

Effect of Financial products and services Cash and in-kind transfers on Political Security

Cash transfer and merit-based scholarship interventions had a harmful effect on political security outcomes, including perceptions of political violence.

Geographic Location: Sub Saharan Africa, Global

Effect: Harmful effect $g = (-0.134)$

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 1 effect sizes)

Short Summary:

The cell evaluates the political and social outcomes of a randomized merit-based scholarship program for girls in Kenya aimed at improving secondary school enrollment and academic performance. The intervention had a harmful effect on political security, as it increased the perceived legitimacy of political violence. While the program increased political knowledge and reduced acceptance of domestic abuse, it did not improve political efficacy, community participation, or voting intentions. These findings indicate that the intervention had both empowering and unintended harmful consequences on political attitudes.

The Intervention:

The intervention involved cash-based merit scholarships intended to incentivize girls to perform well academically and continue in secondary school. This fits within the broader category of financial products and services, which includes microcredit, microsavings, microinsurance, financial literacy support, and both cash and in-kind transfers. These interventions may also include short-term cash-for-work programs or combine financial support with skills training or health services. The scholarship program provided direct financial incentives to individuals, targeting educational outcomes with the expectation that this would generate wider social and political impacts.

How the Intervention is expected to work:

The program was designed to increase educational attainment, particularly for girls, to enhance empowerment and inform political attitudes. It was anticipated that education would reduce acceptance of domestic violence, improve political knowledge, and shape perspectives on authority and social participation. The intervention was not primarily intended to increase voting, civic participation, or direct engagement in political activities, but rather to shift attitudes toward authority and political norms. In practice, while the program achieved some of these goals, it also unintentionally increased the perceived legitimacy of political violence among participants.

The Evidence Base:

This cell includes 3 studies: a randomized controlled trial (RCT), a systematic review, and a qualitative study. The impact evaluation is conducted in Kenya, the systematic review takes a global perspective, and the qualitative study by Adedokun (2019) focuses on Mozambique.

Evidence Findings:

The evidence shows that the scholarship program increased political knowledge and reduced acceptance of domestic abuse. However, it also increased perceived legitimacy of political violence, and did not improve political efficacy, community participation, or voting intentions. Overall, while the intervention empowered young women in terms of awareness and attitudes toward abuse, it had unintended negative effects on perceptions of political violence, highlighting the complex relationship between educational interventions and political security outcomes.

The review evidence:

The systematic review of Lwamba et al. is entitled 'Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in fragile contexts towards peaceful and inclusive societies: A systematic review and meta-analysis'. The review is rated as high confidence in review findings.

The impact evaluation evidence

Friedman (2011): This study evaluated the political and social impacts of a randomized girls' merit scholarship program in Kenya aimed at increasing test scores and secondary schooling. The study, which included 1,387 girls and followed up after baseline data and test scores from 2001 or 2002, found that the scholarship program led to significant test score gains in treatment schools compared to control schools. However, the program did not significantly alter views on gender roles or promote modern values. There was also no notable impact on participants' attitudes toward women's rights. Interestingly, the study found that girls in treatment schools spent significantly less time listening to music and entertainment-focused radio and more time reading newspapers, which are more politically oriented. This suggests that the program may have influenced the participants' engagement with politics, although it did not directly promote modern or pro-democratic values. This study is rated as having low confidence due to incomplete descriptions of the intervention and outcomes, as well as a lack of reported attrition.

Confidence assessment:

Overall low confidence: While outcome findings are generally consistent, most studies are rated as low confidence.

Other outcomes in this study:

Human security / economic security

Human security / educational security

Community and state governance / government performance

Link to review summaries:

Lwamba (2022)