

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on nature and scale of violence and atrocities

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives, including fiscal assistance and work-for-relief grants, had a harmful effect on ethnic violence, while increasing security and administrative spending..

Geographical region: East Asia & Pacific

Effect size: Harmful effect ($g=-0.088$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (01 study; 2 ES)

Short summary

The cell analyses poverty alleviation transfers in Xinjiang under China's "8-7 Plan" (1994–2000) increased local government spending on security (15%) and administration (10%). However, fiscal transfers sometimes intensified ethnic tensions, work-for-relief grants had mixed effects, rural agricultural development showed limited improvement, and ethnic divisions persisted. Confidence in this finding is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The intervention involved poverty alleviation transfers under China's "8-7 Plan," funding infrastructure projects such as roads, power grids, and water facilities. These projects aimed to address economic disparities and ethnic grievances in Xinjiang while strengthening local administrative and security capacity in conflict-prone areas.

How the intervention is expected to work

The intervention was intended to reduce poverty and ethnic violence by improving infrastructure and promoting economic inclusion. Increased fiscal transfers were expected to enhance local government capacity, governance, and surveillance, while mitigating grievances among marginalized groups. Improved roads, electricity, and water infrastructure were hypothesized to foster development, increase public services, and reduce ethnic tensions. However, enhanced state control and elite capture created unintended consequences, sometimes intensifying local conflict.

The evidence base

The cell includes one primary study and two systematic reviews. The primary study used county-level panel data from 1994–2000 in Xinjiang, China. The reviews examined civil society capacity-building and empowerment interventions in relation to violence prevention, finding generally consistent effects across contexts.

Evidence findings

Poverty alleviation transfers increased government security and administrative spending but had harmful effects on ethnic violence. Fiscal assistance tended to intensify violence, while work-for-relief grants showed mixed outcomes.

The review evidence

Civil society initiatives can reduce violence by fostering social cohesion, empowerment, and governance. However, poor implementation or elite co-option may exacerbate tensions, limiting effectiveness in preventing atrocities.

The impact evaluation evidence

Cheng (2021) focuses on the impact of poverty alleviation transfers in Xinjiang on ethnic violence and state-building. The Chinese government allocated significant fiscal assistance and work-for-relief grants under the "8-7 Plan" (1994–2000) to alleviate poverty in Xinjiang, a peripheral and ethnically diverse region prone to instability. The intervention financed infrastructure like roads, power grids, and water facilities to mitigate economic disparities and ethnic grievances. The study employs a county-level panel dataset, using covariate balancing propensity scores (CBPS) and instrumental variable regression to estimate causal effects. The analysis covers all counties in Xinjiang, utilizing data on fiscal transfers, demographic variables, and incidents of ethnic violence from 1994 to 2000. The intervention increased government spending on public security, However, its impact on reducing ethnic violence was ambiguous. Fiscal assistance correlated with intensified violence, while work-for-relief grants had mixed effects. Ethnic violence remained persistent in nearly a third of counties. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

We have low confidence due to limited number of studies.

Link to review summaries

Cramer (2016)

Spangaro Jo (2021)

Other outcomes in the study/cell

- Human security/Physical security/Economic security