

Civil society capacity building and civic engagement and empowerment initiatives on willingness to participate

The civic education program had moderate effects on voter engagement and participation and electoral diversity.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.148$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (1 study; 3 ES)

Short summary

The civil society capacity-building and civic engagement initiative in rural Liberia implemented a nine-month civic education program. The program showed a moderate effect on democratic participation, increasing voter enthusiasm, rally attendance, petition signing, and shifting votes from parochial to national candidates by 10%. Overall, the intervention had a moderate effect on participation. Confidence in these findings is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The study tested two interventions: a civic education program providing election training and governance discussions, and a security program establishing violence early-warning systems in coordination with UN peacekeepers. Both interventions targeted rural Liberia ahead of the 2011 elections, aiming to improve voter coordination, reduce insecurity, and enhance democratic participation.

How the intervention is expected to work

The civic education program aimed to enhance voter knowledge, provide governance discussions, and correct misinformation, enabling informed choices and improved coordination. The security program aimed to reduce voter intimidation, build trust, and increase perceptions of electoral safety. Together, these interventions were expected to foster greater voter engagement, reduce parochial voting, and empower citizens to participate effectively in democratic processes.

The evidence base

The cell includes one primary study, a cluster-randomized field experiment conducted in rural Liberia across five counties: Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba.

Evidence findings

The civic education program had a moderate effect on voter engagement and participation, including a shift from local to national political choices. The security program showed smaller effects on electoral diversity. Overall, the interventions moderately improved democratic participation.

Included studies

Mvukiyehe (2017) The study, conducted in rural Liberia during the 2011 elections, used a cluster-randomized field experiment to test two interventions: a nine-month civic education program and a community-based electoral security program. The interventions aimed to promote free democratic expression in a post-conflict context where voter coordination and security were major challenges.

The civic education program provided election procedure training and facilitated governance discussions, while the security program involved collaboration with UN peacekeepers to establish violence early-warning mechanisms. The study covered rural villages in five counties, targeting areas affected by Liberia's 1989–2003 civil war. Participants included all consenting residents, with program events spanning nine months before elections. A total of 142 towns participated, grouped into treatment and control conditions. The findings revealed that the civic education program significantly increased enthusiasm for electoral participation, with a 0.22 standard deviation rise in engagement-related indicators like attending rallies and signing petitions. It also led to a shift from parochial to national candidates, with a 10% reduction in votes for local candidates. The security program modestly enhanced vote diversity but showed weaker effects on participation. Combining both interventions yielded no additional benefits. This study is high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

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

Other outcomes in the study/cell

- Community and state governance/Civic participation
- Human security/Political security