

Effect of Media & Communication on Nature & scale of atrocity prevention

FM radio broadcasts encouraging defection during the LRA insurgency had a **small effect**, slightly reducing conflict-related fatalities and violence against civilians.

Geographical region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Effect: Small effect ($g=0.014$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (one study with 6 effect sizes)

Short summary

Media and communication interventions using FM radio broadcasts during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency showed a **small effect** on atrocity prevention. Increasing defection messaging by 19 minutes daily reduced conflict-related fatalities by 2.7% and civilian violence by 1%, while increasing defections by 1%. However, the intervention had limited reintegration success and slightly increased looting (by 1.6%). Overall, FM radio broadcasts contributed modestly to reducing violence but produced mixed outcomes. Confidence in these findings is low due to reliance on a single study.

Long summary

The Intervention

The intervention used FM radio broadcasts to encourage defections from the LRA by providing logistical instructions for surrender, assurances of safety, and reintegration messages from families. The broadcasts combined practical guidance with emotional appeals to humanize returnees and reduce fear of government retaliation.

How the intervention is expected to work

The intervention is designed to reduce violence by influencing combatants' beliefs and preferences. Under a belief-based model, combatants rationally update their expectations about reintegration safety based on new information received via broadcasts. Under a preference-based model, emotional and familial appeals alter motivations by strengthening the desire to defect. Together, these mechanisms aim to lower perceived risks and increase incentives for voluntary demobilization.

The evidence base

The cell includes two studies, one systematic review & one primary study. The primary study was conducted in regions affected by the LRA insurgency, spanning Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR). These areas are characterized by remote locations where radio was an effective medium for communication.

Evidence Findings

FM radio defection messaging showed a small positive effect on reducing conflict-related fatalities and civilian violence, though it also led to a slight rise in looting. Overall, the intervention modestly improved atrocity prevention outcomes with mixed behavioral effects.

The review evidence

The review underscores the role of media and communication in influencing policy debates on conflict prevention and the need for stronger evidence in this area. It also examines the nature and scale of violence, finding limited high-quality studies on effective interventions, with some efforts unintentionally worsening conflicts rather than mitigating them.

Included studies:

the cell consisted of one low confidence IE. the detailed summary thus provided here

Armand Alex et al. (2020) evaluated how FM radio broadcasts influenced the reduction of violent conflict during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency. The broadcasts aimed to encourage LRA fighters to leave the group by providing practical instructions, messages from families, and reassurances of safe reintegration into society. The study used data from 21 radio antennas covering LRA-affected regions, along with conflict information from databases like the LRA Crisis Tracker. It analyzed data from 60,600 grid cells, focusing on conflict intensity, radio messaging coverage, and outcomes.

The study found that an increase of 1 standard deviation in messaging intensity leads to a 2.7% reduction in LRA-related fatalities, corresponding to 19 minutes of daily messaging in areas with full radio coverage. Higher intensity defection messaging significantly increases the number of returnees, with a 1 standard deviation increase resulting in a 1% rise in returnees. This suggests defection messaging effectively encourages LRA members to reintegrate into civil society. Regarding abductions, the study found no significant evidence that defection messaging increased LRA abductions, although a slight reduction was observed. Additionally, defection messaging was associated with a 1% decrease in violence against civilians and clashes with security forces, suggesting a potential mechanism for reducing fatalities through fewer attacks. However, no evidence was found that the LRA increased the severity of attacks. One notable downside was a 1.6% increase in looting events linked to higher-intensity defection messaging. While defection messaging generally helped reduce conflict, it may have unintentionally led to more looting. The study is rated as a high confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall, the cell reflects low confidence due to the limited number of studies and the low confidence rating of the included study.

Link to review summaries

Cramer Christopher (2016) (Systematic review).
Studies may be accessed via the EGM.

Other outcomes in this study

None