

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Civic education and capacity building interventions had a moderate effect in reducing acceptance of violence, and youth support for political violence.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.102$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies; 14 ES)

Short summary

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives showed a moderate effect in reducing political violence by promoting political knowledge, increasing civic participation, and fostering ethnic tolerance. These interventions strengthened opposition to violence and encouraged peaceful conflict resolution in polarized environments. Education combined with civic engagement led to notable reductions in youth support for political violence, reinforcing non-violent social norms. Confidence in these findings is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

Two interventions were assessed: the Second Kenya National Civic Education Programme (NCEP II-Uraia) and the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI). NCEP II-Uraia provided civic education to enhance democratic awareness, ethnic tolerance, and governance, aiming to reduce violence and improve political engagement during Kenya's politically tense period. SYLI combined secondary education with civic engagement, constructing schools, training teachers, and organizing youth-led initiatives to foster non-violent conflict resolution and community participation in Puntland and South-Central Somalia.

How the intervention is expected to work

Both interventions aimed to address underlying drivers of violence by promoting knowledge, participation, and tolerance. NCEP II-Uraia sought to reduce acceptance of violence by improving citizens' understanding of democracy, governance, and rights, while fostering ethnic tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. SYLI aimed to empower youth by enhancing access to education and civic engagement opportunities, building skills, optimism, and confidence in non-violent approaches. Both interventions were intended to address grievances, provide alternatives to violence, and strengthen trust in government and community structures, fostering long-term resilience against political violence.

The evidence base

The cell includes two primary studies: one conducted in Kenya using a matched treatment-control design surveying 3,600 individuals, and one conducted in Puntland and South-Central Somalia using a quasi-experimental design.

Evidence findings

Civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiatives had a moderate effect on reducing support for political violence by promoting opposition to violence, fostering ethnic tolerance, and

encouraging peaceful conflict resolution. Education combined with civic engagement further strengthened non-violent norms, particularly among women and urban youth.

Included studies

Finkel (2012) focuses on the Second Kenya National Civic Education Programme (NCEP II-Uraia), implemented from 2006 to 2007. It aimed to enhance democratic awareness, ethnic tolerance, and governance in Kenya amid ethnic tensions and post-2007 election violence. Conducted in Kenya, the study involved a matched treatment-control design, surveying 3,600 individuals (1,800 participants and 1,800 nonparticipants). The program increased political knowledge and engagement while modestly reducing ethnic intolerance and democratic backsliding during violence. Limitations include moderate effects on democratic values and challenges in sustaining civic education impacts. Civic education under NCEP II-Uraia significantly increased participants' opposition to the use of violence ($p < 0.05$), promoting peaceful conflict resolution in Kenya's polarized political environment. Similarly, the program improved opposition to violence as ethnic defense ($p < 0.05$), fostering ethnic tolerance and discouraging violent responses to perceived threats. Both outcomes highlight the program's moderate success in reducing acceptance of violence in politically and ethnically charged contexts. The study is rated as a low confidence quantitative study due to lack of pretest data and recall bias.

Tesfaye (2018) The Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) aimed to reduce youth support for political violence through increased access to secondary education and civic engagement. Conducted in Puntland and South-Central Somalia, the study used a quasi-experimental design, surveying 1,220 youth aged 15-24, including in-school and out-of-school participants across eight locations. The study examined support for political violence among Somali youth across 12 scenarios, revealing significant reductions in support due to the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI). Improved secondary education decreased support by 48.2% ($p < 0.05$), while combining education with civic engagement reduced support by 64.8% ($p < 0.05$). Youth involved in civic engagement showed increased confidence in non-violent change and optimism about future opportunities, mediating reduced support for violence. However, impacts varied based on gender, urbanization, and violence levels, with stronger effects for women and urban youth in less violent areas. These findings emphasize tailored intervention strategies. This is a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

The cell has low confidence due to a limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in the study

- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity/ Sense of belongingness
- Community and state governance/Civic participation
- Human security/Economic security/Political security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes