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Governance, Crime, and Conflict Initiative Evidence Wrap-up

Lessons from randomized evaluations on managing and preventing crime, violence, and conflict

May 2026

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Introduction

What are the most promising strategies for reducing crime, violence, and conflict? The past two decades have seen a dramatic expansion in the experimental literature designed to help answer this question. Moving beyond evaluations of individual programs, increasingly, these studies are striving to test broader hypotheses about how programs work (i.e. what are the key program components driving change) and to generate insights into human behavior (i.e. why individuals may be motivated to act in certain ways).

This evidence wrap-up, prepared by staff at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), offers a broad review of the expansion of this experimental literature and seeks to capture some of the emerging insights from across these studies. The review has been prepared as part of J-PAL and IPA's Governance, Crime and Conflict Initiative (GCCCI), a £23-million investment by FCDO launched in 2017 to produce new experimental research on effective policies to promote peace and good governance, reduce crime, and support individuals and communities recovering from conflict.¹

¹ The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. For more information about the research funded through GCCCI, see the [Governance Initiative](#), [Crime and Violence Initiative](#), and [Peace & Recovery Initiative webpages](#).

The wrap-up reviews rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental literature that helps to answer six questions:

- 1) [What works in policing and building police capacity?](#)
- 2) [What works in terms of justice provision, including criminal justice and corrections/prisons?](#)
- 3) [What works in shifting individuals' behaviors away from crime and violence in high-risk settings?](#)
- 4) [How do criminal organizations and malign non-state armed groups make strategic choices between violent and non-violent action?](#)
- 5) [What works in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery?](#)
- 6) [What works in combating violence against women?](#)

2026 Updates

This is the third edition of this evidence wrap-up, which was first released in 2019 and later updated in 2021. Some of the key updates to this edition include:

- Adding more than 50 new studies and updating countless others as new working and published papers have been released.
- In chapter 1, expanding our discussion on strategies for leveraging limited police resources and improving police-community relations, through training, community policing, and more.
- In chapter 2, drawing in more evidence from low- and middle-income country contexts as strategies for improving criminal justice systems and increasing access to justice.
- In chapter 3, broadening the discussion on behavior change interventions as an effective strategy for preventing and responding to criminal and violent behaviors.
- In chapter 4, expanding our review of the literature exploring links between climate shocks and conflict.
- In chapter 5, adding and updating studies on the rapidly expanding literature on intergroup contact and dialogue as a tool for reducing prejudice in fragile and conflict-affected contexts; and
- In chapter 6, incorporating new evidence on a range of strategies for shifting social norms around gender-based violence, from training and dialogue to mass media campaigns.

Evidence base

The wrap-up focuses primarily on the results of experimental evaluations (randomized controlled trials, or RCTs) from low- and middle-income country (LMIC) settings but also draws on rigorous quasi-experimental research and research from high-income settings in some areas, particularly where few randomized evaluations exist. It does not aim to be exhaustive in scope but rather seeks to highlight the most influential experimental and quasi-experimental studies—including where these studies have found an intervention to have no impact at all—as well as to identify areas both where research is currently being undertaken to answer certain questions and where there are clear evidence gaps. Our goal is to elevate what we judge to be especially influential papers released in recent years, including both published and working papers. To do this, we reviewed evidence from top academic journals and solicited guidance from external academic reviewers.

A few caveats for reading and using this wrap-up:

- While the past decade has seen a large expansion of rigorous evidence on crime, violence, and conflict in LMICs, these studies span an extremely diverse set of contexts. The underlying systems in which crime and violence occur vary tremendously both across and within contexts. As a result, there is no simple or universal solution to “what works.” Instead, treatment must follow diagnosis, corresponding to the underlying drivers of violence in a particular setting—an intervention that has been proven effective in one setting may have little effect, or even backfire, in another.
- Therefore, the goal of this wrap-up is not to prescribe a one-size-fits-all set of solutions, but rather to summarize emerging patterns and mechanisms that may help guide careful, context-specific decision-making. It should *not* be read as a universal toolkit or comprehensive list of programs in which FCDO or others should be investing. Instead, it aims to capture lessons from the most influential experimental and quasi-experimental work to date, highlight where effects appear to hinge on specific contextual features, and demonstrate the type of research needed to understand what generalizes and under what conditions.
- Because the goal of this wrap-up is to highlight experimental evidence, it has little to say regarding the effectiveness of two large categories of programs: (1) those that are either not well suited to experimental evaluation (perhaps because randomization is not feasible, or the number of participants is limited) or (2) those that have not yet been evaluated. While the GCCl investment is intended to produce new evidence in areas that have not yet been a focus of rigorous impact evaluation, some programs will remain best suited to other forms of evaluation.
- Finally, because of its limited scope to primarily emerging evidence from impact evaluation studies that employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs, it should not be considered an exhaustive review of all rigorous evidence on the topics covered and should be considered alongside complementary sources of evidence.

If you wish to consider whether a program or intervention may be suitable for a randomized evaluation, or whether the evidence reviewed below potentially offers relevant insights for new program design in a specific area, please get in touch.

Furthermore, if you know of high-quality, randomized evaluations that have been completed on the themes covered in this wrap-up that you think should be included, please contact us at gcci@povertyactionlab.org.²

² Version 3.0 of this wrap-up was prepared by Aprille Knox, Ana-Maria Colina, and Aimee Barnes of J-PAL's Crime, Violence, and Conflict sector with previous inputs from Isabela Salgado and Cillian Nolan, together with Nessa Kenny of IPA's Peace and Recovery Program. Additional input and oversight was provided by J-PAL's academic co-chairs for the Crime, Violence, and Conflict sector—Chris Blattman and Oeindrila Dube. **Contact:** Aprille Knox, aknox@povertyactionlab.org



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Chapter 1: What works in policing and building police capacity?

Police and security-sector institutions globally are testing a variety of approaches to improve effectiveness and strengthen community relations. Although the evidence base has grown, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, these insights must be interpreted with care given the wide variation in the contexts where they are implemented. Violence may stem from organized groups, local disputes, or concentrated street-level crime, and police agencies differ in capacity, legitimacy, and community relationships. These differences mean that no single model reliably works everywhere. Effective policing requires matching the treatment to the specific problem. This chapter therefore synthesizes emerging lessons and notes where further cumulative work is needed, rather than offering a universal blueprint.

Across the evidence, an emerging pattern suggests that interventions which simply intensify or scale up existing approaches—e.g., concentrating police in high-crime areas, increasing the number of officers or patrols—tend to show limited or inconsistent effects. By contrast, interventions that change how policing is done—e.g., by shifting the focus of policing to unaddressed problems, changing the composition of teams so they operate differently, or training officers to approach situations differently—have shown more consistently promising effects. The chapter's three sections broadly reflect this pattern by examining:

1. **Police deployment and resource allocation strategies:** This section highlights interventions that broadly aim to more efficiently use police resources—including by shifting resources to high-crime areas through strategies like hot spots policing, behavior-based strategies, or focused deterrence—the latter of which emphasizes using police resources to identify specific individuals who may be at high risk of engaging in crime and to shift their behaviors;
2. **Approaches to improving or establishing police-community relations:** This section examines strategies for fostering trust and cooperation between police and the communities they serve, ranging from community-oriented policing programs that encourage collaboration and information-sharing to efforts to extend police presence in areas with limited state authority; and
3. **Strategies for strengthening police capacities and institutions:** This section highlights ways of developing police capacity by diversifying police teams to be more responsive to communities' needs and by implementing skills-based trainings. It also covers technology-based approaches, and non-standard policing units.

Key Takeaways

Emerging insights based on the literature in this chapter include:

- Police trainings—including those that aim to build cognitive skills and focus on procedural justice—have shown promising improvements in officer behavior and citizen perceptions of police. Gains vary by officer characteristics and context but point to the potential of these approaches to strengthen police effectiveness and community trust.
- Gender-responsive policing reforms—including women's help desks, gender-inclusive community policing, and specialized patrol units—can improve police responsiveness to gender-based violence and increase women's engagement with police, particularly when complementary design features like training are included.
- Community policing that emphasizes engagement and problem-solving through strong partnerships between police and community members may improve perceptions of police legitimacy and increase crime reporting, though evidence shows mixed results on actual crime reduction, with implementation challenges often limiting effectiveness.
- Hot spots policing and other place-based deployments may reduce less violent crime in specific high-risk locations, though effects on violent crime are more limited and displacement of criminal activity to neighboring areas remains a concern in some contexts.
- Focused deterrence and other behavior-focused strategies have a strong quasi-experimental track record and are theoretically well-grounded, though rigorous experimental tests, especially in LMIC contexts, remain limited.

Police deployment and resource allocation strategies

Police employ an array of strategies to prevent and respond to crime. But with limited resources, it is important to understand where targeted efforts may be most effective. This section reviews emerging experimental evidence on strategies for efficiently deploying and allocating police resources including interventions focused on policing high-crime areas and shifting offender behaviors.

Targeting police resources to high-crime areas

Incidents of crime in urban areas tend to be highly concentrated—a study by Blattman et al. (2021a) in Bogotá, Colombia found that from 2012-2015 just 2 percent of the city's 137,000 street segments accounted for all murders and a quarter of all other reported crimes. Previous studies have found similar concentrations in other contexts. In the United States, for instance, it is estimated that roughly half of recorded crime occurs in just 4 percent of city blocks nationwide (Weisburd 2015). A first step towards targeting specific high-risk areas is often increased investment in improving data analysis among police departments and providing support for drawing on existing administrative data to identify high-risk areas.

There is a relatively broad experimental literature on the efficacy of **“hot spots policing”**—focusing police resources on those urban areas where crime is most heavily concentrated. A meta-analysis of 65 studies suggests that hot spots policing is effective in reducing crime and is more likely to produce diffusion of crime control benefits into surrounding areas than displacement, though the majority of this evidence comes from high-income contexts (Braga, Turchan, Papachristos, and Hureau 2019).

New research from LMICs is contributing to the evidence base on what types of crimes are likely to be deterred or shifted by hot spots policing. In India, Amaral et al. (2025) found that deploying uniformed officers to hot spots specifically targeting street harassment reduced severe forms of sexual harassment against women, suggesting that focusing hot spots policing on a specific under-addressed problem—and addressing officer attitudes toward that problem—can produce stronger results. Evidence from Colombia is more mixed: while two studies found hot spots interventions reduced thefts and some other non-violent crimes (Collazos et al. 2021; Nussio and Norza Céspedes 2018), a third found the intervention may have pushed property crimes onto neighboring streets (Blattman et al. 2021a). Across the Colombian studies, violent crimes proved harder to affect, though there was no evidence that violent crime shifted elsewhere.

Productive avenues for further research include focusing on what kinds of policing activities undertaken in hot spots are most likely to deter crime, as well as further building out the evidence base on whether non-violent or other crimes are more likely to be deterred or displaced by hot spots policing.

1. **Sexual harassment in public spaces and police patrols: Experimental evidence from urban India (2025)**, Amaral, Borker, Fiala, Kumar, Prakash, and Sviatschi

The Quarterly Journal of Economics

Location: India | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- In collaboration with the Hyderabad City Police, researchers evaluated a hotspot policing patrol program, known as the Safety, Health, and Environment Units (SHE Teams), which deploys undercover officers to specifically target and penalize street harassment.
- The researchers randomly assigned 350 hot spots across the city to undercover, visibly uniformed, or no patrol groups to assess the program's impact on sexual harassment in public spaces.
- Overall, the police patrols had no effect on sexual harassment. However, uniformed policing patrols reduced severe forms of harassment (e.g., forceful touching, intimidation) and reduced the likelihood of women leaving a hotspot due to sexual harassment.
- Researchers found that, on average, officers were more tolerant of milder forms of sexual harassment. In line with these results, they found that more progressive teams were more effective in reducing mild and severe forms of harassment.
- The evidence suggests that the visibility of officers may be important in deterring perpetrators. However, addressing police attitudes may also be crucial to effective enforcement.

2. **Place-based interventions at scale: The direct and spillover effects of policing and city services on crime (2021)**, Blattman, Green, Ortega, and Tobón

Journal of the European Economic Association

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In 2016, the city of Bogotá identified 1,919 hot spots (each consisting of one city block segment) and randomly assigned them to either eight months of roughly doubled police patrolling time, more intensive municipal services (cleanup and lighting), both interventions, or neither. No new police resources were added, meaning the intensification of policing in certain areas came at the expense of police time elsewhere.
- Neither intervention (intensive policing or municipal services) showed statistically significant effects on crime deterrence. However, an analysis of displacement effects suggests that these interventions pushed property crime, but not violent crime, onto neighboring streets.
- The results from this study add to the mixed evidence on the spillover effects of place-based policing, indicating more large-scale studies are needed. They also suggest it is important to note that if some types of crime are easily displaced, as shown, then it may be better to target clusters of hot spots, rather than street segments, to limit displacement.

3. **Hot spots policing in a high crime environment: An experimental evaluation in Medellín (2021)**, Collazos, García, Mejía, Ortega, and Tobón, *Journal of Experimental Criminology*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT

- In 2015, researchers worked with the Medellín Metropolitan Police to identify 967 crime hot spots, of which 384 hot spots were randomly assigned to receive six months of intensified police presence.
- Hot spots receiving more police patrols saw a reduction in car thefts, and the public reported feeling safer during the intervention period. These effects were larger for the least secure areas.
- Assaults also declined in the least secure hot spots and in areas nearby program hot spots, despite remaining stable within most program locations.
- Car thefts declined in the comparison group hot spots that were nearby to hot spots assigned to intensified police presence, while nearby non-hot spots saw a reduction in assaults. There was no evidence that crime shifted to new areas.
- Despite these positive effects on car thefts and assaults, most crimes were not impacted by the increased police presence and public satisfaction with the police remained unchanged.

Beyond deploying officers directly to high-crime locations, researchers have also evaluated whether crime can be deterred at these places through environmental cues alone. These approaches work by manipulating the perceived risk of the environment for anyone present. Two studies from Colombia evaluate this theory: one through an information campaign broadcasting arrest statistics at high-crime housing blocks, and another through surveillance camera installation at identified hot spots.

4. **The deterrent effect of surveillance cameras on crime (2021)**, Gómez, Mejía, Tobón *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** Difference-in-differences

- Across Medellín, 448 surveillance cameras were installed between May 2013 and April 2015 at hot spots identified by the Department of Security. The cameras were installed at quasi-random times across pre-selected hot spots due to bureaucratic and logistical concerns.
- Using administrative data on the exact location and date of camera installations and reported crimes, researchers found reported property crimes and violent crimes decreased by 17 and 26 percent respectively in areas under surveillance. By contrast, crime reports did not change substantially in surrounding areas.
- The number of arrests in the direct vicinity of the cameras (within 60 meters) decreased by 11 percent. The number of camera operators remained constant while more cameras were installed, dividing operator attention among more cameras over time. Further, the two-year time window may have been too short to see camera footage used in prosecution.

- The results suggest that crime decreased because the surveillance cameras deterred people who may have otherwise committed a crime, rather than by leading to more arrests or incapacitating offenders.

5. **Deterring delinquents with information. Evidence from a randomized poster campaign in Bogotá (2018)**, Nussio and Norza Céspedes, *PLoS ONE*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT

- In collaboration with the Colombian National Police, researchers identified 154 high-crime housing blocks in the city of Bogotá and introduced a poster campaign across a randomly selected half of the blocks. The posters were placed in visible spots around the block for three months and shared information on the number of arrests on that block in an effort to make potential criminals feel apprehensive of committing crimes in that location.
- The poster campaign reduced premeditated crimes, like theft or using or selling illegal drugs, but overall crime levels were not affected except during the first month of the campaign. Local perceptions of security and of the police did not change.
- The pervasive perception of impunity in this context may help explain why the poster campaign did not impact overall crime: learning more about arrests in the area may not have changed criminals' behavior if they did not believe they would face any punishment after arrest.

A related strategy targeting specific, high-risk areas is known as **disorder policing**. Sometimes referred to as “broken windows policing”, this approach focuses on trying to eliminate both physical and social disorder (including trying to prevent recurrent nuisances like broken windows). A 2015 systematic review of thirty studies, which included nine RCTs, found only modest impacts on crime control. The strongest impacts were generated by “community and problem-solving interventions designed to change social and physical disorder conditions at particular places” ([Braga, Welsh, and Schnell 2015](#)). This is consistent with the general theme that policing approaches that seek to target specific places can be successful at reducing crime.

Behavior-based policing strategies

Behavior-based policing strategies target behaviors associated with leading to crime or violence, such as gang membership, drug sales or consumption, and carrying firearms.³ One such strategy that deserves mention here is **focused deterrence**. Often called “pulling levers policing”, this approach involves identifying specific offenders or groups and working together with communities, law enforcement agencies, and social services to provide targeted sanctions and incentives to shift offender behavior.⁴

³ Related literature on behavior change techniques for deterring criminal and violent behavior is discussed in depth in chapter 3 of this review.

⁴ One clear definition: “In its simplest form, the approach consists of selecting a particular crime problem, such as gang homicide; convening an interagency working group of law enforcement, social-service, and community-based practitioners; conducting research to identify key offenders, groups and behavior patterns; framing a response to offenders and groups of

A recent review of quasi-experimental studies of focused deterrence approaches in the US found strong evidence of a decrease in serious violent crime ([Braga, Weisburd, and Turchan 2018](#)). One of the best-known instances of the focused deterrence approach was Operation Ceasefire, a program targeting gun violence among youth in Boston in 1996. A quasi-experimental evaluation found the program to be associated with a 63 percent reduction in youth homicides; subsequent studies have pointed to effects of smaller magnitude ([Braga et al. 2001](#)).

However, there are few experimental studies on focused deterrence strategies outside of three noteworthy RCTs from the United States, which found limited or mixed evidence on the strategy's effectiveness at reducing criminal behavior. These studies focused on bringing people who had been convicted of crime to meet with community leaders, criminal justice practitioners, or social workers. One study found no impact on the number of crimes probationers committed, conviction rates, or time until the next arraignment or conviction ([Hamilton, Rosenfeld, and Levin 2018](#)). In contrast, the other two studies did not provide conclusive evidence regarding these outcomes ([Chermak 2008](#); [Uchida et al. 2019](#)). Given the strong quasi-experimental track record, this model warrants further rigorous experimental evaluation, particularly across a wider range of contexts and outcomes beyond those studied to date.

One study on police efforts to reduce drunk driving in Rajasthan ([Banerjee et al. 2024](#)) demonstrates the importance of addressing human behavior in crime prevention strategies. In this case, drunk drivers quickly learned where police checkpoints had been established and changed their behavior to avoid checkpoints. As a result, increasing the frequency of checkpoints actually reduced the number of drunk drivers caught as time went on when checkpoints were set at a fixed, rather than rotating, location. These results reinforce the importance of taking a behavioral approach to combating crime and violence; otherwise, the risky behavior being targeted may simply continue elsewhere.

6. [The efficient deployment of police resources: Theory and new evidence from a randomized drunk driving crackdown in India \(2024\)](#), Banerjee, Duflo, Keniston, and Singh, *Working Paper*

Location: India | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In 2010, researchers worked with the Rajasthan police to evaluate if rotating roadblocks to identify drunk drivers were more effective at reducing traffic fatalities than fixed roadblocks at hot spots. Police stations were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions to test variations in: (1) roadblock frequencies (1-3 nights per week); (2) locations (fixed at the most strategic point identified by the station

offenders that uses a varied menu of sanctions ("pulling levers") to stop them from continuing their violent behavior; focusing social services and community resources on targeted offenders and groups to match law enforcement prevention efforts; and directly and repeatedly communicating with offenders to make them understand why they are receiving this special attention". Braga, Anthony A. and David L. Weisburd. "The Effects of "Pulling Levers" Focused Deterrence Strategies on Crime", *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2012:6, April 2012, p. 5.

chief or randomly rotating between three locations); (3) implementing personnel (regular police or reserve force personnel provided with special incentives); and (4) duration (length of crackdown), versus (4) a comparison group.

- Police stations implementing rotating roadblocks saw a reduction of about 17 percent in nighttime traffic accidents and a reduction of 25 percent in deaths relative to comparison stations. However, fixed roadblocks at hot spots had no impact on traffic accidents or deaths.
- The effectiveness of the rotating checks relative to the fixed checks increased as time went on, suggesting that drivers quickly learned the location of only fixed roadblocks and altered their routes accordingly.
- These results suggest that, when learning among perpetrators is quick, randomly implementing several roadblock checkpoints with high potential for violations may be a better use of scarce policing resources than regularly implementing a single roadblock at the “best” high-potential location.
- Previous work ([Banerjee et al. 2021](#)) with the Rajasthan Police had highlighted that government initiatives could be poorly implemented due to low civil servant motivation. To address this, special teams of officers—monitored by GPS and offered transfer incentives—were deployed to conduct checkpoints. Evaluating the intervention is complicated by the fact that these officers differed from regular staff in motivation, monitoring, local knowledge, and other characteristics.

Similar to the logic behind focused deterrence, policies that embed **conditional repression** make the level of state enforcement contingent on whether criminal groups use violence. For example, Rio de Janeiro’s Pacification strategy (2008-2013) shifted from eradicating all drug trafficking operations to deterring violence. Police pre-announced favela occupations, allowing traffickers to peacefully flee rather than forcing armed confrontations. Those who remained non-violent faced ongoing but relatively routine enforcement, while those who attacked the state would trigger overwhelming military and police response. This created clear incentives for cartels to avoid armed confrontation ([Lessing 2017](#)).

Improving or establishing police-community relationships

Community members possess intimate knowledge of the events that are taking place in their neighborhoods, which can play an instrumental role in assisting police and other state security actors in learning about and responding to crime and violence. Many policing interventions therefore strive to foster and maintain strong, trusting, and cooperative relationships between security actors and residents in the communities in which they operate to promote public safety. For areas traditionally lacking state security presence, expanding access to police can help build communities’ trust in and reliance on the state over customary authorities for dispute resolution and justice provision (for more on this topic, see [Chapter 2](#)). Strategies for improving police-community relations can take many forms, ranging from community-oriented policing strategies—including programs aimed at encouraging community members to collaborate and share information with the police—to expanding police presence and services to communities with weak state presence.

Unlike traditional policing, which focuses on law enforcement and order maintenance, **community-oriented policing** (or “**community policing**”) emphasizes community involvement in crime prevention ([Gill et al. 2014](#)). One of the challenges of evaluating the impact of community-oriented policing is that the nature of this approach varies widely. It may range from initiatives to simply bring the police into closer contact with communities to more strategic efforts to create partnerships between communities and the police to reduce disorder and deter and solve crimes. While there is no universally accepted definition on what constitutes community policing, there is general consensus that it follows four key principles: accountability, collaboration, decentralization, and problem solving ([Connell, Miggans, and McGloin 2008](#)). Under these principles, police and communities are considered co-producers of public safety.

A 2014 review of 25 studies on community policing (of which only one was an RCT) found no effects on crime and violence but improved public perceptions regarding police legitimacy, performance, and disorder ([Gill et al. 2014](#)). The authors identify the lack of clear mechanisms linking community policing to crime reduction, as well as the small number of evaluations measuring crime and violence outcomes, as some of the challenges for assessing the impact of this approach on criminal activity. One area for further research highlighted by this review was the need to identify which policing strategies are most likely to benefit from community participation.

More recently, in a collaborative ‘Metaketa’ research initiative coordinated by [Evidence in Governance and Politics \(EGAP\)](#), six community policing research projects were implemented across Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, Uganda, and the Philippines to assess the impact of this approach on crime and community trust in different contexts. The collective findings revealed no discernible effects on crime rates, citizen perceptions of insecurity or police, incidents of police abuse, or citizen cooperation with police ([Blair et al. 2021](#)), and these null results were consistent across all six countries. Additional qualitative data revealed structural constraints may have disrupted the program implementation, such as leadership insufficiently prioritizing community policing, frequent personnel rotations, and lack of resources to follow up on citizen concerns, suggesting that structural limitations are an important consideration to implementing community policing interventions with fidelity.

Other recent studies are also shedding light on strategies for improving police-community relations in contexts where state authority has historically been weak. RCTs in Liberia and Papua New Guinea have shown how bringing the police closer to communities traditionally governed by customary (rather than state) authorities can improve perceptions of state legitimacy, increase crime reporting, and raise demand for police services ([Karim 2020](#); [Blair, Karim, and Morse 2019](#); [Cooper 2019](#)). Further, a study in South Africa connecting crime victims with the police through an alarm system improved local reliance on and perceptions of the police, while reducing willingness to engage in vigilantism ([Wilke 2024](#)).

An RCT in Pakistan has also demonstrated that community policing can be adapted to overcome gender-based barriers by introducing women-only discussion forums and

integrating female officers into policing teams ([Cheema et al. 2024](#)). This gender-inclusive approach not only increased women's participation in community discussions but also led to lasting shifts in police attitudes toward gender-based violence.

The past decade has also seen increased interest in reducing excessive use of force and improving officer conduct, in part due to high-profile incidents of police violence in the United States. Communities subject to excessive use of force may begin to doubt police legitimacy, minimizing their willingness to engage with security actors. Interventions targeting use of force, including training and technology-based approaches, have shown mixed results and evidence is largely limited to the US context. The evidence on these approaches is discussed further in the following section.

7. [**Working within norms to change gender attitudes: Evidence from community policing in a segregated setting \(2024\)**](#), Cheema, Farooqui, Khan, and Shapiro, *Working Paper*

Location: Pakistan | **Method:** RCT

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- As part of the EGAP Metaketa Initiative, researchers randomly assigned administrative units in Pakistan's Punjab province to receive a citizen-centric problem-oriented policing intervention (CPOP). The program, carried out by teams of officers, organized monthly community forums and developed community policing plans based on issues raised during these meetings.
- Due to lack of formal criteria, the initial officer teams ended up being all-male, and prevailing norms of sex-based segregation led to negligible female participation in the forums. To address this, a gender-inclusive community policing intervention (CPOP-G) was introduced four months later, featuring women-only forums and the integration of female officers into community policing teams.
- Introduction of separate spaces encouraged women citizens to attend community forums and voice concerns around gender-based violence (GBV), which shifted the perspectives of the female officers leading these sessions. This effect spilled over to male police officers working on gender integrated policing teams, who continued to see GBV as a high priority issue a year after the intervention ended.
- The study demonstrates that navigating restrictive social norms through inclusive design can create durable changes in front-line bureaucrats' responsiveness to gender-related issues.

8. [**How the state discourages vigilantism: Evidence from a field experiment in South Africa \(2024\)**](#), Wilke, *Working Paper*

Location: South Africa | **Method:** RCT

GCCI-funded

- The researcher partnered with the South African police and a local non-profit to offer randomly selected households a home alarm system that, when activated by an individual, directly linked them to the police by sending a text message with their location and contact information. The program was intended to make it easier

for police to locate and contact crime victims and to encourage households to rely on official rather than vigilante justice systems.

- After receiving the alarm system, households stated that they were more likely to contact the police in response to a crime. They also had more positive perceptions of police services and were more likely to believe police are motivated to perform well.
- Households receiving alarms were also less likely to say they were willing to engage in vigilante violence and more likely to believe that police would ensure the arrest of perpetrators of vigilantism.
- All effects were concentrated among households who initially had the lowest prior beliefs about the risks of being arrested for vigilantism and police service quality.
- The researcher also found that, exposing respondents to a news article highlighting the police's efforts to combat vigilantism discouraged participation in vigilantism. Exposure to a news article highlighting police's service delivery efforts did not have the same effect.
- This evidence suggests the effect of household alarms on vigilantism may stem more from an increase in perceived risk of participating in vigilantism as opposed to a shift in belief that the quality of police services had improved.

9. [Fire alarms for police patrols: Experimental evidence on co-production of public safety \(2023\)](#), Nanes, Ravanilla, and Haim, *The Journal of Politics*

Location: The Philippines | **Method:** RCT

- In many contexts there can be large barriers to reporting crimes (e.g., citizens unaware of police phone number, unreliable phone lines, or unlikely police response). As part of the EGAP Metaketa Initiative, researchers collaborated with police in Sorsogon province to evaluate the impact of a crime reporting hotline on crime incidence. Given the presence of non-state actors in this province, the researchers also measured the impact on insurgent activity.
- The researchers randomly selected villages where police posted stickers promoting the hotline across the community, informally engaging with citizens. To isolate the impact of the hotline from the impact of engagement (e.g., increased trust or perceived capacity of police), the researchers randomly selected 99 additional villages where police would distribute placebo stickers that did not include the hotline. A comparison group of 100 villages received policing as usual.
- In villages that received the hotline, citizens were more likely to report crimes to the police than in comparison villages, even when considering increased police engagement.
- The authors also found that the hotline led to a decrease in activity from insurgents, but no effect on armed robbery, burglary, assault, or drug pushing. They suggest this was due to police prioritization in deterring insurgent activity over other crimes.
- A companion study ([Haim, Nanes, and Ravanilla 2025](#)) examined the officer-facing side of the same initiative, finding that community policing improved officers' understanding of citizen concerns but did not generate greater empathy, trust, or

accountability toward civilians. However, exploratory analyses suggest these null results may conceal positive effects among officers who were serving outside of their home province, and negative effects where contact exposed officers to perceived threats to their personal safety.

10. [Can community policing improve police-community relations in an electoral authoritarian regime? Experimental evidence from Uganda \(2022\)](#), Blair, Grossman, and Wilke, *Working Paper*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- As part of the EGAP Metaketa Initiative, researchers partnered with the Uganda Police Force to evaluate if a community policing intervention could reduce crime and build trust in the context of an authoritarian regime, where police are often misused to advance partisan goals and are widely considered corrupt.
- Police posts in rural areas throughout Uganda were randomly assigned to follow a new set of community-oriented operating procedures designed by the Ugandan Police Force in collaboration with a local civil society group. The procedures included hosting town halls and door-to-door visits to build a reliable police presence with opportunities for interpersonal interactions, and the formation of Neighborhood Watch Teams encouraging people to report crimes.
- Six to eleven months later, the community policing program had no impact on perceptions of or trust in the police, crime incidence, and perceived security
- The researchers explored potential supply-side (e.g., resource limitations, high officer turnover, etc.) and demand-side (e.g., police intimidation, citizen satisfaction with police status quo, etc.) obstacles to the program but did not find evidence that stations with more favorable conditions were more effective than those in less favorable conditions.
- The researchers caution that community policing programs implemented in similar contexts (e.g., lower income countries with similar constraints as those described in the above point) may not improve police-community relations.

11. [Relational state building in areas of limited statehood: Experimental evidence on the attitudes of the police \(2020\)](#), Karim, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT

- Households in rural communities in Liberia were randomly selected to receive face-to-face visits by trained police officers. These visits were designed to build relationships between households and the police and to improve perceptions of the police.
- The intervention was successful in increasing citizens' preference for police officers over non-state actors to provide security during crises. It also reduced the likelihood that citizens perceived the police as abusive and increased the likelihood that they were perceived as effective. There were no differences in outcomes when the officer was male or female.

- These results imply that relationship building between state agents and citizens is an important part of state legitimacy.

12. **Establishing the rule of law in weak and war-torn states: Evidence from a field experiment with the Liberian National Police (2019)**, Blair, Karim, and Morse,

American Political Science Review

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT

- Rural communities in three counties in Liberia were randomly selected to receive Confidence Patrols—recurring patrols by better-equipped members of the Liberian National Police who were also given a retraining course—over fourteen months.
- The program increased knowledge of Liberian law and the police among communities, improved the security of property rights, reduced the incidence of some types of crime (including simple assault and domestic violence), and increased the reporting of felony offenses to the police. The increase in crime reporting came almost entirely from those generally found to be disadvantaged by customary forms of dispute resolution.
- However, the program did not increase trust in the police, courts, or government more generally.
- Although the authors suggest that police forces should anticipate some, especially initial, resistance to their presence in post-conflict settings, study findings suggest that better-trained and -equipped officers can be effective in deterring some types of crime and improving security of property rights.

13. **State capacity and gender inequality: Experimental evidence from Papua New Guinea (2019)**, Cooper, *Working Paper*

Location: Papua New Guinea | **Method:** RCT

- In late 2015, remote villages in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea—where there had previously been no state presence—were randomly selected to receive a uniformed community police officer (“Community Auxiliary Police”) permanently stationed in the village.
- After eight months, the presence of a police officer had stimulated increased demand for both police presence and customary authorities and widened an existing gap along gender lines in appraisals of the police, with men preferring to call on customary authorities and women preferring the state.
- The presence of community police officers (particularly female officers) increased the probability that incidents of violence against women were reported. Community policing also reduced the perceived prevalence of violence against women, property crime, and alcoholism.
- The study shows that expanding state dispute resolution services does not necessarily lead to a reduction in the role of customary actors in resolving disputes: in this study, the state expansion reinforced the role of customary authorities by increasing demand (among men) for the services they provide.

In many cities, there is also a growing call for civilian alternatives to policing when responding to nonviolent social problems and street disorder. Unlike community policing

strategies, these approaches deliberately avoid police involvement, instead deploying civilian actors to connect residents with state services, resolve disputes, and reduce tensions. Evidence on their effectiveness remains limited and highly context dependent.

14. [Civilian alternatives to policing: Evidence from Medellín's community problem-solving intervention Operación Convivencia \(2023\)](#), Blattman, Duncan, Lessing, and Tobón, *Working Paper*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT

GCCI-funded

- Researchers collaborated with the City of Medellín to randomly assign full-time civilian liaisons to 40 of 80 neighborhoods over a period of 20 months. Liaisons were responsible for advocating for and coordinating government service delivery and tasked to help improve public order, foster communication with the government, and connect residents to dispute resolution and social services.
- The study revealed that, on average, the intervention had no influence on reported governance, legitimacy, or crime. However, the intervention was more effective in neighborhoods where there was relatively greater pre-existing state presence (as measured through an index capturing forms of everyday order and governance).
- In high state presence neighborhoods, the task force was relatively more successful in delivering the intervention, enhancing citizens' perceptions of state legitimacy, and reducing crime and emergency calls.

New GCCI Research

One new study currently being funded through GCCI will contribute to the evidence base of how to improve police-community relationships:

[Safe cities: Improving the citizen-police interface in Pakistan](#) (Acemoglu, Cheema, Khwaja, and Robinson)

In 2015, the government of Punjab introduced the Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) to address the growing demand for police services. While the PSCA sought to improve citizen access to public safety and policing services, very few citizens that used the service were able to resolve them formally through the system. This may be due to police neglecting their duty or citizens being unfamiliar with the legal system. To combat these challenges, researchers partnered with PSCA to randomly assign 20,000 residents that had recently called PSCA's '15' emergency response number to experience either a police complaint hotline, low-cost legal advice, or both. The researchers measure the impacts on dispute resolution, citizen satisfaction with their case, and ongoing citizen engagement, as well as broader attitudes towards the police and government organizations. ([Evaluation Summary](#))

Strengthening police capacities and institutions

In addition to understanding strategies for most efficiently deploying police resources, open questions remain regarding which approaches work best to strengthen police capacities and institutions. To fill this evidence gap, research is exploring how changing the ways police teams are organized, trained, managed, or demographically composed impacts their effectiveness and responsiveness to certain issues—for instance, tackling gender-based violence or responding to the needs of other marginalized groups. A second stream of research is also exploring the effects of various forms of skills training—from investigative skills to interpersonal competencies—on improving police performance. A third examines how technology, including body-worn cameras, can enhance police capacity and accountability with an aim to improve police-citizen interactions. Finally, a growing body of research is exploring whether non-standard policing units, with distinct recruitment standards, training regimes, and accountability mechanisms, can overcome some of the institutional constraints that limit the effectiveness of conventional police forces.

Building diverse police teams

In theory, diversifying police teams may make some community members more willing to cooperate with officers and to support law enforcement efforts, particularly when shared backgrounds help build comfort or trust. Greater diversity may also support police efforts to reduce inequitable practices and may be more responsive to the concerns of marginalized groups. At the same time, it is possible that diversifying police teams may not lead to any changes due to organizational culture and socialization can influence how new officers adapt ([Ba et al. 2021](#)). Quasi-experimental evidence is beginning to address this ambiguity, as are recently completed GCCI-funded randomized evaluations.

In the United States, Black and Hispanic officers were found to use less force and make fewer stops, especially of Black civilians, than white officers working in the same patrol area during the same month, day of the week, and shift time ([Ba et al. 2021](#)). Female officers also made fewer arrests and used less force than their male counterparts. Two additional quasi-experimental studies from Iraq and Liberia, reviewed in detail below, suggest that changes in the ethnic make-up of police teams can have mixed effects on how minority groups perceive the role of the police and how the police act towards these groups, respectively ([Nanes 2020](#); [Blair et al. 2022](#)). A fourth quasi-experimental study evaluating the effect of gender balancing reforms for police teams in Liberia found that adding more female officers did not improve group sensitivity to sexual or gender-based violence or shift beliefs about women's roles in policing ([Karim et al. 2018](#)). However, a recent randomized evaluation from India found adding 'women help desks' in police stations improved registration of cases of violence against women, particularly when staffed by female officers who were less likely to believe that women filed "false" complaints ([Sukhtankar et al. 2022](#)).

15. **Policing in patriarchy: An experimental evaluation of reforms to improve police responsiveness to women in India (2022)**, Sukhtankar, Kruks-Wisner, and Mangal, *Science*
Location: India | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)
GCCI-funded
- Researchers collaborated with the Madhya Pradesh Police (MPP) to evaluate the impact of Women's Help Desks (WHDs) at police stations on police accountability and accessibility to female complainants.
 - In 12 districts, researchers randomly assigned 180 police stations to establish a WHD, a woman led WHD, or no WHD. All WHD assigned stations added help desks (private spaces for women seeking assistance), training on registering crimes against women, and community outreach. Woman-led WHDs received all the interventions described above and female officers were assigned to run the WHDs.
 - Stations with WHDs were more likely to register cases of violence against women. While all WHDs stations increased standard reports, woman-run WHDs stations submitted more time-intensive reports.
 - Female officers in stations with WHDs were less likely to express the belief that women filed "false" complaints compared to female officers in stations without WHDs. This suggests that female officers may have been more sensitive to police training.
 - These results demonstrate that gender-targeted reforms may make police more responsive to women's security concerns, and that the presence of female officers may be key to such efforts.
16. **Policing ethnicity: Lab-in-the-field evidence on discrimination, cooperation, and ethnic balancing in the Liberian National Police (2022)**, Blair, Karim, Gilligan, and Beardsley, *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*
Location: Liberia | **Method:** Lab-in-the-field/Survey experiment
- Researchers conducted a lab-in-the-field experiment with 232 officers from the Liberian National Police to evaluate the effect of "ethnic balancing" within policing teams. Officers were randomly assigned into teams of four with one condition: no more than two ethnic Mandingo (the minority ethnic group in this setting) officers were assigned to any one team. Some teams had no Mandingo members. The research team then had participants engage in simulated teamwork (including a mock crime scene investigation) and behavioral games to test cooperation.
 - Including Mandingo officers on teams led to no increase or decrease in cooperation among members, and that teams including Mandingo officers were, on average, more discriminatory towards Mandingo civilians than teams without Mandingo members.
17. **Police integration and support for anti-government violence in divided societies: Evidence from Iraq (2020)**, Nanes, *Journal of Peace Research*
Location: Iraq | **Method:** Survey experiment

- In a survey of 800 Baghdad residents, participants were randomly provided with different information about the level of integration between Sunni (minority) and Shia officers in the police.
- Informing Sunni respondents about police integration decreased their support for anti-government violence.
- Separately, respondents who said that police officers in their neighborhood were mixed Sunni-Shia, had lower expectations of repression; the same was not true for those who responded that police were exclusively from their own group.

18. [International gender balancing reforms in post conflict countries: Lab-in-the-field evidence from the Liberian National Police \(2018\)](#), Karim, Gilligan, Blair, and Beardsley, *International Studies Quarterly*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** Lab-in-the-field/Survey experiment

- To assess whether gender balancing may influence unit cohesion, effectiveness with respect to sexual and gender-based violence, and organizational gender norms, researchers randomly assigned the proportions of women and men in 102 groups of six Liberian National Police (LNP) officers and subsequently observed their deliberative processes and group choices.
- Adding more women to the LNP groups increased unit cohesion, in terms of matching individual preferences to group decisions. However, there was no evidence that adding more women improved group sensitivity to sexual or gender-based violence or shifted male officers' beliefs about women's roles in policing.
- The researchers found that overall competence was a main determinant of cohesion, participation, and sensitivity to sexual and gender-based violence, rather than individual-level gender or group-level composition. They suggest that improving overall operational effectiveness must be at minimum a complement to gender balancing if the goal is to improve police responsiveness to gender-based violence.

New GCCI Research

One study currently being funded through GCCI will expand the evidence base of how the demographic composition of police teams affects their ability to respond to different forms of crime:

Do policewomen improve law enforcement performance? Evidence from Haryana, India (Shah, Mahajan, and Jassal)

Police cases involving crimes against women (e.g., rape, dowry) are often assigned to female investigators. In contrast, higher profile cases (e.g., murder, kidnapping, corruption) are often assigned to male investigators in police stations across India. Investigator gender can impact both case outcomes as well as career outcomes for the investigating officer. The researchers will examine whether assigning more non-gendered cases to female investigating officers (IOs), otherwise accommodated by the male IOs, improves outcomes for policewomen and citizens. The study will be carried out in Haryana with the collaboration of the Commissioner(s) of Police in the selected districts. The Station House Officer (SHO) will be encouraged to assign more non-gendered cases to women IOs.

Police skills training

Police training can target a wide range of skills from technical training that focuses on competencies like investigation, patrolling, and evidence collection to behavioral training that can focus on how officers interact with and make decisions about civilians, including how they communicate, exercise judgment under stress, and treat people fairly. Reducing excessive use of force is one important outcome that behavioral training approaches have sought to address, with reductions in use of force observed across several procedural justice and cognitive skills training evaluations, though evidence remains largely concentrated in the United States. By giving police departments a direct opportunity to influence how officers operate, training has emerged as one of the more promising levers for improving policing outcomes.

Procedural justice training, which aims to build police legitimacy by emphasizing that officers should act transparently, listen to, and respectfully respond to the concerns of communities, and explain and implement policies fairly, has been one of the most studied training approaches ([Wood, Tyler, and Papachristos 2020](#)). Overall, this approach has shown promising results in improving officer behavior and strengthening community trust. In Colombia, procedural justice training led to increased citizens' trust and cooperation with the police but no discernible effects on crime ([Abril et al. 2023](#)). In Mexico City, a three-day PJ training improved officer behavior, though gains were largest among officers who began the program with more pro-social attitudes toward

the communities they served, suggesting training effectiveness may depend on officer characteristics ([Canales et al. 2025](#)). Procedural justice scripts for routine citizen encounters have been used in Turkey, Australia, and Scotland to build police legitimacy, with mixed results ([Sahin et al. 2017](#); [Mazerolle et al. 2012](#); [MacQueen and Bradford 2015](#)). PJ training has also been associated with reductions in use of force: a quasi-experimental study in Chicago found a 6 percent reduction over two years ([Wood, Tyler, and Papachristos 2020](#)), and a multi-city RCT found fewer arrests and less perceived police harassment in hot spots patrolled by PJ-trained officers (Weisburd et al. 2022).

Related research on cognitive skills training—which aims to change how officers process information and make decisions under stress—has also shown promising results. In Seattle, a PJ training that drew on principles of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helped officers slow down, gather information, and make more deliberate choices during everyday encounters. Trained officers were less likely to make arrests or use force despite staying just as active in the field, suggesting they were using better judgment rather than pulling back ([Owens et al. 2018](#)). In Chicago, the Situational Decision-Making (Sit-D) program—rooted in behavioral science—helped officers recognize and think through high-pressure situations. Officers who received the training stayed active but were less likely to use force, made fewer arrests of Black civilians, and experienced fewer injuries, though these gains faded after a year, suggesting a need for ongoing reinforcement ([Dube, MacArthur, and Shah 2025](#)).

Researchers are also examining training that explicitly aims to reduce potential bias in policing decisions, such as implicit bias training. One study in New York found that while officers' knowledge of implicit bias increased, their behavior and racial disparities in enforcement actions did not change ([Worden et al. 2020](#)), though more evidence is needed before drawing broader conclusions.

19. [A cognitive view of policing \(2025\)](#), Dube, MacArthur, and Shah, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: Chicago, USA | **Method:** RCT | Link to [policy briefcase](#)

- Researchers partnered with police officers at the Chicago Police Department to develop and evaluate the impact of a new cognitive police training, Situational Decision-making (Sit-D). The training, which drew on behavioral science insights, encouraged officers to manage their emotional and physiological response to policing situations, recognize common cognitive biases, intentionally process information, and develop multiple perspectives on a given situation. It consisted of four, four-hour sessions spread over several weeks, allowing officers to apply lessons in the field and discuss their experiences in subsequent sessions.
- In the endline assessment, Sit-D officers processed ambiguous policing scenes more thoroughly and efficiently, while considering a greater variety of perspectives.
- The training also improved officers' threat assessment and communication during simulations. Officers were more responsive to changes in scenarios—as situations

became less threatening, they lowered their intended use of force. They communicated more with subjects and deployed force more appropriately, based on the situation.

- In the field, trained officers reduced their use of force by 23 percent. They also made fewer discretionary arrests and arrests of Black civilians. These effects were strongest in the first four months following the training, suggesting that refresher trainings may be beneficial to reinforce program impacts over time.
- Trained officers did not reduce their overall levels of activity and were less likely to take days off for injuries. The cost saved from fewer days off for injury alone would outweigh the cost of the program.

20. **[Shaping police officer mindsets and behaviors: Experimental evidence of procedural justice training \(2025\)](#)**, Canales, Santini, Magaña, and Cherem, *Management Science*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers partnered with the Ministry of Public Security of Mexico City and the National Security Commission of Mexico to evaluate the impact of a three-day procedural justice, police legitimacy, and leadership training program on the effectiveness, resilience, and trust in Mexico City's police force.
- Researchers randomly assigned sixty police sectors in Mexico City to either partake in the training program, or not. Further, three to twelve months after training, "mystery shoppers" posing as citizens, interacted with trained and untrained officers to monitor police behavior.
- Trained officers demonstrated more procedurally just behavior. Improvements in behavior were largest for officers who began the program with more pro-social perceptions of the communities they served and held more positive views on how citizens perceived them and smallest for officers in communities with higher crime.
- Trained officers also perceived the procedural justice principles of voice, neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness to be more important. As before, improvements were greatest among officers who started the program with positive views of how citizens perceived their work, suggesting procedural justice trainings may be more effective when empathy is fostered between police officers and citizens.

21. **Building trust in state actors: A multi-site experiment with the Colombian National Police (2023)**, Abril, Norza, Perez-Vincent, Tobón, and Weintraub, *IDB Technical Note*
Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT
- Researchers partnered with the Colombian National Police to randomly assign officers from 345 police quadrants (patrolling areas) across five cities to receive procedural justice training, training with daily reminders on the values of procedural justice, or neither, with the aim of improving police-citizen interactions.
 - Citizens in treatment quadrants were more likely to trust in and cooperate with the police, especially in contexts with higher baseline levels of violent crime. This was likely driven by improvements in citizens' perception of just treatment rather than an increase in police presence.
 - However, the intervention did not significantly reduce crime or impact officers' attitudes on trust in citizens or their beliefs about citizens' trust in them. Further, the daily reminders did not produce any additional benefits.
 - The study suggests that investing in procedural justice training for police officers can enhance citizen trust in the police, particularly in high-crime areas. However, more research is needed to understand its long-term effects on crime.
22. **Why do people legitimize and cooperate with the police? Results of a randomized control trial on the effects of procedural justice in Quito, Ecuador (2023)**, Anrango Narváez, Medina Sarmiento, and Del-Real, *Crime Science*
Location: Ecuador | **Method:** RCT
- The National Police of Ecuador identified alcohol consumption as a root cause in rising conflict and have implemented strategies with the goal of preventing this behavior, such as targeting the irregular sale of alcohol.
 - In this study, the researchers partnered with Quito police to assess the impact of a two-day procedural justice training and focused deterrence program on liquor store managers' perceptions of legitimacy and cooperation with law enforcement. The aim of the course was to shift officer views of procedural justice to improve interactions with liquor store managers.
 - The researchers randomly assigned 308 shops where alcohol was sold to either be visited by officers that had received training in procedural justice or not. The trained officers shared personalized punishment risks for illegal sale of alcohol using a procedurally just approach.
 - The results suggest that introducing a procedural justice training led to improved perceptions of legitimacy and an increased willingness to cooperate with the police. They also found managers in the treatment group were more likely to perceive certainty of punishment.

23. [Improving police performance in Rajasthan, India: Experimental evidence on incentives, managerial autonomy, and training \(2021\)](#), Banerjee, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Keniston, and Singh, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*
Location: India | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)
- Together with researchers, the Rajasthan Police designed an intervention aimed to enhance police performance, improve public opinion, and gather objective information about crime rates and performance. The intervention was applied randomly in 162 police stations in 11 districts.
 - Treatment stations were provided with a variable mix of on-duty training at the police academy, engagement of volunteer community observers, rotating work duties and days off, limits on transfers, and “decoy visits” by research staff temporarily posing as citizens reporting crimes.
 - Only the on-duty training and the freeze on transfers were found to improve public perceptions of police performance. Providing on-duty training for all staff raised the probability that crime victims were satisfied with police investigation by 15-19 percentage points. These improvements represent about a twofold increase in victim satisfaction.
 - The on-duty training and decoy visits increased the probability that police officers would file an official report when they were notified of a crime and led officers to treat victims more politely.
 - The introduction of a weekly day off and a rotation of duties had some impact on police morale but did nothing to improve perceptions of police performance.
 - The results demonstrate that it is possible to affect the public image and behavior of the police in a relatively short period of time, using an affordable set of interventions, including training and monitoring with decoys.
24. [Police reform, training and crime: Experimental evidence from Colombia's Plan Cuadrantes \(2013\)](#), Garcia, Mejía, and Ortega, *Documentos CEDE*
Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT
- Across eight Colombian cities, a new police patrol program involving training on interpersonal skills and community contact was introduced in 2010 by the National Police through the Plan Nacional de Vigilancia Comunitaria por Cuadrantes (PNVCC). The PNVCC sought to bring the police in closer contact with the community and combined community policing and problem-oriented policing strategies to prevent crime.
 - By progressively introducing the training over time across randomly chosen cohorts of police stations, researchers were able to evaluate if crime was reduced in areas where police stations received more exposure to the training program.
 - The police training reduced several types of crime, including homicides and violent disputes. This reduction was concentrated in areas that initially experienced the highest levels of crime.

- The study demonstrates that a low-cost program bringing police in closer contact with the communities they serve can improve police response, potentially because police feel more accountable to the community and are more motivated.

25. **Can you build a better cop? Experimental evidence on supervision, training, and policing in the community** (2018), Owens, Weisburd, Amendola, and Alpert, *Criminology & Public Policy*

Location: Seattle, USA | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers partnered with the Seattle Police Department to evaluate a supervisory program designed to slow down officers' thought processes during citizen encounters, drawing on principles of procedural justice and cognitive behavioral therapy.
- Officers were randomly enrolled in a program involving short supervisory meetings during which they reflected on their thought processes during a recent, relatively routine encounter. Supervisors were trained to model procedurally just behavior during these meetings.
- In the six weeks following a supervisory meeting, treated officers were as active in the community as untreated officers but were less likely to resolve incidents with an arrest and less likely to be involved in use-of-force incidents.
- Effects were largest among officers working in areas with moderate predicted risk levels, suggesting that the intervention may be most effective in contexts where officers have discretion over how to respond to encounters.
- The study demonstrates that a relatively low-cost supervisory intervention can produce meaningful changes in how officers interact with the public, without reducing their engagement with the community.

New GCCI Research

One study currently being funded through GCCI will expand the evidence base of how policing training affects officers' behavior related to GBV:

Debiasing law enforcement officers: Evidence from an expressive arts intervention in India (Sviatschi, Prakash, Borker, and Amaral)

Preventing GBV and improving institutional capacity is essential to encouraging women's mobility, economic participation, safety, and access to justice. Researchers aim to use applied theatre, expressive arts, and behavioral science tools to address the micro foundations of male police officers' behaviors and decision-making towards GBV. To accomplish this, they partnered with the Bihar Police in the Indian state of Bihar to implement a clustered randomized control trial across 419 police stations in 12 districts. They will assess the effect of the intervention on various behavioral outcomes and general police performance measures, in order to understand how these changes may translate into improvements in women's experiences with the police and livelihood.

Technology-based approaches

Technology is increasingly being deployed to enhance police capacity and improve accountability, with a particular focus on reducing use of force and improving the quality of police-citizen interactions. Body-worn cameras (BWCs) are among the most studied of these tools. As discussed in the above section on police-community relationships, excessive use of force can erode police legitimacy and reduce communities' willingness to engage with security actors. By recording police-citizen interactions, BWCs aim to improve officer accountability and deter misconduct, with the expectation that officers who know they are being recorded will be less likely to use excessive force. A growing body of experimental evidence has examined whether these expected effects materialize across a range of contexts, with mixed results.

A meta-analysis of ten RCTs involving eight police departments and 2,122 officers from the United States and United Kingdom found that randomly assigning officers to use BWCs for their entire shift had no effect on police use of force on average ([Ariel et al. 2016](#)). Police officers were also more likely to be assaulted, an unanticipated consequence also seen in other evaluations ([Ariel et al. 2016](#); [Ariel et al. 2018](#)). It is possible that assaults against officers increased if officers became more willing to report assaults against them with supporting BWC evidence or if officers changed their behavior when wearing a BWC, making them more vulnerable to assault ([Ariel et al. 2016](#)).

A more recent systematic review concluded that BWCs may reduce citizen complaints, but that more research is needed to confirm if BWCs reduce police use of force or consistently affect police and citizen behaviors, due to the variability of existing evidence ([Lum et al. 2020](#)). Individual studies reflect this variability: an RCT in Washington D.C. found no impact on use of force or citizen complaints ([Yokum, Ravishankar, and Coppock 2019](#)), while a year-long intervention in Las Vegas found BWCs reduced both ([Braga et al. 2018](#)). The evidence suggests that BWCs hold promise as an accountability tool, but their effectiveness depends heavily on how and where they are implemented.

Three recent studies from Brazil begin to fill an important gap by testing BWCs in a middle-income context. Together they paint a nuanced picture, suggesting that while BWCs can reduce police lethality and use of force when implemented effectively ([Fagundes et al. 2025](#); [Barbosa et al. 2025](#)), organizational compliance and officer buy-in may be critical determinants of whether those effects materialize ([Magaloni et al. 2023](#)).

26. **Monitoring technology: The impact of body-worn cameras on citizen-police interactions (2025)**, Barbosa, Fetzer, Soto-Vieira, and Souza, *The Review of Economics and Statistics*

Location: Brazil | **Method:** RCT

- In partnership with Igarapé Institute and the Santa Catarina state Military Police (PMSC), researchers studied the impact of police monitoring through BWCs on police behavior by randomly assigning cameras to 150 officers in five regions of Santa Catarina state.
- Overall, BWCs were effective in deescalating police-citizen interactions and improving accuracy of police reports. Additionally, researchers observed a 61.2 percent reduction in use-of-force by the police.
- The positive effects of BWCs were driven by the reduction in negative police-citizen interactions during low-risk events (i.e. events that had not yet escalated) suggesting that BWCs may play an important role in avoiding conflict escalation.
- Early career officers were more likely to improve behavior and protocol compliance. Further, on days the police officers were not required to wear BWCs, effects on police-citizen interactions disappeared. Together these results suggest that cameras may be an effective incentive for officers who want to progress in their careers.

27. **Body-worn cameras and racial disparities in police violence: Evidence from Brazil (2025)**, Fagundes, Monteiro, Piquet, and Souza, *Working Paper*

Location: Brazil | **Method:** Difference-in-differences | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers exploited the staggered rollout of body-worn cameras across precincts in Sao Paulo's Military Police to evaluate the program's impact on police lethality and racial disparities in police violence.
- BWCs were associated with a 51.8 percent reduction in police lethality driven entirely by a 71.8 percent reduction in killings of Black individuals, who previously faced disproportionately high mortality rates. This equates to 144 to 183 avoided deaths in the first 14 months the cameras were issued.
- Concerns that cameras might reduce police activity were not borne out—reporting of theft and domestic violence increased, suggesting cameras improved officer compliance with protocols rather than reducing police effort. Researchers found no changes in citizen behavior, pointing to officer conduct as the main driver of reduced lethality.
- The body cameras were found to be highly cost-effective. At a cost of USD \$114.64 per camera per month, the estimated economic benefit from lives saved ranges from USD\$117 to \$148 million annually, comparing favorably to other policing reforms in Brazil and the United States.

28. **Warriors and vigilantes as police officers: Evidence from a field experiment with body-cameras in Rio de Janeiro (2023)**, Magaloni, Melo, and Robles, *Cambridge Journal of Evidence-Based Policing*

Location: Brazil | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers worked in collaboration with the Pacifying Police Units (UPP) in Rocinha—a large favela of around 120,000 residents in Rio—to randomly assign more than 470 police officers to wear body-cameras over the course of eleven months, equating to roughly 8,500 shifts.
- Researchers found low levels of compliance—only 30 percent of police-citizen interactions were recorded. However, officers assigned to wear a camera, whether activated or not, were less likely to engage in potentially aggressive activities like stop-and-searches with civilians.
- The program also resulted in an unintended negative side effect. Officers assigned to wear a camera were 60 percent less likely to respond to a request for help and 43 percent less likely to be deployed to answer a call received by an Operation Center.
- When supervisors were assigned to wear body cameras, compliance with wearing the body cameras drastically increased. This suggests that organizational behaviors must change to effectively implement a body camera intervention in this context.

Beyond officer-worn devices, technology has also been deployed in the physical environment to deter crime. In Medellín, Colombia, surveillance cameras installed at identified hot spots were associated with reductions in both property and violent crime,

with evidence suggesting the cameras deterred crime rather than simply displacing it ([see study #4](#)).

Non-standard policing units

The strategies discussed above largely work within existing police institutions to build capacity and improve performance. In settings where conventional policing has struggled to contain violence and institutional constraints are too entrenched, however, states may turn to non-standard arrangements, including military deployment or entirely new policing units with distinct recruitment standards, training regimes, and accountability mechanisms.

One common approach is the deployment of military forces to support domestic law-enforcement activities. Although such approaches can have public support, experimental evidence suggests they should be approached with considerable caution: a study in Colombia found that military patrols had no effect on crime, likely exacerbated it after the intervention ended, and were associated with increased police abuse ([Blair and Weintraub 2023](#)). By contrast, a study in Brazil creating entirely new, specialized policing units with distinct recruitment standards, training regimes, and accountability mechanisms found reductions in homicides and property crime, with no increase in human rights abuses and improved citizen perceptions of legitimacy ([Mancha, Weintraub and Monteiro 2025](#)). However, this strand of research remains nascent and more evidence is needed before drawing firm conclusions.

29. [**A new path to police reform? Effects of a new police squad in Ceará, Brazil \(2025\)**](#), Mancha, Weintraub, and Monteiro, *Working Paper*

Location: Brazil | **Method:** Difference-in-differences | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- Researchers evaluated the rollout of Rondas e Ações Intensivas e Ostensivas (RAIO), a specialized motorcycle-based police squad in Ceará, Brazil, whose officers were selectively recruited, intensively trained, and paid approximately 30 percent more than standard officers.
- RAIO was associated with an approximately 84 percent reduction in robberies and, from the second year onwards, a roughly 57 percent reduction in homicides, suggesting effects that strengthened over time.
- A citizen survey found RAIO was perceived as more effective, less corrupt, and less abusive than other forces, and the program was not associated with increases in human rights abuses.
- The authors suggest that creating parallel policing units may help circumvent institutional constraints—such as bureaucratic inertia, inadequate training, and weak accountability—though the study cannot disentangle whether selection, training, or incentives drove the results, calling for future research to isolate these components.

30. [Little evidence that military policing reduces crime or improves human security \(2023\)](#), Blair and Weintraub, *Nature Human Behaviour*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- In Cali, researchers collaborated with the Mayor's Office, the Third Brigade of the Colombian Armed Forces, and IPA to evaluate *Plan Fortaleza*, a militarized policing program that deployed army patrols to 30 neighborhoods with some of the highest homicide rates in Cali.
- Approximately 214 blocks within these neighborhoods were randomly assigned to military policing, with 765 adjacent blocks designated as spillover groups and the remaining 275 blocks as the comparison.
- The study showed no reduction in crime rates on treatment or spillover blocks during the intervention. If anything, military policing likely exacerbated crime rates after the intervention was complete.
- Further, there was no credible evidence of military abuse but more conclusive evidence of police abuse in treatment and spillover blocks. This may have contributed to residents' preference for military interventions over police in these areas.
- These results serve as a cautionary signal for policymakers. A militarized approach may not mitigate crime and has the potential to cause adverse effects.
- A companion study ([Blair, Mendoza-Mora, and Weintraub 2025](#)) also found that the intervention improved public attitudes toward the armed forces and increased support for their involvement in domestic law enforcement. However, it also raised support for extrajudicial punishment and military coups in response to crime, suggesting that militarized policing may inadvertently erode democratic norms and the rule of law.

Priorities for future research

The evidence reviewed in this chapter highlights two important frontiers for future research: understanding which policing strategies are most effective, and under what conditions they work and for whom. The contexts in which police operate vary enormously, across different types and structures of crime, different accountability mechanisms, and different levels of state presence and community trust. As this evidence base grows, researchers should keep in mind what generalizes across contexts, laying the groundwork for evidence syntheses that can systematically map what works where—a critical next step for the field.

RCTs may be well-placed to fill the following evidence gaps:

- While new research is examining how policing strategies that consider the needs of specific populations may be more effective at building trust and increasing reporting of crimes such as GBV, more efforts are needed to understand under what institutional conditions—including levels of state capacity, police-community trust,

and organizational commitment—community policing is most likely to succeed or fail.

- While hot spots policing has, on balance, been shown to be effective at deterring non-violent crime in targeted areas, it may be displacing criminal activity to other areas. Further research is needed to understand in what contexts and for what types of crime displacement is more or less likely, and which policing activities are most effective at producing durable reductions.
- A rich quasi-experimental literature explores the effectiveness of focused deterrence strategies (often called “pulling levers policing”) and finds that they are associated with a moderate crime reduction effect.⁵ But none of these studies have taken place in LMICs, where the required infrastructure in terms of effective social services and intra-agency coordination may be weaker. This is one area for both further evaluation and greater innovation to disentangle which elements of the strategy adopted in different instances may have been most important for success.
- While emerging evidence suggests that the demographic composition of police teams can influence both officer behavior and community perceptions, significant questions remain about how organizational culture, management structures, and incentive systems shape whether diversity reforms translate into meaningful changes in police practice.
- Although several studies have demonstrated that police training can improve specific outcomes, much remains unknown about which types of training are most effective for different policing challenges. Future studies should examine how skills training across a range of domains—from cognitive and emotional regulation to investigative techniques, interpersonal competencies, and principles of fair and impartial policing—can improve police performance, reduce excessive use of force, and combat discriminatory behaviors.
- Despite growing use of militarized policing tactics and military forces in civilian law enforcement, experimental evidence on their effects remains limited. Priority areas for investigation include understanding the impact of militarized policing and military involvement in public security on civil liberties, human rights, and community trust.
- Similar to focused deterrence strategies, there is a need for further evaluations of interventions to combat police violence, particularly in LMICs. While police violence and excessive use of force may damage police legitimacy in many countries, the experimental literature remains concentrated in the United States and expanding this evidence base to other contexts would help identify which approaches are most effective given potentially distinct drivers of police violence across settings.

⁵ For a recent review of this literature, see Anthony A. Braga, David Weisburd, and Brandon Turchan, “Focused Deterrence Strategies and Crime Control”, *Criminology & Public Policy*, Vol.17, Issue 1, 2018.

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Chapter 2: What works in terms of justice provision, including criminal justice and corrections/prisons?

This chapter reviews evidence on interventions aimed at strengthening both state and non-state systems for justice provision. Few randomized evaluations have examined the efficacy of justice provision in the formal sector. This is in part a product of the difficulties of designing randomized studies in court and prison environments, given these institutions' responsibilities to ensure equal access to justice.⁶ Much of the evidence that does exist comes from the United States, where researchers have begun to forge long-term partnerships with the justice system.⁷ Outside of the United States, researchers are increasingly evaluating approaches to justice provision beyond those offered by the formal, state sector, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states where state institutions are often weak and unable to respond to the needs of the full population, especially in rural areas and for vulnerable groups.

⁶ H. Fernandez Lynch and co-authors (2020) describe many of the ethical objections to experimentation in legal systems, while simultaneously highlighting the importance of evidence-based legal practice.

⁷ Compared to other chapters in this review, this section includes a longer discussion of US-based evidence that has been grandfathered in because evidence from LMICs was more limited when this chapter was originally drafted in 2019. As evidence grows in LMICs, we will continually expand and reframe the chapter accordingly.

Key Takeaways

While the experimental literature on these topics remains limited and context-specific, emerging takeaways include:

- Improving pre-trial and out-of-court dispute resolution—through both state and non-state conciliation centers, mediation training, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms—can help reduce negotiation breakdowns and alleviate formal court congestion;
- Providing tailored information on potential court outcomes and performance feedback can enhance judicial efficiency and citizen satisfaction with court outcomes;
- Effective courts and mediation processes may also strengthen state legitimacy by shaping citizens' beliefs about state capacity and responsiveness;
- Improving coordination between state and communal authorities may also expand access to justice and help resolve violent disputes, though these systems may appeal to citizens differently depending on the target population (i.e. marginalized groups, including women, may be more inclined to report issues to the state if disadvantaged by customary dispute resolution systems); and
- Machine learning algorithms can help identify bias in judicial decision-making, helping to reveal where additional intervention may be needed to address bias, particularly in pre-trial bail decisions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that prioritizing investment in community-based and pre-trial dispute resolution systems and integrating data-driven tools to improve court performance may be critical for reducing court backlogs and improving the functioning of and citizen trust in justice systems, particularly for civil disputes.

Strengthening state institutions for justice provision

An effective judiciary can foster development by enforcing contracts, resolving disputes, securing property rights, and encouraging investment. However, in countries with weak state capacity, formal institutions for justice provision and dispute resolution are often inadequate or non-existent. Where such formal institutions exist, they often are overburdened—unable to respond to the needs of large segments of the population, particularly in rural areas, resulting in large backlogs of unresolved disputes. These formal justice systems are also often plagued by corruption, which may have negative implications on citizens' trust in and willingness to engage with the state. For

communities emerging from conflict, effective systems of dispute resolution are also an essential part of maintaining a lasting peace and preventing violence.

Where the state does have existing institutions (or the mandates to create them) that are tasked with arbitrating disputes and administering justice, researchers are experimenting with various approaches to improve the efficacy, fairness, and take-up of these services—from interventions aimed at reducing trial delays and clearing up case backlogs including through pre-court interventions (e.g., [Chemin et al. 2026](#); [Sadka, Seira, and Woodruff 2024](#); [Caplin, Gomberg, and Sadka 2024](#)) to programs that bring justice systems closer to citizens, reducing barriers to access (e.g., [Mattsson and Mobarak 2026](#); [Abera and Chemin 2021](#)). Efforts to strengthen state services are viewed as key for building state legitimacy and credibility, particularly in countries recovering from conflict, without which there is a risk that non-state actors may gain strength through filling this power vacuum.

31. [**Making information actionable: Experimental evidence from Kenyan courts \(2026\)**](#),

Chemin, Chen, Di Maro, Kimalu, Mokaya, and Ramos-Maqueda, *Working Paper*

Location: Kenya | **Method:** RCT

- In a nationwide randomized evaluation, researchers used data from the first digitized court records in the Kenyan judiciary—with over 9 million observations on court case activities—to develop an algorithm to identify the main sources of court delays, finding the high frequency of adjourned cases to be a major contributor to court backlogs.
- Researchers then randomly assigned courts to receive tailored information on their court's performance, main reasons for adjournment, and potential actions to improve performance with instructions to implement the recommendations sent by the Chief Justice. In some randomly assigned courts, the briefs were also shared with Court User Committees (CUCs) that included local civil society members, lawyers, prosecutors, and police in an effort to increase bottom-up accountability pressure.
- Sharing information with both courts and CUCs reduced the likelihood of case adjournments by 20 percent, leading to a 22 percent reduction in trial length and improved court user satisfaction.
- In regions receiving the information, workers were subsequently more likely to receive formal employment contracts and higher wages, especially in contract-intensive industries. This is likely a result of increasing incentives to enter into contract agreements as courts became faster at addressing cases, including breach of contract cases; this also suggests a causal relationship between judicial performance and development.

32. [Formalizing dispute resolution: Effects of village courts in Bangladesh \(2026\)](#),

Mattsson and Mobarak, *Working Paper*

Location: Bangladesh | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Bangladesh, access to formal courts is often time and resource prohibitive for the average citizen. As a result, many instead rely on informal dispute resolution mechanisms (DRMs), which lack enforcement capacity and are often perceived to be biased in favor of existing local power structures. A 2006 law created a new formal structure of village courts with the power to resolve small disputes at the lowest tier of local government—aiming to increase access to justice at low cost. However, few villages formed such courts and their use was limited.
- The Government of Bangladesh partnered with the UNDP to create the “Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh” (AVCB) program, which provided increased human and physical resources to establish new village courts and provide related information to citizens. Researchers partnered with IPA to randomly roll-out access to the AVCB program in order to evaluate its impact on dispute resolution, social dynamics, and downstream economic outcomes.
- The AVCB program successfully established functional, active village courts and increased the share and number of new disputes resolved in village courts. This more than doubled the share of overall disputes resolved in government sanctioned dispute resolution mechanisms, substantially formalizing how disputes are resolved in rural Bangladesh.
- However, despite being a formal dispute mechanism with enforcement powers, village courts did little to reduce reliance on the informal DRM known as shalish or the burden of cases on other formal DRMs like district courts – despite this being an explicit aim of the program.
- Researchers suggest that village courts were hindered by institutional design and limited government capacity: it would not be feasible to fully replace reliance on shalish with village courts because both institutions rely heavily on input from a locally elected leader, the Union Parishad chair. Due to limits on their time, the reliance on the chair constrained the potential growth of village courts.
- The program also had no effect on households’ perceptions of village social dynamics, economic activity, or satisfaction with local leadership.

33. [Know your rights! A field experiment on legal knowledge, property rights, and investment in Kenya \(2025\)](#), Aberra and Chemin, *Journal of Law, Economics, and*

Organization

Location: Kenya | **Method:** RCT

- In Kenya, land conflicts are often the result of people lacking knowledge on the estate succession process and the legal steps to follow when buying or selling land. To address this, researchers partnered with a team of Kenyan lawyers and paralegals to design and evaluate individual-level training programs for small-scale farmers that covered either 1) how to follow the proper succession process, delivered to households currently in the process of succession, 2) how to buy and

sell land, delivered to households in the process of buying or selling land, or 3) how to properly write a will. Paralegals visited participants' homes to deliver the training.

- Researchers also evaluated a group training program that covered all of the above topics as well as women's land rights. Participants in the group training program received the training during the regular meeting hours of rural women's groups.
- The trainings increased participants' legal knowledge. The training on succession and the group training also increased the likelihood that participants registered a plot of land as their own and reported current property rights over the land, such as the right to cultivate, rent, or sell the land, without needing their family's approval for these activities – a measure of individual property rights.
- Additionally, the group training increased participants' agricultural investments, which could increase land productivity. On average, the group training cost a little over US\$12 per participant, significantly cheaper than alternatives to increasing property rights and investment, such as offering legal representation in courts, which cost \$380 per participant over two years in [Abera and Chemin 2021](#).

34. [**Information and bargaining through agents: Experimental evidence from Mexico's labour courts \(2024\)**](#), Sadka, Seira, and Woodruff, *The Review of Economic Studies*

Location: Mexico City, Mexico | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- In partnership with the Mexico City Labor Court, researchers examined whether trial delays, low settlement rates, misinformation, overconfidence of plaintiffs, and lawsuit inflation could be ameliorated by providing personalized statistical predictions of plaintiffs' expected case outcomes and legally-mandated entitlements.
- To provide customized statistical predictions of case outcomes, researchers leveraged data on 5,000 concluded cases and used machine learning techniques to estimate predictive models on the outcomes of each individual case.
- Researchers found that providing personalized predictions for case outcomes nearly doubled the rate of case settlement and reduced the average case duration, but only when the plaintiffs themselves were present to receive the information directly. Researchers indicated this was because lawyers did not otherwise convey the information provided through the intervention to their clients.

35. [**Judging the judges: Indexing of complex information reduces injustice \(2024\)**](#),

Caplin, Gomberg, and Sadka, *Working Paper*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** RCT

- In Mexico, many judges face significant time pressure to make decisions due to substantial caseloads. This can lead them to make incorrect verdicts that later result in appeals. To address this challenge, researchers added 'index pages' to a random selection of case files to make relevant information easier for judges to locate.

- Adding index pages substantially reduced judicial errors, resulting in successful appeals falling by roughly one-third overall, driven largely by a reduction in appeals of more complex cases (where appeals dropped by roughly half). Judges also issued shorter, more direct rulings, suggesting the indexing helped them focus on the most relevant case information.
- The results demonstrate that cognitive constraints can lead to incorrect verdicts and that relatively low-cost administrative reforms—such as improving how information is presented—can meaningfully improve decision-making, particularly in high-volume or information-dense settings

36. **Does legal representation increase investment? Evidence from a field experiment in Kenya (2021)**, Aberra and Chemin, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Kenya | **Method:** RCT

- In rural Kenya, land disputes are common. The high cost of legal aid often prohibits individuals from seeking help in securing their property rights and accessing the judiciary. With weak property rights, individuals may also lack incentive to invest in and develop their land.
- Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to examine if giving free access to legal representation to people involved in a civil dispute for up to two years could increase recipients' investments and the security of their property rights. Researchers kept costs low by following a community justice center model, where they hired one lawyer, assisted by paralegals, to provide aid to the 191 households in the treatment group over the course of the evaluation (2013-2018).
- Participants that received access to free legal representation were more likely to have met with a lawyer and to pursue using the formal justice system to resolve their dispute. Access to legal aid increased dispute resolution by 20 percentage points: 62 percent of program participants' disputes were resolved, compared to 42 percent in the comparison group.
- Legal aid also increased the amount of time participants spent working on their farm but not other types of investments. Still, participants increased their agricultural output by US\$310 per household per month, and this increase in their harvest improved their access to credit from formal credit unions.

Complementarities between state and non-state systems

Informal and hybrid justice mechanisms, often embedded either in customary institutions or in village- or state-level institutions, have provided fertile ground for new research and innovative approaches to improving access to justice and dispute resolution services. In contexts where informal and hybrid justice institutions have emerged, questions remain regarding how such systems may complement, supplement, and/or undermine existing state institutions and authority.

37. [Preventing rebel resurgence after civil war: A field experiment in security and justice provision in rural Colombia \(2022\)](#), Blair, Moscoso-Rojas, Vargas Castillo, and Weintraub, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT

- In Colombia, the *ComunPaz* program was launched to strengthen coordination between state and communal dispute resolution authorities, in an effort to replace rebel governance structures following the demobilization of FARC, a major rebel group in Colombia. From 149 communities with a historically strong FARC presence, researchers randomly assigned 72 communities to participate in *ComunPaz* activities over three months. A series of activities brought together combinations of police officers, police inspectors, community action councils, and citizens to discuss and plan for the division of responsibilities between different dispute resolution approaches and areas for future collaboration.
- The program reduced the number of unresolved or violent disputes in *ComunPaz* communities, relative to comparison group communities. Police inspectors in the program group also reported being more trusting of community action councils and were more likely to cooperate with them to resolve disputes.
- While the program improved citizens' trust in police inspectors and reduced their trust and reliance on nonstate armed groups, the program did not increase citizens' reliance on state or communal authorities for dispute resolution or build trust in communal institutions.

38. [Trust in state and non-state actors: Evidence from dispute resolution in Pakistan \(2020\)](#), Acemoglu, Cheema, Khwaja, and Robinson, *Journal of Political Economy*

Location: Pakistan | **Method:** Lab-in-the-field experiment

- Researchers were interested in exploring how information about and experience with both formal state institutions and non-state, local village (*panchayat*) councils as dispute resolution systems affected citizens' engagement with these institutions.
- Individuals who either experienced a dispute or were likely to experience one in the future were randomly assigned to receive a range of informational or experiential primes, including positive information about the effectiveness of either state or non-state actors in resolving disputes, details of state dispute resolution and judicial services and (truthful) information about reduced delays in state courts, and trainings and consultations on state-endorsed services on offer for dispute resolution. The goal was to understand how these forms of information and experience may shift attitudes and preferences towards state and non-state actors, and how they might affect trust in the state
- The researchers found that providing information about reduced delays in state courts led citizens to report a higher willingness to use state courts and to greater trust in the state. They also found that as citizens received positive information about the state, they were less likely to report expected usage of non-state actors (*panchayats*).

- Taken together, the authors suggest these results indicate that “there is nothing hardwired about the lack of trust in the state, as credible new information can trigger changes in beliefs and behaviors”—an important finding for efforts to improve the efficacy of state justice provision efforts.

There is also the risk that institutions—both formal and informal—may systematically produce outcomes that favor particular segments of society over others, leading to questions about how best to ensure equal access to justice and procedural fairness, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women. As noted above, much of the existing policing research is also concerned with identifying effective ways of improving justice provision—some of which speaks to the question of how different segments of society may be differentially impacted by different dispute resolution systems.

In Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, Cooper (2019) presents particularly compelling evidence of how customary dispute resolution mechanisms and state forces may appeal to men and women in very different ways, particularly when it comes to addressing gender-based violence (see study #13). Similarly, in Liberia, Blair, Karim and Morse (2019) find that increases in crime reporting came almost entirely from those generally found to be disadvantaged by customary forms of dispute resolution (see study #12).

39. [Delivering justice to the poor: Theory and experimental evidence from Liberia \(2015\)](#), Sandefur and Siddiqi, *Working Paper*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers used public information meetings to recruit participants seeking legal assistance on a host of issues (including criminal, debt, custody-related disputes, and more), half of whom were randomly assigned to receive three months of free legal assistance from a community paralegal trained in statutory legal principles. The program aimed to educate rural Liberians of their legal rights and reduce the direct and perceived social costs of accessing the formal law, thereby providing an alternative to local formal and customary justice mechanisms.
- The researchers found that demand for paralegal assistance was highest for cases that otherwise would have pursued justice through formal rather than customary channels or would have otherwise gone unreported.
- Those who received legal assistance reported higher levels of satisfaction with the results of their cases, were more likely to consider the process fair, and were 10 percentage points less likely to pay a bribe to a police officer or public official. The intervention also improved a number of measures of household wellbeing, including household and child food security, as well as the proportion of single mothers receiving child support.

New GCCI Research

Ongoing GCCI-funded research in the DRC will provide further evidence on citizen preferences between state and non-state justice provision.

State building via punitive and restorative justice: Evidence from the D.R. Congo (Weigel, Ahrenshop, Bergeron, Ngoma, and Robinson)

Resolving disputes is integral to the accumulation of state capacity. Yet too often policymakers privilege fiscal capacity building in fragile states over legal capacity building. In this project, researchers study a low-capacity state—the Democratic Republic of the Congo—seeking to establish legal authority and how its efforts to do so shape citizens' demand for the state. Specifically, they will examine the randomized rollout of a legal capacity building program implemented at scale in the city of Kananga (DRC) by the Ministry of Justice and a local NGO. This program has (1) a “punitive” legal capacity building arm in which state lawyers serve as neighborhood legal representatives with subsidized services, and (2) a “restorative” legal capacity building arm in which the neighborhood chief performs these same functions. They will examine effects on property rights security, crime, violence, and citizens' willingness to pay for the formal state.

Community mediation and dispute resolution

In places where formal, state justice institutions have limited reach, legal interventions often seek to bolster the capacity of existing customary dispute resolution systems. One such approach, **alternative dispute resolution** (ADR), seeks to address the need for immediate dispute resolution by teaching communities a set of skills and behaviors that help build norms around how people should resolve disputes. By building improved dispute resolution skills and norms, ADR could help parties reach self-enforcing bargains faster than through the formal justice systems in fragile states. In addition to ADR, **mediation training** for community leaders may similarly be effective in resolving disputes and reducing local violence. Such systems for resolving disputes outside of formal, state justice systems may be critical for addressing negotiation breakdowns and reducing court backlogs.

40. [Can mediation reduce violence? The effects of negotiation training for local leaders in north central Nigeria \(2022\)](#), Reardon, Wolfe, and Ogbudu, *Mercy Corps Report*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- In Nigeria, Mercy Corps partnered with Pastoral Resolve (PARE) to evaluate a program providing mediation training to local leaders on violence, perceptions of insecurity, and trust and cohesion in communities. The researchers randomly assigned leaders in 88 communities to either receive the mediation training or continue to resolve disputes as they had been.
- Leaders who received the training reported feeling more confident in their negotiation skills, more prepared to settle disputes, and perceived their interaction with leaders from the conflicting group more positively, relative to the comparison group leaders. Communities with trained leaders also experienced a decrease in violence and residents reported feeling more secure and more likely to interact economically and socially with members of conflicting groups. However, the intervention did not impact intergroup trust.
- The results suggest improving the mediation capabilities of local leaders can be an effective way to reduce violence and improve security in conflict-affected communities. Policymakers should consider pairing interventions that intend to stop violence, like mediation training, with other peacebuilding interventions that may better address the underlying causes of conflict, such as by building trust between groups.
- In a follow-up study ([Reardon, Wolfe, and Ogbudu 2024](#)), researchers randomly assigned program and comparison group communities to also participate in a community dialogue intervention designed to build social ties among conflicting groups. They found that the positive impacts of mediation training persisted three years later, accompanied by increases in social cohesion and intergroup trust. However, the new community dialogue program did not impact security or cohesion outcomes, potentially because the one-off dialogue events brought too many groups together for only a short period.

41. [How to promote order and property rights under weak rule of law? An experiment in changing dispute resolution behavior through community education \(2014\)](#),

Blattman, Hartman, and Blair, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Liberia, researchers examined the impact of introducing ADR trainings on the rate at which community members resolved property disputes, the level of satisfaction with dispute resolution, and the incidence of violence related to the disputes. The program involved eight day-long workshops over the course of two months. Overall, the workshops aimed to strengthen informal methods of dispute resolution—such as decisions by customary leaders—and to train and encourage ordinary residents to negotiate their own disputes or mediate those of their neighbors.

- In the short-term (one year following the intervention), communities that received ADR workshops were more likely to resolve land disputes, experienced less violence, and reported higher levels of satisfaction with dispute outcomes, especially for long-standing land disputes. ADR did not, however, lead to better outcomes for disputes over money.
- Treatment communities also saw a 9.2 percentage point (181 percent) increase in extrajudicial punishment (e.g., witch hunts and trials by ordeal, traditionally common means of community punishment and justice). This was a serious side effect that may have resulted from increased emphasis on informal dispute resolution.
- Results from a long-term follow-up ([Hartman, Blair, and Blattman 2021](#)) show that three years following the intervention, ADR participants continued to experience reductions in violence, though there were no long-term reductions in the total incidence or length of disputes.

New GCCI Research

Ongoing GCCI-funded research in Nigeria will expand our knowledge of the long-term impacts of mediation training on community dispute resolution.

Understanding the long-term economic, security and social cohesion effects from training local leaders in mediation (Wolfe and Olawole)

Violent conflict reduces economic growth, and sustainable peace is critical for economic investment and resilience, yet there is limited rigorous micro-level research on whether—and through which channels—localized reductions in violence translate into improved economic outcomes. This project directly addresses this challenge by examining a mediation training program for local leaders in North Central Nigeria approximately two years after the program ended. In an earlier study ([Reardon, Wolfe, and Ogbudu 2024](#)), researchers found that training leaders in mediation reduced community-level violence and improved social cohesion. In this study, they will examine whether these gains hold, and whether they translate to improved economic welfare for households.

Improving criminal justice

Evidence on improving criminal justice has historically been grounded in high-income countries, especially the United States. While experimental evidence on these topics remains limited, researchers have conducted a number of natural experiments across contexts, often leveraging the as-if-random assignment of judges to cases to observe the impact of characteristics like ethnicity and leniency in bail decisions on future criminal justice outcomes, recidivism, or bias.

In the US, for example, researchers have evaluated changes to the prosecution or fining of misdemeanor offenses on defendants' future justice system involvement ([Agan, Doleac, and Harvey 2023](#); [Giles 2023](#)). Outside of the US, (quasi)experimental evidence from Haiti and Argentina is adding to the debate on what works to improve the justice system. In the pretrial period, researchers found that a legal assistance program reduced illegal prolonged pretrial detention in Haiti, while researchers in Argentina found that electronic monitoring reduced recidivism compared to detaining individuals in prison pretrial ([Slough and Fariss 2021](#); [Di Tella and Scharfgrudsky 2013](#)).

42. [Misdemeanor prosecution \(2023\)](#), Agan, Doleac, and Harvey, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: United States | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- The public safety benefits of prosecuting nonviolent misdemeanor offenses are unclear. Researchers used the as-if random assignment of nonviolent misdemeanor cases to district attorneys in Massachusetts who varied in their leniency on prosecuting such crimes to evaluate the impact of prosecution on subsequent criminal justice involvement.
- Non-prosecution led to a 53 percent decline in the likelihood defendants received a new criminal complaint (the first step in starting a criminal case) relative to prosecuted defendants and a 60 percent reduction in the number of new complaints over the following two years.
- The effects were largest for defendants with no prior criminal record. This suggests that not prosecuting nonviolent misdemeanors may decrease the likelihood of future justice involvement in part by helping defendants avoid a criminal record – a record which could otherwise lower defendants' employment prospects and the opportunity cost of engaging in crime.

43. [The government revenue, recidivism, and financial health effects of criminal fines and fees \(2023\)](#), Giles, *Working Paper*

Location: United States | **Method:** Regression discontinuity design

- In 2014, a new law in Milwaukee charged defendants an additional US\$200 surcharge per guilty misdemeanor. Researchers compared defendants sentenced just before and just after the law took effect to evaluate the effect of an increase in

misdemeanor fees on government revenue, recidivism, and the financial health of defendants.

- The increase in fees for misdemeanors increased the likelihood of *felony*-level recidivism within two years, especially among Black defendants. Defendants were also more likely to receive a civil judgment for unpaid fees and had higher outstanding civil judgment debt over three years later. Defendants' credit scores and other credit report outcomes did not change, likely due to poor measures of financial health even before sentencing.
- While the law increased government revenue, the researcher estimates that the recidivism-based social costs created by the policy far outweigh the increase in revenue.

44. **Misgovernance and human rights: The case of illegal detention without intent (2021)**, Slough and Fariss, *American Journal of Political Science*

Location: Haiti | **Method:** RCT

- The Haitian criminal justice system suffers from prolonged case processing times that contribute to illegal prolonged pretrial detention, constituting an abuse of human rights. However, slow case processing and abuse in this context may not be the result of repressive intent among state actors but could be due to poor governance and misaligned bureaucratic incentives.
- To examine this, researchers studied the effect of legal assistance on case advancement and liberation in three Haitian prisons. Researchers randomly assigned 346 detainees to lawyers who would study their case, identify the next procedural step, and appeal to the judge as needed over 10 weeks.
- Given the sensitivity of the experiment, researchers ensured that the number of detainees assigned to a lawyer was maximized, and prisoners could opt out at any point in the evaluation. Researchers found no evidence that lawyers worsened clients' case trajectories.
- Using administrative and survey data, researchers found that legal assistance increased the likelihood that illegally detained people were liberated within nine months. Researchers argued that the lawyers' efforts to identify the case files and the next required procedural step reduced the cost of effort for bureaucrats to process the next step in each case, thus reducing processing delays. This suggests that interventions that improve the behavior of low-level agents, for example by reducing shirking, can improve human rights compliance when abuse is the result of poor governance (vs. strategic repression).

45. **Criminal recidivism after prison and electronic monitoring (2013)**, Di Tella and Schargrodsky, *Journal of Political Economy*

Location: Argentina | **Method:** Natural experiment/instrumental variables

- In the 1990s, Argentina introduced electronic monitoring (EM) as an alternative to imprisonment, with the aim of reducing pretrial costs. Researchers used administrative data from 1998-2007 to investigate whether EM during the pretrial period led to lower reoffending rates compared to traditional incarceration. The study leveraged the as-if random assignment of detainees to judges who, based on

their ideology, were more or less likely to assign any detainee to EM for the pretrial period.

- Individuals under EM during the pretrial period were 11 to 16 percentage points (about 50 percent) less likely to recidivate compared to individuals in prison pretrial, who had an average recidivism rate of 22.37 percent. Researchers found no difference in the severity of crimes committed by those who reoffended, suggesting EM still had a deterrent effect to more serious crimes.
- Despite potential concerns with EM, such as the risk of offenders fleeing, researchers suggest that it may offer a promising alternative to imprisonment in terms of cost savings and reduced future crime rates.

Bias reduction

Other quasi-experimental evaluations—including in Miami, Philadelphia, and New York—have leveraged administrative data and machine learning models to assess potential bias in judges' bail decisions ([Arnold, Dobbie, and Hull 2022](#); [Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang 2018](#); [Kleinberg et al. 2018](#)). This work is complemented by emerging research from Kenya and Israel where researchers evaluated the extent of ethnic bias in criminal appeal rulings or in pretrial bail decisions, respectively, and demonstrated the need to find effective solutions to address bias in both contexts ([Choi, Harris, and Shen-Bayh 2022](#); [Gazal-Ayal and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2010](#)).

46. [Ethnic bias in judicial decision making: Evidence from criminal appeals in Kenya \(2022\)](#), Choi, Harris, and Shen-Bayh, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Kenya | **Method:** Natural experiment

- In Kenya, researchers examined ethnic biases in court decisions by analyzing 9,545 criminal appeal rulings from the Kenyan High Court between 2003-2017. The study leveraged the as-good-as random assignment of cases to judges to assess if judges' rulings were influenced by shared or different ethnicity with the defendant. Researchers also analyzed the language in rulings for potential signs of ethnic bias.
- Judges were three to five percentage points more likely to approve an appeal when the defendant shared the same ethnicity. This effect was primarily driven by judges from the Kikuyu ethnic group, the largest group in Kenya, who were 6 to 10 percentage points more likely to grant appeals to defendants of the same ethnicity. No evidence was found that judges unfairly penalized defendants from other ethnic groups.
- Judges used around 0.12 standard deviations more "trust-related language" in their judgments, such as "consistent" and "trustworthy", when the defendant was of the same ethnicity. However, no difference was found in the use of "disgust-related language," suggesting that judicial bias may manifest more as in-group favoritism than out-group hatred.
- The evidence of in-group favoritism indicates that the current practice in Kenya does not fully eliminate bias and additional interventions related to the composition of the local judiciary, judicial vetting, and legal training processes may be necessary.

47. [Measuring racial discrimination in bail decisions \(2022\)](#), Arnold, Dobbie, and Hull, *American Economic Review*
Location: New York City, USA | **Method:** Instrumental variables
- Using data from 595,186 pretrial cases in New York City from 2008-2013, researchers investigated racial disparities in US bail decisions. Leveraging as-good-as random case assignment to judges, researchers measured differences in the release rates of White and Black defendants with otherwise similar characteristics, including risk of pretrial misconduct.
 - White defendants were roughly 5-7 percentage points more likely to be released on bail than Black defendants, even when factors such as gender, prior arrest history, and type of charges were considered. About two-thirds of this disparity in bail decisions could be attributed to discrimination in individual judges' release decisions.
 - Researchers found that stricter judges, those assigned a lower proportion of cases with Black defendants, and judges not recently appointed were more prone to making racially disparate bail decisions. Researchers found two drivers behind the differences in judges' decisions: a judge's racial preference (racial bias) and predictions about misconduct based on the defendant's race (statistical discrimination), suggesting a need for more interventions targeting judges making racially disparate bail decisions.
48. [Racial bias in bail decisions \(2018\)](#), Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Location: Miami and Philadelphia, USA | **Method:** Instrumental variables
- In the United States, bail judges exercise considerable discretion when setting conditions for release and bail, resulting in differences between judges even when operating within the same jurisdictions. Researchers leveraged administrative court data from Miami (where bail judges work on a part-time schedule) and Philadelphia (where bail judges are full-time specialists) to test whether racial biases influenced judges' bail setting decisions as measured by examining pretrial misconduct rates for marginal white and black defendants.
 - They find evidence of racial bias in judges' bail decisions for black defendants—when comparing white to black defendants with otherwise similar characteristics (in terms of prior offenses, type of offense, etc.), black defendants were 3.6 percentage points more likely to be assigned monetary bail and, conditional on being assigned monetary bail, received bail amounts US\$9,923 higher, on average. Marginally released white defendants were about 22 percentage points more likely to be arrested prior to disposition than marginally released black defendants.
 - The researchers suggest that these results were likely driven by judges' inaccurate stereotypes of black defendants. They observe that full-time judges and part-time judges with more experience were less likely to exhibit racial biases in their bail decisions.

49. [Human decisions and machine predictions \(2018\)](#), Kleinberg, Lakkaraju, Leskovec, Ludwig, and Mullainathan, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Location: New York City, USA | **Method:** Machine learning algorithm
- Researchers evaluated whether they could use statistically driven predictions on whether arrested defendants are likely to flee or commit new crimes to improve judges' decision-making processes related to bail. These predictions were generated through a machine-learning algorithm trained on information related to offenses and criminal histories from a large dataset of cases heard in New York City from 2008-2013. They exploited as-good-as-random assignment of judges to different defendants' cases.
 - They suggest that algorithmic predictions can improve judges' bail decisions. They find that many judges were releasing defendants that the algorithm deemed to be very high risk (i.e., least likely to appear for court), and that judges often did not jail the riskiest defendants first.
 - The researchers suggest that a properly built algorithm could reduce crime and jail populations, by 25 to 42 percent respectively, while simultaneously reducing racial disparities. In addition, this algorithm could also be used as a behavioral diagnostic to assess why some judges inaccurately predict risk level.
50. [Let my people go: Ethnic in-group bias in judicial decisions—Evidence from a randomized natural experiment \(2010\)](#), Gazal-Ayal and Sulitzeanu-Kenan, *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*
Location: Israel | **Method:** Natural experiment
- In Israel, new criminal cases are randomly assigned to judges on weekends, with judges making pretrial bail decisions shortly after arrests based on limited suspect information. This provided researchers with a unique opportunity to assess the influence of ethnic identity on 59 Arab and Jewish judges' decisions to detain suspects or release them on bail in 2004.
 - Researchers observed that a suspect's ethnic identity influenced release decisions by judges, with in-group bias among both Arab and Jewish judges. Judges were more likely to release co-ethnic suspects on bail, e.g., Jewish judges were more likely to release Jewish suspects than Arab suspects.
 - Out of 897 cases that led to detainment, researchers found no evidence of ethnic bias in the judges' decisions regarding the length of detention.
 - With a majority of judges belonging to the predominant ethnic group in their jurisdiction, this in-group bias may contribute to discriminatory treatment of minorities within the national legal system, starting as early as the pretrial bail decisions.

Behavioral nudges

In addition, research in the US has used behavioral nudges to help improve criminal justice outcomes by reducing negative consequences for both citizens and the criminal justice system.⁸ For example, there is growing evidence from randomized evaluations that simple reminders through text messages, mail, or phone calls can effectively reduce the rate at which individuals fail to appear to court by addressing informational barriers and facilitating their ability to anticipate and plan for a court appearance. This evidence has been summarized in detail in a [J-PAL Policy Insight](#) and is thus excluded from this review.

Priorities for future research

While there is growing evidence on what works to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the justice system and improve access to state and non-state dispute resolution services more broadly, this is still an understudied topic, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Priority areas for further research through randomized evaluations include the following:

- Judicial training and effectiveness and its impact on the cost of engaging in crime and violence;
- Addressing corruption and bias in police, courts, and other justice institutions;
- Reentry strategies to reduce recidivism and promote rehabilitation and reintegration within communities;
- Alternatives to incarceration, particularly those for juvenile offenders, and including those that leverage behavior change techniques, educational opportunities, and training and employment programs (discussed in greater depth in [Chapter 3](#)); and
- Restorative justice approaches to address and support community healing from crime and violence.

⁸ The [Access to Justice Lab](#) (A2JL), based at Harvard University, is currently undertaking several randomized evaluations to expand the evidence base on legal practice in the United States. Areas of current exploration, as they relate to criminal justice, include: pretrial release, expungement, and holistic defense (i.e. incorporating social workers into the criminal defense team). [J-PAL North America](#) has also recently launched the Initiative for [Effective US Crime Policy](#), which will support randomized evaluations of strategies that foster a more effective and fair criminal legal system in the United States.

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Photo: Rob Kozloff | University of Chicago

Chapter 3: What works in shifting individuals' behaviors away from crime and violence in high-risk settings?

This chapter reviews evidence on interventions aimed at reducing or preventing the violent behavior of individuals in high-crime or conflict settings. The primary focus is on strategies aimed at engaging individuals to shift their decisions and actions, rather than police or military interventions targeted at individual people or behaviors focused on increasing probability of detection or punishment (for related research on the latter, please refer to [Chapter 1](#)).

There are a growing number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies exploring this topic, including in fragile settings. This chapter examines emerging insights from evaluations of:

- **Behavior change interventions**, including **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-informed programs** that typically focus on targeting emotional regulation, developing non-cognitive social skills, and correcting maladaptive mental processes by teaching people to evaluate and modify the way they think and make decisions, as well as other forms of soft skills training.
- **Employment and vocational skills training programs** that seek either to reduce the barriers to lawful employment by matching individuals to new jobs or by providing them the skills to obtain better paying jobs, thus increasing the returns to peaceful activities.

As highlighted in [Chapter 1](#), one emerging lesson from this literature is that targeted approaches that focus on individuals at highest risk for committing crimes or engaging in violent behaviors, may be a particularly effective means for reducing violent behavior in high-crime and conflict settings. Because crime can be displaced across locations, interventions that engage individuals directly—rather than solely relying on place-based strategies—may generate more durable reductions in violent behavior.

Evidence from OECD contexts reinforces these insights. In a recent review of empirical evidence on strategies for encouraging desistance from crime, Doleac (2023) emphasizes that a small group of individuals who are caught in cycles of recidivism account for a large share of crime. The review finds that interventions that improve economic stability and expand non-crime alternatives (e.g., through public assistance like welfare and food stamps), reshape peer networks, and support better day-to-day decision-making (e.g., through CBT) have been effective in reducing recidivism. However, the evidence on which program models reliably achieve these changes remains mixed, underscoring the importance of understanding and targeting the underlying mechanisms behind these behaviors.

Key Takeaways

Emerging insights based on the literature in this chapter include:

- Targeted approaches that focus on individuals at highest risk for committing crimes or engaging in violent behaviors, may be a particularly effective means for reducing violent behavior in high-crime and conflict settings.
- Even interventions targeted at older, at-risk, or criminally engaged youth can reduce criminal or antisocial behaviors, at least in the short term. Evidence from a range of interventions that employed behavior change techniques implemented in El Salvador, Liberia, and the United States suggest that this may be a cost-effective approach to reducing youth engagement in criminal activities.
- Evidence on whether vocational training and employment programs reduce crime and violence is mixed and highly context-dependent. While findings from fragile and low-income settings are limited and often show modest or uneven impacts, evidence from high-income contexts—particularly the United States—suggests that certain program models, like Summer Youth Employment Programs, can reduce criminal involvement.
- More research is needed to understand the circumstances under which violence and conflict respond to material gains, such as income generated through licit employment. This research should be complemented by efforts to also understand the non-financial motivators of crime and violence and to unpack the potential socio-emotional benefits underlying vocational training and employment programs that may offer effective channels for targeting these behaviors.

Behavior change interventions

A growing number of crime and violence prevention programs have sought to draw on behavior change techniques as a means of shifting the way people think and make decisions. These techniques often aim to address peoples' cognitive biases as a means of helping them to improve their decision making and self-regulation skills and increase empathy.

One approach that many such interventions draw from is **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**. CBT is just one of multiple approaches that teaches people to evaluate and modify the way they think and make decisions. A key aspect of CBT-informed interventions is that they help participants recognize how cognitive biases, such as making default assumptions, can distort decision-making, and support emotional regulation, social skills development, and identity change. Further behavioral and soft skills techniques can then be used to help individuals think more systematically about the situations they are in, slow their decision-making, plan ahead, and set goals, all of which can help curb violent and self-destructive tendencies. These techniques also often aim to help participants improve their self-image, adopt identities that are associated with less violent norms of behavior, and relate and adapt to their environments, which can further promote behavioral change that reduces crime and violence.

A 2007 meta-analysis ([Lipsey, Landenberger, and Wilson](#)) of 58 studies—19 of which were randomized evaluations—reinforces the potential of CBT-informed interventions to reduce recidivism in juvenile and adult offenders. However, few of the evaluations referenced tested programs at scale in real-world settings, and few observed the effects of interventions outside of the United States.

More recently, [evidence from eight experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations](#) of behavioral interventions designed to change how people think about themselves or their situations suggests these programs have been effective in reducing criminal, violent, and antisocial behaviors across a range of contexts and populations. There is still some debate regarding the precise mechanisms driving changes in participant behaviors. However, where studies have been able to isolate and test for mechanisms, evidence suggests that these interventions may help participants slow-down their decision-making processes, improve their emotional regulation, and/or consider alternative situations and perspectives. These insights have also been applied to police officers: a cognitive training program for officers in Chicago drew on similar behavioral science principles to improve decision-making under stress, with promising results on use of force and officer conduct ([see study #19](#)). Moreover, the majority of the programs tested involved low-cost interventions with simple, standardized curricula, most often delivered by facilitators with no formal training in social work or psychology. This suggests behavior change programs are promising as a cost-effective, adaptable approach to reduce crime and violence.

The evidence to date suggests that CBT-informed and other behavior change approaches may work best in contexts where violence is driven by individual decisions, impulsive behavior, or other forms of non-strategic violence carried out by small and fragmented groups. These interventions may be less likely to shift behavior in settings where violence is strategic, organized, or directed by well-organized armed groups or criminal organizations ([see Chapter 4](#) of this wrap-up for more on group decision-making).

51. [Predicting and preventing gun violence: An experimental evaluation of READI Chicago \(2024\)](#), Bhatt, Heller, Kapustin, Bertrand, and Blattman, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: Chicago, USA | **Method:** RCT

- In Chicago, a team of implementers and researchers co-designed the Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI), which provided a combination of subsidized employment opportunities with professional development sessions and group-based CBT to men at highest risk of being involved in gun violence in Chicago for up to 18 months.
- While the intervention had no detectable impact on a combined measure of serious violence, there is suggestive evidence that READI reduced arrests for shooting and homicides. Moreover, participants who were referred to the program by outreach workers saw a 0.13 standard deviation reduction in involvement in serious violence, driven by a 79 percent reduction in arrests and a 43 percent reduction in victimizations for shootings and homicides.
- The READI program highlights how a highly targeted intervention—involving less than 0.01 percent of Chicago’s population—can lead to positive impacts on city-wide crime and violence reduction. In the absence of the READI program, the roughly 2,500 men who participated in the study would have accounted for about 6 percent of Chicago’s shooting and homicide victims during an average 20-month period. Researchers estimate that the incidents of crime and violence in which they would have been involved would cost society between US\$711 million and US\$3.6 billion.

52. [Cognitive behavior therapy reduces crime and violence over 10 years: Experimental evidence \(2023\)](#), Blattman, Chaskel, Jamison, and Sheridan, *American Economic Review: Insights*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- High-risk young men (18-35 years old) in Monrovia, Liberia were recruited and randomly selected to participate in an eight-week long CBT-informed program that combined group therapy with one-on-one counseling aimed at improving participants’ self-image and self-control. Half of participants also received a one-time unconditional cash grant of US\$200.
- In the short run, receiving therapy with or without the cash reduced the likelihood of aggressive and criminal behavior among participants and improved some

measures of self-control and self-image (including reductions in impulsivity and improvements in self-esteem). These results were more pronounced for participants who received *both* therapy and cash.

- After ten years, researchers observed a 0.2 standard deviation decline in antisocial behaviors among men who received therapy alone and a 0.25 standard deviation decrease among those who received therapy and cash. These findings suggest that over a ten-year period, those who received therapy plus cash committed 200 fewer crimes relative to those in the comparison group.
- The long-run reductions in crime and violence were greatest among the men who reported the highest levels of antisocial behavior before starting the program. For this group, therapy alone reduced antisocial behavior by 0.91 standard deviations and therapy and cash by 1.25 standard deviations.
- These results demonstrate that cognitive behavioral therapy, combined with unconditional cash transfers, can be an effective and lasting method of reducing criminality and violence, offering an alternative to more coercive policing and imprisonment tactics.

53. **Preventing violence in the most violent contexts: Behavioral and neurophysiological evidence from El Salvador (2024)**, Dinarte and Egana-delSol, *Journal of the European Economic Association*

Location: El Salvador | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers evaluated whether an after-school program (implemented by NGO Glasswing) delivered in a highly violent context could lead to reductions in violence and misbehavior, as well as improve academic performance. The program consisted of two primary types of activities: social skills (which drew on principles of cognitive behavioral therapy and included discussions of socioemotional skills, conflict management, and violence awareness) and more traditional club activities (e.g., leadership, art and culture, sports, or science). Students from five public schools in El Salvador could choose to enroll in the program before being randomly assigned to the treatment (after school program) or comparison (no intervention) groups. Facilitators received no formal training in social work or psychology and did not necessarily come from backgrounds similar to participants.
- Students who received the intervention reported fewer delinquent actions and less violent behavior, relative to those in the comparison group (effects that were confirmed via teacher reports). However, these results appear to be driven by larger reductions in misbehavior among students who were assessed to be “least violent” at baseline, suggesting that those who were more accustomed to bad behavior may have a harder time modifying their actions.
- The program also improved participants' academic performance, attitudes towards school, and time spent completing homework, as well as reduced absenteeism. Improvements in academic achievements and reductions in absenteeism were greatest for students with a higher propensity for violence at baseline.

- The researchers also observed positive spillovers of the program onto reading, math, and science grades, as well as reductions in bad behavior in schools with greater shares of participants.
- Using portable EEG headsets, the researchers conducted a series of lab-in-the-field experiments to observe students' emotional responses to both positive and negative stimuli, observing positive effects of participants' emotional regulation following participation in the program. Furthermore, students who received the program perceived a greater ability to manage or control what happens in their lives.

54. **Can recidivism be prevented from behind bars? Evidence from a behavioral program (2022)**, Arbour, *Working Paper*

Location: Quebec, Canada | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- The researcher leveraged the 'as-if-random' assignment of inmates to participate in the 'Parcours' (in English, 'Journey') program to evaluate its impacts on a range of outcomes, including recidivism, prison misconduct, and likelihood of being granted parole.
- Parcours, first introduced in provincial prisons in Quebec in 2007, consisted of three main modules generally delivered over a period of three months in group settings. The modules included discussions of the decision-making and balancing the pros and cons of criminal activities and how personal beliefs can cloud judgment, as well as reflections on motivations behind past criminal behaviors to avoid falling into similar patterns in the future.
- The study found that the program reduced the likelihood of recidivism by 18 percentage points (60 percent) one year following release, though the program did not appear to impact prison misconduct or the likelihood of being granted parole.
- Of those recommended to participate in the program, first-time offenders were most likely to comply and appeared to benefit most from participating in the program, with positive impacts on recidivism persisting up to three years following the intervention.

55. **Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago (2016)**, Heller, Shah, Guryan, Ludwig, Mullainathan, and Pollack, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: Chicago, USA | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers conducted three randomized evaluations of CBT-informed programs delivered to individuals in high-crime settings in Chicago. In two of the RCTs, local NGO Youth Guidance delivered weekly hour-long group sessions to male youth in low-income Chicago public schools for one to two school years. In the third RCT, researchers partnered with the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) to deliver twice daily group sessions for male juvenile detainees over three to four weeks.

- In the school-based studies, total arrests per student decreased by 28-35 percent by the end of the program, and recipients were 12-19 percent more likely to graduate high school on time. Therapy helped students learn strategies to relate to their environment, slow down their decision-making processes, and plan ahead.
- In the JTDC-based study, youth who received CBT were 39 percent less likely to be readmitted within two months of release, a reduction that persisted eighteen months later.
- These results suggest that CBT-based interventions can offer a cost-effective approach to reduce criminal behavior among young men in high-risk environments across diverse contexts. These CBT programs were short-term and relatively easy to implement, with standardized curricula delivered by minimally trained facilitators. Researchers estimate the program's overall societal benefits were anywhere from five to thirty times greater than the program's cost.

CBT-informed and other mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) interventions have also been evaluated as an approach for helping populations recovering from experiences of violence or conflict or experiencing forced displacement cope with the trauma inflicted by these experiences and strengthen their economic and livelihood trajectories (e.g., [Bhatt et al., 2023](#); [Saraf, Rahman, and Jamison, 2019](#); [Betancourt et al. 2013](#); [O'Callaghan et al. 2013](#)). Much of the literature has focused only on short-term effects—a 2019 systematic review of MHPSS programs in humanitarian emergencies found that only one of 35 studies included in the review assessed impacts after one year ([Bangpan, Felix, and Dickson 2019](#)). However, with this caveat, these studies have shown some evidence of effectiveness in reducing the strain of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and improving functioning. Bangpan, Felix and Dickson (2019) highlighted the need for evaluating the effect of this programming on broader outcomes beyond mental health to include resilience and well-being, arguing that these insights would help better anchor conversations around the cost-effectiveness of such programming. A full review of this literature lies outside of the scope of this wrap-up. For more, see [J-PAL's Learning Agenda for the Humanitarian Initiative](#).

New GCCI Research

Four studies currently being funded through GCCI will further expand the evidence base on behavior change programming in FCV settings:

Coping with war through God: Islamic-based CBT and the promotion of mental health and prosociality among refugees (Isaqzadeh)

Over the past two decades, Muslim countries have disproportionately suffered from civil wars that have caused the displacement of millions of people, either as refugees or Internally Displaced People (IDP). The displaced people are particularly vulnerable to psychological disorders because of war-related traumas and adverse experiences before departure, during the transition, and after arrival in a new community. Nonetheless, they have very limited or no access to mental health services. In addition, the experiences of war and displacement undermine intergroup trust and contribute to hostile attitudes and antisocial behavior toward outgroups, particularly toward members of rival groups. Researchers propose a pilot study to examine the impacts of Islamic-based counseling. The randomized evaluation will be conducted in Turkey and will study the effects of Islamic-based CBT, delivered by religious clerics, on Afghan refugees' mental health and prosociality toward outgroups.

Can cognitive behavioral therapy reduce crime among at-risk youth in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil? (Camargo, Mello, and Pantaleão)

Violence and homicides are in part associated with individuals' failure to recognize and rethink aggressive behaviors and biased beliefs. Researchers in Brazil are conducting a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of the SEJA Methodology, an approach that incorporates CBT to promote better psychological responses among vulnerable and traumatized adolescents in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The program will target adolescents who are most at risk of becoming victims and/or perpetrators of violence. A key objective of the evaluation is to develop a replicable program that can be implemented at scale in Brazil and eventually translated into similar contexts in Latin America.

Thinking twice: Does cognitive behavioral therapy influence police officer behavior? Experimental evidence from Mexico City Police (Canales and Santini)

Police officers face a unique range of traumatic and stressful situations throughout their careers, which significantly impact their mental and physical well-being, job performance, and interactions with the public. Yet, with few exceptions, most police organizations don't offer sufficient mental health support to officers. There is a huge opportunity for police organizations to design and implement interventions that support the mental health of their personnel, grounded in operational realities and attentive to the stigma against seeking help. In partnership with the Mexico City Ministry of Citizen Security (SSC), researchers will conduct a randomized evaluation to assess whether CBT can reduce violent behavior on the streets, improve officers' mental health, and enhance job performance.

Evaluating an intervention to reduce youth gang involvement (Blattman, Tobon, Garcia, and Rodriguez)

Street gangs are a dominant employer of adolescent boys in many Latin American cities and a leading driver of school dropout, incarceration, and violence. Yet there is little rigorous evidence on how to prevent gang recruitment in low- and middle-income countries. This project evaluates Parceritos, an intervention designed to prevent gang entry among high-risk adolescent boys in Medellín, Colombia. The program combines immersive, localized information on post-secondary education and employment with a behavioral intervention teaching planning and goal attainment as a skill. It is delivered in public schools by a trusted local NGO and targets the 15 percent of males identified as highest-risk through a novel screening algorithm. The study will assess short-term changes in beliefs and planning skills, as well as medium-term outcomes in school retention, criminal involvement, and gang entry. Results will inform Medellín's education and security strategy and offer practical guidance for other Latin American cities facing similar challenges.

Given growing interest in CBT-informed approaches in particular as a means of reducing criminal and violent engagement among youth (as well as other segments of society), the table below lays out some key areas for further inquiry to unpack the mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of these interventions.

DEEP DIVE:	OPEN QUESTIONS ON COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY ⁹
<p>UNDERSTANDING MECHANISMS</p> <p>(i.e. when does CBT work and why?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Given CBT-informed curricula may take many forms, is CBT as a comprehensive approach driving its effects or are individual components (e.g., mentorship, group dialogue, individual therapy, etc.) responsible for the observed behavioral changes? (i.e. what program components are vital to CBT's success?)
<p>IMPROVING PROGRAM DELIVERY</p> <p>(i.e. what are the optimal and necessary implementation conditions?)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What level of supervision is needed to achieve program impact (i.e. delivery by clinical psychologists vs. locally trained facilitators)? What are the tradeoffs between clinical and non-clinical implementation (particularly when considering effectiveness at scale)? - As attendance can often be a barrier to program efficacy, what strategies are effective for engaging and retaining participants in CBT programs over time? How can the benefits of participation be made most salient? - Where is delivery most effective (for instance, when targeted at youth, is delivery more effective inside or outside of schools)? - Can virtual (including app- and text-based) CBT be effective and, if so, what is the most effective form for virtual CBT to take?
<p>VARYING THE INTENSITY AND DURATION OF CBT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the optimal frequency and intensity of CBT programs for achieving desired results? - Can "booster" sessions (i.e. CBT sessions delivered at intervals following the conclusion of the main intervention) help prolong or amplify program impacts? - Can app- or text-based CBT services augment the success of in-person sessions?
<p>EXPANDING MEASUREMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the spillover effects of CBT exposure onto the broader community? - Is CBT more or less effective in reducing certain types of criminal activity or violent behavior (e.g., violent crime vs. property crime; organized crime; etc.)? - What are the long-term effects of exposure to CBT interventions? - What upstream outcomes (e.g., mental health, welfare, etc.) can be measured to help researchers assess often hard to observe or sensitive downstream outcomes on crime and violence reduction? Moreover, research should aim to develop creative measures for sensitive outcomes that people are likely to underreport (e.g., gang participation).
<p>COMPARING VIS-À-VIS OTHER INTERVENTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does CBT compare to other, lighter touch psychological interventions (e.g., mindfulness)? - How do CBT-based programs compare to other soft or hard skills training interventions delivered in the same contexts? - What complementary interventions may amplify the impacts of CBT and how (e.g., cash transfers)?

⁹ Many thanks to Chris Blattman, Benjamin Feigenberg, Julian Jamison, Laura Chioda, and Sara Heller for their helpful suggestions on this list of open questions.

Vocational training and employment programs

Poor and unemployed young men, particularly in fragile contexts, are often viewed to be at highest risk of engaging in criminal activities, joining extremist groups, or otherwise participating in violence ([World Bank 2012](#)). But what factors impact their decisions to engage in these activities?

Gary Becker's influential economic model of crime posits that individuals make rational decisions between the likely costs and benefits of engaging in crime ([Becker 1968](#)). This suggests there are two types of levers for reducing crime: either by decreasing the associated benefits or by increasing (or making more salient) the associated costs. While many researchers acknowledge that such a model does not wholly explain individual participation in crime and violence, the framework continues to inform, at least in part, the design of many crime and violence prevention strategies, including many vocational training and employment programs ([Bazzi and Blattman 2014](#)). If programs succeed in increasing the benefits of participating in non-criminal activity, including by increasing availability and access to jobs, can they reduce crime and violence?

Theory also suggests that labor market programs—ranging from direct employment to vocational and livelihood training—may drive reductions in criminal and violent activities through a variety of channels.¹⁰ These include by:

- **Increasing economic returns** to non-criminal and non-violent activity, thereby raising the opportunity costs of engaging in crime and violence;
- **“Incapacitating” youth** by occupying their time that could otherwise be used to engage in illicit activities;
- **Improving youths’ cognitive and socio-emotional skills**, through training, on-the-job learning, and mentoring; or
- **Reducing grievances** by expanding the pool of employment services and opportunities available to historically marginalized groups who may otherwise feel disenfranchised by the state.

Across settings, evidence on whether vocational training and employment programs reduce crime and violence or promote peace is mixed and highly context-dependent, with results varying based on labor market conditions and program design ([Doleac](#)

¹⁰ See for instance: Cohen, Lawrence E., and Marcus Felson. 1979. “Social Change and Crime Rate Trends: A Routine Activity Approach.” *American Sociological Review* 44(4): 588-608. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094582>; Wilson, W. J. *When Work Disappears: The World of the Urban Poor*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996.; Blattman, Christopher and Laura Ralston. 2015. “Generating employment in poor and fragile states: Evidence from labor market and entrepreneurship programs.” White Paper. Retrieved from: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2622220>; Brück, Tilman, Neil T. N. Ferguson, Valeria Izzi, and Wolfgang Stojetz. 2019. “Can Job Programs Build Peace?” HICN Working Paper 297. Retrieved from: <https://isdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HICN-WP-297.pdf>.

2023; [Brück, Ferguson, Izzi, and Stojetz 2019](#)). While research from fragile, LMIC contexts is generally limited and has shown modest or uneven impacts, evidence from high-income settings—particularly the United States—has demonstrated more consistent reductions in criminal involvement under certain program models.

Vocational training in LMIC contexts

Despite high policymaker expectations, there is relatively little experimental research on the ability of job skills training programs to reduce violence or promote peace in fragile or conflict-affected settings where there are often more limited opportunities for formal sector employment ([Brück, Ferguson, Izzi, and Stojetz 2019](#)).

Where evidence does exist, studies from Liberia ([Blattman and Annan 2016](#)) and Afghanistan ([Lyal, Zhou, and Imai 2020](#)) find that pairing skills development with economic incentives, such as capital inputs or cash transfers, may be more effective than vocational training alone. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on “capital-centric” employment programs, which suggest that even small capital injections can empower, rather than create dependency ([Blattman and Ralston 2015](#)).

Furthermore, it may be the case that choosing between crime and licit employment is not strictly an either/or decision, particularly in fragile, resource-scarce settings where individuals often engage in “portfolios” of work in order to mitigate risk ([Blattman and Ralston 2015](#)). While vocational training and employment programs may reduce involvement in criminal or violent activities, it may be difficult to get people to exit these activities entirely, as illustrated by the RCT in Liberia described below ([Blattman and Annan 2016](#)). In a related vein, if these programs fail to generate substantial income changes or lift individuals out of poverty, it is unlikely they will effectively lead to sustained reductions in crime and violence.

More research is needed to understand the ways in which shifts in economic conditions (including income) can drive an individual's decisions to engage in criminal or violent behavior. This research should be complemented by efforts to also understand the non-material drivers of crime and violence and to unpack the potential non-economic benefits underlying vocational training and employment programs that may offer effective channels for targeting these behaviors.

56. **[Preventing Islamic radicalization: Experimental evidence on anti-social behavior \(2022\)](#)**, Vicente and Vilela, *Journal of Comparative Economics*

Location: Mozambique | **Method:** RCT/Lab-in-the-field experiment

- Researchers collaborated with Islamic Council of Mozambique (CISLAMO) to evaluate the impact of two interventions aimed at preventing radicalization in the northern region of Cabo Delgado. The first intervention—a business management and entrepreneurship module—aimed to increase the opportunity costs of engaging in violence by training participants on the basics of business management, including how to set a business plan and budget, as well as on how

to search and prepare for job interviews. The second intervention—a sensitization campaign delivered by religious leaders—aimed to change religious beliefs by countering claims made by Islamic fundamentalists.

- Both interventions had positive impacts on participants self-reported attitudes, increasing trust in the state, decreasing support for an Islamic autocracy, and building optimism around the potential peace benefits of natural resources.
- However, the entrepreneurship and employment module increased anti-social behaviors, as measured through a lab-in-the-field 'joy-of-destruction' game that allowed participants to choose whether to destroy a hypothetical monetary endowment to another person whose demographic characteristics varied. The researchers suggest this increase may have been driven by the perception that others would respond aggressively as economic competition increased. By contrast, the religious sensitization campaign reduced anti-social behaviors by a magnitude of 8-9 percentage points.

57. **Can economic assistance shape combatant support in wartime? Experimental evidence from Afghanistan (2020)**, Lyall, Zhou, and Imai, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers randomly evaluated a livelihood training program—"Introducing New Vocational Education and Skills Training" (INVEST)—and one-time unconditional cash transfer (US\$75) on combatant support among 2,597 "at-risk" youth in Kandahar, Afghanistan.
- The livelihood training alone had little effect on participants' attitudes towards combatants and, while cash initially increased pro-government sentiments, these effects dissipated after eight months and attitudes eventually reversed to increased support for the Taliban.
- When conditioned on participating in the livelihood training, cash transfers increased support for the Afghan government while marginally decreasing pro-Taliban sentiment, even in historically pro-Taliban areas (despite not leading to economic livelihood improvements).
- The authors argue these results suggest that the combination of training and cash provided a sufficient signal of government competency for recipients to revise their existing beliefs about government performance and responsiveness.

58. **Can employment reduce lawlessness and rebellion? A field experiment with high-risk men in a fragile state (2016)**, Blattman and Annan, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Liberia, researchers tested the effect of an intensive agricultural training program—which provided both human and physical capital and integrated economic and counseling and life skills sessions—on employment activities, income, and socio-political integration.

- The program increased participants' employment in agriculture and average wealth and decreased the amount of time they spent in illicit activities. Decreases in illicit activities were largest among men with economic incentives not to leave the village. However, while treated men spent fewer hours engaged in illicit activities, many did not exit these activities entirely.
- The program had no effect on attitudes towards violence and democracy, and little effect on anti-social behaviors, community engagement, or peer groups.
- The returns to future cash incentives suggest that one-time transfers of skills and capital may have limited deterrent effects on future violence. This implies that capital transfers or cash-for-work programs may be more effective if they condition payment on a participant's location—e.g., out of hot spots where illicit activities are more common and not in areas characterized by mercenary work.

59. [Generating skilled self-employment in developing countries: Experimental evidence from Uganda \(2014\)](#), Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Beginning in 2006, researchers evaluated the impact of Uganda's Youth Opportunities Program—a program that invited young adults, aged 16 to 35, to organize into groups and submit a proposal for a cash transfer to pay for: (i) fees at a local technical or vocational training institute of their choosing, and (ii) tools and materials for practicing a craft.
- While results demonstrated that cash significantly increased participants' income (even four years later), the program had no measurable effects on cohesion, aggression, or community and political participation, though results were self-reported.

US-based summer youth employment programs

In the United States, combining vocational training and employment programs with activities that emphasize social, emotional, and planning-related “soft” skills have shown promise in reducing engagement in criminal activities. Evidence from multiple studies of summer youth employment programs (SYEP) in US cities finds that providing youth with temporary, minimum-wage employment was effective in reducing participants' incarceration and mortality rates, at relatively low cost (between US\$1,400-\$3,000 per participant). In Boston, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia, placing youth from neighborhoods at high-risk of crime into summer jobs programs consistently reduced violent crime arrests, incarceration, and arraignment for property or violent crime, respectively, in addition to producing positive impacts on a range of other youth development outcomes ([Modestino 2019](#); [Davis and Heller 2020](#); [Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2016](#); [Heller 2014](#)). In most cases, these effects persisted multiple months beyond when the programs ended.

Because the effects of SYEPs on criminal justice involvement and youth safety last beyond the end of the summer, it is unlikely they are solely a function of youth being kept busy while they are out of school. Rather, researchers hypothesize that longer-term changes are occurring. One hypothesis is that youth are developing socio-emotional skills that can be deployed inside and outside the workplace. These skills allow youth to process social information and make decisions, skills that are central to avoiding risky behavior and interpersonal conflict. Another hypothesis for why summer jobs decrease criminal justice involvement is that they might also expand youth's social networks and introduce them to new peers who may engage in lower risk activities. Some researchers have also posited that the tangible increase in household income may also dissuade youth in high-poverty neighborhoods from engaging in crime as a means of economic survival.

Moreover, youth at risk of experiencing 'socially costly outcomes', such as involvement in the criminal justice system or disengagement from schools, experienced the greatest benefits from SYEPs. Developing eligibility and recruitment strategies that target youth who the evidence indicates are likely to be most responsive to the intervention may therefore increase the overall impact of SYEPs. For an in-depth review of this literature, see [J-PAL North America's 2022 evidence review](#).

60. **[How do summer youth employment programs improve criminal justice outcomes, and for whom? \(2019\)](#)**, Modestino, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*

Location: Boston, USA | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- The research team partnered with Action for Boston Community Development to study the effects of Boston's SYEP, which placed youth (aged 14-24) in subsidized, minimum-wage positions for a maximum of 25 hours per week over a period of six weeks, from early July to mid-August.
- Participation reduced the number of arraignments for both violent and property crimes—by 35 and 29 percent respectively—but did not reduce the likelihood of ever being arraigned. The reduction in arraignments for violent and property crime was estimated at a combined total savings of \$1,928 per youth, outweighing the administrative cost of \$600 per participant (excluding wages).
- The program also improved participants' self-reported behavioral, social, job-related, and academic skills and attitudes. Accompanying exploratory analyses suggested that increases in select social skills, including managing emotions, asking for help, and conflict resolution, may have been linked to the reduction in arraignments for violent and property crimes.
- These findings suggest that improvements in social skills, rather than improvements in job prospects or simply occupying youths' time during the summer, could be a primary mechanism through which SYEPs reduce criminal justice outcomes.

61. [The effects of youth employment: Evidence from New York City summer youth employment program lotteries \(2016\)](#), Gelber, Isen, and Kessler, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: New York City, USA | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers studied the impact of the New York City SYEP—which placed youth (aged 14-21) in paid, entry-level, minimum-wage jobs for up to 25 hours per week for seven weeks—on youth earnings, employment, college enrollment, incarceration, and mortality.
- SYEP increased earnings during the year of the program. During the year of participation, the program increased the probability of having a job by 71 percentage points but had minimal impact on employment thereafter.
- Participation also significantly decreased the probability of incarceration and mortality. Participants were 0.10 percentage points less likely to be incarcerated, a 10 percent reduction from the baseline incarceration rate of 0.99 percent, implying 112 fewer incarcerations. There was also an 18 percent decline in mortality, equating to 83 fewer deaths.
- Researchers suggest that the reduction in deaths may be attributable to a decline in death from homicide. The high cost of preventable death and incarceration suggest that a reduction in these outcomes may substantially affect cost-benefit assessments of summer youth employment programs.

62. [Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth \(2014\)](#), Heller, *Science*

Location: Chicago, USA | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers partnered with One Summer Plus (OSP)—a public summer jobs program in Chicago—to evaluate the effects of an 8-week summer job program on violent crime rates among youth. Youth were randomly assigned to either: (1) 25 hours per week of employment in a non-profit or government job at minimum wage and paired with a mentor; (2) 15 hours per week of employment paired with 10 hours per week of a socio-emotional learning (SEL) training based on CBT principles; or (3) a comparison group.
- Youth who received an offer of summer employment through OSP (both jobs-only and jobs with SEL) were less likely to be involved in violent crime. For each 100 youth offered employment, four fewer were arrested for violent crimes relative to youth who received no job offer (a 43 percent decrease). The program had no effect on other types of arrests, and there was no change in school attendance.
- Results indicate that the decrease in violent-crime arrests was not simply due to an “incapacitation” effect of youth having less free time to engage in crime over the summer—most of the reduction in violent crime arrests occurred after the end of the program. The decline persisted 13 months later, suggesting that youths’ summer experiences impacted their behaviors after the program.
- Results suggest that a well-targeted, low-cost summer job program can impact youth violence, and that such programs may be more effective by focusing on prevention rather than remediation.

By contrast, studies of more intensive vocational training programs targeted towards similar demographic groups in the United States have found program costs to exceed benefits in most scenarios. For example, while Job Corps—an 8-month residential vocational training program—and JOBSTART—a nonresidential program modeled after Job Corps—were both found to be effective in reducing arrest rates for participants, the combined social and economic benefits of the programs did not offset their overall costs ([Schochet et al. 2008](#); [Cave et al. 1993](#)). Thus, how to make such interventions more cost-effective while maintaining program benefits remains an open question.

Priorities for future research

The experimental literature exploring strategies for reducing violent behavior of individuals in high-crime and fragile settings remains nascent. Priority areas for further research through randomized evaluations include the following:

- More research is needed to understand the channels through which CBT-informed programs lead to behavior change. Existing research suggests CBT programming may have been effective in part because it slowed down participants' decision-making processes, encouraged more planning, enabled more patient behavior, and/or shifted self-identity and values. Additional research to better understand the mechanisms driving these effects, as well as testing how to deliver this change most cost-effectively, is needed.
- To date, there have been no RCTs of multidimensional juvenile therapy programs outside of the United States or United Kingdom. While this type of intervention offers great promise for crime reduction, it is necessary to adapt these strategies elsewhere in order to test whether or not these results hold.
- Given the mixed evidence on vocational training and employment interventions, additional research is necessary to unpack which features of these programs may be driving positive reductions in criminality and violence. This includes better understanding what non-financial incentives may motivate individuals toward engaging in criminal activities or combatant support during wartime, as well as understanding the circumstances under which violence and conflict respond to material gains, such as income.
- Many programs—such as early childhood interventions—may have later-life impacts on criminal and violent behavior. More effort should be placed on identifying potential opportunities to incorporate outcomes measures on these themes into research on program models in fragile and high-crime settings.

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Chapter 4: How do criminal organizations and malign non-state armed groups make strategic choices between violent and non-violent action?

This chapter reviews a mixture of experimental, quasi-experimental, and qualitative evidence on how malign non-state actors—including criminal organizations, gangs, insurgents, militias, terrorist organizations, and others—make strategic decisions between violent and non-violent action in response to economic shocks or resource competition, as well as influxes of foreign aid or counterinsurgency efforts. In addition, it briefly introduces qualitative evidence of how these types of groups may leverage non-material incentives—such as social capital, pride, or grievances—to achieve their objectives.

Key Takeaways

Because these actors are not uniform in nature and the experimental evidence base remains limited, it is challenging to draw generalizable lessons from across this literature. However, several patterns are beginning to emerge that can help inform policy and practice:

- Economic shocks—such as those triggered by commodity price fluctuations, climate variability, and trade disruptions—can influence violence by altering opportunity costs and resource competition, often prolonging or intensifying existing conflicts rather than triggering new ones. Negative shocks to labor income may lead to violence if individuals exit these activities in favor of more profitable opportunities that may exist with armed groups, whereas shifts in prices to more profitable commodities (like oil and gold) may increase the use of violence by groups that aim to capture the production and associated economic benefits of controlling these resources.
- To mitigate the impacts of economic shocks, strategies to stabilize incomes (e.g., through insurance, public works, vocational training, or social protection) and improve transparency in resource governance may help reduce vulnerability to income shocks and curb predatory behaviors.
- The evidence base is mixed on the impacts of foreign aid interventions delivered in conflict settings though the type (including whether it is easily 'lootable') and timing of aid appear important. Non-state armed groups may strategically sabotage foreign aid efforts to reduce their impact on civilians and/or to capture resources particularly when risks to retaliation are low, which may prolong or escalate conflict.
- Emerging findings suggest that small-scale (under US\$50,000), conditional, community-informed foreign aid interventions implemented in government-held or non-contested areas may be most successful in reducing violence. However, the precondition of delivery in government-controlled areas may limit applicability to many real conflict settings.
- When delivering aid in conflict-affected settings, development actors should prioritize delivery mechanisms that reduce opportunities for sabotage or capture by armed groups (e.g., through digital transfer or by pairing delivery with enhanced security mechanisms).

Economic shocks and resource competition

Over the past decade, a relatively large quasi-experimental literature has emerged examining the relationship between income shocks—such as those generated by dramatic changes in commodity prices resulting from climate-induced shifts in agricultural productivity, trade liberalization policies, and more—and conflict.

Dal Bó and Dal Bó (2011) lay out one model for understanding how shifts in commodity prices may either prevent or trigger episodes of violence through one of the following channels:

- 1) **Opportunity cost:** Building on Gary Becker's seminal economic model of criminality introduced in [Chapter 3](#), as economic returns to certain commodities increase or decrease, individuals may be more or less incentivized to enter or exit illicit activities and armed groups as they weigh which options may be more economically lucrative. For instance, if the price of a commodity falls, this may lower the opportunity costs of joining an armed group, thereby increasing conflict.
- 2) **Rapacity:** Armed actors make decisions about whether to violently steal valuable resources. Thus, the presence of high-value commodities, such as oil, may lead to greater conflict as groups vie for control over these resources. This is particularly true for higher priced commodities that are considered easily “lootable”—i.e. requiring relatively low-skill labor and minimal physical capital to produce. In contrast to the above channel, if the price of one of these high-value commodities falls, this may lower rapacity given a decrease in the quantity and value of goods that can be stolen, thus decreasing conflict.

Under Dal Bó and Dal Bó's theoretical framework, a fall in the price of labor-intensive goods will increase conflict, as wage effects are large, and the opportunity cost effect dominates. Concurrently, a fall in the price of goods that are not labor intensive, such as natural resources, will lower conflict, as the rapacity effect dominates over relatively small wage effects.

Bazzi and Blattman (2014) conducted a multi-country analysis of commodity price shocks in low- and middle-income countries and find no evidence that these economic shocks influence the outbreak of new conflict or coups, contrary to previous theories that rising state revenues incentivize state capture. However, they do underscore that these shocks may play a role in existing conflicts, contributing to the persistence and intensity of insurrection.

More recently, a meta-analysis by Blair, Christensen, and Rudkin (2021)—which draws on the results from 46 natural experiments that use difference-in-differences designs—finds that shifts in the price of a bundle of various commodity types does not affect the likelihood of conflict on average. However, by disaggregating results based on

commodity type, they find more nuanced results that support the theoretical framework laid out by Dal Bó and Dal Bó (2011). Across studies that observed price increases to labor intensive agricultural commodities (e.g., corn and coffee), conflict decreased, likely by creating viable avenues for economically lucrative employment, thereby raising the opportunity costs of engaging in fighting. By contrast, in contexts that experienced increased prices for capital-intensive commodities (e.g., oil and gas) or easily lootable commodities (e.g., artisanal minerals), conflict increased, likely due to an increase in the use of violence by groups aiming to capture the production and economic benefits of controlling these resources.

For example, Dube and Vargas (2013) find that decreases in the price of labor-intensive agricultural commodities (e.g., coffee, sugar, bananas) had adverse effects on workers' wages and increased violence perpetrated by armed groups in Colombia. In contrast, increases in the price of natural resources (e.g., oil, gold, and coal), which are produced in a non-labor-intensive manner, increased violence. These results provide evidence that negative shocks to labor income may lead to violence if individuals exit these activities in favor of more profitable opportunities that may exist with armed groups, whereas shifts in prices to more profitable commodities (like oil and gold) may increase the use of violence by groups that aim to capture the production and associated economic benefits of controlling these resources.

A number of additional within-country analyses also point to the importance of opportunity cost effects in contexts such as the Mexican drug war (Dube, García-Ponce, and Thom 2016) and the Maoist insurgency in India (Fetzer 2020). The findings around opportunity cost effects suggest that policies designed to mitigate household economic shocks may ultimately influence violence perpetrated by armed groups. Insurance schemes, vocational and skills training programs, public work projects, or other interventions designed to smooth incomes during or immediately following periods of economic instability have been suggested as potential interventions to reduce local vulnerability to income shocks (Miguel, Satyanath, and Sergenti 2004). The findings on predation effects suggest that efforts to improve the transparency of mining and revenues generated from mining may be important for reducing conflict.

Price shocks and conflict

The studies summarized below from Colombia and sub-Saharan Africa shed light on the specific ways in which price shocks may lead to conflict, providing evidence for the specific theoretical channels discussed above.

63. [On the origins of the state: Stationary bandits and taxation in Eastern Congo \(2020\)](#), Sanchez de la Sierra, *Journal of Political Economy*
Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** OLS & Instrumental variables
- This study examines how fluctuations in mineral prices for coltan and gold influenced the behavior of armed groups operating in Eastern DRC in the early 2000s.
 - When demand for coltan—a bulky, easily taxable mineral—increased, armed actors sought control over mining areas, including through an increase in violent attacks. They also enforced taxes on mining outputs and provided protection services.
 - By contrast, rising gold prices did not lead to violent takeovers of gold mining sites. Instead, armed groups focused on controlling the villages where miners and their families lived, implementing taxation systems and regulating labor without directly seizing mines.
 - When armed actors' objectives aligned with those of the local population, household welfare improved, suggesting that their role extended beyond mere extortion. Combined these findings suggest that in areas where armed groups have established a monopoly on the use of violence, they may also take on functions typically associated with states, such as taxation and security provision.
64. [Commodity price shocks and civil conflict: Evidence from Colombia \(2013\)](#), Dube and Vargas, *Review of Economic Studies*
Location: Colombia | **Method:** Difference-in-differences
- This study explores how price changes of labor-intensive agricultural goods (e.g., coffee) and non-labor-intensive natural resources (e.g., oil) affect violence levels (categorized by guerrilla attacks, paramilitary attacks, and other forms of clashes and casualties) in Colombian municipalities between 1988-2005.
 - The authors find that some types of income shocks reduced conflict, while others increased it. In particular, changes in the price of labor-intensive agricultural commodities were negatively related to conflict: when the price fell, conflict rose in municipalities that produced relatively more of these goods. For example, a sharp fall in the world coffee price led to an increase in violence, in part by lowering the opportunity cost of joining armed activity (as the negative price shock lowered rural wages, and the income opportunities of coffee farmers). They find similar patterns with other labor-intensive agricultural crops including sugar, banana, tobacco, and palm.
 - By contrast, the price of less labor-intensive natural resources was *positively* related to conflict: when the price rose, conflict rose in municipalities that produced more of these resources, suggesting the oil shock increased violence by promoting rapacity over contestable resources. The authors find similar patterns with coal and gold.

- These findings point to several policy implications: (i) price stabilization schemes that place a floor on the price of labor-intensive commodities may help mitigate violence in the wake of price shocks, (ii) improved monitoring may help prevent natural resource revenue from fueling conflict, and (iii) natural resource price shocks may pose more of a threat as a potential trigger to predatory violence when more money is transferred to the local level.

The advent of more micro-level grid cell data has improved researchers' ability to measure shocks and test theories and channels through which conflicts arise in a more fine-grained manner. For example:

65. [**This mine is mine! How minerals fuel conflicts in Africa \(2017\)**](#), Berman, Couttenier, Rohner, and Thoenig, *American Economic Review*

Location: sub-Saharan Africa | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data

- The authors use grid-cell level data on fourteen minerals to examine the effects of price shocks to these commodities in sub-Saharan Africa.
- They find that positive price shocks increased conflict in grid cells producing more of these minerals and present evidence suggesting that armed groups were financed by predated on these resources.
- For example, spikes in mineral prices inside a rebel group's ethnic homeland often led these groups to expand their fighting into new areas and as groups were able to appropriate a mining area, they became more likely to perpetrate violence elsewhere in subsequent years.

66. [**External shocks, internal shots: The geography of civil conflicts \(2015\)**](#), Berman and Couttenier, *Review of Economics and Statistics*

Location: sub-Saharan Africa | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data

- The authors conduct a cross-national analysis of agricultural price shocks, leveraging fine-grained data in 50x50 km grid cells within these countries.
- They show that at the grid cell level, negative price shocks to agricultural commodities increased conflict onset, incidence, and intensity; however, these effects were smaller in the interior of the country where there was less trade.
- When the data was aggregated to the country level, they find no effect on conflict onset, but conditional on there being an outbreak of conflict in a country, conflicts were more likely to start in locations most opened to trade.
- In addition, the paper presents some evidence favoring the opportunity cost channel over the state capacity channel. For example, agricultural shocks affect income, but do not affect military spending, a key factor in state capacity. In addition, the effects on conflict are not any smaller in capital cities, where the state typically has greater control over territory.

These types of price shocks have also been shown to affect violence through their impacts on drug markets. In Peru, Sviatschi ([2022](#)) observes that as illicit coca production became more profitable, parents were more likely to use child labor for

cultivation, setting youth on a trajectory towards more illicit activities in the future (as documented by higher likelihood in arrests for violent and drug-related crimes). In Mexico, Dube, García-Ponce, and Thom (2016) find that declines in maize prices shifted agricultural cultivation to illicit drugs that was associated with greater cartel presence as well as killings perpetrated by these groups.

67. **Making a narco: Childhood exposure to illegal labor markets and criminal life paths (2022)**, Sviatschi, *Econometrica*

Location: Peru | **Method:** Difference-in-differences/Instrumental variables

- The author leverages changes in Colombia's drug enforcement policies—including aerial crop spraying—to examine how a shift in coca production to Peru, and resulting exogenous price shock, affected those living in areas where coca production was agriculturally viable.
- In areas where coca production became more profitable, parents were more likely to use child labor for illegal coca cultivation and the earning potential of the cocaine industry increased the likelihood that children aged 11-14 dropped out of school.
- This exposure set youth on a trajectory to be more engaged in illicit activities in the future—as adults, individuals who grew up in coca producing districts that experienced these exogenous price shocks were 30 percent more likely to be incarcerated for violent and drug-related crimes (but not other types of crime) than those born either in a different district or in the same district but at a different time.
- Meanwhile, individuals who grew up in districts that experienced exogenous price shocks for other, licit commodities (like coffee and gold), or where coca was grown for medical and religious purposes, did not have a higher likelihood of engaging in crime later in life.
- Combined, these results suggest that continued engagement in illicit activities during adulthood may have been driven by developing illegal industry-specific human capital early in life.
- The author also finds that early investments, such as conditional cash transfers that promote school attendance, can play a role in reducing child labor in illegal drug production.

68. **From maize to haze: Agricultural shocks and the growth of the Mexican drug sector (2016)**, Dube, García-Ponce, and Thom, *Journal of the European Economic Association*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** Difference-in-differences

- Exploiting shifts in the Mexican maize price linked to weather conditions in US maize-growing regions, this study examines how shocks to legal commodity prices affected the drug trade in Mexico. This empirical approach is necessary to understand how drug production responds to legal alternatives available to farmers.

- In municipalities with climates conducive to maize production, lower maize prices increased cultivation of both marijuana and opium poppies. In addition, lower maize prices were also associated with increased drug cartel presence and killings in the effected regions.
- These findings suggest that cartels responded strategically to price changes including by moving their operations into territories negatively impacted by maize prices shocks where farmers were more willing to cultivate these illicit crops. In response, policies designed to support households and cultivators to cope with unanticipated economic shocks may influence the decision-making of criminal organizations.

Environmental shocks

Another set of studies utilize climate shocks to highlight how both individuals and groups—ranging from structured non-state armed organizations like insurgent groups to informal groupings of farmers and pastoralists—respond to economic downturns in ways that could lead to conflict. As above, much of this research relies on micro-level grid data and we include just a snapshot of more recent literature using this approach below.¹¹

Based on a recent review ([Burke et al. 2024](#)) of 80 quasi-experimental studies that explore the links between climate shocks and conflict, researchers suggest that climate change can be a risk factor for triggering or exacerbating violent conflict at the interpersonal and intergroup levels. At the interpersonal level, numerous natural experiments have found that crimes—particularly violent crimes—between individuals tend to increase when ambient temperatures are higher. The authors observe similar trends at the intergroup level: numerous studies since 1960 have indicated that higher temperatures, adverse rainfall levels, and droughts have been associated with higher risks of political and collective violence in low- and middle-income countries. When analyzing these studies together, they conclude that higher than average temperatures are associated with increases in intergroup and interpersonal violence, as well as self-harm. The researchers outline where evidence is accruing on potential channels connecting higher temperatures and climate shocks to conflict, identifying economic, demographic, and psychological factors, as well as migration and politics, as the leading mechanisms underlying this relationship. Specifically, they point to the potential of economic policies, such as cash transfers and other social safety nets, in mitigating the impacts of potential climate shocks.

In line with findings from Burke et al. 2024, emerging evidence suggesting that social protection programs can help smooth climate-related income shocks and mitigate the risk of conflict. In two index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) programs in Kenya and

¹¹ An exhaustive review of this literature lies outside of the scope of this evidence wrap-up.

Ethiopia, researchers found that IBLI reduced drought-related conflict by reducing migratory pressures and helping pastoralists manage negative income shocks, respectively ([Gehring and Schaudt 2024](#); [Sakketa et al. 2025](#)). Similarly, in India, researchers found that a large public workfare program (the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or NREGA) insulated participants from shocks to their agricultural income from adverse monsoon rains; areas where demand for NREGA increased following low rainfall also saw a reduction in conflict ([Fetzer 2020](#)). Together, there is growing evidence that programs that help people smooth their incomes during climate events can reduce conflict by raising the opportunity costs of fighting and decreasing competition over scarce resources.

69. [Transhumant pastoralism, climate change, and conflict in Africa \(2025\)](#), McGuirk and Nunn, *The Review of Economic Studies*

Location: sub-Saharan Africa | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data

- Researchers utilized geospatial data on ethnic territories, rainfall events, and violent conflicts from 1989 to 2018 to analyze how climate variability impacted conflict between transhumant pastoralists (i.e. migratory herds people) and sedentary farmers in Africa.
- They find that reduced rainfall in pastoralist regions led to an increase in conflicts in neighboring agricultural areas and effects were strongest during the wet, growing season. These findings confirm the hypothesis that when rainfall decreases, transhumant pastoralists may be inclined to migrate earlier than typical onto neighboring agricultural farmland when it is still being used for crop cultivation. These early movements may lead to destruction of crops and resource competition, which may trigger conflict.
- Because pastoralist groups tend to be Islamic and sedentary farmers tend to be Christian, these climate-induced conflicts help explain a rise in religious conflicts during this period not driven by religious grievances alone.
- Aid projects focused on curbing environmental degradation (e.g., through irrigation, land conservation, or other agricultural interventions) had no observable impact on conflict rates. However, greater political representation of pastoralist communities reduced conflict spillovers, suggesting political inclusion may play a key role in mitigating climate-driven tensions.

70. [The protective role of index insurance in the experience of violent conflict: Evidence from Ethiopia \(2025\)](#), Sakketa, Maggio, and McPeak, *Working Paper*

Location: Ethiopia | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- Researchers leveraged an encouragement experiment that randomly offered households discount coupons for an IBLI product to evaluate how IBLI uptake impacted incidents of violent conflict during periods of drought in southern Ethiopia.
- Results indicated that households who had previously experienced weather-related shocks were more likely to participate in the insurance program and that IBLI uptake reduced their risk of conflict exposure created by climate shocks.

71. [Insuring peace: Index-based livestock insurance, droughts, and conflict \(2024\)](#), Gehring and Schaudt, *CEsifo Working Paper*
Location: Kenya | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data
- Researchers leveraged the staggered rollout of an index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) program in Kenya, which automatically provided payouts to pastoralists when predetermined drought thresholds were crossed, and exogenous variation in rainfall to examine IBLI's impact on conflict during periods of low rainfall.
 - Results indicate that neighborhoods with IBLI coverage experience a reduced risk of conflict during drought periods. These results appear to be driven by helping protect pastoralists against income shocks and reducing their pressure to migrate in search of fertile grazing land.
 - Based on these findings, the authors suggest that market-based interventions like IBLI may offer a cost-effective complement to conflict mitigation strategies that require broader institutional reforms.
72. [Heat and hate: Climate security and farmer-herder conflicts in Africa \(2023\)](#), Eberle, Rohner, and Thoenig, *Working Paper*
Location: sub-Saharan Africa | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data
- The authors use geolocalized data to examine how climate shocks (temperature spikes) impacted violence between farmers and herders in Africa over the period of 1997-2014.
 - They find that when temperatures rose by one degree, the likelihood of conflict in 'mixed' areas where both farmer and herder communities were present increased by 54 percent, compared to 17 percent in non-mixed areas.
 - Conflicts appeared to be most prevalent in the border, 'fringe' areas between range- and farm-lands, suggesting that violence may be driven by competition for scarce economic resources rather than due to ethnic or cultural tensions.
73. [Can irrigation infrastructure mitigate the effect of rainfall shocks on conflict? Evidence from Indonesia \(2020\)](#), Gatti, Baylis, and Crost, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*
Location: Indonesia | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data
- Using a combination of geolocalized data sources on rainfall, water resources, and conflict occurrence in Indonesia, this study examined whether decreased agricultural production due to low rainfall resulted in higher incidents of conflict and whether conflict was mitigated in locations with access to irrigation infrastructure.
 - The authors find that civil conflict incidents increased and agricultural production decreased when there was low rainfall during the agricultural season, but that both effects were largely mitigated when there was access to irrigation dams. Moreover, they find that the effects of irrigation were strongest for conflicts related to natural resource allocation and popular justice (i.e. acts of retaliation over disputes), rather than conflicts related to ethnic identity, and only visible in rural areas.

74. [Can workfare programs moderate conflict: Evidence from India \(2020\)](#), Fetzer, *Journal of the European Economic Association*

Location: India | **Method:** Difference-in-differences

- This study evaluates the impact of India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)—the world's largest public-works program, which guarantees 100 days of public-sector employment to all rural households in India willing to work at the minimum wage—on the relationship between local monsoon shocks and conflict and crime.
- Access to employment through the NREGA program appears to have increased the opportunity cost of engaging in violence by dampening the effect of poor rainfall, resulting in a decrease in conflict and some forms of crime in districts affected by Maoist violence.
- Because households in low- and middle-income countries tend to be at higher risk of income shocks, due to erratic weather or other unforeseen events, these findings suggest that social insurance in the form of a public employment program may be an effective policy for mitigating against conflict.

75. [Conflict, climate and cells: A disaggregated analysis \(2018\)](#), Harari and La Ferrara, *Review of Economics and Statistics*

Location: sub-Saharan Africa | **Method:** Georeferenced panel data

- The authors use grid-cell level data on crop cover and within-year variation in weather shocks to construct a measure of agricultural shocks on civil conflict in Africa.
- They find that negative climate shocks that occur during the growing season of the main crop cultivated in a particular cell had persistent effects on increased conflict incidence. Cells that experienced conflict in one growing year had a higher probability of experiencing conflict again in the subsequent year.
- Climate shocks outside of the growing season had no apparent effect on conflict, suggesting that conflict was triggered by lower agricultural yields (and, thereby, reduced profits).
- The authors suggest that the opportunity cost model seems most consistent with their findings, though weak state capacity and preexisting ethnic cleavages also appear to exacerbate the impacts of weather shocks.

Trade-related shocks

Finally, a third set of studies leverage trade-related shocks to document how economic downturns have led to increases in violent crime. In Mexico, Dell, Feigenberg, and Teshima (2019) observe that declines in manufacturing employment led to large increases in drug-related violence and homicides, likely because it became more lucrative to engage in criminal employment and criminal organizations practiced violence to gain control of the market. Similarly, in Brazil, Dix-Carneiro, Soares, and Ulyseia (2018) find that deteriorations in labor market and economic conditions, triggered by trade liberalization policies, led to increases in crime.

76. [The violent consequences of trade-induced worker displacement in Mexico \(2019\)](#), Dell, Feigenberg, and Teshima, *American Economic Review*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- This study examines how fluctuations in manufacturing job opportunities have affected trade-related violence and violent drug conflicts in Mexico by exploiting variation in Chinese exports to the US market—where Chinese firms act as a key source of competition to Mexican manufacturing firms.
- Trade-induced declines in manufacturing employment led to substantial increases in drug-related violence and homicides. These impacts were concentrated in municipalities where a transnational drug trafficking organization was present.
- Impacts also appeared greater in municipalities where international competition for marketing job opportunities disproportionately affected young, less-educated men.
- These findings suggest that when it becomes more profitable to traffic drugs—and it is, therefore, more lucrative to pursue criminal employment (i.e. when opportunity costs shift)—criminal organizations may practice violence to gain control of the market.

77. [Economic shocks and crime: Evidence from the Brazilian trade liberalization \(2018\)](#), Dix-Carneiro, Soares, and Ulyseia, *American Economic Journal*

Location: Brazil | **Method:** Natural experiment

- Researchers exploited variations in regional, sector-specific tariffs—triggered by trade liberalization policies introduced in Brazil between 1990-1995—to assess how economic shocks impacted crime rates, as measured by changes in homicide rates.
- Regions where trade liberalization policies triggered larger economic shocks experienced increases in crime after 1995 (when the reform was complete). These results appear to be driven by deteriorated labor market and economic conditions—including firm closures, reduced wages, and reduced government revenues—in regions that specialized in industries that faced larger tariff reductions.

New GCCI Research

Two studies currently being funded through GCCI will further expand the evidence base on climate shocks and conflict:

Weathering conflict: Combining insurance and edutainment? (Morsink, Jensen, Shikuku, Gidey, and Barrett)

Shocks to natural resources, that either cause resource scarcity or resource abundance, are an important driver of conflict. In the context of pastoralism in the drylands of Ethiopia and Kenya, researchers show that both droughts and pasture abundance increase the incidence of raiding and theft of livestock, which are increasingly becoming violent. The proposed research aims to identify practical and cost-effective interventions that can reduce conflict in this setting. To do so, researchers will conduct a cluster-randomized control trial with two interventions— (1) one an encouragement design for the purchase of drought insurance that aims to reduce conflict caused by forage-scarcity, through indemnity payments during droughts; and (2) the other a mobile cinema of an animated edutainment video geared towards increasing support for grazing and restitution agreements and increasing the appeal of alternative livelihoods for young men, aimed at reducing drivers of conflict observed during period of abundance.

Understanding the drivers of farmer-herder conflicts in West Africa (Aker, Voors, and Maigari)

Farmer-herder conflicts have increased over the past few decades. While literature points to several potential causes of conflict—including historical, ethnic and social factors, and shocks—more recent literature highlights the impact of climate change on conflict, due to declining rainfall and land degradation, thereby fueling competition over scarcer resources. Much of the existing academic work uses cross-country comparisons, making it difficult to identify the key policy levers that could be used to address the root causes of conflict. The Sahel has witnessed increasing farmer-herder conflicts, but little is known about intensity, dynamics, causes, and impacts. This formative study will investigate local conflict dynamics across 400 villages and over a full year, combining high frequency phone surveys with in-person surveys among farmers and herders and GIS data on migration corridors and pastureland quality. The ambition is to develop and scope interventions to help reduce and mitigate conflicts, through increasing pastureland, enabling coordination and develop strategies for conflict mitigation.

Impacts of foreign aid and development interventions

There are numerous theories for how development spending in conflict-affected countries might lead to increased peace and stability, including by:

- **Shifting opportunity costs to participation** in armed violence through material inputs that generate improved economic opportunities (e.g., jobs and other welfare benefits). This model predicts that retaining and recruiting participants will become more difficult and, thus, decrease violence as the costs of engaging in illicit insurgency activities rise relative to legal economic activities.
- **Building state capacity** by increasing the resources legitimate government actors have at their disposal to spend in particular sectors, from security to administrative capacity. These resources can enhance state capacity vis-à-vis non-state armed groups, making it easier for the government to repress insurgency, thereby reducing conflict.¹²
- **Increasing popular support for government** by “winning hearts and minds.” These programs are grounded in the assumption that when populations perceive the state to be providing beneficial goods and services, they may be more likely to provide information to government forces (allowing the government to better target their counterinsurgency efforts) and less likely to sympathize with insurgent groups.

Evidence supporting these channels nevertheless remains limited; few randomized evaluations have been conducted on these subjects. One emerging insight from quasi-experimental studies is that the *type* of aid appears to matter, including whether the form of aid delivered is easily “lootable.” Similarly, the *timing* of aid is important. This may be because non-state armed groups stand to benefit by capturing aid resources or through sabotaging government efforts to deliver improved services. There are also indications that humanitarian aid delivered to contested areas amid ongoing hostilities may increase the duration and lethality of civil wars.¹³

¹² This theory holds in contexts where the state is viewed to have a legitimate monopoly over the use of force rather than in cases where the state itself may be a corrupt or illegitimate actor and non-state armed actors may be the preferred service providers.

¹³ See: Lyall, Jason. 2019. “Civilian Casualties, Humanitarian Aid, and Insurgent Violence in Civil Wars.” *International Organization* 73, no. 4 (2019): 901-926. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818319000262>; Strandlow, Daniel, Michael Findley and Joseph Young. “Foreign Aid and the Intensity of Violent Armed Conflict.” AidData Working Paper No.24, May 2016. Retrieved from: http://docs.aiddata.org/ad4/pdfs/wps24_foreign_aid_and_the_intensity_of_violent_armed_conflict.pdf; Wood, Reed, and Christopher Sullivan. 2015. “Doing Harm by Doing Good? The Negative Externalities of Humanitarian Aid Provision during Civil Conflict.” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 3 (July): 736-748. <https://doi.org/10.1086/681239>; Narang, Neil. 2015. “Assisting Uncertainty: How Humanitarian Assistance Can Inadvertently Prolong Civil War.” *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (March): 184-195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12151>; Nunn, Nathan and Nancy Qian. 2014. “US Food Aid and Civil Conflict.” *American Economic Review* 104, no. 6 (June): 1630-66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.6.1630>; Crost, Benjamin, Joseph H. Felter, and Patrick B. Johnston. 2016. “Conditional cash transfers, civil conflict and insurgent influence: Experimental evidence from the Philippines.” *Journal of Development Economics* 118 (January): 171-182. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2015.08.005>; Fast, Larissa. 2014. *Aid in Danger: The Perils and Promise of Humanitarianism*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.; and Polman, Linda. 2010. *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* New York: Henry Holt and Co.

Thus, foreign aid, development interventions, and counterinsurgency response programs, in some instances, may inadvertently lead to increased conflict as armed groups may strategically resist their implementation or attempt to extract resources through violent and non-violent means ([Premand and Rohner 2024](#); [Croft, Felter, and Johnston 2014](#); [Dube and Naidu 2015](#); [Sexton 2016](#)). For example, two recent systematic reviews ([Zürcher 2017](#); [Zürcher 2020](#)) conclude that development aid more often exacerbates than alleviates violence when delivered in conflict zones, driven by misappropriation or sabotage of aid by ‘violent actors.’ Given that they are operating with finite resources, insurgents must make strategic decisions regarding where and how to carry out acts of resistance. Emerging evidence suggests that these groups are more likely to initiate attacks where the costs and likelihood of retaliation are low.

Below, the evidence is divided into studies that find aid to have positive, mixed, and negative effects on conflict incidence. Taken together, these findings suggest additional research is necessary to better understand how the form in which aid programs are delivered can influence the risk of violent conflict and, in some cases, even exacerbate conflict.

Aid as conflict reducing

Some evidence from Iraq ([Berman et al. 2013](#); [Iyengar, Monten, and Hanson 2011](#); [Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011](#)) and Afghanistan ([Sexton 2016](#)) suggests that small-scale (under US\$50,000), conditional, community-informed interventions implemented in government-held or non-contested areas may be most successful in reducing violence. Experimental evidence from the Philippines ([Croft, Felter, and Johnston, 2016](#)) further emphasizes that the type of aid program matters—while a community-driven development (CDD) program led to increases in insurgent attacks, a conditional cash transfer (CCT) program implemented by the same government agency decreased conflict-related incidents, potentially because it was more difficult to sabotage.

78. [Conditional cash transfers, civil conflict, and insurgent influence: Experimental evidence from the Philippines \(2016\)](#), Croft, Felter, and Johnston, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Philippines | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers leveraged an ongoing experiment of a CCT program in the Philippines to estimate its effects on civil conflict at the village level.
- They found that villages that received cash transfers experienced a substantial decrease in conflict-related incidents, relative to control villages, in the first nine months of the program (though these effects dissipated in the second year).
- Treated villages also experienced a decrease in “insurgent influence”—categorized on a spectrum from permanent rebel presence, indicating strong influence, to no rebel presence or risk of being targeted, meaning no influence. This finding suggests that the CCT program played a role in weakening rebel presence.

- CCT programs may be less easy to sabotage because aid is disbursed directly to households through electronic transfers, making it more difficult to derail. This offers suggestive evidence that CCT programs may be more effective than other aid programs like CDD, which was observed to increase conflict in the same setting ([see study #89](#)).
- The authors note several possible limitations of these findings: (i) they cannot rule out displacement effects and (ii) they cannot rule out that cash transfers reduced civilian violence by enabling households to pay more “revolutionary taxes” to insurgents.

79. **Modest, secure, and informed: Successful development in conflict zones (2013)**,

Berman, Felter, Shapiro, and Troland, *American Economic Review*

Location: Iraq | **Method:** First-differences

- Researchers used panel data to compare the effectiveness of several development programs in reducing violence over the first five years of the Iraq war.
- Consistent with the ‘hearts and minds’ hypothesis, they find that programs were most effective when they were small (under US\$50k), conditional, designed to take into account community preferences, were executed in territories where the government was in control (which implied their cooperation in delivery and information sharing), and took place in territories where there was a baseline level of security that allowed them to be implemented.

80. **Building peace: The impact of aid on the labor market for insurgents (2011)**,

Iyengar, Monten, and Hanson, *Working Paper*

Location: Iraq | **Method:** Difference-in-differences

- Researchers leveraged variation in the implementation of Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) projects in Iraq—which offered funding for a range of infrastructure and social service programs, including “labor-intensive” projects to create local employment opportunities—to assess the relationship between labor market conditions and violence.
- They found that increased labor-related spending led to a decline in labor-intensive insurgent violence and an overall reduction in violence driven by fewer attacks on civilians, despite increased attacks against military targets.
- These findings suggest that shifting opportunity costs by increasing the availability of legal, non-violent labor market opportunities may reduce insurgent groups’ ability to recruit and, thus, lead them to substitute away from labor-intensive forms of violence, which require sufficient manpower, towards more capital-intensive attacks, like attacks on military infrastructure.

81. [Can hearts and minds be bought? The economics of counterinsurgency in Iraq \(2011\)](#), Berman, Shapiro, and Felter, *Journal of Political Economy*

Location: Iraq | **Method:** First-differences

- Researchers examined panel data from Iraq on violence against Coalition and Iraqi forces, reconstruction spending, and community characteristics.
- They find that improved service provision—delivered through CERP—reduced insurgent violence, particularly for smaller projects and following the 2007 “surge,” which was accompanied by increased knowledge of communities’ needs. By contrast, the majority of non-CERP reconstruction spending did not lead to reductions in violence, but additional research is needed to assess why this was the case.

Mixed responses to aid

Elsewhere, research has revealed that reactions to aid and development assistance can vary substantially based on location, insurgent characteristics, and delivery approach. In Afghanistan, Lyall (2019) and Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov (2025) present evidence of how both insurgent groups and civilians may respond differently to increased government presence, resulting in heterogeneous effects on violence incidents across geographies.

82. [Can development programs counter insurgencies? Evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan \(2025\)](#), Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers examined the effect of the National Solidarity Program (NSP)—Afghanistan’s largest development program—on insurgent violence, attitudes towards government, and economic well-being. Rollout of the NSP was randomized across two waves, in which treatment villages began the program in 2007 and comparison villages in 2012.
- They found that the CDD program led to weak reductions in insurgent violence, improved citizens’ perceptions of local security, increased support for government, and improved economic outcomes.
- However, these overall findings mask significant variation by geography. In Eastern regions of Afghanistan, NSP had no effect on the number of violent incidents or on perceptions of government. Moreover, in areas closest to the Pakistani border, researchers observed increases in violent incidents near villages. By contrast, the remainder of the country saw durable reductions in the frequency of violent attacks (and attacks moved further away from villages) and increases in popular support for the state.
- The authors suggest that the increase in violence near the Pakistani border may have been driven by differences in the makeup of insurgent groups in this region. In Eastern Afghanistan, many insurgents came from or were trained in Pakistan or elsewhere, meaning they were less likely to rely on local support to carry out

activities and could more easily flee across the border if needed. Thus, in Eastern regions, these groups may have strategically sought to repel increased government presence and authority, leading to higher incidents of conflict. By contrast, in other regions of the country, insurgent groups relied on local citizens to support their efforts, both actively and tacitly. Here, increased access to government services appears to have been more effective in building popular support for the state and shifting opportunity costs of engaging in insurgent activities.

83. [Aid, attitudes, and insurgency: Evidence from development projects in Northern Afghanistan \(2023\)](#), Sexton and Zürcher, *American Journal of Political Science*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** Difference-in-differences

- To test the 'hearts and minds' hypothesis, researchers compared villages in northern Afghanistan that did or did not receive German development infrastructure aid between 2017-2018 on a range of subsequent social, political, economic, and conflict outcomes, including perceptions of government and insurgent groups.
- While villages that received aid projects saw improvements in households' perceived economic well-being during project implementation, they simultaneously observed deteriorated perceptions of local government performance and improved sympathy for insurgents.
- These backlash effects appear to be driven by ongoing projects implemented without meaningful consultation with local communities and were strongest for infrastructure projects focused on reconstructing government buildings or roads, as opposed to health interventions. However, even in villages where there was close consultation, there were no major shifts in attitudes towards the government or insurgents.
- Notably, villages that received aid did not experience changes in conflict incidents triggered by either insurgent attacks or counterterrorism operations.

84. [Civilian casualties, humanitarian aid, and insurgent violence in civil wars \(2019\)](#), Lyall, *International Organization*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** Natural experiment

- The study draws on data from the USAID-funded Afghan Civil Assistance Program (ACAP II), which provided assistance (in the form of food or household supplies) to civilians accidentally harmed by either the Taliban or the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Researchers leveraged the program's as-if random assignment of assistance to roughly half of the more than 1,000 incidents they investigated between 2011-2013 to assess the impact of humanitarian assistance on Taliban attacks against the ISAF, Afghan forces, and civilians.
- ACAP II aid (which was relatively low-cost, averaging US\$195 per recipient) was associated with a reduction in Taliban attacks against ISAF, but not Afghan forces, for up to two years after the initial incident. Reductions in attacks were strongest in areas near ISAF military bases, with larger effects in rural areas and when delivered

in response to incidents resulting in generally lower rates of Taliban-afflicted casualties and property damage (as opposed to ISAF-afflicted).

- Importantly, there was no indication that ACAP II aid led to reprisal attacks by the Taliban against civilians, meaning no backlash effect was observed.

85. **Guns and butter? Fighting violence with the promise of development (2017)**,

Khanna and Zimmermann, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: India | **Method:** Regression discontinuity design

- Researchers analyzed the impact of NREGA on incidents of Maoist insurgency-related violence. Because the program was phased in over time, targeting first the poorest communities, researchers were able to use a regression discontinuity design to analyze its short-run effects on violence reduction.
- The NREGA program led to an almost immediate increase in Maoist-related violence in the short-run, primarily driven by an increase in police-initiated attacks against Maoists but also driven partially by an increase in insurgent retaliatory attacks on civilians.
- The researchers suggest that civilians in Maoist-affected areas may have been more willing to share information with the police when NREGA was offered, as it demonstrated the government's commitment to helping those living in poverty. However, they are unable to rule out competition for resources as the mechanism driving the almost immediate rise in violence.

Retaliation to aid

Emerging evidence suggests that non-state armed groups are more likely to initiate attacks where the costs and likelihood of retaliation are low and that they may strategically use violence to sabotage the delivery of development and aid programs and/or attempt to capture the resources these programs provide. For example, researchers find that, in Afghanistan ([Sexton 2016](#)), aid delivery led to an increase in violence in contested areas as the Taliban attempted to exert control, but not in government-controlled territories. Furthermore, in the Philippines, Crost, Felter, and Johnston ([2014](#)) suggest insurgent groups increased violent attacks in areas targeted by a community-driven development (CDD) program in order to prevent communities from participating in the program. More recent evidence from Niger ([Premand and Rohner 2024](#)) finds similar results to the Philippines, observing increases in conflict following the implementation of an unconditional cash transfer program, which appears to be driven by foreign terrorist groups attempting to sabotage the delivery of the program or gain access to its economic resources.

86. **Cash and conflict: Large-scale experimental evidence from Niger (2024)**,

Premand and Rohner, *American Economic Review: Insights*

Location: Niger | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers leveraged the randomized roll-out of a large-scale, unconditional cash transfer program implemented by the Government of Niger to assess whether cash transfers affect the likelihood of conflict events.
- While the cash transfer program resulted in many positive impacts (e.g., on household consumption, food security, and psychosocial well-being), results suggest that it may have inadvertently led to an increase in conflict incidents while the program was being rolled out.
- Increases in conflict were primarily driven by foreign actors, particularly terrorist groups like Boko Haram, from outside the villages in which the transfers were implemented. However, the increase in conflict was temporary, dissipating in the years after the program ended, and did not spill over into neighboring villages that did not receive the transfers.
- These results suggest that foreign armed groups may have sought to attempt to 'sabotage' the government's delivery of the program or gain access to the economic 'lootable' resources but that these efforts ceased after the program ended, explaining the only temporary increase in conflict observed.
- Future programs may consider reinforcing security efforts or testing less visible digital delivery in areas where cash transfers are being delivered to help protect against the unintended conflict spikes this program observed.

87. **Aid as a tool against insurgency: Evidence from contested and controlled territory in Afghanistan (2016)**, Sexton, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** Time series regression

- Using random variation in the distribution of some US counterinsurgency aid in Afghanistan, the study analyzes the effects of aid spending on resulting levels of insurgent violence.
- The researcher found that insurgents used violence as a strategic response to counterinsurgency aid delivered in contested districts. Civilian aid reduced insurgent violence when distributed in government controlled districts, but increased insurgent violence when allocated to contested districts. This calls into question the utility of counterinsurgency aid as a strategy for extending pro-government control to contested areas.
- Findings also suggest that the type of aid mattered: humanitarian projects did not lead to increases in insurgent violence, whereas projects designed to build military defense infrastructure provoked more violent attacks in both contested and secured districts.

