

Foundational state design processes, transitional political processes, and election support impact on nature and scale of violence or atrocities

Electoral violence prevention, local governance, peace operations, constitution drafting, and decentralization interventions show harmful effects on reducing violence or atrocities.

Geographic region: Global, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean, South Asia

Effect: Harmful effect ($g = -0.055$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (11 studies 52 effect sizes)

Short summary

Interventions aimed at reducing electoral and political violence through constitution drafting, peace operations, decentralization, local governance, electoral campaigns, and peace messaging had a harmful effect on violence and atrocities. Some interventions reduced violence in specific contexts, but overall, the effect is negative, reflecting mixed and context-dependent outcomes.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions include constitution drafting processes, international election observation, decentralization reforms, local governance initiatives, and UN peace operations addressing security, political reintegration, and economic recovery. Other measures included electoral campaigns, town meetings, popular theatres, peace messaging, and education programs to support civic and political knowledge. Capacity-building through training and participatory approaches aimed to increase community engagement and integrate traditional authorities into formal governance structures.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions are expected to reduce violence and support peaceful political processes by strengthening local governance, encouraging community participation, and improving political knowledge. Election education campaigns provide information on electoral security and peaceful participation, while peace messaging and civic education aim to influence perceptions of political violence. Participation in constitution drafting may reduce violence in some regions, while integration of traditional authorities into public administration can lower conflict risk. Security-first strategies and sequential interventions are expected to reduce conflict more effectively than simultaneous strategies. However, effects vary across contexts and interventions

The evidence base

The cell includes 21 studies: 13 impact evaluations, 7 qualitative studies, and 1 systematic review.

Studies were conducted in Mozambique, Nigeria, Colombia, Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, India, Madagascar, Myanmar, African states, Sudan, Syria, and global analyses. Of the 13 impact evaluations, effects were extracted from 11 studies; 2 studies lacked sufficient data for effect size calculation.

Evidence findings

Overall, the evidence shows mixed results. Some interventions, such as electoral violence prevention, local governance, peace operations, constitution drafting, and decentralization,

reduced violence in certain contexts. However, the pooled effect is harmful, reflecting inconsistencies and variations across studies.

The review findings

The review shows that there were seven studies focused on governance interventions. Results were inconsistent, particularly in ethnically divided societies with decentralized or competitive political systems.

Included studies

Akman (2010) examines peace operations and their strategies in post-conflict societies, focusing on the interaction between security and development efforts. It explores three main strategies: Security-only, Sequential, and Simultaneous, in the context of various countries, including Nicaragua, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, and Cambodia. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies. The quantitative analysis uses a dataset covering civil wars from 1946 to 2006, employing logit models corrected for temporally dependent data to test the effectiveness of different peace operation strategies. The qualitative component involves structured, focused comparisons of six case studies, selected based on the strategy of intervention and varying in terms of success and failure. The findings indicate that interventions prioritizing security first, through Security-Only and Sequential strategies, are more successful in terminating conflicts and achieving durable peace compared to Simultaneous strategies. The study suggests that while Simultaneous strategies are less effective, the quality of peace achieved is not fully accounted for in the statistical analysis and requires further qualitative investigation. The study is rated medium confidence as it is a non-experimental study, and has partially described the interventions.

Birch (2017) assessed the effectiveness of electoral violence prevention through capacity building through training and education and attitude-transforming strategies through peace messaging, pacting, dialogue, and meditation. The study used secondary datasets to compare state-initiated and non-state-initiated violence across eastern Europe and central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental study and used a new global dataset of the EVP strategy between 2013 and 2015. The results provide support for the arguments in favour of both capacity-building and attitude-transformation strategies of EVP, but with an important nuance: whereas attitude-transforming interventions are linked to lower rates of state-initiated violence, capacity-building approaches are associated with lower levels of non-state-initiated violence. The result for attitude-transformation interventions such as pacting, mediation, and peace messaging holds in both the models based on V-DEM and CREV data, whereas the result for capacity-building reaches statistical significance only in the model based on the more finely-grained CREV data. There is also some evidence that attitude transformation may increase non-state electoral violence; though the coefficient is only significant in the CREV model and only weakly so (at the 0.044 level), there is a hint that international efforts to alter the attitudes of non-state actors towards election-related violence may backfire in some contexts. The study was rated as medium confidence due to non-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and outcomes.

Burchard (2019) assessed the effectiveness of conditions which courts can moderate election-related violence in Nigeria. The study argues that increased trust in courts will be correlated with lower levels of electoral violence while low trust in courts will be associated with higher levels of electoral violence. Similarly, we argue that the successful nullification of election results by the EPTs will have a constraining effect on electoral violence. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental study and tested this theory of court effects on electoral violence in the pre-election period in Nigeria during the 2015 and 2019 elections based on the independent variable operationalized as the EPT decisions from the 2011 and 2015 elections. Total number of pre-election violence events includes 33. The study found support that

overturning an election outcome by an election tribunal and high trust in courts reduce the likelihood of pre-election violence in the next election. The election overturns by tribunal variable has a coefficient (-0.504) and 0.050 p-values. The high trust in court variable – coefficient (-0.775) and p-value (0.07). The control variable for pre-election fatalities - coefficient (0.186) and p-value (0.00). In model 2 for the analysis of the 2019 elections, the study found that having trust in the court significantly reduced the likelihood of pre-election violence in the 2019 elections. While controlling for population and pre-election fatalities, having some trust in the court was statistically significant with a coefficient of 0.750 and a p-value of 0.006. Similarly, having high trust in the court was also statistically significant with a coefficient of 0.878 and a p-value of 0.001. The study was rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design.

Chacon (2013) assessed the effectiveness of decentralizing reforms i.e., fiscal resources on acts of selective violence against civilians (e.g., massacres) and acts of indiscriminate violence which include terrorist attacks with small explosive devices, attacks on infrastructure of the municipality, and displaced households. The study was conducted in Colombia. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design and includes data from 11,257 elected and non-elected officials. The panel, long-difference, and non-linear specifications are robust and consistent with the motivating theory. This theory predicts that in a civil war, an exogenous increase in the public resources of subnational governments can have a detrimental impact on local security and that this effect depends crucially on the capacity and strength of these local governments. As shown, the fiscal transfers to the municipalities and their interaction with various measures of local state capacity have the predicted opposite signs and are statistically significant at conventional levels. The study was rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design.

Collier (2014) conducted a field experiment based on anti-violence campaigning. The campaign appealed to collective action through electoral participation and worked through town meetings, popular theatres, and door-to-door distribution of materials. The campaign was designed to induce experimental subjects to oppose voter intimidation. The main mechanism employed was to lower the perceived threat to individual voters through collective action. The study was conducted in Nigeria. The study is designed as a randomized controlled trial. The study included 24 enumeration areas, 1200 participants in baseline (50 per area), and 1149 participants during the post-election survey. Overall, the study found clear and statistically significant effects of the campaign on diminishing perceptions of political violence and increasing empowerment of the population against political violence. These effects are 0.39, 0.23, and 0.22 standard deviation units for general political freedom and conflict, local electoral violence from the top, and local empowerment from the bottom (respectively). These effects are strongly significant at the 1 or 5 percent levels using cluster-robust standard error inference. The study is rated as low confidence due to attrition not being reported in the study.

Gonzalez (2015) assessed the impact of a social monitoring initiative in which citizens used cell phones to report instances of fraud during the 2009 Afghan Presidential election on institutional corruption. The study was conducted in Afghanistan. The study was designed as an experimental study design and covered 139 neighborhoods for capturing the mobile coverage. The study found that there is a considerable drop in fraud levels for polling centers within the coverage area. In particular, for centres within a 5.7-kilometer bandwidth around the coverage boundary, the share of votes classifying as Category C+ fraud is about 5.2 percentage points lower in centers on the coverage side. Given an average share of about 19.8 for centers on the non-coverage side, this represents about a 26 percent drop in the share of fraudulent votes. The study was rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and overall attrition of more than 20% in the study sample.

Mustasilta (2019) The study assessed the conditions under which traditional governance contributes to state capacity to maintain peace. The state traditional governance interaction types includes discordant and concordant. Concordant interaction refers to institutional designs in which either traditional governance is synthesized into the state-steered system or its authority is recognized and demarcated as a parallel structure in certain functional areas. Discordant interaction is defined as interactions without integration or state recognition regarding the functions of traditional governance. The study was conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study is designed as a quasi-experimental study design. The study used 53 onsets of intrastate armed conflicts. The state traditional governance interaction types were obtained from the time series data with a total of 835 observations (486 disconcordant and 349 concordant). The empirical results support the argument that integrating traditional authorities into the public administration lowers the risk of armed conflict in comparison to when they remain unrecognized by the state. Concordant interaction is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of conflict onset, with its coefficient statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Institutional hybridity decreases the probability of onset by more than 60%, from 0.113 (11.3%) to 0.042 (4.2%), holding everything else constant. The study was rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and outcomes; and attrition not being reported in the study.

Mvukiyehe (2009) evaluates the micro-level impacts of the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) on security, economic recovery, and political reintegration after the 2002-2007 civil war. The analysis used survey data from 1,459 civilians and ex-combatants, conflict event data, and socioeconomic indicators. It employed a mixed-methods approach, including panel methods for time-variant data and cross-sectional methods for static data, alongside hierarchical small-area estimation techniques to address sparsity in community-level observations. Sampling weights and clustering techniques were applied to ensure representativeness and robustness in the estimates. The findings show that UNOCI deployments had minimal impact on reducing victimization rates, as these had already declined significantly prior to its arrival. However, there was limited evidence that UNOCI-monitored zones deterred renewed hostilities. Households in areas with peacekeeping deployments experienced fewer economic losses and somewhat better recovery, although these findings are preliminary and require further causal analysis. UNOCI's electoral sensitization activities were associated with increased confidence in the fairness of upcoming elections. However, its presence did not significantly influence the return of local political leaders or broader political reintegration. The study is rated low confidence due to non-experimental study design and attrition not being reported in the study.

Mvukiyehe (2017) This study assesses the impacts of exposure to electoral programming from broadcast radio on the women's political behaviors and attitudes in the context of the 2011 general elections in Liberia. The intervention focused on five special election programs. Listening groups of women were set up in randomly allocated treatment communities in order to isolate any effects. They met on their own three times per week to listen to a specific electoral program in real time. For the fourth weekly meeting, groups were joined by the staff from the implementing partner organization to listen to and discuss a pre-recorded program. The study is designed as a randomized controlled trial and implemented in 600 households across 20 treatment and control communities. In each community, interviews in 10 of the 15 households were conducted with female respondents and 5 were conducted with male respondents. The study showed that there are largely modest, but consistent positive effects of exposure to UNMIL Radio's elections programs on most outcome indicators (between 1 and 5 percentage points seems to be the most common marginal effect on many outcome indicators, but others also have marginal impacts as high as 9 and 10 percentage points). Only just under half of these estimates are statistically significant at conventional levels, most likely due to a relatively small sample size. Amongst the variables that describe national participation, electoral turnout increased by 9 percentage points for treated women. The study is rated as high confidence.

Nandwani (2019) investigates if devolution of political power in conflict-affected areas can reduce violence. This is addressed by assessing the impact of a local government institution, introduced in the Adivasi districts in 1996, on Maoist insurgency in India. The local councils aimed at addressing Adivasi grievances by recognising their traditional lifestyle and land, forests, and water rights, thereby reducing their incentive to participate in insurgency. The study is designed as a quasi-experimental study design. The study used district-level data on Maoist insurgency for 17 Indian states from the Global Terrorism database. A total of 14,036 observations were included in the analysis. There is a significant ($p < 0.05$) and positive impact of PESA on the increase in insurgency after its implementation. The introduction of local self-government in schedule five areas increased the likelihood of insurgency by almost 8–12 % points. Given the average likelihood of insurgency is 14%, there was a considerable increase (50–75%) in insurgency in schedule five districts. The study is rated as low confidence due to non experimental study design, partial description of intervention and outcomes and attrition not being reported in the study.

Smidt (2016) The study assessed the impact of the presence of international election observers on electoral violence. The study was based on elections conducted in African states. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. The sample for analysis was drawn from 230 state-wide elections held in 43 African states. The study shows that the international election deters the government from using post-electoral violence after non-fraudulent elections ($p < 0.05$). The analysis showed that the actors involved in post-electoral violence and over-aggregated measures: the estimated effects of international election monitoring on government and opposition-sponsored post-electoral violence point in opposite directions. Whereas governments refrain from using force in the presence of international election observers, opposition groups become more likely to engage in post-electoral violence, at least in 63% of the sampled elections without massive fraud. If blatant fraud occurs, its exposure by observers can spark repression, but the violence-inducing effect of monitoring opposition groups disappears. The study is rated as low confidence due to non experimental study design, little description of intervention.

Smidt (2020) The study assessed the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations routinely organizing election education events on violent protests and rioting involving civilians during electoral periods via three pathways in Côte d'Ivoire. These include learning about PKO's electoral security assistance during elections for mitigating fears of election violence; provision of politically relevant information that can strengthen political efficacy and people's ability to make use of peaceful political channels and finally, peace messages during election-education events can change people's calculus about the utility and appropriateness of violent behavior. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design and data for analysis was obtained from secondary datasets. The statistical analyses support the argument that PKOs' election-education events can mitigate violent protest and rioting ($p < 0.01$) by soothing fears of election violence, reducing political alienation, and delegitimizing violence ($p < 0.01$). Yet election education makes little difference in opposition strongholds and among opposition supporters, who tend to perceive the PKO as biased. The study is rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and attrition being not reported in the study.

Widner (2005) - Over 1975-2003 nearly 200 new constitutions were drawn up in countries at risk of conflict, as part of peace processes and the adoption of multiparty political systems. The process of writing constitutions is considered to be very important to the chances of sustaining peace, and The Commonwealth and the US Institute for Peace have developed good practice guidelines in this area. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. The study used 'drafting database' record of roughly 130 procedural and contextual features of over 194 constitution-writing cases carried out since 1975. The study shows that differences in the degree of participation in the drafting of constitutions has no major effect on post-

ratification levels of violence in some parts of the world, such as Europe, but does make a difference in Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific together. The study is rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design, partial description of intervention and attrition being not reported in the study.

Confidence assessment

The overall confidence in the cell is low, given that 10 studies are rated low confidence and 2 studies are rated medium confidence.

Other outcomes in the study:

Community and state governance/ Civic Participation / Government performance

Violence and atrocity prevention / Social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Human security / Physical security / Political security / Economic security