

## Effect of Dispute Resolution on Government Performance

Dispute resolution interventions showed a small positive effect on government performance, strengthening trust in justice systems while facing challenges in implementation, corruption, and enforcement.

**Geographical Region:** Sub Saharan Africa, Middle East & North Africa, South Asia

**Effect:** Small effect ( $g = 0.03$ )

**Confidence in study findings:** Low ( 2 studies with 9 effect size)

### Short Summary

Dispute resolution interventions including UNMIL in Liberia, RLS-I in Afghanistan, and PEACE in Niger were evaluated for their impact on governance and justice system performance. UNMIL patrols and dispute-resolution activities increased trust in the police but were associated with a 10–11% rise in perceptions of government corruption in patrol communities. RLS-I strengthened coordination between Traditional Dispute Resolution (TDR) and formal justice systems, though quantitative evidence on registration rates was limited. PEACE improved citizen-government trust, reflected by a 14% increase in perceived availability of social services, and supported mediation efforts, though infrastructure-focused areas saw limited impact. Overall, the interventions strengthened links to formal justice systems, but governance challenges such as corruption and inconsistent enforcement constrained effectiveness.

### Long summary

#### *The Intervention*

UNMIL implemented patrols, public works, and dispute-resolution activities in collaboration with state and local leaders. RLS-I delivered six legal education workshops over 4–6 months, along with discussion sessions, coordination meetings, and networking activities to enhance TDR. PEACE used the **CATALYSE approach**, combining mediation, infrastructure projects, resource access, economic inclusion, and cultural or sporting events to foster social cohesion and conflict resolution.

#### *How the intervention is expected to work*

The UNMIL intervention aimed to build trust in state institutions by enforcing legal norms, curbing illegal practices, and linking formal and informal justice systems. RLS-I focused on increasing elders' legal knowledge, promoting collaboration with formal justice institutions, and discouraging harmful social practices. PEACE sought to reduce vulnerability to violent extremism by fostering community trust, improving access to government services, and reinforcing conflict resolution mechanisms to support stability and social cohesion.

#### *The Evidence base*

This cell includes three impact evaluations conducted in Niger, Afghanistan, and Liberia, though one study was excluded from effect size (ES) calculation due to insufficient data for computing Cohen's  $d$ .

#### *Evidence findings*

Dispute resolution interventions were associated with increased trust in justice systems but faced governance challenges, including implementation gaps, corruption, and inconsistent enforcement. Overall confidence in the findings is low, based on three low-confidence studies.

*The Impact evaluation evidence:* There are three IEs included in this cell. The detailed summary thus provided below;

**Blair (2019):** The study evaluated the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and its impact on the rule of law in post-conflict Liberia. It aimed to build confidence in state institutions, enforce formal-informal justice separation, and eliminate illegal practices like trial by ordeal. UNMIL activities included patrols, public works, and dispute resolution interventions with local leaders. The study surveyed 242 rural communities across Lofa, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh counties, collecting data in three waves (2009, 2010-2011, 2013) from residents, local leaders, and officials. A mixed-method approach was used, incorporating surveys, list experiments, qualitative interviews, and difference-in-differences analysis.

Findings related to government performance revealed increased perceptions of corruption with higher exposure to UNMIL, particularly through patrols, interventions, and public works, with citizens in weekly patrol communities being 10-11% more likely to describe the state as corrupt. While formal institutions (e.g., the police) gained increased trust, citizens' perceptions of corruption within the government were exacerbated, especially in communities with frequent UNMIL patrols. This suggests that although the police were seen as more reliable, the overall quality of governance and service provision remained questionable due to corruption concerns. Direct interaction with UNMIL personnel reduced perceptions of corruption within UNMIL itself, with a 4% decrease in views of UNMIL as corrupt and biased. There was no significant change in perceptions of democratic practices or the strength of democracy, even as reliance on formal institutions grew. The study is rated as a low-confidence quantitative study.

**Killan(-2014):** assessed the Rule of Law Stabilization - Informal Component (RLS-I) in Afghanistan, aimed at strengthening Traditional Dispute Resolution (TDR). The program provided six legal education workshops (30 hours over 4-6 months) for elders and dispute resolvers, covering conflict resolution, inheritance, family law, and other legal topics. Additional activities included discussion sessions, coordination meetings, and networking. The study sampled 850 elders, 996 disputants, and 3,820 citizens across six districts (three treatment, three control). Using a difference-in-differences approach, it measured changes in dispute resolution practices, attitudes, and women's roles. Findings were assessed through surveys and a 5-point perceptual index, though the study is rated low confidence.

Key findings on government performance revealed Increased coordination between TDR and formal justice mechanisms, as evidenced by efforts to register TDR decisions with government entities. However, quantitative data on registration rates are not explicitly provided. Discussion sessions and coordination meetings with state justice actors likely strengthened the alignment between informal and formal justice systems. The study is rated as a low confidence study.

**Lichtenheld (2022):** evaluates the PEACE program in Niger's Tillabéri region, aimed at reducing vulnerability to violent extremism by fostering social cohesion. Using Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach, the intervention engaged communities in participatory planning to promote trust and cooperation. Key activities included mediation and dialogue, infrastructure development, resource management, economic inclusion for youth and women, and cultural/sporting events. A quasi-experimental design was used across 40 villages (20 treatment, 20 control), with data collected at baseline (2020), midline (2021), and endline (2021) from 1,843 respondents (55% male, 45% female). The PEACE program made modest improvements in relations between citizens and governing actors. Communities exposed to more PEACE activities reported increased trust, with more respondents stating that leaders kept their commitments to the community. Treatment communities showed a 2.5% increase

in the availability of social services, while control communities experienced a 9.5% decrease, resulting in a 14% difference between the two groups. Additionally, treatment communities saw a statistically significant improvement in the perceived effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms, with a greater impact in villages that received mediation and dialogue activities. The increase in perceived effectiveness was not observed in villages that received infrastructure-focused activities. The study is rated as a low-confidence quantitative study.

*Overall confidence assessment*

Overall, the confidence level is low, as the cell comprises three studies, all rated as low confidence.

**Other outcomes assessed**

Violence & atrocity prevention/Diplomatic relation & peaceful dispute resolution

Community & state governance/Access to justice, rights & public services

Community & State Governance/Civic Participation

Violence & atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence or atrocities

Violence & atrocity prevention/Nature & scale of violence or atrocities

Social cohesion/feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity