

## **Effect of Civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on Political security**

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives, including the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI), had a small effect on political security.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Small effect ( $g=0.08$ )

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (4 studies; 22 ES)

### **Short summary**

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives were implemented across multiple contexts to enhance political security. Interventions included civic education workshops, participatory governance programs, voter mobilization campaigns, and youth engagement initiatives. These programs improved political knowledge, non-electoral participation, and trust in institutions, but some initiatives revealed governance weaknesses, leading to dissatisfaction. Overall, the programs had a small effect on political security. Confidence in these findings is low due to the limited number of studies.

### **Long summary**

#### *The intervention*

Civic education programs included participatory workshops in the DRC to enhance political knowledge and decentralization reform, SMS campaigns in Kenya to encourage voter turnout, and town halls in Liberia addressing governance and voter rights. In Somalia, interventions involved secondary school rehabilitation and youth-led civic engagement campaigns. These initiatives aimed to foster democratic participation, improve trust in governance, and reduce electoral manipulation and political violence.

#### *How the intervention is expected to work*

These initiatives aimed to strengthen democratic engagement by increasing political knowledge, trust in institutions, and civic participation. Civic education and participatory workshops provide knowledge of governance, decentralization, and voter rights, empowering citizens to make informed choices and resist manipulation. Outreach campaigns, such as SMS messages, encourage voter participation and promote institutional trust. Youth-led civic engagement and education foster skills, confidence, and nonviolent participation, while security measures help mitigate election-related violence. Combined, these approaches aim to build more informed, engaged, and politically active citizens in fragile democracies.

#### *The evidence base*

The cell includes four primary studies; these were conducted across diverse contexts using varied designs. In the DRC an encouragement design was implemented in eight villages in Bandundu province. In Kenya a randomized field experiment across 12,160 polling stations. In Liberia a cluster-

randomized design across 142 towns was evaluated. In Somalia a quasi-experimental design studied the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) in Somaliland, Puntland, and South-Central Somalia.

### *Evidence findings*

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives, including SYLI, had a small effect on political security. The interventions increased political knowledge, non-electoral participation, and institutional trust, but also highlighted governance challenges and dissatisfaction where systemic weaknesses remained.

### *Included studies*

**Finkel (2021)** The VOICE civic education program was conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) from 2010-2011, targeting democratic engagement and decentralization reform. The intervention used participatory workshops ("Boîtes à Images") to improve political knowledge and encourage civic participation among citizens. Eight villages in the Bandundu province were sampled using an encouragement design with 1,120 respondents. The program increased general knowledge (SD +0.36) and decentralization knowledge (SD+2.21). Political efficacy improved significantly (SD+1.60). Regarding values and norms, participants expressed stronger support for decentralization ideals (SD+0.77), tolerance (SD+0.64), and the right to criticize (SD+0.47). Political discussion increased moderately (SD+0.54), and non-electoral participation, including community problem-solving and peaceful protests, also rose (SD+0.34). However, electoral participation (e.g., voting intention) showed negligible or slightly negative effects. The study highlights that while civic education fosters democratic ideals and non-electoral engagement, it also increases dissatisfaction with political institutions due to heightened awareness of deficiencies. This study is considered a low confidence quantitative study.

**Marx (2016)** analyzed the 2013 Kenyan National Elections, where the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) sent over 11 million SMS messages to encourage voting and bolster trust. Conducted across 12,160 polling stations, the randomized field experiment targeted a sample of 14,400 individuals, collecting survey responses from 7,400. Trust in the IEBC dropped by 4 percentage points among treated respondents (a 5% decline relative to control), attributed to failures in delivering a transparent and peaceful election. Trust in the Supreme Court of Kenya (SCK) also declined insignificantly. Among those in constituencies with election violence, trust in IEBC fell an additional 7 percent points, underscoring the salience of unmet expectations. The perceived fairness of the election and Supreme Court rulings declined by 2 and 1 percentage points, respectively, among treated groups. Satisfaction with democracy dropped significantly, with "very satisfied" responses declining by 2.6 percentage points (8% relative decline). Despite mobilizing voters (+2% turnout), the intervention highlighted risks in young democracies: heightened expectations from voter outreach can backfire if institutions fail to meet these expectations. This study is considered a low confidence quantitative study.

**Mvukiyeh (2017)** focusing on manipulation, surrendering of rights, and invalid vote proportions. The study evaluated two interventions during Liberia's 2011 elections: civic education and security committees, using a cluster-randomized design across 142 towns, targeting rural, war-affected communities. The civic education program included town halls discussing governance, elections, and voter rights, while the security program created community-based early-warning systems to address election violence. The civic education program increased participants' awareness and willingness to report voter intimidation, with self-reported exposure to manipulation rising by 14% compared to control groups. However, this effect may indicate greater willingness to recognize and report manipulation rather than an increase in actual intimidation. Notably, civic education reduced perceptions of being "in trouble" for voting against local patrons by 5 percentage points. The civic education intervention significantly reduced invalid votes by 5 percentage points in presidential and senate races ( $p < 0.05$ ). This reduction reflects improved voter understanding of ballots due to the

program's training components. The security program, while less impactful, also contributed to slight reductions in invalid votes. Overall, the study highlights civic education's dual effect: empowering voters against manipulation and enhancing electoral quality, though potentially increasing short-term local contestation. This study is considered a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

**Tesfaye (2018)** The Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) was implemented across Somaliland, Puntland, and South-Central Somalia to improve access to secondary education and civic engagement opportunities, with the goal of reducing youth support for political violence and improving governance perceptions. The program involved rehabilitating schools, teacher training, and fostering youth-led civic action campaigns. A quasi-experimental design evaluated the program's impact, with a sample size of 1,220 youth participants across treated and control groups. The provision of secondary education significantly increased youth confidence in both federal and state governments ( $p < 0.05$ ). SYLI participants exhibited higher trust levels, potentially driven by perceptions that the government was fulfilling its responsibilities by supporting education. Federal government confidence increased by 0.15 on a standardized scale ( $p < 0.01$ ), while state government confidence improved by 0.12 ( $p < 0.05$ ). These effects were amplified when education was combined with civic engagement opportunities, which further bolstered perceptions of nonviolent civil action effectiveness. This study is considered a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

#### *Confidence assessment*

The overall confidence level of the cell is low due to a limited number of studies in the cell.

#### **Other outcomes in the study**

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity/Sense of belongingness/  
/Willingness to participate or help
- Community and state governance/govt. performance/Civic participation
- Human security/Economic security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes