

### **Effect of Media & communication on social norms of violence or atrocity prevention**

Media and communication interventions show a small effect on social norms related to violence and atrocity prevention, with some improvements in tolerance and reduced in-group superiority, though deeper beliefs often persist.

**Geographical region:** Sub-saharan Africa, Latin America & Caribbean, Middle east & North Africa

**Effect:** Small effect ( $g=0.014$ )

**Confidence in study findings:** Medium (9 studies with 54 effect size)

### **Short summary**

Media interventions produced a small effect on social norms related to violence. Radio dramas, video narratives, social media campaigns, and religious messaging were deployed to reduce biases, promote reconciliation, and foster tolerance. While some interventions successfully increased intergroup understanding and reduced in-group superiority, others had minimal impact on deeply held beliefs. Long-term, large-scale programs, such as PDEV II, were more effective at promoting peace-oriented norms. Overall, the effect on social norms remains small and context-dependent.

### **Long summary**

#### *The Interventions*

Interventions included radio dramas and video content with storytelling, religious sermons, social media campaigns, paradoxical thinking multimedia, and large-scale programs combining media with community engagement. These programs aimed to promote dialogue, perspective-taking, and tolerance in conflict-affected communities.

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

Media interventions work by influencing perceptions, modeling prosocial behavior, and fostering dialogue. Storytelling and narratives encourage empathy and perspective-taking, while social media and religious messaging frame messages to align with audience values. Cognitive-based approaches challenge entrenched beliefs, and large-scale programs combine media with community activities to strengthen trust, social cohesion, and conflict resolution skills.

#### *The Evidence base*

The cell comprises 11 studies, including one low-confidence systematic review (SR) and 10 impact evaluations (IEs). Of the 10 IEs, one was excluded from the cumulative effect size calculation due to insufficient data. The included IEs were conducted in conflict-prone regions across West Africa (Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger), East Africa (Burundi, Rwanda), Latin America (Colombia), and the Middle East (Israel).

#### *Evidence findings*

Media interventions had a small positive effect on social norms. Some interventions increased tolerance, reduced biases, and promoted dialogue, while short-term programs had limited impact on deeply held beliefs. Larger and sustained interventions showed more consistent improvements.

### *The review evidence*

The review assessed media-based interventions, including radio dramas, media campaigns, intergroup dialogues, contact programs, conflict resolution training, and self-reflection activities, across 19 studies in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America. Findings showed mixed effectiveness—some interventions successfully reduced in-group superiority, social distance, and stereotypes, while others had limited impact on deeply rooted beliefs.

*Included studies:* there are 9 IEs with varied quality of confidence included under the cell. The details summary thus provided as below;

**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 results indicated that the intervention had no significant impact on more abstract or ideological beliefs regarding U.S. actions or the justification of violent extremism. Study is rated as Low confidence study.

**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 study employed a quasi-experimental design with propensity score matching to estimate the causal effects of the intervention, as random assignment was not possible. The final sample included 1,074 participants—714 listeners and 360 non-listeners—recruited from 12 communities across five provinces in Burundi, selected for their diverse ethnic compositions and varying levels of exposure to conflict-related violence.

The findings revealed no significant differences between listeners and non-listeners regarding inclusive victimhood or historical perspective-taking. However, listeners were less likely to view their in-group as superior and were less inclined to blame the out-group. They also showed a greater tendency to recognize their in-group's responsibility for the country's problems. Additionally, listeners were more likely to act as active bystanders when witnessing derogatory treatment of an out-group member. However, they displayed a lower awareness of the role that passive bystanders play in escalating violence. The study is rated as a medium-high confidence study.

**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 resulted in mixed results in influencing attitudes and priorities related to violent extremism. While the justification for extremist violence was already low, the intervention led to a further slight reduction (3.7% lower than the control group average, or about 0.1 standard deviation). Participants exposed to the intervention were more likely to identify governance (5% increase) and insecurity/violent extremism (2.5% increase) as government priorities. For attendees of one or more sessions, these effects were amplified (23% and 15%, respectively). However, the intervention did not alter beliefs about the causes or motivations of violent extremism, nor did it affect perceptions of support for violent extremism across groups or discussion items. The overall impact on shifting underlying beliefs and stimulating dialogue about violent extremism was limited. Overall, the study presents high-medium confidence.

**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 significantly increased support for peace and reintegration policies while reducing beliefs about FARC members' unwillingness and inability to change. The study is rated as a low confidence study.

**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 documented no clear effect of pro-peace messaging on attitudes toward extremism, with no variation by ethnicity. High concern about extremism (90%) and low justification for violence (3%) suggest floor and ceiling effects, potentially limiting observable changes. Overall, the study is high-medium quality, with rigorous design offset by practical limitations and mixed results.

**Gallego (2019)** evaluated how social media bots influence political discourse using a randomized experiment on 4,500 Colombian Twitter users before the 2016 Peace Plebiscite. The intervention involved automated Twitter accounts posing as a general, a scientist, and a priest, sending messages promoting the peace agreement with FARC. These messages were

framed using conservative values (patriotism, authority, sanctity) and liberal values (harm, fairness, reciprocity) to assess whether different messengers and message framings influenced engagement and political expression. The intervention was grounded in Moral Reframing Theory and Political Deliberation Theory, the intervention tested whether messages aligned with users' ideological values would increase engagement and discussion. The intervention had no statistically significant effect on mean sentiment over time ( $p > 0.05$ ), with only a short-lived positive effect observed on the first day post-treatment. While the intervention significantly increased positive tweets about the peace process in the first week ( $p < 0.01$ ), this effect was weaker among conservative users. Pre-treatment sentiment played a key role—users with prior negative tweets Overall, while the treatment amplified existing support, it failed to change underlying attitudes in the long term. The study is rated as low confidence due to the limited generalizability of the results to the broader population.

**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 demonstrated a positive impact on social norms concerning violence and atrocity prevention. Notably, it helped moderate the rise in support for violence justified by Islam and significantly reduced the justification for religious violence as well as the belief in violence as an effective solution. Overall, the program played a meaningful role in shifting norms and attitudes away from endorsing violence. Overall, the study was of medium to high quality, with a strong, multidimensional approach and focused on long-term sustainability.

**Hameiri (2016)** evaluated the Paradoxical Thinking Intervention, a psychological approach designed to reduce conflict-supporting attitudes by presenting exaggerated versions of widely held beliefs, leading individuals to reconsider their positions. The intervention was implemented through a multichannel campaign called "*The Conflict*", which targeted a right-wing, religious city in central Israel (~25,000 residents) during the Knife Intifada. Over six weeks, residents were exposed to online banners, YouTube ads, billboard posters, and distributed materials (t-shirts, balloons, brochures). The intervention amplified societal beliefs to an extreme, creating cognitive dissonance that encouraged reevaluation of views and reduced support for violence. A randomized field experiment (pre-post design) with 215 intervention and 320 control participants tested its impact on conflict-supporting attitudes, aggressive policies, and conciliatory measures. The paradoxical thinking intervention reduced conflict-supporting attitudes, especially among right-wing participants, leading to less support for aggression and more for conciliation. However, centrists showed unexpected lower support for conciliation, possibly due to a literal interpretation of the messages. The study is rated as high-medium confidence with strong rigorous methodology,

**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 the reconciliation program did not significantly impact beliefs about violence. Both groups strongly agreed that violence builds gradually but showed only moderate agreement on violence erupting suddenly, with no measurable differences between them. Additionally, the program had no effect on perceptions of bystander responsibility for violence. Overall, the study presents Low confidence.

**Bowers 2017** examined the impact of the Arewa24 television channel in Nigeria, particularly its flagship soap opera *Dadin Kowa*, which aimed to shift attitudes toward violence, intergroup tolerance, and gender norms. The intervention was based on social learning theory, which posits that observational learning through media can influence attitudes and behaviors. The study used an encouragement design where subjects in northwestern Nigeria were randomly encouraged to watch Arewa24, while placebo and control groups watched other channels or no specific programs. The study employed a pre-post survey design, surveying 60 neighborhoods at the onset of Arewa24's programming and again after two years. Sampling involved randomized assignment within gender-defined blocks, with respondents completing weekly interactive voice response (IVR) surveys over 25 weeks.

Findings on social norms regarding violence prevention revealed mixed outcomes. Although the intervention sought to reduce support for violence, its effectiveness was inconsistent. Viewers in 2015 were not significantly less supportive of violence than non-viewers, suggesting limited impact in changing violent norms. In some matched comparisons, Arewa24 viewers even exhibited higher support for violence, possibly due to pre-existing attitudes among those who chose to watch the channel. Additionally, while Arewa24 included anti-violence messaging, its overall influence was diluted by broader media exposure and external socio-political changes. The findings highlight the challenges of using media alone to reshape deeply entrenched social norms regarding violence in conflict-affected regions. the study is rated as low confidence.

#### *Confidence assessment*

The overall cell is rated **medium confidence** due to inconsistencies in individual effect sizes.

#### *Link to review summaries*

Ditlmann Ruth K (2017).

The study may be accessed via EGM.

#### **Other outcomes studied:**

Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & acceptance of diversity

Social cohesion/Willingness to participate/help

Human security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes

Human security/Economic security

Human security/Political security

Community & state governance/Civic participation

Community & state governance/Government performance