

Effect of Dispute resolution on Social norms regarding Violence or Atrocity

Dispute resolution programs in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East strengthened social ties and reduced justification for violence but had a harmful effect on support for political violence.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa & Middle East & North Africa

Effect: Harmful effect (g = -0.132)

Confidence in study findings: Low (2 studies with 5 effect size)

Short Summary

Dispute resolution interventions, including the PEACE program in Niger and the Conflict Management program in Jordan, aimed to reduce violence by fostering social cohesion and intergroup cooperation. While they strengthened social ties and lowered justification for violence, they had a harmful effect on support for political violence. Contextual factors such as economic hardship, discrimination, and resource competition limited the interventions' overall effectiveness.

Long summary

The intervention

Dispute resolution programs, including the PEACE program in Niger and the Conflict Management program in Jordan, implemented community-driven initiatives to promote peaceful conflict resolution. Activities included mediation, joint infrastructure and resource management projects, livelihood support, cultural events, leadership training, and establishing safe spaces to build trust and cooperation between different groups.

How the intervention is expected to work

Interventions seek to reduce support for violence by fostering trust, promoting cooperation, and addressing social grievances. Leadership training and collaborative projects are intended to change norms, encourage intergroup collaboration, and reduce indirect support for armed groups.

The evidence base

The cell includes two primary studies from the Tillabéri region of Niger and Northern Jordan, employing a quasi-experimental and mixed-methods evaluation design.

Evidence findings:

The interventions strengthened social ties and reduced justification for violence but had a harmful effect on support for political violence. Economic hardship and competition over resources sometimes reinforced grievances, limiting the overall impact.

Included studies: The cell contains two low-confidence primary studies. The detailed summaries are thus provided here:

Lichtenheld (2022): The study evaluates the PEACE (Preventing Violent Extremism Actions through Increased Social Cohesion Efforts) program, which aims to reduce the vulnerability to violent extremism by enhancing social cohesion in the Tillabéri region of Niger. The

intervention employed Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach, a methodology focused on community mobilization and participatory planning. This approach engaged communities in identifying and addressing shared needs to promote trust and cooperation among different groups. The main activities included in the PEACE program are: 1) Mediation and dialogue initiatives to foster conflict resolution skills and promote peaceful interaction. 2) Infrastructure projects that involve the collaborative development or rehabilitation of community assets. 3) Access to shared natural resources initiatives to manage and equitably distribute resources like water and land. 4) Livelihoods and economic inclusion efforts designed to enhance economic opportunities for youth and women. 5) Cultural and sporting events aimed at bringing communities together through shared cultural expressions and recreational activities. The study used a quasi-experimental design involving 40 villages, randomly assigned into treatment (20 villages) and control (20 villages) groups in the program's first phase. Data collection occurred at three points—baseline in 2020, midline in 2021, and endline in 2021—yielding insights from 1,843 respondents (55% male, 45% female).

The PEACE program did not show significant improvements in reducing support for political violence or armed groups. However, indirect measures indicated that the timing and type of intervention—particularly mediation and dialogue—helped reduce support for groups like ISGS. It also suggests that social cohesion programs can lower justification for violence through mediation, infrastructure, and community engagement. Despite these efforts, some implicit support for armed groups persists, as revealed by indirect measures. The study, rated as a low-confidence quantitative study,

Maroni (2015):The Conflict Management for Syrian Refugees, Host Communities, and Municipal Actors in Jordan intervention, implemented by Mercy Corps in the Northern Jordan governorates of Mafraq and Irbid, set to reduce tensions and mitigate conflict risks between Jordanian host communities and Syrian refugees. The program included training community leaders (Jordanian, Syrian, and municipal) in interest-based negotiation, supporting community development projects collaboratively designed by these leaders to benefit both groups, and establishing safe spaces to promote interaction and cooperation.

The study used a mixed-methods evaluation design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Household surveys were conducted in June 2013 (baseline) and May 2014 (12-month follow-up), sampling 854 individuals at baseline (667 in treatment areas, 187 in comparison areas) and 845 individuals at follow-up (662 in treatment areas, 183 in comparison areas). Additionally, 12 focus group discussions were held with 114 participants (69 Jordanians, 45 Syrians; 51 male, 63 female). Studies have reported support for violence under the theme of social norms regarding violence or atrocity. Additionally, it reported community stability, economic conditions, influence over decision outcomes, intergroup social relationships, conflict management capacity, social trust, and cohesion.

The study found that economic competition and resource scarcity were the primary drivers of tensions between Jordanian hosts and Syrian refugees, with 28% of Jordanians and 27% of Syrians citing job scarcity as the main source of conflict. Discrimination increased support for violence, as Syrians who felt discriminated against were 1.5 times more likely to justify it. Mercy Corps' conflict management program reduced support for violence, as target communities saw a decline in acceptance of violence, while non-participant communities experienced an increase. However, limited quantitative evidence was found for changes in intergroup interactions, decision-making inclusion, or discrimination experiences. Despite reduced support for violence in program areas, economic hardship and political empowerment correlated with greater acceptance of violence, suggesting that grievances and perceptions of influence shape conflict attitudes. This study is rated as a low-confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall. The cell is rated as low-confidence due to limited number of studies.

Other outcomes in this study

Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature & scale of violence

Violence and atrocity prevention/ Diplomatic relations + Peaceful dispute resolution

Social cohesion/feeling of trust & acceptance of diversity.

Community & state governance/ Civic Participation

Community & state governance/ Government performance