

## Effect of Media & Communication on Civic Participation

Media and communication interventions fostered civic engagement, though their effectiveness was **small** and context-dependent.

Geographical region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Effect: Small effect ( $g=0.049$ )

Confidence: Low (6 studies with 13 effect size)

### Short Summary

Media and communication interventions had a small positive effect on civic participation, modestly increasing community engagement and collective action. While some programs, such as PDEV II and Voices for Peace, improved collaboration and reporting of security concerns, effectiveness varied across contexts and interventions. Overall, sustained exposure and local adaptation are key for meaningful participation gains.

### Long summary

#### *The Intervention*

Media-based initiatives used radio dramas, public campaigns, and discussion-based programming to promote participation and civic awareness. The PDEV II program integrated media broadcasts with community engagement and youth training to strengthen local governance. The Voices for Peace project combined radio dramas with weekly listening groups to discuss issues like corruption and police-community relations. The Kumbuka Kesho initiative in the DRC used storytelling to encourage intergroup collaboration, while religious sermon messaging in Burkina Faso promoted tolerance through moral appeals. In Mali, peace radio programs were paired with workshops and governance activities to encourage citizen involvement in local decision-making.

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

These interventions aim to enhance civic participation by shaping public discourse, increasing awareness of rights and responsibilities, and providing models for collective action. By combining entertainment-education with participatory dialogue, they foster trust, build social capital, and encourage citizens to engage constructively with governance and security actors.

#### *Evidence base*

This cell consists of a total of six IEs conducted in varied regions, including Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Rwanda, Burkina Faso's Sahel region, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and northern Mali.

#### *Evidence findings*

Media interventions had a small positive effect on civic participation, with notable improvements in collaboration and engagement in some contexts but limited or no effects in others. Effectiveness varied with program duration, delivery mode, and contextual factors such as local trust and conflict intensity.

### *Included studies:*

The cell consist six IEs & the the detailed summary thus provided here

**Aldrich (2014)** study focuses on **USAID's Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)**, including programs like **Peace through Development (PDEV)** and **PDEV II**, aimed at countering violent extremism by addressing its root causes. Objectives include reducing extremist recruitment, fostering peace and civic engagement, and building community resilience. Key activities include teacher training, curriculum support, peace and tolerance radio broadcasts, workshops for civic engagement, rural job creation, micro-grants for local NGOs, and youth empowerment initiatives. By promoting norm change, civic participation, economic stability, strengthened social networks, and institutional capacity building, the intervention seeks to provide alternatives to extremist narratives and foster long-term resilience.

Research conducted in Timbuktu and Dire, two adjacent cities in northern Mali, involved 200 respondents evenly split between the treatment groups. The findings revealed that residents of Timbuktu were approximately 40% more inclined to engage in local government activities compared to their counterparts in Dire. Overall, the study is Low confidence quantitative study.

**Bilali et al. (2017)** evaluated a media-based program using the radio drama *Kumbuka Kesho* ("Remember Tomorrow") in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rooted in social cognitive theory, it aimed to promote positive social change and intergroup relations in a conflict-affected context. The program used role modeling to portray inclusive collective actions, such as protests, micro-loan programs, and intergroup collaboration, to address grievances like corruption, poverty, child labor, and injustice. The control show discussed these grievances without proposing any actions.

The study findings documented that the participants who listened to the role-modeling show expressed a higher willingness to participate in collective action than participants listening to the control show. There was no difference in collective action between the control show and the no-show condition ( $b = -0.22$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $p = 0.27$ , 95% CI: [-0.62; 0.17]). Overall the study is of high quality due to its robust group-randomized experimental design, including control and treatment groups and rigorous analysis methods. The study is rated as low confidence.

**Bilali et al. 2019** evaluated the *Voices for Peace* project, featuring the radio drama *Wuro Potal*, designed to counter violent extremism in Burkina Faso's Sahel region. The intervention aimed to reduce vulnerability to extremism by raising awareness, promoting dialogue, fostering social cohesion, and encouraging collaboration with security forces. Activities included weekly listening sessions in 66 treatment villages over 12 weeks, where participants engaged in 52 episodes addressing issues such as corruption, governance, and police-community relations. Training personnel facilitated group discussions and encouraged reflection on key themes and collective learning. Conducted in Seno Province—the study surveyed 2,904 core participants from 132 villages (66 treatment, 66 control) at baseline and endline, partially including 2,112 network participants.

The radio drama intervention revealed that approximately 60% of participants viewed collaborating with the police or reporting suspicious activities as the most effective way to combat violent extremism. The intervention significantly increased this behavior, with intervention participants 6% more likely to report collaboration as a strategy and 18% more likely if they attended at least one session. In a "suspicious person" scenario, intervention participants were 10% more likely to agree they would contact authorities compared to the control group. These findings highlight the intervention's success in promoting proactive civic participation in security efforts. Overall, the study presents high-medium confidence.

**Finkel (2018)** evaluates The Peace through Development II (PDEV II) program, implemented from 2011 to 2016, aimed to enhance resilience to violent extremism (VE) in at-risk communities across Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger. It focused on four strategic objectives

(SOs): empowering youth, amplifying moderate voices, strengthening civil society, and improving local governance. The program combined community activities with media efforts, notably radio, to reach wider audiences.

Under SO1, "Youth Empowered," PDEV II offered vocational training, leadership programs, and literacy support. SO2, "Moderate Voices Increased," focused on media capacity-building, public campaigns, and interfaith dialogues. SO3, "Civil Society Capacity Increased," aimed to strengthen civil society organizations through training and the formation of Community Action Committees (CACs). SO4, "Local Government Strengthened," improved the skills of local officials in public administration and governance. The program targeted 83 zones, with core zones receiving full interventions, non-core zones focusing on radio, and no-activity zones having limited engagement. It used high and low-intensity zones to prioritize resources and activities for deeper community engagement.

The PDEV II radio component evaluation revealed a decline in community decision-making for both groups, but it is more significant for the "Non-radio" group. The "Radio" group experienced a smaller decline, suggesting that radio exposure helps sustain higher levels of community engagement over time. Overall, the study was of medium to high quality, with a strong, multidimensional approach focused on long-term sustainability.

**Grossman (2022):** The "Pro-Peace Messaging through Religious Sermons" intervention involved exposing adolescents to audio excerpts of a sermon delivered by a prominent Burkinabé imam, Alidou Ilboudo. The sermon emphasized Islamic teachings promoting peace, tolerance, and non-violence while invoking a shared national identity among Burkinabé citizens. The intervention was implemented as part of a randomized survey experiment in 12 schools across rural and peri-urban regions of Burkina Faso, targeting students aged 12 to 18. Enumerators played the sermon recordings to participants individually, ensuring comprehension by allowing clarifying questions or repeated playback if needed. The aim was to test whether such messaging could enhance intergroup tolerance, reduce support for violent extremism, and increase civic participation among at-risk youth in a region affected by Islamist extremist insurgencies.

The study found that participants in the intervention group were less likely to engage in pro-peace civic activities, such as recording and sending a message to authorities, compared to those in the control group. While non-intervention participants showed a slight increase in willingness, this was not statistically significant, and overall civic participation remained low across all groups. Overall, the study is of high-medium quality confidence.

**Nichols-Barrer et al. (2014)** evaluated the Rwanda Threshold Program (RTP), an initiative sponsored by the Millennium Challenge Corporation, aimed at improving governance and civil society engagement in Rwanda. The intervention, implemented between 2009 and 2011, included four major components: strengthening the professionalism and accountability of the Rwanda National Police (RNP), enhancing the rule of law through judicial reforms, supporting media professionalism and independence, and increasing civic participation by empowering civil society organizations and local governments. The study was conducted across Rwanda's 416 sectors, providing a nationally representative evaluation of the program's impact on governance indicators, citizen engagement, and access to justice and public services. The diverse settings included rural and urban areas, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of how the intervention addressed critical governance challenges in post-conflict Rwanda.

The Rwanda Threshold Program (RTP) showed a small positive impact on awareness of local government meetings, increasing by 1.4 percentage points; however, this result was statistically insignificant. Additionally, there were negatively insignificant effects on familiarity with local government officials and perceived access to government information. On the other hand, both treatment and control districts exhibited positive trends in citizen influence and knowledge about local government affairs, with the improvements being more notable in the control districts. Overall, the study presents high-medium confidence.

*Confidence assessment*

Overall, the study is rated low confidence due to inconsistencies among the included studies, despite a fairly representative sample.

**Other outcomes in the cell**

Community & state governance/ government performance

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

Violence & Atrocity preventions/social norms regarding violence or atrocity

Human security/intermediate social cohesion outcomes

Social cohesion/feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity

Human security/Political security

Human security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes