

### **Effect of Media & Communication on Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity**

Media interventions had a small effect on fostering trust and acceptance of diversity, with some initiatives improving reconciliation while others inadvertently reinforced divisions.

**Geographical region:** Sub-Saharan Africa

**Effect:** small effect ( $g = 0.015$ )

**Confidence assessment:** Low (9 studies with 49 effect size)

#### **Short Summary**

Media and communication interventions, primarily radio dramas and video storytelling, aimed to foster reconciliation, trust, and social cohesion in conflict-affected regions. These interventions leveraged entertainment-education, role modeling, and cognitive belief modification to challenge prejudices, encourage intergroup cooperation, and shift social norms. Evidence indicates a small positive effect on participants' feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity. Results were mixed—some programs successfully increased intergroup trust and reduced social distance, while others unintentionally reinforced ethnic divisions or reduced willingness to cooperate. The cell is rated low confidence due to variation in outcomes across studies.

#### **Long Summary**

##### *The Intervention*

The interventions included radio dramas, video storytelling, religious messaging, and community engagement programs designed to promote reconciliation, social cohesion, and conflict resolution. Activities embedded messages of peace, trauma recovery, and intergroup cooperation, highlighting role models who encourage bystander intervention and inclusive practices.

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

These interventions aim to influence attitudes, social cohesion, and behaviors through psychological and social mechanisms. Entertainment-education narratives model positive social norms to encourage trust, cooperation, and inclusive perspectives. Religious and government messaging reinforce unity, while civic engagement programs empower communities to counter prejudice and extremism. Collectively, these mechanisms seek to reduce bias, foster empathy, and strengthen acceptance of diversity over time.

##### *The Evidence base*

The cell includes 15 studies—5 systematic reviews (SRs) and 10 impact evaluations (IEs)/primary studies.

Among the 10 included IEs, one was not considered for cumulative effect size due to insufficient data. The primary studies used quasi-experimental, mixed-methods, RCTs, natural experiments (e.g., radio signal variation), and experimental priming to assess

shifts in attitudes and behaviours in post-conflict and violence-affected regions like Burundi, Eastern DRC, Rwanda, Colombia, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger.

The SRs varied in confidence, with three rated high-medium and two low. Studies covered L&MICs and fragile contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe, and North America, including Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger, Burundi, Rwanda, Colombia, and Israel.

#### *Evidence findings*

Media and communication interventions produced a **small positive effect** on trust and acceptance of diversity. While some programs enhanced intergroup trust, reduced social distance, and promoted inclusive victimhood, others unintentionally reinforced ethnic divisions or weakened cooperative behaviors.

#### *The review Evidence*

Systematic reviews of interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings—including media campaigns, citizen engagement, peace education, and intergroup contact—showed mixed effectiveness. Interventions were generally more successful in structured settings and among younger populations, but overall effects varied by context, target group, and implementation strategy..

#### *Included studies:*

the cell includes 11 primary or impact evaluation studies with low to high quality of confidence, where two were not considered for cumulative effect size. The detailed summary thus of all included studies are provided below;

**Bilali et al. (2015)** evaluated a media-based reconciliation program implemented in Burundi through a radio drama titled *Murikira Ukuri* (Shedding Light on the Truth). The program used an entertainment-education approach, embedding educational messages within an engaging fictional narrative. Its objectives included raising awareness of the causes and progression of mass violence, promoting reconciliation by encouraging active bystandership and reducing passivity in the face of violence, challenging in-group superiority, and fostering inclusive victimhood and intergroup trust. The program also provided role models for behaviors such as speaking out against violence and empathizing with out-group members. The radio drama portrayed a fictional conflict between two ethnic groups, enabling listeners to engage with complex power dynamics and grievances while promoting positive intergroup norms. The study used a quasi-experimental design with propensity score matching to estimate the intervention's causal effects. The final sample included 1,074 participants—714 listeners and 360 non-listeners—from 12 communities across five provinces in Burundi, chosen for their ethnic diversity and varying exposure to conflict-related violence. The findings revealed that compared with non-listeners, listeners reported more out-group trust, less social distance, and endorsed norms about trauma disclosure. The study is rated as a high-medium confidence study.

**Bilali (2015)** evaluates the intervention involved in a radio drama, *Kumbuka Kesho*, broadcast in Eastern DRC to promote peaceful intergroup relations amidst ongoing violence, it used fictional narratives grounded in social psychology theories to model reconciliation and trauma recovery behaviors. The objective was to test if media-based interventions effective in post-conflict settings (e.g., Rwanda, Burundi) could foster inclusive victim consciousness, reduce social distance, and mitigate conflict-enhancing attitudes in an ongoing conflict context. A mixed-methods study included an experimental priming paradigm with 1,522 participants and focus group interviews with 51 listeners. The intervention showed that listening to the radio drama significantly reduced exclusive victimhood ( $p = 0.008$ ), indicating a shift away from the belief that

only one's own group has suffered. Inclusive victimhood increased among listeners ( $p = 0.03$ ), with priming further amplifying this effect. Social distance decreased among listeners, suggesting greater openness to intergroup relationships, but the effect was significant only in the priming condition. The study is rated as low confidence.

**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 role-modeling show unexpectedly reduced tolerance and openness to intergroup cooperation. Participants were more likely to believe that discussions among different ethnic and political groups worsened issues and less likely to support the expression of diverse opinions compared to the control group. In contrast, tolerance significantly increased in the control show compared to the no-show condition, though there was no difference between groups regarding openness to intergroup cooperation. The study is rated as high quality due to its robust group-randomized experimental design, the inclusion of control and treatment groups, and rigorous analysis methods.

**Bruneau (2022) evaluated** a 5.5-minute media video intervention designed to address psychological barriers to peace in Colombia. Created in collaboration with Colombian filmmakers, the video featured interviews with ex-FARC combatants and non-FARC Colombians. It focused on reducing negative beliefs about the willingness and ability of FARC members to reintegrate into society. The intervention highlighted successful coexistence initiatives, such as mixed sports teams and community events in demobilization camps, to demonstrate FARC members' capacity for positive change. The primary objective was to promote peace and reintegration by challenging the belief that FARC members are unwilling and incapable of change. This objective was guided by a theory of change rooted in cognitive belief modification rather than affective pathways, such as empathy, to reduce psychological barriers to reconciliation. The study revealed that the intervention consistently increased empathy towards FARC members across studies and over time. Its effects on reducing prejudice were significant initially but not sustained or replicated in subsequent analyses. The study is rated as High confidence in the consistency of findings.

**Blouin (2019) –** examines the impact of government-run radio propaganda on inter-ethnic attitudes in post-genocide Rwanda, focusing on Radio Rwanda, a state-controlled broadcaster promoting national unity while de-emphasizing ethnic identity. Using natural variations in radio reception caused by Rwanda's mountainous terrain, the research assesses whether exposure to propaganda reduces ethnic salience and strengthens inter-ethnic trust. The study hypothesizes that media exposure reshapes identity perceptions, fostering trust and cooperation across ethnic lines. The study, conducted in 52 rural villages with 438 farmers (plus a follow-up survey of 154 participants), used random selection from local political representative lists. Findings reveal that Radio Rwanda reduced ethnic salience by 10-13 percentage points ( $p < 0.05$ ) and boosted inter-ethnic cooperation by 15.6 percentage points ( $p < 0.01$ ). In the private trust game, inter-ethnic trust offers were 47% higher ( $p < 0.01$ ) in radio reception areas. Additionally, public trust offers were 25% higher than private trust offers in non-radio areas, indicating that propaganda aligns private and public behavior. The results strongly suggest that state-controlled media can reshape ethnic attitudes and promote national unity. The study is rated as low confidence study.

**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 evaluation of the PDEV II radio component revealed significant differences between the "Radio" and "Non-radio" groups in various dimensions of trust and perceptions. The "Non-radio" group experienced a decline in interpersonal trust of about -0.15, while the "Radio" group maintained stable levels near 0, suggesting that radio exposure helps preserve trust. A similar trend was seen in institutional trust, with the "Non-radio" group declining by around -0.10 compared to a minimal decline in the "Radio" group. Regarding interethnic marriage, the "Non-radio" group showed a small positive change (0.05), whereas the "Radio" group demonstrated a larger improvement (0.2), indicating radio's potential to foster positive attitudes. Both groups reported decreases in perceived ethnic and religious differences, with the "Non-radio" group experiencing slightly greater declines (-0.2) than the "Radio" group (-0.15). In summary, these findings suggest that radio exposure positively influences trust and interethnic attitudes while also slightly reducing perceived ethnic and religious differences. 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 no significant impact of the pro-peace message on trust or attitudes toward religious out-groups, with treatment effects being modest and statistically indistinguishable from zero. However, the imam's speech reduced tolerance for other ethnic groups as neighbors by 0.037 and trust in other ethnic groups by 0.065. These findings suggest that the treatment influenced attitudes, but in unexpected ways, likely due to the salience of ethnic divisions in response to religious extremism in Burkina Faso. The study is rated as a medium – high-quality confidence.

**Paluck (2009)** evaluated *Musekweya* ("New Dawn"), a radio soap opera designed to promote reconciliation, trust, and empathy while discouraging prejudice and violence in post-genocide Rwanda. Through fictional narratives about two Rwandan communities, it conveyed educational messages on intergroup cooperation, trauma

healing, and rejecting violent norms. The study hypothesized that exposure to the program would shift personal beliefs, alter perceptions of social norms, and encourage behaviors like dissent, cooperation, and reconciliation, with emotional engagement and group discussion amplifying its impact. Participants were drawn from general population, genocide survivor, and Twa communities across four regions. Communities were stratified by demographics, matched into pairs, and randomly assigned to the reconciliation or control program. From each community, 40 adults were randomly selected, ensuring gender, age, and family balance.

Study findings documented that Reconciliation listeners were significantly more likely to agree that trusting others is not naive ( $p = 0.04$ ). Additionally, the belief that intermarriage should be allowed within families showed a significant positive effect ( $p = 0.01$ ), reflecting progress toward promoting reconciliation and reducing prejudice. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the reconciliation and health groups regarding perceptions of mistrust ( $p = 0.52$ ). Overall, the study presents Low confidence.

**Paluck (2010)** examined the impact of a weekly radio talk show in eastern DRC designed to promote tolerance, outgroup engagement, and perspective-taking. The study had three key objectives: assessing mass media's ability to spark interpersonal discussion about community conflict, testing its effects on intergroup contact and perspective-taking in unsupervised conflict settings, and presenting an experimental approach to studying discussion-based interventions. The underlying mechanism of the intervention was that media-driven discussions, through fostering social norms and shared cognition, could shape behaviors by encouraging listeners to engage with a variety of perspectives and understand outgroup members.

Data from 842 participants representing diverse ethnic and linguistic groups revealed no differences in perspective-taking between talk show and baseline listeners. While the show did not affect general outgroup tolerance, it was associated with reduced tolerance for disliked groups. Talk show listeners were more likely to oppose disliked groups joining community associations and believed peace would be impossible if these groups remained in DRC. These effects were stronger among individuals who actively discussed the program. Overall, the study demonstrated medium confidence.

**Bowers et al. (2017)** assessed the Arewa24 intervention in Northern Nigeria, a Hausa-language television channel aimed at reducing support for violence, increasing tolerance, and promoting gender equality. The study employed a matched observational design, comparing 2013 (pre-launch) and 2015 (post-launch) survey data, alongside an experimental encouragement design. Data was collected from 17,196 respondents across 1,642 neighborhoods. Findings were unexpected, as viewers showed increased support for violence and less progressive gender attitudes, though some improvements in intergroup tolerance were observed. The study is rated as low -confidence.

**Cole et al. (2003)** assessed the Rechov Sumsum/Shara'a Simsim intervention in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, a bilingual Sesame Street adaptation designed to promote respect and understanding among Israeli-Jewish, Palestinian-Israeli, and Palestinian children. Using a pre-post-test design, the study surveyed 275 preschoolers in Tel Aviv, Acre, and Ramallah. Findings showed that while children demonstrated increased prosocial justifications for conflict resolution and improved knowledge of cultural symbols, negative stereotypes of Jewish and Arab adults persisted, particularly among Palestinian children. The study is rated as a low confidence.

*Confidence assessment*

Overall, the cell is rated with low confidence due to inconsistencies in effect sizes across primary studies and varying confidence levels among included systematic reviews, despite the inclusion of a large number of IEs.

**Other outcomes in this study**

Violence and atrocity prevention/Social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Human security/Intermediate social cohesion

Human security/willingness to participate or help

Link to review summaries

Ditlmann Ruth K (2017)

Carthy Sarah L (2020)

Aboud Frances (2012)

Sonnenfeld Ada (2021)

Hsieh Wing (2021)

All the studies may be accessed via EGM.