

Effect of diplomatic recognition and other diplomatic efforts on nature and scale of violence and atrocities

The diplomatic interventions like advocacy, sanctions, compensation, blacklisting, and economic programs have no effect on violence and atrocities outcomes.

Geographical region: Middle East & North Africa, Europe & Central Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, East Asia & Pacific, South Asia, Global

Effect size: No effect ($g = -0.001$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (11 studies; 40 ES)

Short summary

The cell examines the impact of diplomatic interventions on violence and atrocities, with varied outcomes depending on context, methods, and actors involved. Common interventions include human rights advocacy, sanctions, blacklisting, compensation payments, and economic programs, with mixed success. Economic and compensation strategies often reduce violence (e.g., “Iraqi First” initiative, detainee payments), while sanctions and naming-and-shaming campaigns sometimes exacerbate repression. Unlike isolated actions, diplomatic scrutiny combining positive and negative feedback shows promise for human rights improvement. Differences arise in intervention scale, type, and context, with some cases showing unintended consequences, such as increased violence or economic disruptions in fragile regions. Overall, there is no effect of the interventions on the outcomes. We have low confidence in the cell due to inconsistency in the effect sizes across the studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The cell explores diverse diplomatic interventions targeting violence and atrocities. Interventions include economic sanctions, military strategies, compensation payments, blacklisting terrorist organizations, and human rights advocacy (e.g., naming and shaming, scrutiny). Other approaches involve local economic revitalization, anti-piracy naval operations, and legislative measures like the Dodd-Frank Act. Interventions aim to influence behaviour by imposing costs, incentivizing cooperation, or fostering accountability. Some interventions, such as balanced scrutiny and local economic spending, show promise in reducing violence. In contrast, others, like sanctions or isolated human rights campaigns, often exacerbate issues or yield negligible impact.

How the intervention is expected to work

The interventions aim to address violence and atrocities through different mechanisms. Economic sanctions and blacklisting seek to disrupt resources and increase the costs of undesirable actions, expecting targeted actors to comply under pressure. Similarly, naming and shaming publicly expose violations to generate international or domestic accountability. However, compensation payments and local economic initiatives work by fostering goodwill and reducing grievances, aiming to mitigate violence through improved cooperation and trust. Naval interventions and counterinsurgency programs combine deterrence with protective measures, focusing on immediate stabilization but risking escalation in fragile zones. Legislative interventions like the Dodd-Frank Act (requiring US companies to declare the source of conflict-affected minerals) target structural issues, attempting to curb resource-driven conflicts but occasionally destabilize local economies.

While economic aid and balanced diplomatic scrutiny tend to foster cooperation, punitive measures such as sanctions and isolated criticism often provoke resistance or unintended consequences.

The evidence base

The cell includes 11 primary studies and one systematic review. There is a high degree of consistency in the review findings. The review is concerned with interventions for violence and atrocities.

Six of 11 studies followed quantitative analysis, three quasi-experimental designs, two mixed method designs, and the study employed qualitative analysis.

The studies are from Iraq (4 studies), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2 studies), Somalia (1 study), Africa (1 study), the Philippines and Indonesia (2 studies), and various other regions (U.S. Pacific Command) (1 study).

Evidence findings

The interventions include sanctions, military actions, economic aid, counterinsurgency, and advocacy. Outcomes vary; some reduce violence or improve governance, while others exacerbate repression, conflict, or piracy. Overall, diplomatic efforts have no effect on the nature or scale of violence. But since there is a large variation in effects, an assessment needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

The review evidence

The review findings of one systematic review are that diplomatic efforts can reduce violence through negotiations, but may also worsen conflict by legitimizing actors or increasing repression. Outcomes depend on domestic politics, conflict dynamics, and external interests.