88. [Bases, bullets, and ballots: The effect of US military aid on political conflict in Colombia \(2015\)](#), Dube and Naidu, *The Journal of Politics*
Location: Colombia | **Method:** Instrumental variables
- Researchers analyzed the impact of US military aid delivered to Colombia between 1988 and 2005 on political conflict, actions of nonstate armed groups, and illegal drug cultivation. The authors leveraged data on changes in US military funding to countries outside of Latin America, as an instrument for changes in funding to Colombia, in combination with municipal-level variation in the allocation of military aid throughout Colombia to compare how aid affected municipalities with and without military bases.
 - The researchers observed that when military aid increased, paramilitary and government attacks also increased in regions with military bases (though they did not observe any changes in guerilla attacks). They also observed increases in paramilitary homicides in the same regions during election years.
 - These results suggest that in conflict settings, foreign military assistance may serve to strengthen nonstate actors, particularly when resources may be diverted from state to nonstate groups.
89. [Aid under fire: Development projects and civil conflict \(2014\)](#), Crost, Felter, and Johnston, *American Economic Review*
Location: Philippines | **Method:** Regression discontinuity design
- Using a regression discontinuity design, researchers estimated the effect of a large CDD program (KALAH-CIDSS) on conflict in the Philippines.
 - They found that municipalities barely eligible for the program experienced large increases in conflict casualties compared to those municipalities that were barely ineligible for the program.
 - The researchers determined that the increase in violence was driven by insurgent-initiated incidents that occurred before funds were disbursed, in the preparatory stage. This suggests that insurgents were primarily interested in preventing eligible communities from participating in the program, rather than motivated by appropriating the program's resources.
 - These findings support the hypothesis that insurgents may strategically sabotage the delivery of government-supported aid programs in order to prevent potential recipients from developing more favorable attitudes towards the government, which could weaken support for insurgents amongst local communities.
90. [US food aid and civil conflict \(2014\)](#), Nunn and Qian, *American Economic Review*
Location: Global | **Method:** OLS regression and Instrumental variables
- Food aid is one of the main forms of humanitarian assistance in conflict and disaster settings. But its delivery, often over large geographic distances, makes it particularly vulnerable to theft and appropriation by malign actors. Researchers leveraged a range of data sources from 1971-2006 that capture time variation in food aid shipments, due to weather-induced shifts in US wheat production, as well as

variation in a country's likelihood of receiving US food aid to estimate the impact of foreign food aid on conflict onset, incidence, and duration.

- The study finds that increases in food aid led to increases in conflict incidence and the duration of existing civil conflicts but had no effects on the onset of conflict or on interstate conflict. This positive link between food aid and conflict appears to be driven by countries that have previously experienced conflict and was most pronounced in increasing the duration of smaller-scale civil conflicts.
- The authors suggest that further research is needed to assess how other outcomes (outside of conflict) may be positively or negatively impacted by shifts in food aid in order to better assess policy trade-offs.

Moreover, conflict in and of itself can reduce access to aid and other forms of development assistance. Ghorpade ([2020](#)) shows how greater exposure to conflict in Pakistan reduced likelihood of accessing government-run aid programs. Like the studies above, the author suggests that one plausible explanation for this reduced access to state-run aid programs specifically may be due to efforts by armed groups to contest increased state presence in areas they have traditionally controlled.

91. [Calamity, conflict, and cash transfers: How violence affects access to aid in Pakistan \(2020\)](#), Ghorpade, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*

Location: Pakistan | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- The researcher used community distance from the Afghan border as an instrument for assessing how exposure to violent conflict affected household access to state-implemented social assistance (cash transfer) programs following the aftermath of a large-scale flood in Pakistan.
- Results indicate that communities with higher exposure to violence (as measured by conflict-related deaths) were less likely to receive state-implemented cash transfers. However, violence exposure had no apparent effect on receipt of cash transfers from other, non-state entities, including religious and NGO entities.
- The author suggests that these negative findings were driven by (likely) Taliban presence and their strategic attempts to contest increased state presence by disrupting the flow of aid, as they sought to maintain their legitimacy and control in these areas.

Non-material incentives

Armed organizations must balance economic (e.g., wages, monetary rewards, or in-kind rewards like drugs and alcohol) with non-economic (e.g., intrinsic value, utility, social capital) rewards to recruit adequate numbers, maintain organizational cohesion, and deter defection. However, these non-material explanations are very difficult to measure and test. As such, there has been limited quantitative analysis (through experimental or quasi-experimental approaches) to understand how these factors, particularly grievances and social networks, affect crime and violence outcomes. This section only begins to scratch the surface of the existing literature on this topic, which is largely grounded in qualitative studies, many coming from the field of political science, as a means of highlighting areas where future quantitative research can help expand the evidence base on how armed groups utilize non-material incentives to win support.

This literature is also closely linked to that described in [Chapter 3](#), as it relates to the strategic choices armed groups make in order to appeal to individual motives to fight or join illicit groups. According to Humphreys and Weinstein ([2008](#)), there are three main theories that can be used to explain individual participation in civil war:

- **Grievance theory** suggests that alienation from mainstream political processes and decision-making, marginalization, and economic deprivation may drive participation;
- **Selective incentive theory** suggests that people are willing to fight in exchange for expected returns for participation, both material (e.g., money, food, etc.) or non-material (e.g., personal safety); and
- **Social sanction theory** suggests that social norms and pressures may motivate participation.

For all the above reasons, individuals may be motivated to join a violent group or organized crime cell. Moreover, armed groups themselves can make strategic choices to appeal to these specific motivators.

Sanín and Wood ([2014](#)) further suggest the addition of ideology as a driver of participation. They discuss the ways in which armed groups may strategically leverage ideology as a means of recruiting support, maintaining cohesion and morale, guaranteeing obedience and discipline, and even motivating innovation. They note that insurgent groups with strong ideological grounding may choose to forego using violence, even in situations when violence may be the more strategic choice tactically, to uphold a commitment to ideological values. By contrast, groups may also leverage their ideological grounding as a means of legitimizing use of violence.

A largely qualitative literature on the socialization strategies of militaries, street gangs, and armed groups helps shed light on how these groups use a mixture of coercion, indoctrination, and encouragement to shape recruits' (particularly young people's) self-image and behavior. In some ways, the socialization techniques of armed groups

bear a strong resemblance to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) interventions (see [Chapter 3](#)), focusing on changing appearance, providing role models, encouraging repetitive practice, and positively reinforcing behavior. Looking at a case study from Uganda, Beber and Blattman (2013) observe that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) used extreme violence to break down abductees' psychological defenses and desensitize them to violence and used other forms of misinformation to promote fear and loyalty and to fundamentally alter the beliefs and values of recruits.

The recruitment of child soldiers offers some initial insights regarding when armed groups optimize between threatening or causing pain versus offering rewards.¹⁴ This research suggests that punishment or coercive recruitment techniques may be more common when potential recruits have fewer outside, licit options available and when there is not much to lose by resorting to extortion (i.e. when foreign powers may be supporting corrupt regimes that commit human rights violations or the military is unable to keep civilians safe). Possible strategies to counteract or deter the forcible recruitment of children include counterpropaganda—to counter the indoctrination and misinformation strategies that non-state armed groups employ—and escape training, as well as enforcement of international penalties or prosecution, such as by making aid conditional on human rights behavior.

In recent work by Marchais et al. ([2024](#)), researchers examine the role that both emotions and community played in the expansion of militias and insecurity in eastern DRC. They find that the withdrawal of state forces from a number of districts in 2011 left a power vacuum that gave space for numerous Raia Mutomboki (a militia meaning “outraged citizens” in Kirega) village chapters to emerge comprised of local citizens who appeared to have joined for a range of both private motivations (e.g., economic and security) and social motivations (e.g., revenge and community protection). Notably, the state's departure led to a spike in insecurity driven by foreign armed actors and it was in villages that experienced this rise in insecurity that the Raia emerged. They find that civilians who had previously been victimized were more likely to join Raia chapters, suggesting emotions of revenge played a role in their decisions to participate, and that community leaders (i.e. village chiefs) played a key role in running public recruitment campaigns that were critical to spurring participation. Ongoing research by Dunia, Sánchez de la Sierra, and Yu ([2025](#)) in the DRC highlighted in the table below will help further shed light on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations driving participation in non-state armed groups.

¹⁴ However, theory also suggests that children may be easier to lead and indoctrinate, cheaper to retain, and more responsive to coercive methods, and that they may be more willing to fight for non-pecuniary rewards (e.g., duty, revenge, purpose, and/or protection).

New GCCI Research

Two studies currently being funded through GCCI will further expand the evidence base on drivers underlying participation in violent and armed groups:

Moral violence: Unbundling altruism at the heart of Congo's largest armed group (Dunia, Sánchez de la Sierra, and Yu)

This study examines who joins armed organizations and why, as well as the effect of the participation motives on the performance and trajectories inside the group. The study aims to shed light on the traditionally unexplored role of moral sentiments of injustice and parochial revenge, and their impact on recruitment and violent labor management. Researchers will interview new recruits as soon as they onboard, set up a fit bit tracking device, track their village of origin, interview their household and a random sample of households, and randomly select households among the households of new recruits to receive a cash transfer, to examine whether higher income creates incentives to quit the group. ([Evaluation Summary](#))

Participation motives and abuse prevention for non-state armed actors (Sanchez de la Sierra and Yu)

Significant evidence suggests that individuals are motivated by moral sentiments to join armed groups and express them using violence—to redress grievances and recover dignity lost as a result of victimization and abuse by other groups. These sentiments can drive revenge and ingroup-outgroup barriers, leading to outgroup civilian abuse. At the same time, evidence suggests that such participation motives are subject to erosion—being in an armed group offers opportunities for extortion, and greed can erode moral sentiments and commitment to the cause over time, such that grievance turns to greed. This erosion may lead in turn to negative behaviors that also affect ingroup civilians. This project examines the (d)evolution of motivation for active militia fighters and designs, and tests the effectiveness, of interventions aimed at reducing civilian abuse by active militia fighters. The researchers randomly assign new combatants to either: 1) undergo a training in international humanitarian law; 2) participate in a perspective taking curriculum, aimed at promoting empathy to civilians; 3) receive both interventions; or 4) receive no intervention.

Early findings suggest that participants of the perspective taking program were more likely than non-participants to exit the armed group, suggesting the program was effective in building empathy for civilians. The researchers are now conducting follow-up work to measure empathy of those who exited the group and to assess how program effects persist over time, including when booster perspective taking sessions are added.

Priorities for future research

Large unanswered questions remain in understanding and combating the operations of extremist, insurgent, terrorist, criminal, and other non-state armed groups, including on:

- Understanding how these groups govern, finance, and recruit and how to counter these efforts;
- Identifying the determinants for participating in such organizations (e.g., ideology, religion, economic, etc.);
- Designing effective strategies for countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalization;
- Identifying effective actions the state can take to incentivize recruited members at various ranks to disengage and reduce their incentives or abilities to commit violence (e.g., through income support, government services, or interventions that address social and political ideologies);
- Increasing civilian collaboration with legitimate authorities and decrease civilian collaboration with armed groups;
- (Re)building trust in the state in areas where its reach is limited and non-state actors have emerged as alternatives for providing critical services and dispute resolution;
- Determining which local processes are most effective in reducing violence and how external actors can influence these strategies;
- Understanding when and how external actors (including development and political actors) can effectively mitigate risks of future violence;
- Effective actions the state can take to combat organized crime, including through prosecution, increased governance, and tackling gang revenue streams, including through combating retail drugs and drug trafficking;
- Examining the role of illicit economies, such as illegal mining, deforestation, and drug trafficking, in fueling crime and violence, and exploring strategies to disrupt these economies both locally and by addressing cross-border criminal networks;
- Understanding the role of 'criminal governance' in terms of resolving local disputes, maintaining social order, and providing security; and
- How institutional configurations influence whether violence is seen as a means of liberation or retribution particularly in situations of power imbalances in which one party can and does oppress another.

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Chapter 5: What works in peacebuilding, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery?

This chapter provides an overview of the emerging experimental and quasi-experimental evidence on peacebuilding, reconciliation, and other post-conflict recovery programming. We focus on six broad categories of programming commonly used by policymakers following conflict to restore trust and social bonds, help people and groups negotiate peace, and prevent potential backslides into violence:¹⁵

¹⁵ Also relevant to this chapter is the literature on community mediation and dispute resolution, covered in [Chapter 2](#).

- 1) **Community driven development (CDD) and community-driven reconstruction (CDR) interventions** (henceforth CDD/R programs), which grant community members a key role in determining how aid is allocated. CDD/R programs in fragile states often aim, in part, to contribute to social cohesion and reduce conflict within a given community.
- 2) **Transitional justice interventions**, which generally bring victims and perpetrators of conflict face-to-face in a community forum. Such programs are based on the understanding that the open discussion of grievances promotes societal and individual healing.
- 3) **Intergroup contact interventions**, which facilitate contact between diverse groups of people. These interventions are based on the theory that intergroup contact (when certain conditions are met) can reduce prejudice and bias.
- 4) **Perspective taking and personal narratives**, which seek to generate empathy towards outgroup members, often by dispelling negative stereotypes, sharing personal accounts, and putting oneself in another's metaphorical shoes.
- 5) **Media interventions**, such as radio and television programming, which aim to shift social norms, build social capital, and contribute to peace. Media programs often provide a far-reaching and low-cost way of spreading information to large numbers of people.
- 6) **Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) interventions**, which typically use a multidimensional approach—incorporating a host of economic and livelihood interventions—to incentivize former combatants to lay down their weapons and help them to reintegrate economically, socially, and politically into society.

In addition, the chapter closes with a discussion of emerging evidence on the impact of women's inclusion in peacebuilding and development programs in fragile and conflict-affected settings, highlighting promising pathways through which women's inclusion could affect peacebuilding outcomes.

Many of the interventions evaluated in studies reviewed here—particularly on intergroup contact and perspective taking—have emerged from a non-experimental literature, largely grounded in social psychology, that emphasizes the importance of social cohesion in defusing tension and conflict between groups. By social cohesion, we refer to the World Bank definition of “a sense of shared purpose, trust and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state” ([Chatterjee, Gassier, and Myint 2023](#)). This includes both *horizontal* social cohesion—bonding within and among communities—and *vertical* social cohesion, which refers to the relationships between citizens and institutions or authority figures with power. This literature argues that social cohesion and capital, or the norms and networks that help people collaborate, can allow for both information exchange and peaceful bargaining between groups.

Key Takeaways

Emerging insights based on the literature in this chapter include:

- CDD/R interventions often lead to improvements in local infrastructure and service quality, but have rarely shifted decision-making, social cohesion, or institutions in fragile settings. This suggests they may be an effective tool for delivering public goods but are unlikely on their own to drive deeper changes in governance or cohesion.
- Limited experimental evidence suggests that while community reconciliation can successfully rebuild social ties, it may also impose psychological costs. Pairing these activities with dedicated counseling and trauma-informed support may be critical for helping participants process painful memories that are resurfaced.
- Intergroup contact can lead to small reductions in prejudice and discrimination, but these gains tend to be modest and confined to direct participants, with little evidence on broader community-level effects. Emerging evidence of backlash effects in some contexts highlights the need for caution in assuming contact is uniformly positive and points to ways in which it can be counterproductive.
- Perspective-taking and personal narrative interventions can modestly improve empathy and pro-social behaviors, including towards populations displaced by conflict, but open questions remain regarding the durability of impacts and performance in settings experiencing active or ideological conflict.

Community-driven development and reconstruction

Community-driven development (CDD) and community-driven reconstruction (CDR) interventions involve the provision of grants or resources to a community, coupled with the establishment of highly participatory decision-making structures that allow communities to collectively determine how to invest the provided resources in public goods. While the established decision-making structures vary (e.g., direct elections vs. representative meetings, unconditional vs. performance-based incentives), the economic and empowerment aims of such programs remain the same: “to safeguard the benefits of decentralized service delivery where institutions are weak,” and empower communities by allowing them to invest resources as they choose ([Casey 2018](#)).

When implemented in conflict or post-conflict settings, increasing social capital and cohesion, as well as reducing conflict, are often among CDD/R programs' explicit

objectives ([Casey 2018](#)). In these settings, involving citizens in participatory decision-making activities is seen as a key component of reengaging them in public life, which is viewed as necessary for restoring social cohesion and building trust in government institutions ([Mansuri and Rao 2013](#)).

Most existing research has focused on evaluating these programs' impact on governance outcomes, such as infrastructure and service delivery, collective action capacity, and support for democratic institutions ([Mansuri and Rao 2013](#)). In a recent review of the evidence, Samii ([2023](#)) found that while CDR programs may not lead to improvements in collective action, CDR programs can still successfully create enduring institutions that are relatively invulnerable to corruption and adaptable to evolving service delivery needs, often going beyond original program goals.

These findings are consistent with evidence that CDD interventions have been shown to improve service delivery and infrastructure. For example, in Sierra Leone, a CDD intervention improved the quality of local infrastructure in the short run, and a decade later communities had sustained around two-thirds of those gains, with some modest improvements in crisis response during the Ebola outbreak ([Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel 2012](#); [Casey, Glennerster, Miguel, and Voors 2023](#)). Some studies have also shown improvements in citizen satisfaction. Studies in Indonesia and Bangladesh find that when communities directly participated in choosing local projects, they reported higher satisfaction and perceived the process as more inclusive, even when the set of chosen projects or long-term institutional structures remained largely unchanged ([Olken 2010](#); [Tompsett, Habib, Cocciolo, and Ghisofli 2023](#)).

By contrast, evaluations of the impact of CDD/R on social capital and conflict outcomes have shown more disappointing results—while they can contribute to reconstruction and improved service delivery (particularly in terms of public infrastructure) in fragile contexts, they may not improve measures of social cohesion or reduce violence. A recent meta-analysis of CDD interventions ([Casey 2018](#)) found most programs had null or mixed results on social capital and collective behavior.

These findings are consistent with those of Mansuri and Rao ([2013](#)), who review more than 500 empirical studies of local participatory development programs (including CDD interventions) and find little evidence suggesting this type of programming leads to long-term improvements in social cohesion. Rather, they suggest in some cases these programs may actually serve to reinforce existing societal divisions as groups that form tend to be homogeneous in nature, excluding disadvantaged and marginalized groups—though they acknowledge additional research on interventions that mandate the involvement of marginalized groups is needed.

Moreover, CDD/R programming has been found to have null or negative effects on security or conflict-related outcomes in certain contexts. As discussed in the previous chapter, quasi-experimental research from the Philippines ([see study #89](#)), found that a CDD program increased conflict casualties during the early stages of program

preparation, suggesting that insurgents may try to sabotage projects for political reasons. Similarly, in Afghanistan ([see study #82](#)), while a CDD program reduced the number of security incidents in some areas, no such effect was observed in Eastern regions bordering Pakistan, again where insurgents may have strategically repelled these community-building efforts.

Taken together, these findings suggest that CDD/R interventions may not be the right tool for shifting deeper governance or cohesion outcomes, but that their strengths may lie instead in delivering services and infrastructure rather than transforming social relations. As such, efforts to build cohesion may require complementary or alternative approaches. Given the often-high cost of CDD/R programming, future research should explore whether other types of interventions may provide a more cost-effective means to achieve the shared social capital aims.

92. [Exporting institutions: Evidence from a field experiment in Congo \(2019\)](#),

Humphreys, Sanchez de la Sierra, and van der Windt, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers measured the effects of a four-year DFID-funded CDR program (Tuungane I) that sought to alter attitudes towards democratic practices and local decision-making in communities in Eastern DRC. In total, 1,250 villages were randomly assigned to partake in a CDR intervention in which they elected gender-balanced, village-level management committees who decided (in consultation with their communities) how to allocate a cash grant of US\$3,000. The selected projects were then carried out over the next two years, with oversight from village committees. In addition, researchers assessed whether subsequent public funds allocated to these villages (unconditional cash grants of US\$1,000) were less likely to be captured by elites.
- In the short-term (two years into the CDR intervention), treatment villages did not demonstrate increased levels of community participation or oversight and did not have a greater likelihood of allocating resources to those most in need, suggesting that the CDR program did not produce behavioral change or social capital and cohesion benefits.
- Results from a long-term follow-up study ([Mvukiyehe and van der Windt 2020](#)) found that the CDR intervention sustained public infrastructure improvements even eight years after the beginning of program implementation—as evidenced by higher quality infrastructure in schools and hospitals in treated villages. However, the authors find no impact on other measures of service delivery (e.g., quality of health services and staff), economic development (e.g., economic welfare and asset ownership), or social transformation (e.g., women's empowerment, governance, or social cohesion).

93. [How does development assistance affect collective action capacity? Results from a field experiment in post-conflict Liberia \(2015\)](#), Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein, *American Political Science Review*
Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT/Lab-in-the-field experiment
- Researchers examined the effects of a CDR program which randomly invited communities to organize and receive up to US\$420 in matching funds for a new local development project—determined by the level of contributions by randomly selected community members in a public goods game.
 - The study found that the program improved collective action capacity in post-conflict Liberia, with program villages exhibiting higher levels of social cooperation and participants contributing substantially more, on average, to the public goods game.
 - These collective action gains were only found in mixed-gender groups, however, with female-only groups experiencing zero or negative impacts on collective action. Researchers suggest that female-only groups may have relied on traditional women's networks unaffected by the intervention to make decisions, while the intervention improved communities' ability to solve mixed-gender collective action problems.
94. [International interventions to build social capital: Evidence from a field experiment in Sudan \(2015\)](#), Avdeenko and Gilligan, *American Political Science Review*
Location: Sudan | **Method:** RCT/Lab-in-the-field experiment
- In Sudan, researchers studied a large-scale CDD program launched by the World Bank in 2008 to encourage post-war reconstruction and reconciliation.
 - The program offered grants for infrastructure and physical capital investments, coupled with the creation of participatory local governance structures and the provision of capacity building on topics such as budgeting and monitoring. The evaluation included 24 communities in North Kordofan and Kassala, and researchers surveyed 576 households.
 - The program increased civic participation and improved perceptions that local governance was participatory, but did not impact social networks, prosocial behavior, or societal norms.
 - Researchers attributed the increase in community participation to more open local governing institutions, as opposed to strengthened social capital.
95. [Reshaping institutions: Evidence on aid impacts using a pre-analysis plan \(2012\)](#), Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Location: Sierra Leone | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)
- Researchers evaluated the impact of a CDD program that promoted inclusive and accountable decision-making by providing villages with small development grants to be allocated by village committees. In total, 236 villages from two ethnically and politically distinct districts were randomly allocated into a treatment group or a comparison group.

- The program successfully established village-level organizations and tools to manage development projects and contributed to higher construction quality of local public goods, such as functioning primary schools. The program additionally led to more market activity in treatment communities, including the presence of more traders and items for sale, suggesting short-run economic gains.
- There was no evidence that the program led to fundamental changes in local institutions, participation in decision-making, or social norms of behavior. The study additionally found no impact on women's participation in community meetings or their role in local decision-making.
- Results from a long-term follow-up study (Casey, Glennerster, Miguel, and Voors 2023) found that the CDD program had continued material benefits—in the form of gains in local public goods and market activities—but that there were no changes in the use of democratic decision-making within local institutions. These findings suggest that it is extremely difficult to fundamentally alter local, deeply entrenched political hierarchies, particularly through external interventions.

Transitional justice

Transitional justice interventions, such as truth and reconciliation commissions or reconciliation programming, have become a common approach to rebuilding social ties and promoting healing among communities in the aftermath of conflict, in response to systematic or widespread human rights abuses. These programs often bring victims and perpetrators of conflict face-to-face in a community forum or provide other fora for victims to discuss their experiences of conflict and are grounded in the belief that the open discussion of grievances can promote societal and individual healing.

Findings from one of the first randomized evaluations of a reconciliation program in Sierra Leone ([Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi 2016](#)) show that community-based reconciliation efforts can generate meaningful social benefits—the program increased forgiveness toward former perpetrators, strengthened trust in ex-combatants and migrants, and encouraged greater participation in local groups and public goods contributions. At the same time, revisiting wartime experiences in public forums came with psychological costs, including higher rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms. These mixed effects suggest that while reconciliation activities can successfully rebuild social ties, pairing these activities with dedicated counseling and trauma-informed support may be critical for helping participants process painful memories that are resurfaced.

It is worth noting, however, that this program appears to have been more effective than CDD programming in the same setting in achieving shared aims of increasing horizontal ties between individuals and groups. While Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel ([2012](#)) found no evidence that a CDD program in Sierra Leone created greater social cohesion, Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi ([2016](#)), described below, find that reconciliation

programming had significant impacts on social capital (including strengthened social networks, greater trust in ex-combatants, higher likelihood to contribute to public goods, etc.) at a much lower cost.

More recently, researchers have examined how transitional justice museums shape attitudes in divided societies. By memorializing past violence, such exhibits may foster empathy and reconciliation, but they also may risk reinforcing grievances where groups hold competing narratives of the past. Researchers have explored these dynamics in Chile, where one museum was found to influence attitudes toward democracy and restorative transitional justice policies ([Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas 2022](#)), and in Northern Ireland ([Balcells and Voytas 2025](#)).

Overall, the experimental evidence base on transitional justice interventions remains extremely limited and highly context dependent. More evidence is needed to understand when these interventions support healing and when they risk reinforcing underlying divisions.

96. [**The troubles and beyond: The impact of a museum exhibition on a post-conflict society \(2025\)**](#), Balcells and Voytas, *American Journal of Political Science*

Location: Northern Ireland | **Method:** RCT/Survey experiment

- Researchers randomly assigned university students to visit either a museum exhibit presenting multiple perspectives on the Troubles conflict or an unrelated exhibit focused on the role of chemical elements in daily life.
- Over the course of six months, students answered questions about their feelings toward unionists or nationalists, blame attribution for the conflict, and sympathy for Republican/Loyalist groups. Researchers also measured support for restorative policies (e.g., a truth commission or financial support for victims) and punitive justice policies (e.g., investigating unionists or nationalists accused of violence).
- The museum visit did not shift attitudes toward societal cleavages or transitional justice but did trigger strong negative emotions, such as guilt, fear, and disgust. Students who self-identified as unionists or nationalists responded to the visit similarly.
- The researchers suggest that the museum's deliberately neutral approach — highlighting multiple perspectives without taking a stance on past violence or paths to reconciliation — may not have left visitors with a clear enough takeaway to disrupt their beliefs or prompt deep reflection. While clearer messaging or more victim-centered, interactive elements (as seen in other transitional justice museums, e.g., Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas 2022 in Chile, below) may be needed to shift beliefs and attitudes, the exhibit nonetheless engaged visitors without deepening divides or increasing polarization, which is notable given the sensitivity of the topic.

97. [Do transitional justice museums persuade visitors? Evidence from a field experiment \(2022\)](#), Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas, *The Journal of Politics*

Location: Chile | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers randomly assigned Chilean university students to visit a transitional justice museum memorializing victims of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile in order to assess whether museums have a polarizing or conciliatory effect in promoting reconciliation after violence.
- Although those identifying with the right or left viewed the museum differently, regardless of their ideological priors, the students who visited the museum were more supportive of democracy, more likely to be opposed to institutions associated with the period of repression, and more likely to support restorative transitional justice policies like victim compensation. Some of these effects persisted up to six months after the museum visit.
- The authors suggest that transitional justice museums' use of emotional appeals drive the change in citizens' attitudes, which could inform other reconciliation processes.

98. [Reconciling after civil conflict increases social capital but decreases individual well-being \(2016\)](#), Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi, *Science*

Location: Sierra Leone | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Sierra Leone, researchers partnered with local NGO, Fambul Tok, to evaluate the impact of a community-based reconciliation program. Fambul Tok's program created forums for victims to describe the violence they experienced and for perpetrators to seek forgiveness for their crimes, integrating these testimonials with traditional ceremonies. No one was prosecuted or punished for participating, and there were no monetary rewards for participating. These ceremonies took place ten years after the war ended.
- The program led to greater forgiveness of war perpetrators and strengthened social capital in the form of increased trust for ex-combatants and migrants (who are often perceived to be ex-combatants). It also strengthened social networks, increased participation in community groups such as parent teacher associations and women's organizations, and increased contributions to public goods.
- However, the program had negative impacts on psychological health—villages where the reconciliation forums took place recorded higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after the intervention.
- These negative impacts on psychological wellbeing challenge the view that reconciliation promotes individual healing through catharsis or forgiveness. Rather, they are more consistent with a view that talking about the past brings up painful memories and can potentially re-traumatize individuals.
- Both positive and negative program effects persisted for nearly three years after the intervention. Taken together, the findings suggest that people do not self-heal, since reconciliation processes ten years after the war still had effects on forgiveness. Since the need for reconciliation may remain in place long after war ends, this suggests that reconciliation processes should be restructured in ways that reduce their negative psychological costs, while retaining their positive social capital benefits, perhaps by taking place earlier or by being coupled with psychological support.

