

Effect of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and peace support/keeping operations on nature and scale of violence or atrocities

UN peacekeeping can shorten conflicts, reduce battle deaths, and lower post war violence and show a small effect on violence and atrocities.

Geographical region: Global, Sub Saharan Africa, South Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, East Asia & Pacific.

Effect: Small effect ($g = 0.058$)

Confidence in study findings: Medium confidence

Short summary

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs, along with peacekeeping operations (PKOs) are expected to reduce violence and atrocities. They are intended to influence conflict dynamics by reducing violence and stabilizing post war environments. The evidence shows that UN peacekeeping presence shortens conflicts especially in fragmented settings (i.e. with a large number of combatant groups) and decreases battle deaths, while UN police lower post war violence. But overall effects are small. This is partly as peacekeeping reduces violence but does not end it. After a ceasefire or peace agreement violence, often transforms into other forms of instability, sometimes involving other actors not covered by the peace agreements. The success of interventions depends on mission size, mandate, and coordination with mediation efforts. Peacekeeping reduces electoral violence and atrocities, but its long-term impact on sustaining peace remains uncertain, particularly in complex conflicts with persistent security challenges.

Long summary

The Interventions

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration are programmes for ex-combatants that bring together reconciliation, security and socio-economic dimensions. The intervention typically involves removing weapons from combatants' hands, taking individuals out of militarised structures, and providing them with training for new livelihoods as well as psychosocial support.

Peace Support Operations (PSOs) and Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) are:

- 1) PSOs encompass all multi-functional operations, conducted impartially, normally by states or by international or regional organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), involving military forces and diplomatic and humanitarian agencies, and are designed to support a long-term political settlement or other specified objective, and
- 2), the deployment of UN peacekeepers into countries in a post-conflict setting. This involves the deployment of international troops and police, who work with local civilian peacekeepers to provide security to an area (UN Peacekeeping n.d.). Operations with primary or secondary objectives to prevent, halt or reduce the risk of atrocities are also considered within this category.

How is the intervention expected to work?

Peacekeeping operations and DDR may have an effect on the nature and scale of violence and atrocities by mitigating conflict intensity and reducing civilian harm. The presence of peacekeepers may deter armed groups from targeting civilians, while UN police deployments may help curb post war violence by strengthening local security institutions. Higher fragmentation in conflicts may lead to prolonged and more intense fighting, but UN troop deployment may reduce the overall level of battle deaths. However, while peacekeeping may decrease large-scale violence, conflicts may transform into other forms of instability.

Evidence base

The cell includes 26 quantitative studies.

Global (7), Sub Saharan Africa (4), South Asia, Latin America & Caribbean, East Asia & Pacific.

The cell also includes 4 qualitative studies: Adedokun (2019, Sub Saharan Africa), Channel Research (2011), Sub Saharan Africa, Gromes (2019), Global, Leib (2019), Sub Saharan Africa.

There is one narrative systematic review: Cramer (2016) which has global coverage.

Evidence findings

Peacekeeping reduces the level of violence, but does not end conflict, which transforms to other forms and there is no clear effect on domestic and personal security, with acts of violence actually increasing over time. Traditional peacekeeping missions show better performance on these indicators than stabilisation missions, with the poor performance of the latter largely driven by the case of Somalia. Higher levels of aid are associated with lower levels of violence, though this conclusion depends on the case of Liberia as an outlier (Brosig, 2018).

The presence of peacekeepers is associated with a measurable decrease in fatalities in elections, resulting in a lower likelihood of civil war (Fjelde, 2021). UN peacekeeping presence reduces risk of electoral violence, though the number of UN bases is insignificant. Lastly, there is no significant difference in effects between UN military presence in the pre- and post- election periods (Fjelde, 2022).

UN police significantly reduce post war violence, with deployments of as few as 400 police halving the predicted level of violence, and 1000 police reducing it by 84%. In contrast, UN troops do not have a significant effect on reducing post war violence and may even be associated with an increase in violence by actors other than the main combatants. The effectiveness of UN police is attributed to their role in capacity-building and providing interim security, which helps mitigate organized collective violence (Bara, 2020). Both UN and regional peacekeeping operations are effective in reducing violence against civilians by governments, but only UN troops and police are effective in curbing civilian targeting by non-state actors. Larger UN missions, in terms of troop and police deployments, are associated with fewer civilian deaths caused by rebels. Regional peacekeepers do not have a significant effect on reducing violence by rebel groups. The effectiveness of peacekeeping may depend on the capabilities and mandates of the peacekeepers, with UN missions generally having more resources and experience (Bara & Lisa, 2020). Peacekeepers' military presence improves security (observed and perceived) (Bove, 2002).

The presence of UNPKOs does not significantly stabilize peace. However, military victories have a positive effect when deployed in support of negotiated settlements, particularly those involving disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) components (Caplan, 2017).

The most important moderators are the presence of mediation efforts alongside PKOs, and fragmentation.

The interaction of mediation and UNPKOs shows a negative effect on recurrence, particularly at lower levels of recurrence risk. However, while mediation alone does not significantly extend the duration of agreements, its interaction with UNPKOs positively impacts agreement duration. The combined efforts of mediation and peacekeeping are beneficial in maintaining peace, although the effect is more pronounced at lower probabilities of recurrence (DeRouen, 2018). UN interventions significantly reduce the proportional hazard of returning to war by over 85%. Meanwhile, UN interventions during ongoing wars have no statistically significant impact on shortening the duration of conflicts, with estimates from unmatched samples overstating their effectiveness (Gilligan, 2008).

Fragmentation - that is many groups being involved in a conflict - is associated with longer and more intense conflicts when UN peacekeepers are not present. However, the presence of UN PKOs mitigates these adverse effects. Specifically, fragmentation without UN involvement leads to a 31% decrease the likelihood of a conflict ending in a given period, indicating longer conflicts, while UN presence is associated with an 11% improvement in the chance of the conflict ending, suggesting shorter conflicts, although this effect is not statistically significant. Higher fragmentation is also correlated with increased battle deaths, but this effect diminishes with UN troop deployment. UN peacekeeping is effective in reducing the duration and intensity of conflicts in highly fragmented environments (Arı & Gizelis, 2020).

Included studies

Arı (2020) examines the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations (UN PKOs) in mitigating the adverse effects of conflict fragmentation on civil war duration and intensity. Fragmentation, characterized by a higher number of competing actors, exacerbates coordination problems and increases the risk of opposition to peace processes, making conflicts longer and deadlier. The study focuses on the effectiveness of UN interventions in such fragmented conflicts, arguing that UN PKOs are particularly crucial in these challenging environments. The research employs a global dataset covering civil conflicts from 1990 to 2013, using the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset to analyze conflict duration and the number of battle-related deaths to assess conflict intensity. The study introduces the Conflict Fragmentation Index (CFI) to measure fragmentation more accurately by considering the distribution of combat activity among conflict parties. The analysis includes Cox proportional hazard regressions and negative binomial regressions to evaluate the impact of UN peacekeeping on conflict duration and intensity, respectively. The study finds that fragmentation is associated with longer and more intense conflicts when UN peacekeepers are not present. However, the presence of UN PKOs mitigates these adverse effects. Specifically, fragmentation without UN involvement leads to a 31% decrease in the hazard rate, indicating longer conflicts, while UN presence is associated with an 11% increase in the hazard rate, suggesting shorter conflicts, although this effect is not statistically significant. Additionally, higher fragmentation correlates with increased battle deaths, but this effect diminishes with UN troop deployment. The findings suggest that UN peacekeeping is effective in reducing the duration and intensity of conflicts in highly fragmented environments. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is a non-experimental study.

Bara (2020) analysed the impact of UN peacekeeping operations on post war violence, focusing on the roles of UN troops and police. The authors report that while peacekeepers are effective in maintaining peace between former combatants, the majority of post war violence is perpetrated by other armed actors not covered by peacekeeping mandates. The context of the study spans various post war situations globally between 1991 and 2016, including countries like Bosnia, DR Congo, and Kosovo. The research employs a global monthly dataset of peacekeeping and post war violence from 1991 to 2016, observing post war periods for up to five years unless conflict resumes. The study uses data from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset and focuses on post war periods of severe conflicts, ensuring sufficient information on battle locations to define conflict zones. The sample includes 71 post war periods, with violence data sourced from the UCDP GED data. The study finds that UN police significantly reduce post war violence, with deployments of as few as 400 police halving the predicted level of violence, and 1000 police reducing it by 84%. In contrast, UN troops do not have a significant effect on reducing post war violence and may even be associated with an increase in violence by actors other than the main combatants. The effectiveness of UN police is attributed to their role in capacity-building and providing interim security, which helps mitigate organized collective violence. The study is rated medium confidence as it is a non-experimental study and due to the small sample size.

Bara (2020) examines the effectiveness of UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations in mitigating violence in civil conflicts. It highlights the increasing role of regional organizations and coalitions of states in peacekeeping, which have deployed more operations than the UN in recent decades. The focus is on understanding whether UN peacekeepers are more effective than their non-UN counterparts in managing civil conflicts and reducing violence against civilians. The research utilizes a novel dataset that provides monthly data on the number of troops, police, and observers in both UN and non-UN peacekeeping operations from 1993 to 2016. The dataset is compiled from SIPRI Yearbooks and the Peacekeeping Database, using linear interpolation to estimate monthly personnel levels. The study includes 121 missions across 52 conflicts in 36 countries, with 51 UN missions, 47 regional missions, and 23 international missions. The study finds that both UN and regional peacekeeping operations are effective in reducing violence against civilians by governments, but only UN troops and police are effective in curbing civilian targeting by non-state actors. The analysis shows that larger UN missions, in terms of troop and police deployments, are associated with fewer civilian deaths caused by rebels. Regional peacekeepers do not have a significant effect on reducing violence by rebel groups. The study suggests that the effectiveness of peacekeeping may depend on the capabilities and mandates of the peacekeepers, with UN missions generally having more resources and experience. The study is rated low confidence as it is a non-experimental study with unclear evaluation questions.

Bove (2002) suggests that civil wars affect the economic conditions of households by disrupting economic transactions and harming their psychological well-being. To restore basic conditions for local economic recovery in conflict-torn regions, the international community has only a limited number of tools at its disposal. This study asks whether UN peacekeeping is one instrument to mitigate the negative effect of conflict on households' economic well-being. It argues that, by reducing violence and heightening perceptions of safety, UN missions (i) encourage labor provision and economic exchanges, and (ii) instill confidence by reducing the psychological impact of daily stressors. Combining high-frequency household survey data and information on

subnational deployment of UN peacekeepers in South Sudan, the study shows that peacekeepers' military presence improves security (observed and perceived), which in turn revitalizes local economies and households' subjective well-being. These improvements ultimately boost households' consumption, partially countering the negative effect of ongoing civil wars by keeping local communities' economy afloat. The study first examines households' consumption and then moves to testing the proposed causal mechanisms linking them to peacekeeping presence. The main difference across all models shown is the dependent variable. Because most outcomes are dichotomous, coefficients correspond to marginal effects on linear probabilities. The only exceptions are per capita goods (in units) and traveling time to the closest market (in hours). To assess whether the presence of peacekeepers improves households' well-being, the study analyzes food consumption, irregular consumption, food purchases, and durable (nonfood) goods. The findings indicate that households report higher per capita food consumption—by about 24 units per capita—when peacekeepers operate in their county. Peacekeepers' presence reduces the probability of a household reporting lack of food by almost 10 percentage points and increases food purchases by about 23 units per capita, suggesting an improvement in households' capacity to buy food. Additionally, the likelihood of employment for household heads is higher, increasing by 7 percentage points in areas with peacekeeping presence. Traveling time to local markets is also shorter, reducing by more than 1 hour, as peace missions facilitate the return of market activities by improving security conditions. The study finds that UNMISS increased consumption of food and durable items for households in counties hosting peacekeepers and improved the security environment, restored economic opportunities, and had a positive impact on households' psychological well-being. The mediated effect of peacekeeping via violence, safety, economic opportunities, and psychological well-being results in about a 2-unit increase in household per capita food consumption, though not statistically significant at conventional levels. Peacekeeping presence leads to a 2-percentage point decrease in the likelihood of reporting irregular food consumption and a 5.5-unit increase in per capita food purchases. Finally, peacekeeping presence is linked to improvements in psychological well-being, with expectations that living conditions will become at least "fairly good" being 14 percentage points higher and life satisfaction almost 5 percentage points higher in counties where peacekeepers are deployed. These findings highlight the mechanisms through which UN peacekeeping produces its economic-enhancing effects. The study is rated low confidence.

Brosig (2018) conducts a time trend analysis of 11 conflict-related indicators for the five years after the start of peacekeeping operations in Africa for the period 2000-2015. The study finds that: (1) peacekeeping reduces the level of violence, but does not end conflict, which transforms to other forms; (2) there is no clear effect on domestic and personal security, with acts of violence actually increasing over time; and (3) there is no clear improvement in accountability, rule of law or political stability. Traditional peacekeeping missions show better performance on these indicators than stabilisation missions, with the poor performance of the latter largely driven by the case of Somalia. But overall, the finding that 'peacekeeping works' ignores the different types of violence and dysfunction which may persist. The authors also report that higher levels of aid are associated with lower levels of violence, though this conclusion depends on the case of Liberia as an outlier. The study is rated low confidence.

Caplan (2017) investigates the factors contributing to the endurance of peace in countries that have experienced civil armed conflict. It focuses on the role of conflict termination types, such as military victories and negotiated settlements, and the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) in post-conflict stabilization. The context includes countries like Burundi,

East Timor, El Salvador, Liberia, Nepal, and Sierra Leone, which have all experienced civil wars and subsequent peace processes. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining statistical survival analysis with six detailed case studies. The survival analysis considers 205 peace episodes since 1990, using a hazards model to evaluate the duration of peace and the influence of various factors. The case studies provide qualitative insights into specific country contexts, complementing the quantitative data. The study uses data from the Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) and other sources to define and analyze post-conflict periods. The study finds that military victories tend to result in more durable peace compared to negotiated settlements, which are more likely to break down. The presence of UNPKOs does not significantly stabilize peace. However, military victories have a positive effect when deployed in support of negotiated settlements, particularly those involving disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) components. Economic factors like income per capita also positively influence peace duration, although other economic variables such as growth and aid were not significant. The study highlights the complexity of peace stabilization and the variability of factors influencing peace duration across different contexts. The study is rated low confidence as it is a non-experimental study and unclear evaluation question description.

DeRouen & Ishita (2018) examines the role of mediation and United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) in civil war peace agreements, focusing on their combined effect in reducing the risk of renewed or continued violence and enhancing the duration of peace agreements. The context includes various civil war scenarios globally, with a specific case study on the peace process in Guatemala during the 1990s, where mediation and peacekeeping efforts were instrumental in ending a long-standing conflict. The research utilizes a sample of 154 civil war peace agreements signed between 1975 and 2011, sourced from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). The study employs logit and hazard models to analyze the effects of mediation and UNPKOs on the likelihood of violence recurrence and the duration of peace agreements. The analysis includes control variables such as agreement design, democracy, and income per capita. The study finds that mediation significantly reduces the probability of renewed violence, with a negative and significant effect on the risk of recurrence. The interaction of mediation and UNPKOs also shows a negative effect on recurrence, particularly at lower levels of recurrence risk. However, while mediation alone does not significantly extend the duration of agreements, its interaction with UNPKOs positively impacts agreement duration. The findings suggest that the combined efforts of mediation and peacekeeping are beneficial in maintaining peace, although the effect is more pronounced at lower probabilities of recurrence. The study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design and little description of the intervention

Fjelde and Höglund (2021) introduces the Deadly Electoral Conflict Dataset (DECO), which is a comprehensive global dataset of election-related violence with lethal outcomes from 1989 to 2017. It addresses limitations of existing similar datasets, such as the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). DECO includes 4,233 incidents of lethal electoral violence, resulting in almost 24,000 deaths globally. The paper shows that DECO events appear more frequently in Africa and Asia than the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. It categorizes events based on targets, perpetrators, timing within the electoral cycle (pre-, during, and post-elections). Derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset, DECO incorporates additional coding to establish the electoral context of these violent events. It also distinguishes between violence perpetrated by state forces, non-state actors, and civilians. The empirical findings of the study show that DECO often overlaps with other forms of political violence, including civil wars or communal conflicts. The dataset also

highlights the involvement of other actors, such as political party supporters, armed groups, and government forces. Majority of the DECO events also identify targets as civilians, including voters, party supporters, and non-designated civilians. Finally, the results show that presence of peacekeepers is associated with a measurable decrease in fatalities in elections, resulting in a lower likelihood of civil war. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention and evaluation questions.

Fjelde and Smidt (2022) explores the relationship implications of the presence of UN peacekeepers on electoral violence across sub-national administrative units in all countries that hosted UN peacekeeping missions in Africa from 1994 to 2017. The study employs a fixed-effect regression model on geo-referenced data on peacekeeping combined with high-resolution information on electoral violence incidents. The sample includes 16 unique elections in 8 countries, with a total of 730 unique administrative units. Data on election dates are taken from the National Elections Across Autocracies and Democracies database version 5 and local presence of peacekeepers were drawn from the Geo-PKO dataset. For the dependent variable, information was drawn from the DECO dataset and UCDP geo-referenced event database. Results show that additional UN base in an average sub-national unit decreases the risk of electoral violence by 0.5%. Additionally, electoral violence is more likely if war between the government and non-state armed groups are heightening over the past 2 years. Meanwhile, while UN peacekeeping presence reduces risk of electoral violence, the count of UN bases is insignificant. Lastly, there is no significant difference between UN military presence in the pre- and post- election periods. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention.

Gilligan (2008) investigates the causal effects of the UN peacekeeping mission on civil wars – if it maintains peace post-conflict and reduces the duration of ongoing wars. The authors use matching techniques to address the non-random assignment of UN interventions, comparing treated (conflicts with interventions) and untreated (conflicts without interventions) cases. They identify key confounding variables and apply one-to-one nearest neighbor matching using GenMatch to balance these factors. The analysis focuses on two samples: post-conflict settings (examining peace duration) and active conflicts (measuring war duration). Matched data is analyzed using a Cox proportional hazards model. For post-conflict sample, the dependent variable is the number of months a certain country is at peace after a civil conflict. For in-war sample, the dependent variable is the duration of war once the UN intervened. Results show that UN interventions significantly reduce the proportional hazard of returning to war by over 85%. Meanwhile, UN interventions during ongoing wars have no statistically significant impact on shortening the duration of conflicts, with estimates from unmatched samples overstating their effectiveness. The study is rated medium confidence as it is non-experimental and due to its partial description of the intervention, outcomes, and evaluation questions.

Confidence assessment

The cell is rated medium confidence.

Other outcomes in this cell

- Human security/ Food security and nutrition & Health security
- Human security/ Physical security
- Human security/ Economic security
- Violence and atrocity prevention/ Diplomatic relations & Peaceful dispute resolution