The impact evaluation evidence

Allendoerfer (2019) examines how human rights organizations (HROs) use information campaigns (e.g., "naming and shaming") to improve human rights conditions, either directly or through third-party actions such as economic sanctions and military interventions. It draws on theories like the "boomerang" and "spiral" models, which suggest that HRO advocacy prompts external actors to pressure violating states, influencing their behavior. The global research uses a time-series cross-section of countries between 1990 and 2005. The study employs a causal mediation model to analyze the direct effects of HRO activities and the mediated effects of third-party actions on human rights outcomes. Data sources include the CIRI Human Rights Data Project, the Threat and Imposition of Sanctions (TIES) dataset, and the International Military Intervention (IMI) project. Countries included: non-perfect human rights countries with available data (1903 observations). The key findings suggested that third-party actions (economic sanctions and military interventions) have a negative impact on human rights conditions ($p < 0.008$). This indicates that these actions often exacerbate repression rather than improve human rights. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is a non-experimental study with partial description of interventions and outcomes.

Blair (2022) examines the effects of compensation payments, termed "detainee release payments," made to civilians wrongfully detained by counterinsurgent forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom (2004–2008). These payments aimed to mitigate grievances arising from wrongful detention and foster positive civilian perceptions, ultimately reducing insurgent violence. Compensation was distributed at the discretion of US military commanders and amounted to modest sums (e.g., \$6 per day of detention). The research focuses on Iraq, explicitly analyzing data from nationwide districts during the insurgency period. The study employs a quantitative analysis using data from the Iraq Reconstruction Management System (IRMS) and violence metrics from the MNF-I SIGACT III database. The sample includes payments made across districts in Iraq,

with millions of dollars allocated between 2006 and 2009. The findings suggested that detainee release spending significantly reduces insurgent violence ($p < 0.05$), with a negative association between spending and insurgent-initiated SIGACTs, even with minimal controls included. This study is rated as a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Bussmann (2015) examines the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a neutral non-governmental organization, in promoting international humanitarian law (IHL) and protecting civilians during civil conflicts. It focuses on the ICRC's dissemination activities, such as training sessions for military personnel and public condemnations aimed at preventing atrocities. The study involves global analysis. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, quantitative panel regressions analyzing one-sided violence across 72 countries (1989–2004), and time-series analyses for Bosnia and Darfur using Granger causality tests. 72 countries in the quantitative analysis. Findings suggested that the number of years since ratification of the Geneva Conventions (GC-IV-1949) is positively associated with increased one-sided violence (OSV) by both governments and rebels, indicating a decline in compliance with international humanitarian law over time. The Additional Protocol II (AP-II-1977) shows a weak positive association with rebel violence but no significant impact on government violence. The presence of the ICRC in conflict zones does not significantly reduce one-sided violence (OSV) by either governments or rebel groups. In some cases, ICRC presence is associated with increased rebel violence, possibly due to its deployment in more severe conflict zones. In addition, neither ICRC seminars on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) nor public condemnations (naming and shaming) significantly reduce one-sided violence (OSV) by governments or rebel groups. These findings suggest that these specific interventions have limited effectiveness in preventing civilian harm during conflicts. This study is rated as a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Davenport (2022) examines the termination of large-scale state repression (LSSR) and conceptualizes repression as a "spell" that is unlikely to terminate without significant disruption. Democratization is identified as the most consistent factor leading to the termination of LSSR, as it introduces accountability and institutional changes that disrupt repressive processes. The study is global in scope, analyzing 239 repression spells across various countries from 1976 to 2006. Empirical analysis using a Cox proportional hazards model to investigate the factors influencing the termination of repressive spells. The study draws on data from the Political Terror Scale (PTS), measuring repressive actions based on severity and scope. The analysis includes 239 large-scale repression spells over 30 years. 2,527 spell-year observations were analysed for the study. Democratization increases the likelihood of repression termination by 112% ($p < 0.01$). The study is rated as low confidence as it is designed as a non-experimental study, and has little description of the intervention.

Iyengar (2010) focuses on the dynamics of violence and insurgent behavior in Iraq during the U.S. occupation. The study examines how new information about U.S. public support for its presence in Iraq influences insurgent behavior. It specifically investigates the impact of satellite television access in disseminating information about U.S. commitment, which insurgent groups use strategically. The context is the decentralized and factionalized nature of insurgencies in Iraq, where groups compete for visibility and resources. The study is conducted across 18 provinces in Iraq, focusing on variations in satellite TV access. The research uses a difference-in-differences approach to compare provinces with high versus low satellite television access. Data sources include U.S. military fatalities (Department of Defense), Iraqi civilian fatalities (Iraq Body Count), and satellite access (World Food Program survey). The findings indicate that satellite access amplifies the impact of poll releases on insurgent violence over time. In period 2 (Nov. 2005-2006), a 10% increase in satellite access correlates with a 6.5% rise in attacks, 20–30% drop in civilian fatalities, and 40–50% increase in U.S. military fatalities. By period 3 (Nov. 2006-2007), these effects grow stronger, with attacks increasing by 13%, while civilian and military fatality trends remained consistent. No significant effects are observed in Period 1 (Nov. 2004-2005). The study rated as low confidence quantitative study as the findings are based on short-term increases in violence post-poll releases. The study uses province-level data, which may obscure intra-regional differences in insurgent dynamics and satellite access, reducing precision in identifying information-driven changes.

Jo (2020) focuses on the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) blacklist as an intervention. It explores how blacklisting terrorist groups affects their operations and behaviours, particularly regarding their funding sources and ability to perpetrate violence. Blacklisting involves financial sanctions, travel restrictions, and

reputational damage. Groups dependent on private funding, such as donations or diaspora support, are particularly vulnerable, whereas those funded through state sponsorship, terrorist networks, or criminal activities often exhibit resilience or adaptability. The study is based on global data, with specific examples from regions like the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Colombia, and the Philippines. The U.S. is the primary actor administering the FTO list, but its effects extend internationally, influencing allied countries and global counterterrorism efforts. The study employs a mixed-method approach, combining statistical analysis of a dataset comprising 412 terrorist groups between 1970 and 2014 and case studies of specific terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, MeK (Mujahedin-e-Khalq), and FARC. Funding types were categorized into private funding, state sponsorship, terrorist networks, and criminal activities. The analysis reveals that FTO Blacklisting significantly reduces attacks for groups reliant on private funding ($p < 0.05$) due to sanctions and stigmatization. No significant impact is observed for groups supported by state sponsors, terrorist networks, or criminal activities, highlighting their resilience to FTO interventions. Interaction effects underscore funding-source-specific vulnerabilities. This study is rated as a high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Kahn-Nisser (2018) explores the interplay between diplomatic efforts, particularly human rights (HR) "shaming," "faming," and combined "scrutiny" and changes in HR protection levels across different countries. The study focuses on three approaches: shaming: criticizing problematic hr practices, faming: acknowledging reforms and positive hr developments and scrutiny: a combination of shaming and faming to provide balanced feedback. The intervention targets countries that are part of the UN's Convention against Torture (CAT) and analyses the effect of these approaches on HR practices. The research analyses countries that have ratified the CAT from 2002 to 2017, without specifying individual locations but emphasizing international coverage. The study uses a mixed-methods approach: quantitative analysis of HR practices, utilizing the CIRI Physical Integrity Rights Index (0 to 8 scale) and examination of UN CAT committee reports for shaming, faming, and scrutiny. Total analysed reports over 200 in the observed years. Faming ($p < 0.01$) and shaming ($p < 0.001$) alone is negatively associated with human rights (HR) protection, suggesting that positive feedback without criticism may reduce pressure for reforms and criticism without acknowledgment of progress might provoke backlash or resistance. The combined intervention of shaming and faming (scrutiny $p < 0.001$) is positively associated with HR protection, highlighting that balanced and detailed feedback promotes better HR practices. This study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Shaver (2013) evaluates the U.S. military's "Iraqi First" initiative, a local-business revitalization program aimed at reducing insurgent violence in Iraq. The initiative directed billions of dollars towards purchasing goods and services from local businesses, as part of a broader economic-based counterinsurgency strategy. The intervention is contextualized within the theory that improving local economic conditions can diminish insurgent support and activities by altering opportunity costs and incentivizing cooperation with government forces. The study focuses on Iraq, analysing various provinces affected by insurgent violence during the U.S.-led coalition's counterinsurgency efforts in 2007-2008. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis Using a two-stage least squares (2SLS) model to assess the causal impact of local spending on violence and contractual data from the U.S. Army Contracting Business Intelligence System, insurgency-related incidents from the MNF-I SIGACTS III database, and socioeconomic data from the ESOC Iraq Civil War Dataset includes 1,980 observations, representing monthly violence levels and economic activities across districts. The results indicated that for every \$1 million spent on local contractual obligations, there is an estimated reduction of approximately 1.5 insurgent attacks in the region ($p < 0.05$). This demonstrates that local economic revitalization programs, such as "Iraqi First," can effectively mitigate violence in conflict zones. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Shellman (2011) analyses the impact of U.S. counterinsurgent (COIN) strategies, specifically focusing on Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) actions. These include military training conducted in India (e.g., Malabar naval training, cope air force training) and diplomatic and military actions in Philippines, involving agreements, intelligence sharing, and joint military operations like Balikatan. The study utilises quasi-experimental design with matched-case counterfactual analysis and time-series impact assessments. Data on separatist groups' violent activities from 1997 to 2006. Positive diplomacy by the U.S. towards the Philippines has an almost negligible non-significant impact on separatist violence. Similarly, negative diplomacy shows a slight negative effect but is also statistically non-significant. The study is considered a low confidence quantitative study due to the lack of specific data sources, sample sizes, statistical methods, and effect sizes.

Shortland (2011) evaluates the impact of international naval interventions from 2008–2010 to address piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin. The interventions included the establishment of the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), deployment of naval forces by NATO, EU, and other countries, and anti-ransom regulations to deter pirate financing. These measures aimed to stabilize maritime trade and prevent alliances between pirates and terrorist organizations like Al-Shabaab. The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative analysis of piracy incidents with qualitative interviews with naval officers, shipowners, and risk consultants. A total of 882 piracy incidents were analysed, with geographical subgroups divided into the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin. The results showed that the IRTC coefficient (0.49, $p < 0.05$) indicates a moderate increase in piracy incidents due to strategic adaptation. IRTC shows a non-significant reduction in successful attacks. MSPA suggests increased successful attacks, likely due to concentrated shipping and limited patrols. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Stoop (2018) examines the impact of Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in July 2010. This legislation aimed to reduce the link between mineral trade and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It required U.S.-listed companies to trace and declare the origins of certain minerals (tin, tantalum, tungsten, and gold). However, it led to a de facto ban on artisanal mining, adversely affecting local livelihoods and shifting violence dynamics. The study focuses on the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly 27 territories in North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, and parts of Katanga and Orientale provinces, as designated by the U.S. State Department's conflict mining zones. The study is a quantitative analysis using geo-referenced data on conflict events and mining sites from 2004–2015. The data includes reports on battles, violence against civilians, looting, and riots. The sample includes monthly observations of 27 treated territories impacted by the Dodd-Frank Act and control observations from non-treated territories. The Dodd-Frank intervention had no significant effect on looting or violence against civilians. It significantly increased battles (+7.5%), reflecting heightened competition in gold-rich areas, and marginally raised riots (+3.9%), likely due to economic disruptions impacting artisanal mining communities in treated territories. The study is with high confidence due to extensive datasets and a robust analysis over a significant time period.

Confidence assessment

This cell has low confidence overall due to inconsistency in the studies effect sizes.

Link to review summaries

Cramer (2016)

Other outcomes in this study

- Violence and atrocities prevention/diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolutions