

Effect of Foundational state design processes, transitional political processes, and election support intervention on social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Election support interventions, including election campaigns and election education events, had a small effect on voter empowerment and willingness to engage in political violence.

Geographic Focus: Sub Saharan Africa

Effect: Small effect ($g=0.032$)

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

Short summary

Election support interventions modestly influenced social norms around violence by promoting collective electoral participation and encouraging peaceful political engagement. Activities such as town meetings, popular theatre, and door-to-door distribution of educational materials were implemented alongside UN peacekeeping election education events that focused on electoral security, political efficacy, and peace messaging. While these interventions showed some improvement in empowerment measures and reductions in willingness to use political violence, the overall effect was small. Consistency exists between the two studies, but confidence remains low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions centered on election campaigns and education activities aimed at encouraging peaceful electoral participation. UN peacekeeping operations facilitated election education events during electoral periods, communicating messages about electoral security, citizen political efficacy, and the importance of non-violent political engagement. Activities included town hall meetings, popular theatre, and door-to-door campaigns to raise awareness and foster collective action. These interventions were short-term and delivered by international actors, which may have limited their contextual sensitivity.

How the intervention is expected to work

Election support interventions are expected to reduce political violence and enhance voter empowerment by informing citizens about electoral security, providing politically relevant information, and delivering peace messages. By increasing perceptions of safety and awareness of non-violent avenues for political expression, the interventions aim to shift social norms, decrease perceived threats from opponents, and encourage constructive engagement in elections.

The evidence base

The cell includes two quasi-experimental impact evaluations from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire.

Evidence findings

Election support interventions had a small positive effect on voter empowerment and reducing willingness to use political violence ($g = 0.032$). The overall confidence in the cell remains low due to the limited number of studies despite consistent findings across them. There are 2 impact evaluations in the cell and evidence summaries of the 2 studies are thus provided here:

Included studies

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. The study showed that the anti-violence campaign increased the sense of security in the general population. The campaign also boosted empowerment to counteract electoral violence – the likelihood that the postcard was mailed was 8 percentage points higher for treated respondents. It was also found that there were 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.

Smidt (2020) 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 Coˆte 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 not being reported.

Confidence assessment

Overall confidence in the cell is low due to the limited number of studies, both of which are rated low confidence, despite consistent findings across them.

Other outcomes in this study:

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

Human security / Political security / Physical security

Community and state governance / civic participation