

## The effect of support to civilians and non-state armed groups on nature and scale of violence or atrocities

A study of FARC in Colombia shows that political training to non-state armed groups reduces violence

Geographic region: Latin America

Effect size: Harmful effect ( $g=0.178$ )

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 2 effect sizes)

### Short summary

Political training for combatants in FARC in Colombia was found to reduce civilian harm.

### Long summary

#### *The intervention*

Support to civilians and non-state armed groups includes any support provided to civilians or non-state groups to counter, mitigate, deter or avoid a threat and prevent violence in the context of an atrocity. This could include military assistance such as the provision of weapons, funds, logistics, military training and access to intelligence and sanctuaries, or the provision of other assistance, such as advice, funding, or providing material goods. It does not include aid for humanitarian or development purposes.

The one study included in this cell studies political training to non-government forces.

#### *How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome*

Support to non-state armed groups and civilians could reduce violence and protect civilian populations by reshaping combatant behaviour and influencing civilian attitudes in contested and controlled areas. Political training is expected to reduce civilian harm by instilling behavioral norms and aligning combatants with group strategies that emphasize restraint toward civilian populations. By reshaping beliefs and preferences, political training reduces the reliance on punishment to enforce discipline, encouraging combatants to adhere to rules of engagement. Counterinsurgency aid operates by influencing civilian attitudes and behavior, fostering loyalty toward pro-government forces, and limiting cooperation with insurgents. This is believed to weaken insurgent influence and operations.

#### *The evidence base*

This cell includes 1 impact evaluation set in Colombia with two effect sizes. The study is rated low confidence as it does not control for selection bias.

#### *Evidence findings*

Support to non-state armed groups reduces violence. Specifically, political training provided by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to its own members reduced civilian killings, as those who received the training were less likely to kill civilians than were those members receiving only military training or no training.

#### *Included study*

**Oppenheim and Weintraub (2017)** explores the implications of political training in reducing civilian killings, particularly in the case of Colombia from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The researchers argue that the political training matters to combatants' conduct and so reducing civilian killings. The study focuses on a particular form of training, which is the management of force, which guides where and how violence and coercion should be applied. The researchers conducted a survey of 476 former FARC combatants, with a dataset collected from Fundacion Ideas para la Paz (FIP) in 2008. The sample was randomly drawn from the list of ex-combatants processed through the government's reintegration program. The survey included information on the modes of training and the ex-combatants' locations across time. These are combined with records of civilian killings from 1998 to 2005, gathered from the Colombian Human Rights Observatory. To analyse the relationship between political training and civilian casualties, the ordered logistic regression models and negative binomial regression models were used. The control variables include economic conditions, geographic characteristics, and conflict intensity in each region. The results show that political training within the FARC has a significant impact on reducing civilian killings, as FARC units with higher levels of political training are significantly less likely (at 68%) to kill civilians compared to units with less or no political training. The regression models also demonstrate that political training has a far more significant impact on reducing civilian killings, compared to military training. The study is rated low confidence due to its inadequate description of the evaluation questions.

#### *Confidence Assessment*

The study is rated low confidence as it only includes 1 study, and this study is also rated low confidence.

#### **Other outcomes in the study:**

None