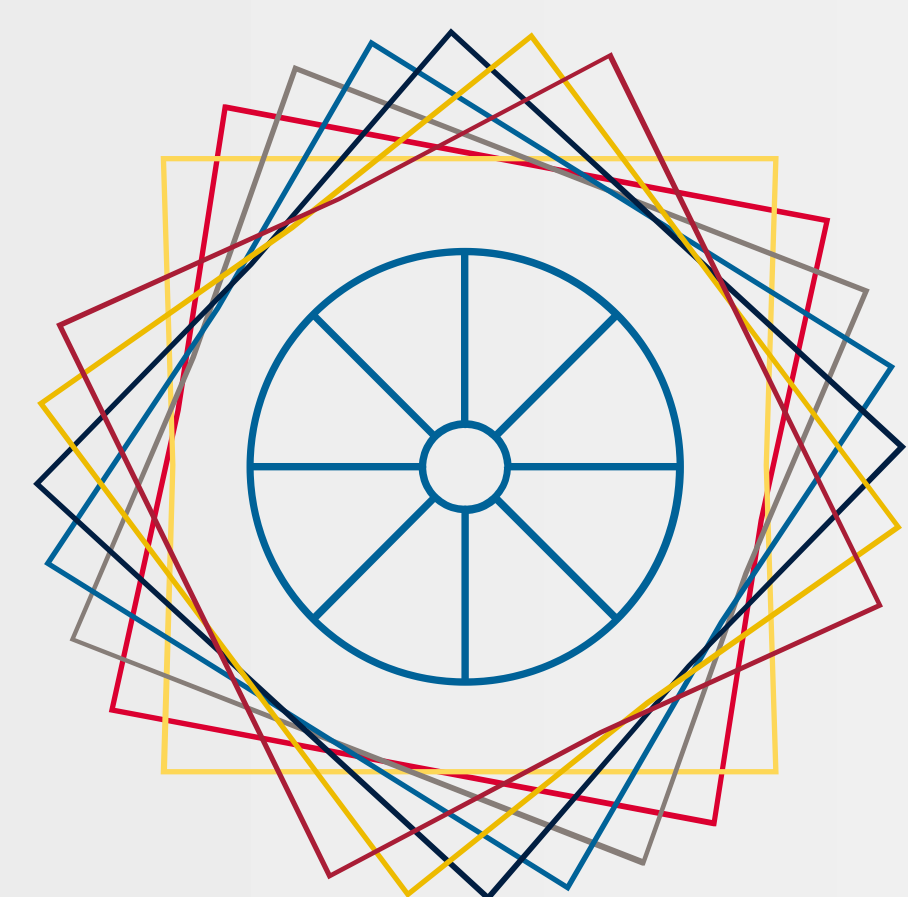
## Conceptual

- Surprising lack of consensus on various defining traits of P and disproportionate US influence on how P is understood

## Practical

- No organised global or regional set of actors or networks
- No minimal consensus on P solutions toolbox
- Differential responses: some treat P merely as a new reality to accept and adapt to (like climate change); others treat it as a problem that requires a deliberate, focused effort to fix

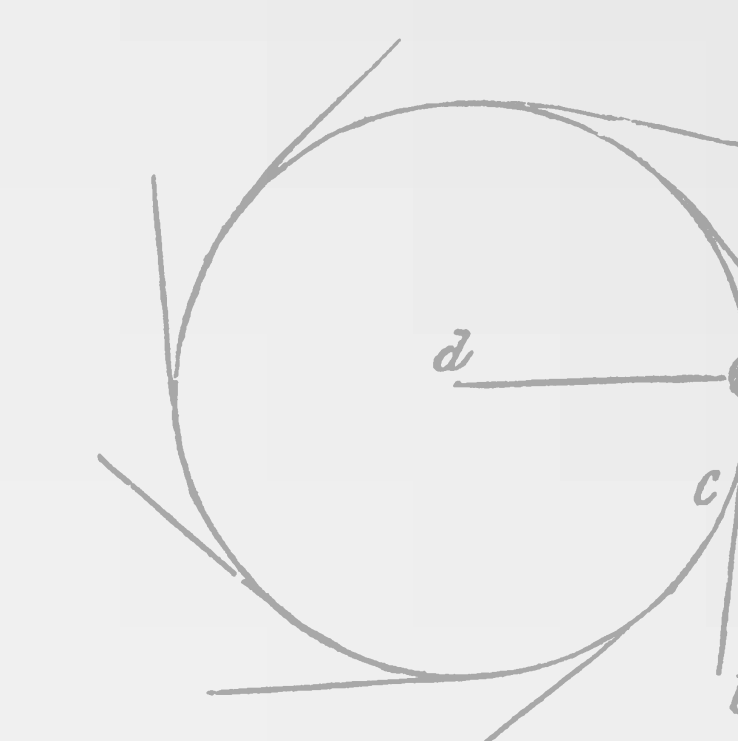




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# 'Hallmarks' of Polarization

**1- Centrifugal hallmark:** Polarization involves a move away from the centre and toward identifiable poles or extremities.



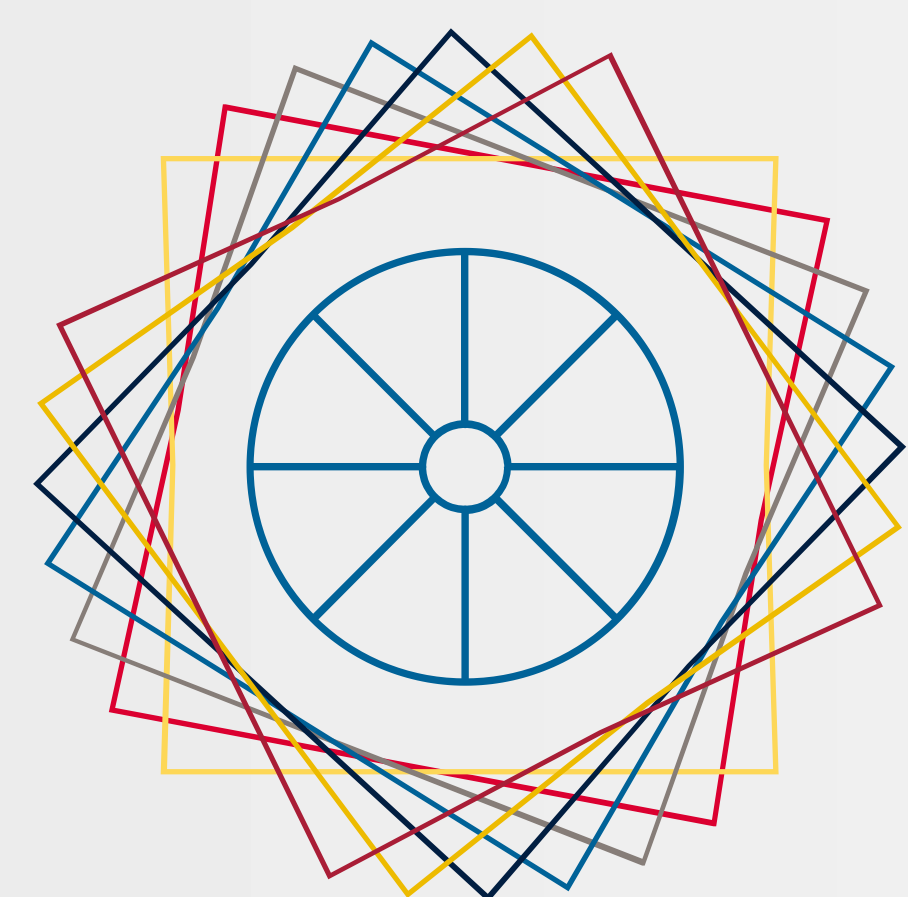
**2- Inter-group hallmark:** Polarization is a relationship problem between identifiable poles or groups. The dynamic and solution spectrum are fundamentally horizontal.



**3- Scale hallmark:** Polarization is a mass form of conflict or dispute (though it can manifest most intensely at elite levels). It is not a suitable term to use in relation to small-scale conflicts or elite disputes that have no mass social effects.







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# 'Hallmarks' of Polarization

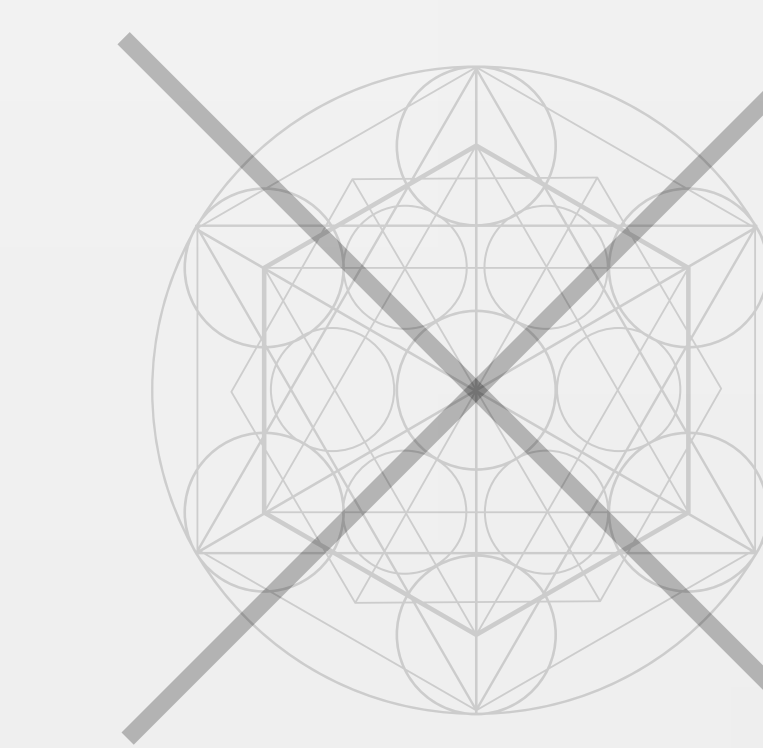
**4- *Viral hallmark:*** Polarization involves feedback loops and self-reinforcing action-reaction dynamics. It works like a contagion once it gets moving



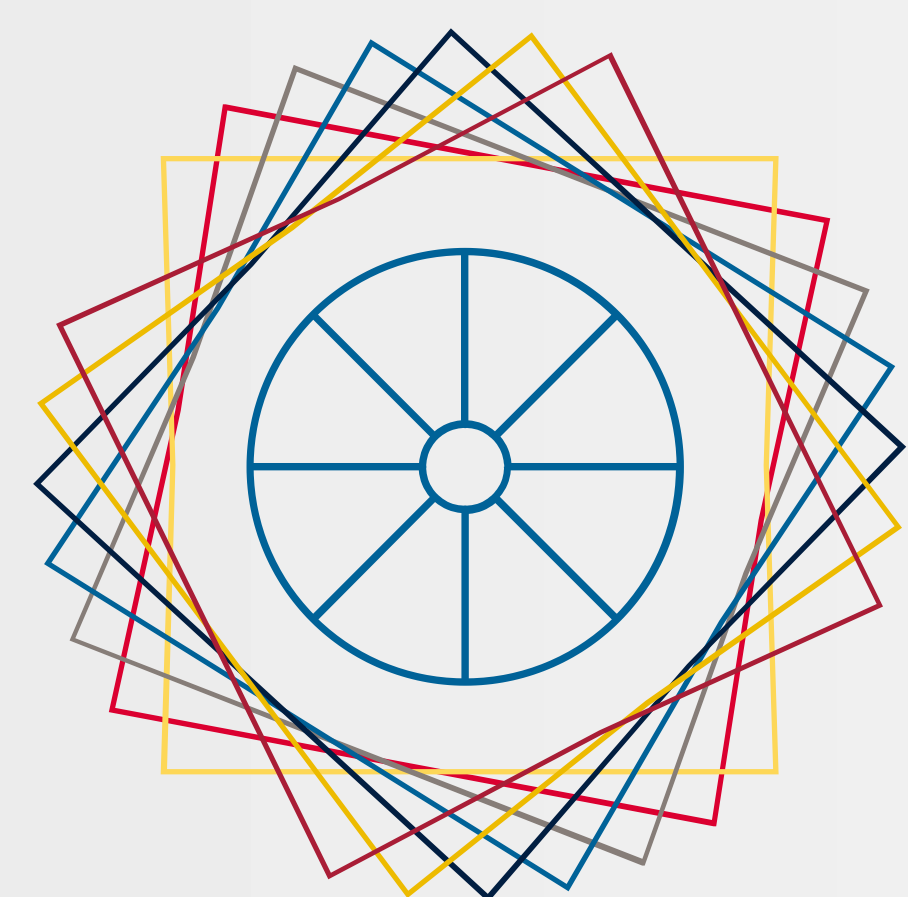
**5- *Identity hallmark:*** Polarization may be triggered by events and issues but it devolves (or amalgamates) into the terrain of identity in which the 'who' matters more than the 'what', and emotion more than reason. The greater the polarization, the more rigid the sense of identity.



**6- *Simplification hallmark:*** Polarization involves a loss of viewpoint diversity and a default to simplification, binaries, in-group romanticisation and out-group demonisation.







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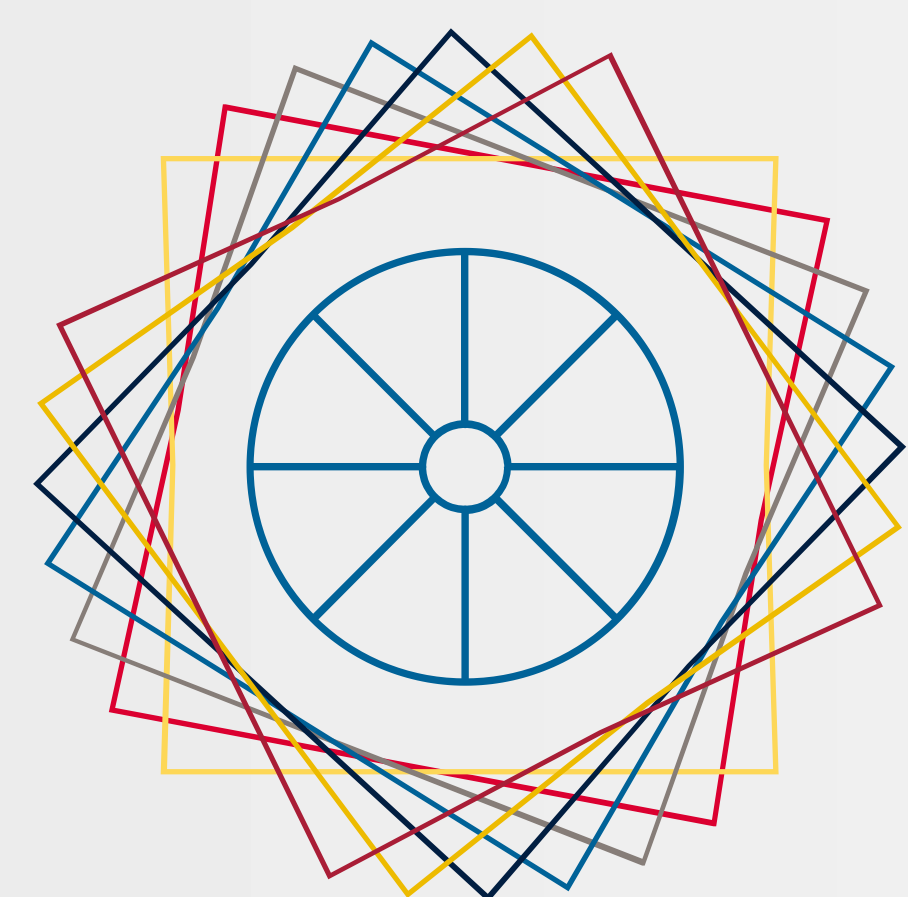
# 'Hallmarks' of Polarization

**7- *Symmetry hallmark:*** Polarization involves groups or poles that exhibit some 'rough' symmetry of power, resources and/or activity. Unilateral aggression by one group against another (especially by stronger against weaker, bigger against smaller) cannot be properly classified as polarization.

**8- *Consequential hallmark:*** Polarization involves big stakes. It is not about gastronomic preferences or other trivial matters, but about 'big questions' that involve perceived threats to society and political systems as a whole.

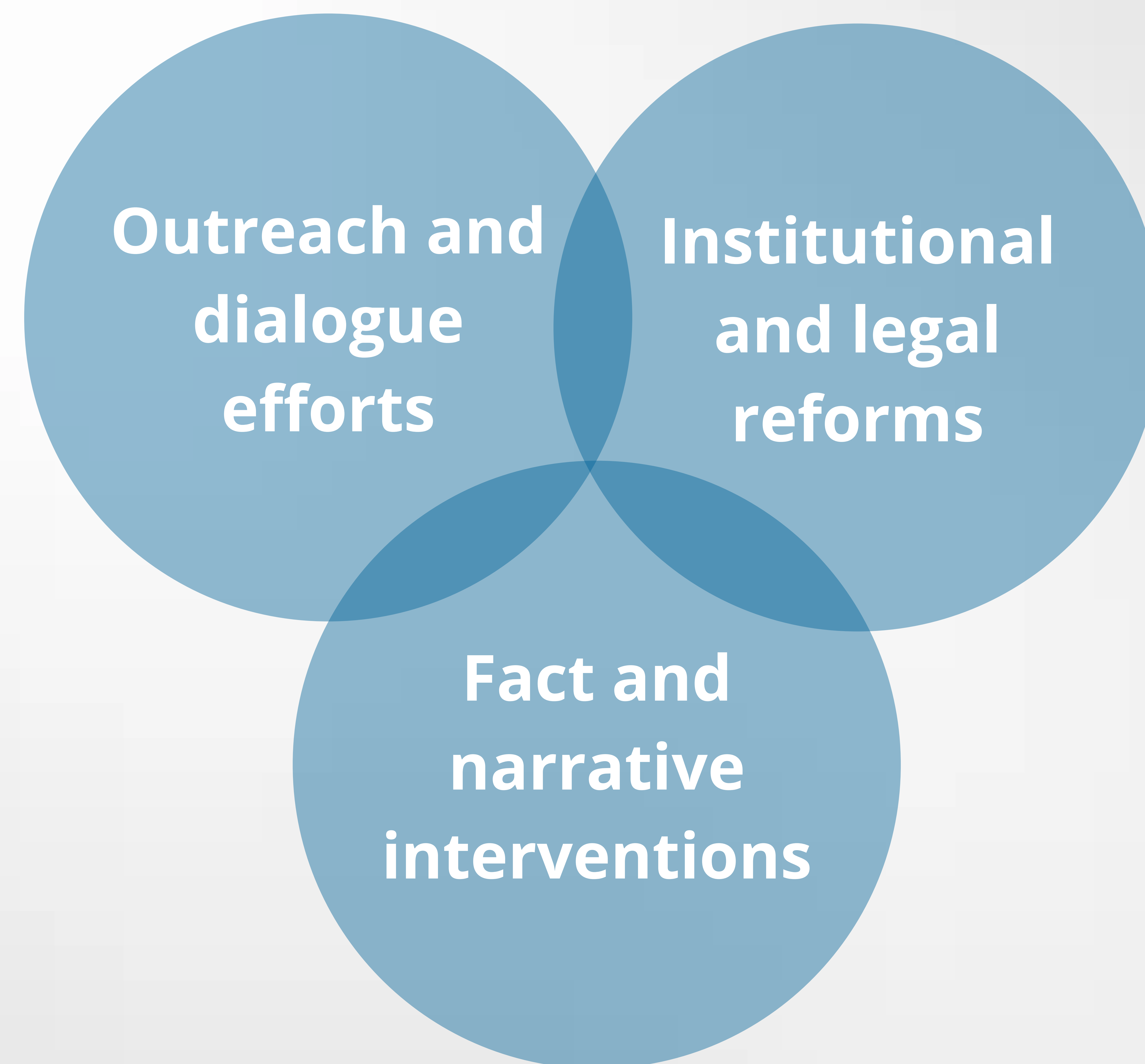




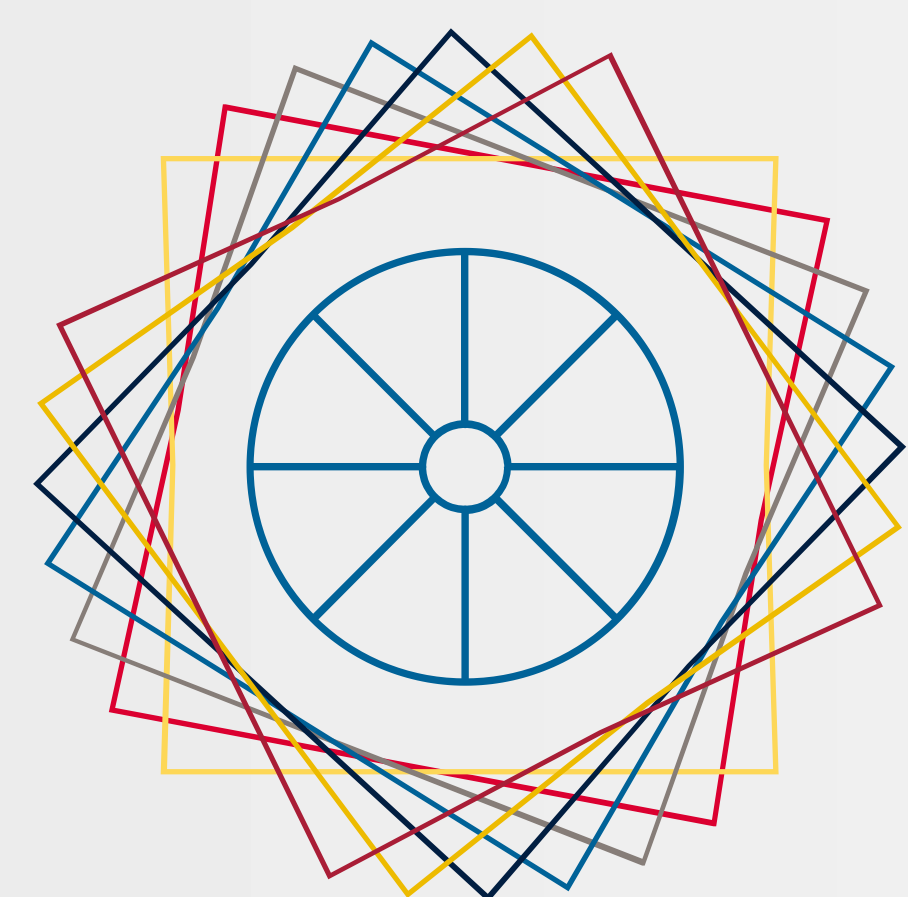


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# **Most prevalent solution categories**





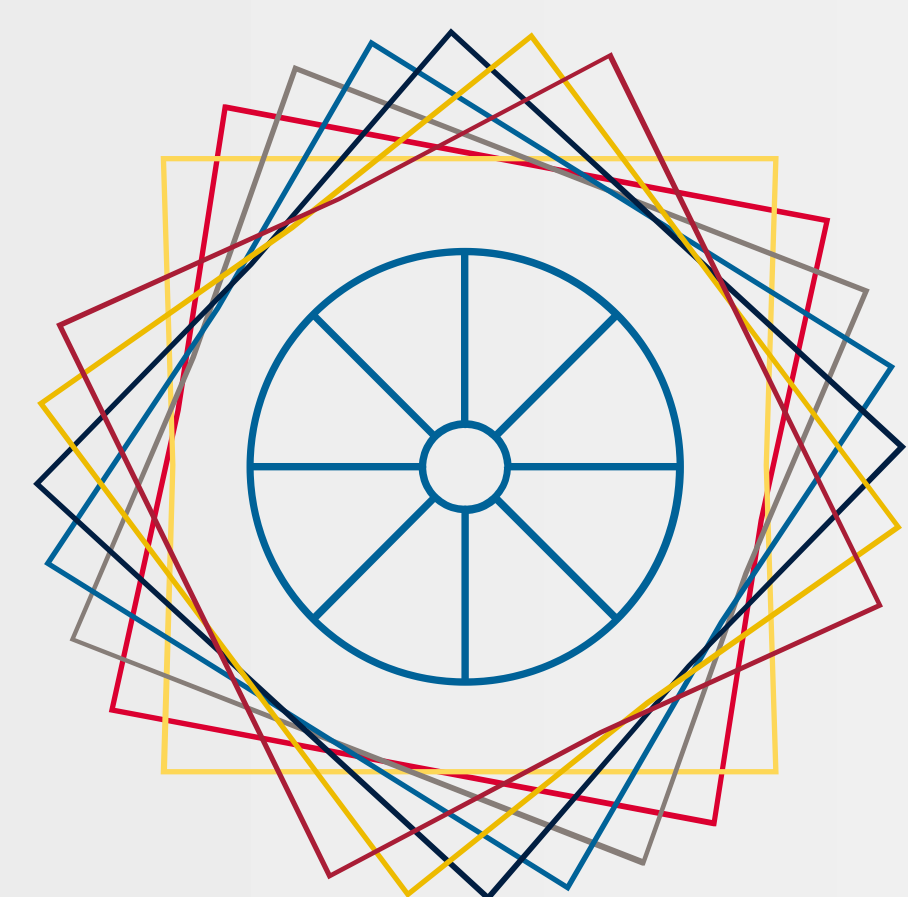


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# Cross-cutting assumption

Any successful intervention to combat P requires purposeful organisation, coalitions, political awareness, strategy formation, etc.



