

Effect of social funds, community-driven development and reconstruction on social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Social funds interventions aimed to shift social norms on violence and atrocities through community projects, media, and vocational training. Overall, there was no measurable effect, though mediation and dialogue interventions modestly reduced support for violence.

Geographical region: Sub Saharan Africa.

Effect size: No effect ($g=-0.001$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (2 studies; 6 ES)

Short summary

Social funds and community-driven development programs had no overall effect on changing social norms around violence and atrocities. Evidence from Niger's *PEACE* program indicates that community mobilization and participatory planning improved social cohesion and inter-group cooperation but had limited influence on attitudes toward violent extremist groups. Mediation and dialogue components reduced support for political violence but, in some contexts, reinforced in-group trust rather than broad inclusivity. Confidence in this finding is low due to the small number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The interventions included vocational training, infrastructure rehabilitation, mediation and dialogue initiatives, radio programs, participatory planning, and natural resource management. These activities aimed to strengthen local governance, social cohesion, and resilience by engaging communities in collective decision-making and inclusive development processes.

How the intervention is expected to work

These programs are designed to reduce violent extremism and promote peace by addressing social fragmentation, economic marginalization, and governance weaknesses. Through community-driven projects and dialogue, they foster cooperation across ethnic and political divides, enhance trust, and strengthen conflict resolution mechanisms. By improving livelihoods and civic participation, the interventions seek to mitigate violence and reduce susceptibility to extremist recruitment.

The evidence base

The cell includes two primary studies and 1 systematic review. There is a high degree of consistency in the review findings. The review is concerned with interventions, including training, for women's empowerment and gender equity in fragile settings.

The peace through development II (PDEV II) was implemented in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger and PEACE program was conducted in the Tillabéri region of Niger. One quasi-experimental difference-in-differences (DiD) approach and other on utilizes the randomized phase-in experimental design.

Evidence findings

Findings show limited and selective reductions in support for extremist violence. While *PDEV II* showed some positive norm shifts, contextual factors affected sustainability. The review evidence found small but positive effects on women's representation in local and subnational governance during peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery.

The review evidence

Although positive effects were observed in targeted intervention areas, their impact on long-term behavioural changes was smaller. Increased representation of women in local and subnational civil and political processes, including during peacebuilding and post-conflict restoration.

The impact evaluation evidence

Finkel (2018) The Peace through Development II (PDEV II) program, funded by USAID, aimed to counter violent extremism in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger from 2011 to 2016. The program sought to improve social cohesion, increase resilience to extremist ideologies, and promote civic engagement. It included interventions such as vocational training, media campaigns, and community-led initiatives to address underlying causes of extremism. PDEV II was implemented in 45 "core zones" (which received all program interventions) and 56 "non-core zones" (which received only radio-based interventions). The impact evaluation used a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences approach to assess the program's effects by comparing core and non-core zones. Surveys were conducted with 7,888 respondents across 83 zones. Across all zones, justification for religious violence declined over time. Support for violence as a problem-solving method showed a small decline in core zones, with the most significant effects observed in Burkina Faso. The impact in Chad and Niger was negligible, indicating that while some aspects of PDEV II programming influenced attitudes, the overall effect was limited. Attitudes against using violence for religious reasons improved significantly across all zones. The study found a minor decrease in support for attacks with potential civilian casualties (-3.3%). However, the result was not statistically significant. A 15.1% reduction in support for Islamist groups like AQIM was observed, but this was not statistically significant. We have high confidence in the study due to its quasi-experimental design, large sample size, longitudinal structure, difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis, and rigorous statistical controls reducing bias.

Lichtenheld (2022) The study evaluates the PEACE (Preventing Extremism through Action and Community Engagement) program, which aimed to enhance social cohesion and reduce support for violence in Niger's Tillabéri region. The intervention employed community-driven development (CDD) strategies, mediation and dialogue sessions, shared infrastructure projects, livelihoods support, and cultural/sports activities to improve intergroup relations and reduce vulnerability to violent extremism. The study used a quasi-experimental approach, with a difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis comparing communities with different levels of exposure to PEACE activities. It incorporated direct survey questions and indirect survey experiments (list experiments and endorsement experiments) to measure support for violence while minimizing social desirability bias. The study focused on 40 villages and the final sample size for endline survey experiments (measuring support for violence) was 589 respondents. Participants included men, women, and youth across different ethnic and livelihood groups. The direct measure of support for violence showed no statistically significant reduction in justification of violence due to PEACE. However, the indirect measure revealed a significant reduction in support for violence—but only in relation to the timing of the intervention, not the number of activities or intensity of participation. The study is considered low confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

Overall, Low confidence due to the limited number of studies in the cell.

Link to review summaries

Lwamba (2022)

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/Nature and scale of violence or atrocities
- Social cohesion/Feelings of trust & Acceptance of diversity/
- Community and state governance/Civic participation/Government performance
- Human security/Economic security/Educational security/Political security/Intermediate social cohesion outcomes