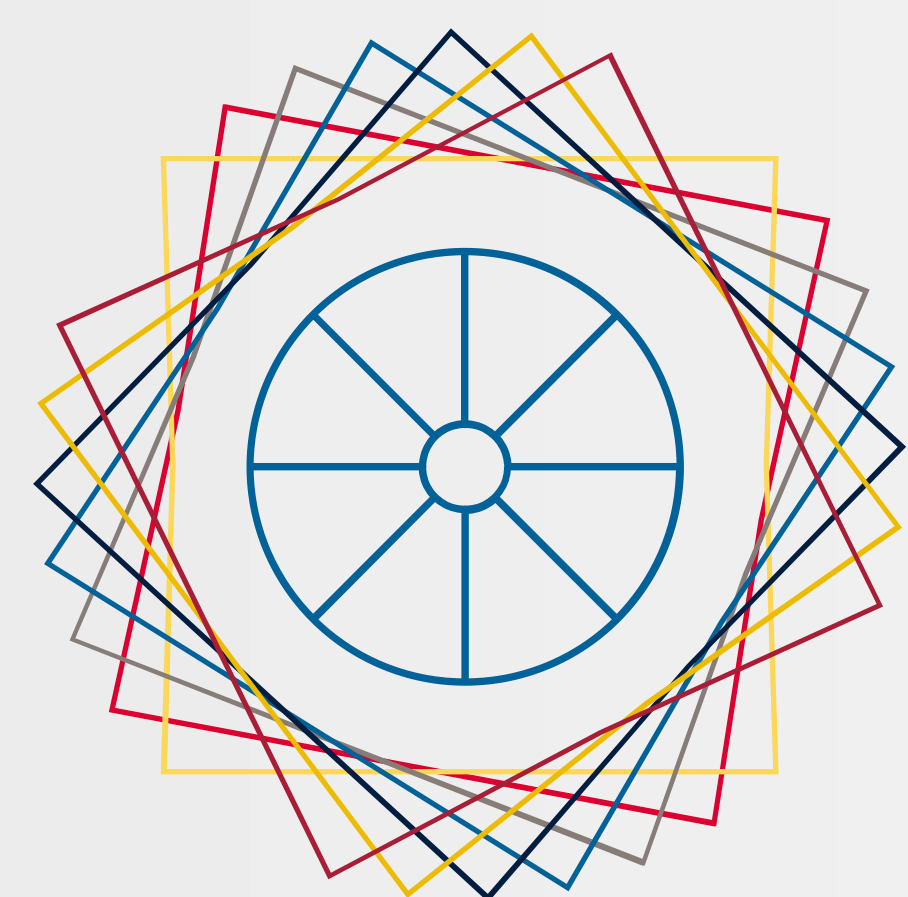


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# Context first

## Questions such as:

- Is the polarization already severe in its intensity and in its consequences?
- What is the regime type?
- Who is polarized and why?
- Are there windows of opportunity to prevent/reduce the polarization (e.g., political transitions, peace agreements, external shocks)?

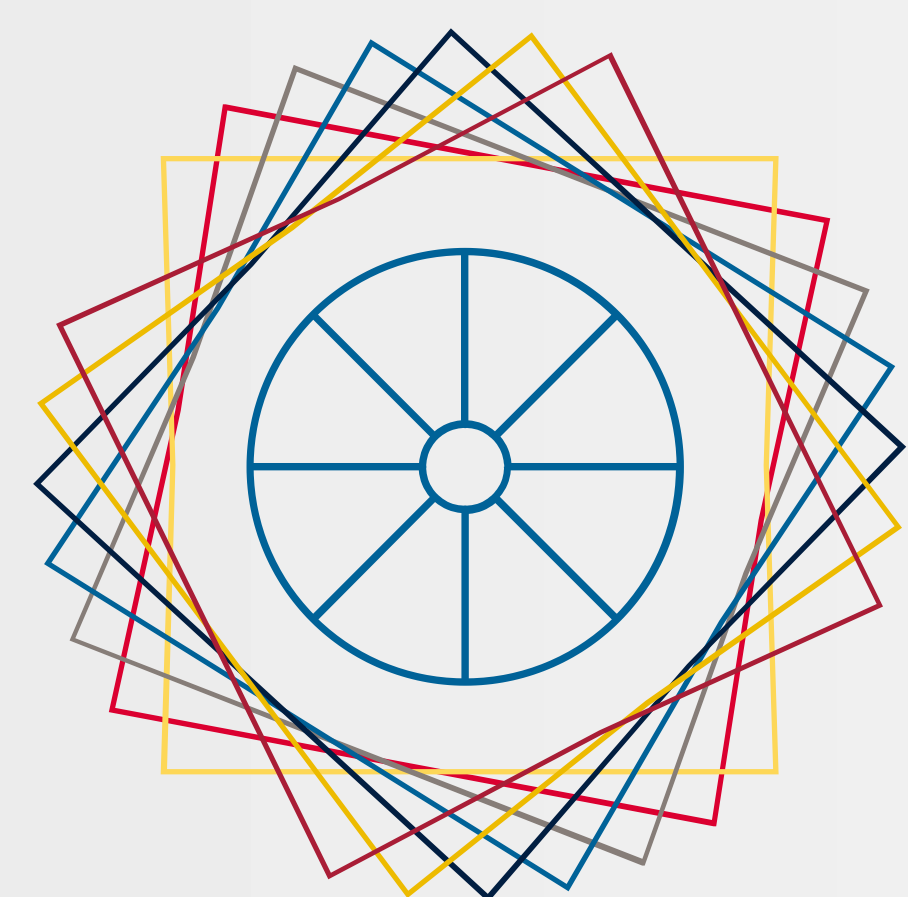


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# Intervention design variables

- In-group vs. out-group *focus*
- Cooperative vs. confrontational *approach*
- Short term vs. long term *aims*
- Micro vs. meso vs. macro *scale*
- Local vs. national vs. regional vs. global *scope*

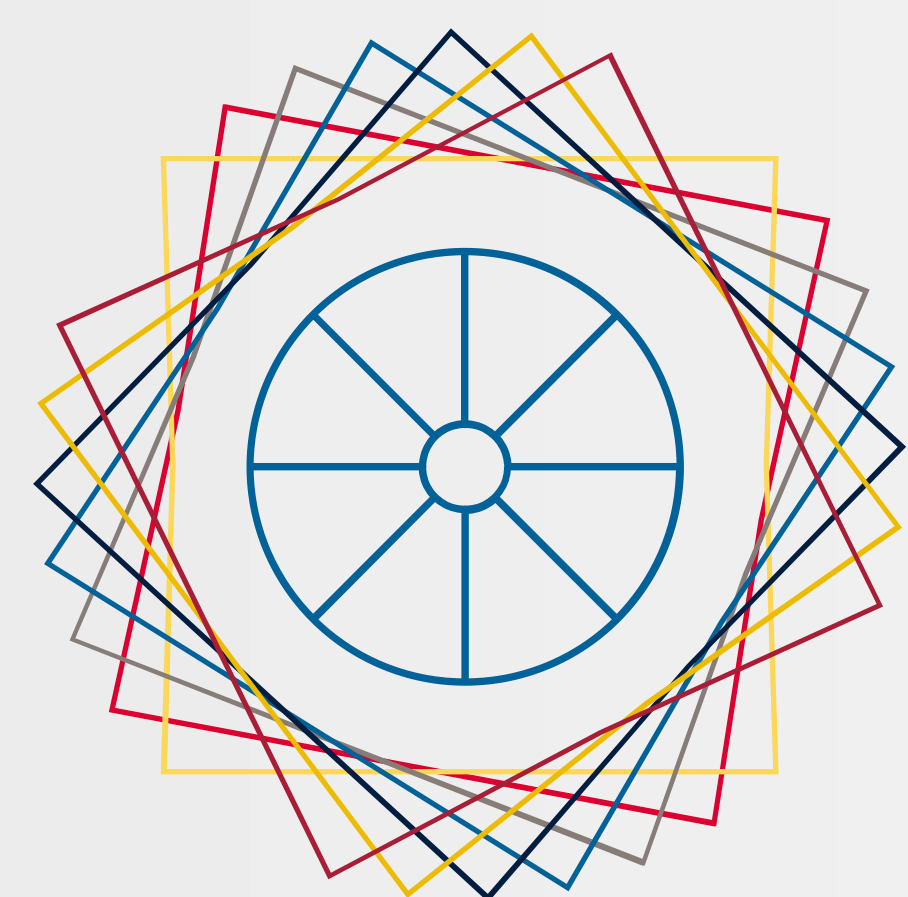




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# Outreach and dialogue efforts: examples

- ***Cooperative vs. confrontational:*** e.g., soft vs hard dialogue techniques
- ***Short term vs. long term:*** e.g., from early CBMs with spoilers and adversaries, to formal peace accords
- ***Micro vs. meso vs. macro:*** e.g., from grassroots reconciliation, to large-scale national dialogues
- ***Local vs. national vs. regional vs. global:*** e.g., intra-state and inter-state dialogue for Ukraine

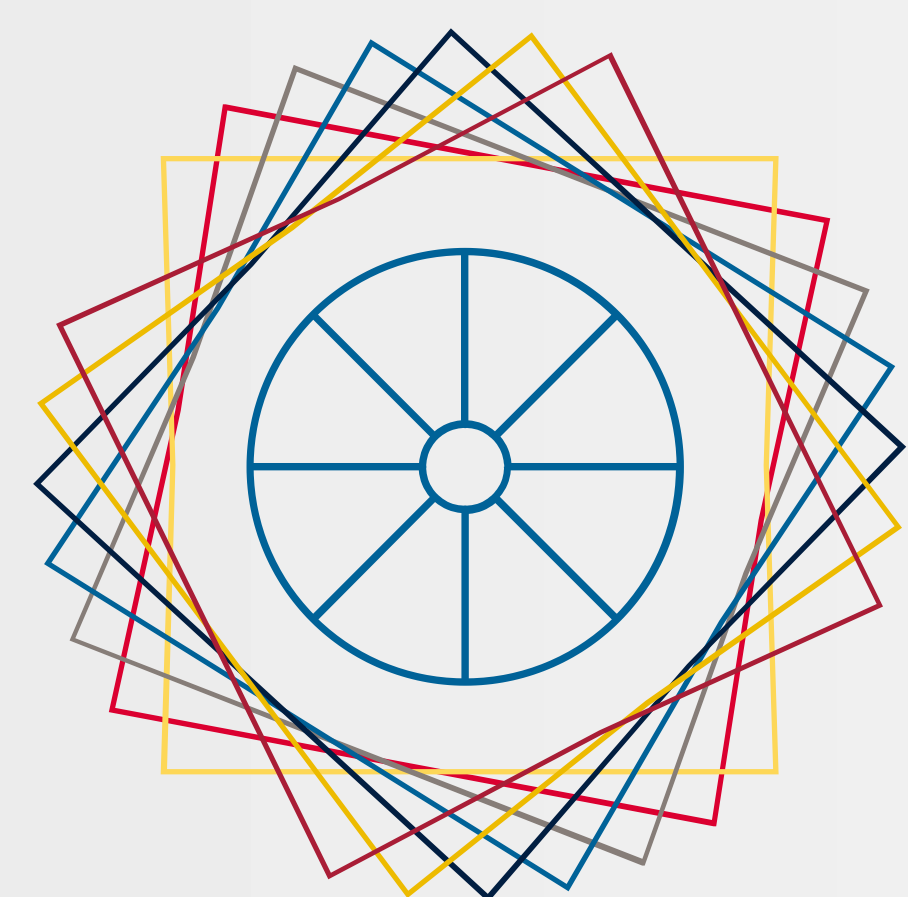


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# Fact and narrative interventions: examples

- ***Cooperative vs. confrontational:*** e.g., from alternative futures building, to combating disinformation
- ***Short term vs. long term:*** e.g., from media training to 'narrative landscape' transformation
- ***Micro vs. meso vs. macro:*** e.g., minor investigations to TRCs
- ***Local vs. national vs. regional vs. global:*** e.g., influential regional narratives and norms



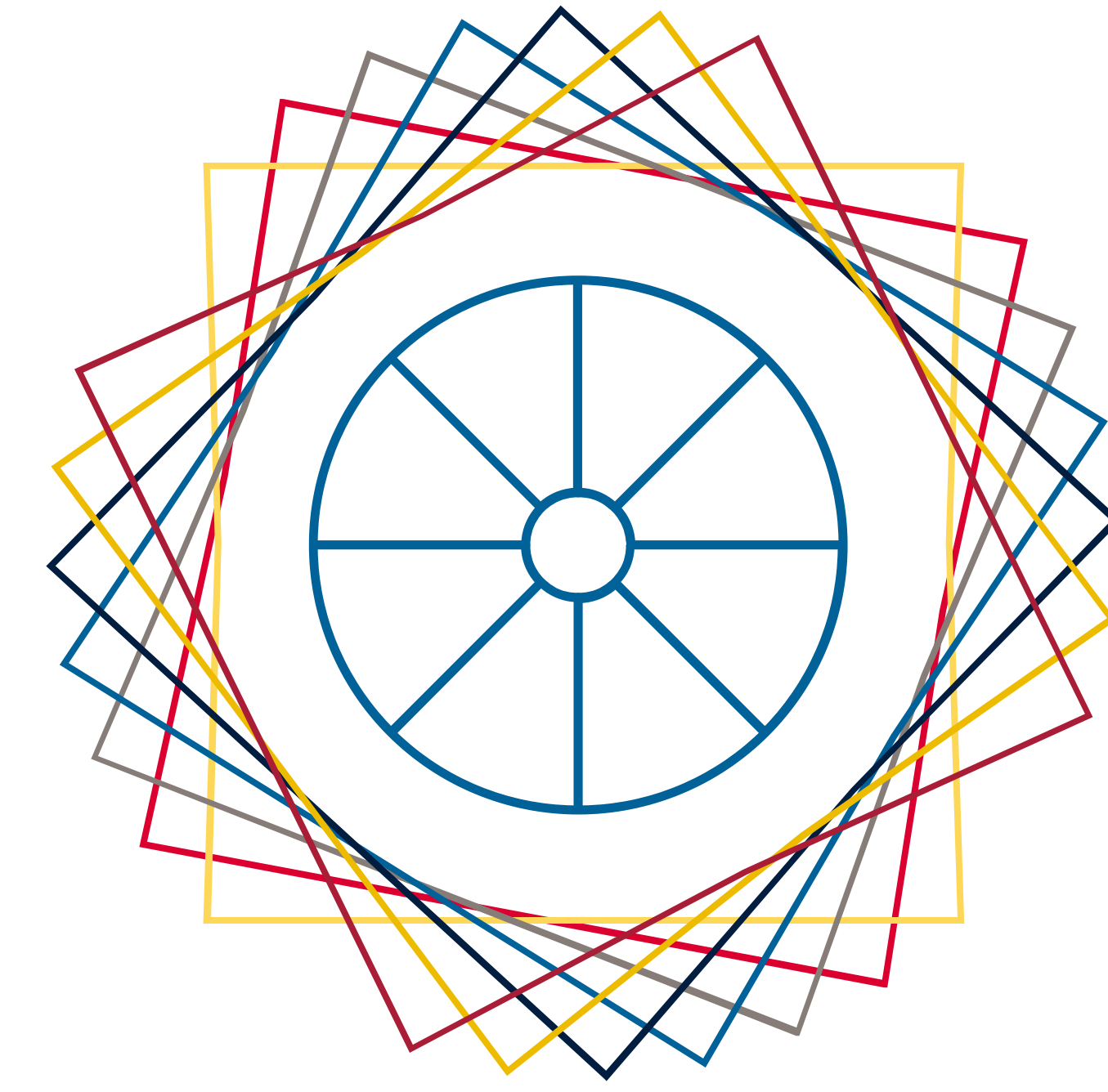


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# Institutional and legal reforms: examples

- ***Confrontational vs. cooperative:*** e.g., from public interest litigation to citizen assemblies
- ***Short term vs. long term:*** e.g., from temporary fiscal supports, to correcting entrenched inequalities that aggravate P
- ***Micro vs. meso vs. macro:*** e.g., decentralisation, electoral reform
- ***Local vs. national vs. regional vs. global:*** e.g., from city-level incubation projects to global regulation of internet standards





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