Intergroup contact

Some peacebuilding programs aim to promote peace by improving interactions among individuals on opposite sides of the conflict divide by, for example, reducing the degree of prejudice and discrimination groups harbor towards one another. One such type of programming—commonly referred to as intergroup or social contact—has built on decades of social psychology research on prejudice reduction. The “contact hypothesis,” as laid out by Allport (1954), asserts that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and bias when the following conditions are met: (i) there is equal status between groups; (ii) groups are working towards a common goal; (iii) there is intergroup cooperation; and (iv) there is support from authorities. But can contact lead to measurable changes in attitude and behavior and, ultimately, serve to reduce conflict among opposing groups?

A 2006 meta-analysis by [Pettigrew and Tropp](#) reviewed more than 500 contact studies (using a range of methods), coming to the conclusion that “intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice”. On average, interventions including meaningful contact led to a modest but consistent reduction in prejudiced attitudes (mean $r = -0.215$), a pattern replicated across 94 percent of the 515 studies reviewed. However, a 2019 review by [Paluck, Green, and Green](#)—which examined evidence from 27 randomized evaluations (70 percent of which took place in the US)—found that contact interventions aimed at addressing racial or ethnic bias often produced much weaker effects, compared to interventions addressing other forms of prejudice.

Still, the literature has grown noticeably since either of these reviews, including an increase in evaluations in fragile or conflict-affected settings. More recently, [Lowe \(2025\)](#) conducted a meta-analysis of 41 randomized evaluations, half of which took place in the “Global South,” and found smaller impacts on prejudice and intergroup relations than prior reviews—the intergroup contact interventions reviewed on average led to 0.08 standard deviation improvement on prejudice and intergroup relations. Lowe also found that contact was more effective at shifting participants’ views of the individuals they had met than of the broader outgroup, underscoring that positive effects often remain highly localized and may not readily generalize to wider populations.

Recent experimental work has also highlighted that intergroup contact can produce unintended backlash effects, particularly among members of dominant or majority groups. In both Lebanon ([Mousa, Naumann, and Scacco 2025](#)) and India ([Ghosh, Kundu, Lowe, and Nellis 2026](#)), contact reduced willingness among majority-group participants to engage in future intergroup activities, underscoring that contact can trigger discomfort or potentially threaten majority group status rather than improving intergroup relations.

When taken together, evidence suggests that intergroup contact can lead to small reductions in prejudice and discrimination and appears to be more effective at

reducing discriminatory behaviors than reducing prejudice. However, these gains tend to be modest and confined to direct participants, with little evidence on broader community-level effects. Moreover, emerging evidence of negative or backfiring effects in select cases calls for caution in interpreting contact as a uniformly positive or transformational peacebuilding strategy. Additional research is needed to identify the conditions under which contact improves relations, when it risks exacerbating divides, and how complementary interventions might help amplify benefits or mitigate backlash.

While recent work has started to shed light on how contact can alter the ways in which groups view one another and the extent to which they are more tolerant of each other in conflict-prone contexts, more evidence is needed to discern whether these efforts ultimately translate into lower levels of conflict or higher degrees of cooperation and collaboration among groups. Evidence is also limited regarding the conditions that are most likely to spur positive behavior or attitude changes, as most evaluations have not been designed to test the length of contact or what other conditions could help amplify the potential benefits of contact.¹⁶ Further, most research to date has focused on evaluating programs with people under the age of 30 and targeted ethnic, racial, xenophobic, or religious prejudice, leaving open questions on how contact impacts different groups and divisions within a society. Additional research is also needed to understand how face-to-face contact compares to other programs aimed at reducing prejudice (see the table below for more on open questions in intergroup contact research).

99. [Intergroup contact, empathy education, and refugee-native integration \(2025\)](#),

Mousa, Naumann, and Scacco, *Working Paper*

Location: Lebanon | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- The large-scale displacement of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has fueled rising levels of polarization and anti-refugee rhetoric that have resulted in mass deportations and systematic discrimination. These beliefs are exacerbated by a cycle of limited engagement between Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees, even though the latter now make up nearly a quarter of the country's population.
- Together with local NGO partner, Amel, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure whether intergroup contact (centered around a health and nutrition curriculum), empathy education (with a curriculum involving peace messaging), or a combination of both, could improve social cohesion and reduce ethnic-based prejudice among Syrian refugee and Lebanese youth participating in a psychosocial support program.

¹⁶ In Lowe's (2025) review, he found that the few studies meeting all of Allport's conditions (above) were no more effective than those that did not.

- Intergroup contact had little effect on prejudice and willingness to engage in future intergroup activities, particularly among Lebanese participants. However, it was more effective at improving knowledge of and confidence in dealing with interpersonal conflict.
- By contrast, empathy education modestly decreased outgroup prejudice and fostered inclusive refugee policy preferences among Lebanese youth. Neither intervention had impacts on the attitudes of participants' parents.
- Combining intergroup contact and empathy education had the most negative outcomes. The researchers suggest that this effect may have been a result of Lebanese participants feeling threatened when they were asked to empathize during intergroup contact.

100. [The power of dialogue: Forced displacement and social integration amid an Islamist insurgency in Mozambique \(2025\)](#), Pita Barros, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Mozambique | **Method:** RCT

GCCI-funded

- In Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, an Islamist insurgency has displaced over one million people. With the goal of reducing intergroup tensions and addressing religious extremism, the researcher evaluated the impact of a brief, structured intergroup contact program featuring community dialogues.
- The program brought host community members and IDPs together through community meetings of 8-10 people to discuss their experiences with the displacement situation and the insurgency and potential paths forward. The meetings featured moderated questions and an open discussion section, together lasting 3 hours, which is relatively short compared to other intergroup contact programs.
- Community dialogue meetings between locals and internally displaced people improved locals' tolerance of IDPs and reduced their prejudice and discrimination. The program also improved IDPs' sense of integration and trust of local hosts.

101. [Intergroup interaction and attitudes to migrants \(2025\)](#), Bezabih, Bezu, Getahun, Kolstad, Lujala, and Wiig, *The Journal of Politics*

Location: Ethiopia | **Method:** RCT

- In Tigray, Ethiopia, researchers randomly assigned 600 residents of a community hosting a refugee camp to four groups that would play an incentivized guessing game (e.g., guessing how many regions of Ethiopia grow a type of grain, etc.) or a comparison group. In the first three guessing game groups, participants were paired with a randomly selected member of the local refugee camp to play the game with, and played versions of the game that either had a neutral framing, economic framing, or ethnic identity framing. In the fourth group, participants were paired with another host community member to play the neutral game. In the comparison group, participants did not play the guessing game.

- Participants assigned to play the game with a migrant improved their attitudes toward migrants, regardless of the framing of the game, relative to participants in the comparison group. However, participants that played the guessing game with other host community members also improved their attitudes toward migrants by a similar amount, suggesting the effects were driven by general human interaction, and not a specific benefit of intergroup contact.
- None of the interventions altered how migrants believed host community members viewed them, however.

102. **Prolonged contact does not reshape locals' attitudes toward migrants in wartime settings (2024)**, Zhou and Lyall, *American Journal of Political Science*¹⁷

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** RCT

- As displacement reaches record numbers as a result of conflict and other humanitarian emergencies, researchers sought to understand the effects of prolonged, collaborative contact between host communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs). They did so by evaluating a large vocational training program—the Introducing New Vocational Education and Skills Training (INVEST)—delivered by Mercy Corps in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The program aimed to increase employment and improve livelihoods through a combination of vocational and soft-skills training programs delivered to locals and IDPs over the course of up to 6 months.
- The researchers found no effects of program participation on prejudice reduction towards IDPs, regardless of course duration or classroom demographics. Locals were no more likely to engage with IDPs following the intervention, though they also did not express any increase in animosity or feelings of labor market competition. These null effects persisted up to eight months following the intervention.
- The authors note that these findings suggest that intergroup contact alone may not be enough to shift prejudice or improve intergroup relations in fragile or conflict-affected settings. However, the INVEST program did not have an explicit prejudice reduction module, which may be an important consideration for contact programming in such contexts. The authors also did not measure if discriminatory behaviors changed even if attitudes remained the same, as seen in other evaluations of intergroup contact (e.g., [Mousa 2020](#)).

103. **Does exposure to other ethnic regions promote national integration? Evidence from Nigeria (2024)**, Okunogbe, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** Instrumental variables

- For over 40 years, Nigeria used its National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to encourage national integration by randomly assigning university graduates to

¹⁷ See also [Study #57](#) for a description of impacts on economic well-being and political attitudes.

complete their mandatory national service outside of their home region for a year, across Nigeria's states. The researcher evaluated the impacts of this program, comparing participants who were randomly assigned to serve in a region where they were either an ethnic majority or a minority, with *all* participants serving in ethnically diverse cohorts (i.e. experiencing some degree of intergroup contact).

- Graduates who served in a state with a different ethnic majority (i.e. experiencing a greater degree of intergroup contact through migration) expressed greater national pride seven years later. They were more knowledgeable about other regions, expressed willingness to migrate for job opportunities, and were more likely to live outside their ethnic region years later compared to those who completed their service in their ethnic region.
- However, these experiences also deepened participants' connections to their own ethnic groups. They had more favorable views towards their own group, with no evidence of improved attitudes towards other ethnic groups, suggesting that relative to intergroup contact, intergroup migration programs can foster a shared national pride without further improving intergroup tolerance.

104. [Outgroup avoidance \(2024\)](#), Weiss, Siegel, and Scacco, *Working Paper*

Location: Israel | **Method:** RCT

- The city of Jerusalem is deeply segregated –socially and linguistically—online and offline. While Palestinians living predominantly in East Jerusalem may have reasons to visit the predominantly Jewish Israeli neighborhoods of West Jerusalem, e.g., to access services, visit commercial areas, or for employment, Jewish residents are much less likely to visit East Jerusalem. These patterns contribute to Jewish Israeli residents being relatively uninformed about the lived experiences and state repression of Palestinians in Jerusalem.
- Researchers conducted an online experiment to evaluate the impact of desegregating online environments and exposing Israelis in West Jerusalem to translated Facebook posts from Palestinians in East Jerusalem at least once per day over two weeks in their usual Facebook timeline on attitudes toward Palestinians in November 2020 to February 2021.
- Exposure to Palestinian posts did not shift Jewish Israelis' attitudes toward Palestinians or change their self-reported interest in viewing additional Palestinian content. Further, exposure reduced participants' subsequent online engagement with Palestinian content.
- Through a separate survey with behavioral exercises, researchers suggest that online contact may not influence intergroup attitudes because participants may have a strong preference to avoid engaging constructively with Palestinian content due to individual attributes like prejudice, mistrust, discomfort, or pessimism about the future of intergroup relations. Preferences for avoiding intergroup contact pose a challenge for designing and scaling intergroup contact programs in natural settings, including online.

105. [Diversity in health care institutions reduces Israeli patients' prejudice toward Arabs \(2021\)](#), Weiss, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*
Location: Israel | **Method:** Natural experiment
- Diversity in public institutions could be a promising way to facilitate positive intergroup contact between different social groups. In Israel, the researcher leveraged the as-if random assignment of Jewish patients to Arab or Jewish doctors in 21 medical clinics to evaluate the impact of brief contact with an Arab doctor in an elevated social position on prejudice.
 - Patients seen by an Arab doctor reduced their prejudice toward Arabs, for example by being more willing to accept an Arab neighbor or coworker, and increased their optimism around the extent Arabs want to live in peace.
 - While these changes were only modest in size, the researcher highlights that the result is notable in a context with extensive segregation, prejudice, and intergroup conflict, where addressing prejudice is likely challenging through brief contact alone. Further, a broader literature highlights health benefits from diversity in health care institutions, making prejudice reduction an added reason to consider diversifying health care delivery.
106. [Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq \(2020\)](#), Mousa, *Science*
Location: Iraq | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)
GCCI-funded
- Leveraging the universal appeal of soccer in Iraq, the researcher partnered with the Nineveh Governorate Council and a local Christian NGO to evaluate the impact of mixed Christian-Muslim soccer teams on social cohesion and interactions between Christians and Muslims in the ISIS-affected cities of Erbil and Qaraqosh.
 - Following their participation in the league, Christians with Muslim teammates demonstrated more tolerant behaviors towards their Muslim peers. They were more likely to continue training with Muslim players and to vote for a Muslim player (not on their team) to receive a sportsmanship prize.
 - However, these changes did not extend to Muslims in the broader community. Players were no more likely to attend a mixed-religion social event or patronize a Muslim-owned business. Furthermore, their views on salient issues, like blaming Muslims for Christian suffering, remained unchanged.
 - Taken together, these results suggest the potential for civic organizations that cut across social cleavages to improve social trust and tolerance after conflict, at least in relationships key to day-to-day coexistence (e.g., among peers), though effects on broader community outcomes remain limited.
107. [Unity in diversity? How intergroup contact can foster nation building \(2019\)](#), Bazzi, Gaduh, Rothenberg, and Wong, *American Economic Review*
Location: Indonesia | **Method:** Natural experiment

- After independence in Indonesia, a country with over 700 ethnolinguistic groups, the government introduced a voluntary resettlement program, the Transmigration program, with one aim of the program being to foster a sense of shared national identity to overcome internal divisions. From 1979-1988, the government assigned over 2 million voluntary migrants to be relocated from Java and Bali to over 800 newly created villages in the Outer Islands, in a quasi-random process. As a result, the program created an opportunity for greater contact between groups, as new Transmigration villages had greater ethnic diversity and less segregation than organically settled villages even three decades later.
- The most diverse Transmigration villages demonstrated greater integration toward a shared national identity, as measured by using the national language at home, intermarriage, and children's name choices. Individuals in these villages were also more likely to help poorer neighbors and to contribute to public goods.
- Transmigration villages that, by chance, had only a few ethnolinguistic groups experienced increases in ethnic attachment and likelihood for ethnic conflict, and had lower social capital, as measured by interethnic tolerance, trust in and willingness to help poor neighbors, and more.
- Together, the researchers suggest that in contexts bringing together many small social groups, incentives to integrate under a common identity may be stronger than contexts with few groups, where intergroup antagonism and pressure to gain cultural dominance may be stronger.

108. [Does peacebuilding work in the midst of conflict? Impact evaluation of a peacebuilding program In Nigeria \(2019\)](#), Dawop, Grady, Inks, and Wolfe, *Working Paper*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT

- In response to escalating conflicts between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria, Mercy Corps, in collaboration with local partner Pastoral Resolve, launched the Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN) program and conducted a randomized evaluation of its impact at the community and individual levels after two years. The ECPN aimed to prevent violent conflicts between communities by training local leaders in dispute resolution and creating opportunities for different groups to interact collaboratively across the community through local development projects and violence prevention planning.
- Despite a general increase in violence in the region during the study, ECPN-engaged communities either showed improvement or deteriorated less than comparison communities on most measures. Researchers identified positive impacts of the program on intergroup contact, trust, and perceptions of security, but found no effect on perceptions about the effectiveness of local dispute resolution.
- Among individuals, participants with the greatest exposure to the program showed the largest positive shifts in their behaviors and attitudes. Indirect or low exposure participants within the ECPN-engaged communities also changed their attitudes, especially around intergroup trust and their sense of security.

- Researchers demonstrated that peacebuilding programs that foster positive, collaborative intergroup interactions can improve intergroup trust, even in conflict settings.

109. **Can social contact reduce prejudice and discrimination? Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria (2018)**, Scacco and Warren, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers studied a vocational training program that brought together Christian and Muslim young men in Kaduna, a conflict-prone city in Nigeria, for 16 weeks of computer training. The study aimed to test whether extended contact in an educational setting can reduce prejudice and discrimination between groups that are often adversarial. The program was cross-randomized such that those assigned to receive the training were randomly assigned to either mixed-religion or same-religion classrooms. Within mixed classes, participants were then assigned either a co-religious or non-co-religious learning partner.
- They find that students in mixed-religion classrooms demonstrated significantly less outgroup discriminatory behavior (though there was no change in reported prejudice) compared to students in single-religion classrooms. However, the mixed-religion group did not discriminate any less than a pure comparison group that did not participate in the computer training intervention.
- This would appear to suggest that the increase in discriminatory behavior among those in homogenous classrooms may have resulted from greater opportunities for in-group bonding, which could reinforce existing biases against the out-group.

Researchers are also exploring alternative forms of “contact” beyond those that require face-to-face interaction, examining, for instance, how deeper horizontal connections (e.g., financial linkages) may affect measures of prejudice, trust, and social cohesion, including in conflict-prone settings.

110. **Valuing peace: The effects of financial market exposure on votes and political attitudes (2019)**, Jha and Shayo, *Econometrica*

Location: Israel | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Prior to the 2015 Israeli elections, researchers randomly assigned 1,345 Jewish Israeli voters to either a financial asset treatment or a comparison group. Within the treatment group, individuals either received endowments of assets that tracked the value of specific indices or company stocks from both Israel and the Palestinian Authority or received an endowment of cash to invest in stocks. In addition, they were given incentives to learn about the performance of their assets and make weekly decisions to buy or sell.
- They found that exposure to financial markets resulted in a large shift in individuals' vote choices towards parties that supported restarting the peace process and away from parties skeptical of peace negotiations. They suggest this shift came about because of improvements in financial literacy that led individuals within the treatment group to reevaluate the economic costs of conflict.
- In a companion paper, researchers also found the intervention increased generalized trust, or the view that most people can be trusted (Jha, Shayo, and Weiss 2025).

- While not a traditional “contact” study, relative to the others presented in this section, this evaluation sheds light on how creating deep horizontal linkages between groups—in this case through the delivery of financial assets that incentivize stability—may lead to more peaceful bargaining.

New GCCI Research

GCCI is currently funding five ongoing studies that test contact theory in Nigeria, Jordan, Turkey, and Ethiopia:

Can social contact reduce economic conflict between farmers and herders?

Evidence from Nigeria (Dube, Soeren Henn, and Robinson)

This study tests whether intergroup contact can reduce long-running conflict between farmers and settled herders in Nigeria. Across 286 communities, the researchers compare intergroup dialogue workshops—in which farmers and herders jointly discussed the sources of their conflict—with health workshops that brought both groups together without addressing the conflict directly.

Preliminary results suggest the inter-dialogues strengthened social ties between leaders and improved farmer cooperation, but also triggered an influx of outside nomadic herders, reducing herder cooperation and increasing economic disputes. The health workshops produced uniformly negative effects, worsening cooperation, stereotypes, and empathy, and increasing disputes. Over a two-year horizon, violence rose in inter-dialogue communities—driven by outside herders whose presence unraveled cooperative gains—but not in health workshop communities. Together, the findings suggest that even short-run improvements in cooperation can set in motion dynamics that ultimately worsen outcomes.

Social and economic integration of Syrian refugees in host communities in Jordan

(La Ferrara, Dias, and Holmlund)

Does interpersonal contact between groups lead to a reduction in prejudice or does it exacerbate divisions? This research uses a large-scale randomized evaluation to investigate this question in the context of communities in Jordan that are hosting Syrian refugees. The evaluation builds on a cash-for-work program, where refugees and Jordanian residents cooperate in upgrading infrastructure in Jordanian municipalities exposed to a large influx of refugees. Researchers are varying the proportion of Syrian refugees who work in the teams employed by the program, thereby changing exposure to members of other groups. They will measure how contact impacts stereotyping, social norms, trust between the groups, and productivity. They are also evaluating the effect of disseminating information about refugees among residents on these outcomes.

Debunking misinformation to foster inclusion of refugees: A comprehensive approach towards integration and empowerment (Akbiyik and Raffler)

Misinformation can result in part from limited interactions between different social groups; this isolation can also contribute to limited political support for refugee integration policies. In Turkey, researchers are evaluating whether daily interactions between groups could help correct misinformation and bolster support for refugee integration policies, and whether related misinformation is more effectively corrected when fact checks are delivered by a source ideologically aligned with the participants.

Peace through intergroup contact (Waleign, Taw, Akalu, Dittmann, and Abate)

In Ethiopia, the federal system is structured around ethno-linguistic regional states, where administrative boundaries correspond to dominant ethnic groups. As a result, most people live and work within regions primarily inhabited by their own ethnic group, limiting everyday interethnic contact. This separation can reinforce stereotypes and heighten the risk of prejudice and conflict between groups. In response, many peacebuilding initiatives have focused on fostering interaction and understanding across ethnic lines. One such intervention is the Host Family Program (HFP), implemented by the University of Gondar, which pairs university students with host families residing near the university. In partnership with the University of Gondar and Ethiopia's Ministries of Peace and Education, researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to assess how intergroup interaction affects host families participating in the Host Family Program. Specifically, they will focus on whether hosting a student from a different ethnic background reduces prejudicial attitudes towards the student's broader ethnic group.

Fostering national identity through intergroup contact (Waleign, Dittmann, Mo, Taw, and Akalu)

Ethiopia adopted an ethnic federal system three decades ago, establishing administrative boundaries along ethnic lines. While intended to empower ethnic groups, this approach has unintentionally limited inter-ethnic interactions and weakened a sense of shared national identity. In response, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) is preparing to launch a University Service Program (USP). This initiative will require first-degree students at public universities to spend a year living and working in a community from a different ethnic background. The program aims to foster meaningful, long-term engagement between students and host communities, encouraging the exchange of ideas, traditions, and ways of life. By promoting mutual understanding and reducing prejudice, the USP has the potential to strengthen a cohesive Ethiopian national identity. To evaluate the program's impact, this project is conducting a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in partnership with the MoE.

Given growing interest in intergroup contact as a means of supporting prejudice reduction, peacebuilding, and violence prevention in fragile- and conflict-affected states, the table below lays out key areas for further inquiry on the effectiveness of contact programming in contexts experiencing or recovering from conflict.¹⁸

DEEP DIVE:	OPEN QUESTIONS ON INTERGROUP CONTACT
UNDERSTANDING MECHANISMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the conditions identified by Allport (e.g., supportive role of authorities, equal status of groups, intergroup cooperation, groups working towards a common goal) required for contact to be effective, and what additional features determine whether contact succeeds? - What features beyond the Allport conditions help ensure that effects generalize to the broader outgroup, rather than only to the individuals directly involved in contact? - Under what circumstances does contact produce backlash or adverse consequences, and through what mechanisms (e.g., status threat, discomfort, reactance) do these negative effects emerge?
TESTING CONTACT IN REAL-WORLD SETTINGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizing that, in the real world, people self-select into contact, how can programs be designed to engage participants who are most likely to avoid contact—and who may stand to benefit the most? - Are there forms of contact beyond face-to-face interaction that can create deeper horizontal linkages between groups, such as economic contact? - Can "vicarious contact" (i.e. when people observe in-group contact with out-group members on TV or online) shift attitudes and behaviors? - Can virtual contact be effective and, if so, what is the most effective form for virtual contact to take? - How effective are low-cost, community-driven intergroup contact interventions in building cohesion, and how do these compare to more resource-intensive programs? - How do unstable and contested political settlements shape the effectiveness of contact even when all optimal conditions are met?
ANALYZING IMPACTS BY STUDY POPULATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who should social contact interventions target (e.g., average community members or local influencers; individuals with higher baseline levels of prejudice or those who are less prejudiced and potentially easier to influence)? - How are people affected differently based on their prior prejudice levels? - Under what conditions do majority and minority groups respond differently to contact, and when might those differences include negative or defensive reactions? - Is backlash disproportionately observed among majority-group participants, and if so, what explains systematic differences in how majority and minority groups respond to contact? - When in someone's lifetime does contact matter? Could contact be more effective for young people (youth attitudes may be more malleable, but familial influences may also be strong)? - Does the contact hypothesis hold with newly mixed populations, such as refugees and host communities?

¹⁸ Many thanks to Alex Scacco, Eliana La Ferrara, Matt Lowe, Oeindrila Dube, Salma Mousa, Shana Warren, and Henrique Pita Barros for their helpful suggestions.

<p>VARYING THE INTENSITY AND DURATION OF CONTACT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What role does intersectionality play in influencing the effectiveness of contact interventions? (i.e. does contact have different effects on individuals who may identify with multiple minority "out-groups"?) - Does group size matter? Do the effects of contact vary based on the ratio of the minority group represented in the activity being evaluated? - What is the role of peer influence in amplifying or negating the effects of contact? - What is the ideal frequency for contact? What is the minimum effective dosage? - Is sustained contact important or required? Do interventions need institutionalized follow-up mechanisms to achieve persistent effects, and can long-run analyses shed light on these questions? - Do the effects of cluster-level contact interventions (e.g., at the village level) differ from those of individual-level interventions? Shifting social norms around intergroup interaction may require intervening at a higher level of aggregation.
<p>EXPANDING MEASUREMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can contact affect outcomes beyond prejudice (e.g., can contact affect violent conflict or influence other factors that can play a role in conflict between groups, such as underlying productivity, access to public goods, or collective action)? - How long do the effects of contact last? Are effects immediate or are they activated over time (for instance, how do effects respond to shocks)? - What are the spillover effects of contact onto community members who are not directly exposed to the intervention?
<p>COMPARING VIS-À-VIS OTHER INTERVENTIONS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does contact perform relative to other prejudice reduction interventions (like perspective taking or higher-level structural changes)? - Is explicit peace messaging a complement or a substitute of contact programming?

Perspective taking and personal narratives

A related strand of literature to contact theory explores how interventions that aim to foster empathy towards outgroups—through, for instance, personal story-telling or exercises that prompt participants to embody another's perspective—may promote understanding, trust, and acceptance that spans societal cleavages. This research is grounded in a large literature in social psychology and neuroscience examining emotional and empathic responses across different social and cultural groups, which suggests that outgroup suffering generally elicits less empathic responses relative to ingroup suffering (Cikara et al. 2011). In places where people identify closely with their social group, and where groups compete or have competed with one another, outgroup suffering can even result in emotions of pleasure rather than pain in some cases (Cikara et al. 2014; Cikara 2015).¹⁹

¹⁹ For more on this strand of literature, see the work of the [Harvard Intergroup Neuroscience Lab](#) (led by Mina Cikara), which studies "how failures of empathy, dehumanization, and misunderstanding unfold in the mind and brain."

While researchers are increasingly applying these approaches to promote acceptance of populations who have been affected by conflict (including refugees and others who have been forcibly displaced), relatively few experimental studies to date have directly measured how these types of interventions may promote societal healing following conflict outside of laboratory settings—an area ripe for future research.

Perspective taking is a psychological approach that aims to reduce bias and prejudice by encouraging participants to embody the mindset of members of the outgroup—i.e. to imagine spending a day in another person's shoes. Similar to contact theory, perspective taking is grounded in a robust social psychology literature where, in often controlled experimental settings, it has been shown to increase feelings of sympathy and empathy, improve attitudes towards target groups (most often groups that are marginalized or stigmatized), and build social bonds ([Batson 1991](#); [Bruneau and Saxe 2012](#); [Galinsky, Ku and Wang 2005](#)), though effects are often modest ([Paluck, Porat, Clark, and Green 2021](#)). However, few studies have examined the effects of this approach when administered to groups in active or ideological conflict or examined the long-term impacts of these interventions.

Researchers in Turkey ([Alan et al. 2021](#)) found that a perspective taking curriculum—which taught students to view different situations from the perspectives of others—was effective in lowering peer violence, improving relationships between refugee and Turkish students, and increasing prosocial behaviors like trust, reciprocity, and altruism. In the United States, Adida, Lo, and Platas ([2018](#)) had American citizens complete a written exercise where they were instructed to put themselves in the shoes of a refugee. Those who participated in the intervention were more likely to subsequently write a letter to the US president in support of refugees, though these results were short-lived and did not necessarily manifest in corresponding changes in attitudes.

Researchers have also evaluated the effect of online perspective taking programs, with promising results. In Colombia, an online perspective taking video or perspective taking game both improved prosocial attitudes and behaviors toward Venezuelan forced migrants immediately following the interventions ([Rodríguez Chatruc and Rozo 2024](#)). In Hungary, Simonovits, Kézdi, and Kardos ([2018](#)) found that an online perspective taking game was effective in reducing prejudice towards both an ethnic minority group as well as towards refugees—effects that persisted at least one month following the intervention.

By contrast, a study in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Paluck 2010)—described below under media interventions ([see study #123](#))—found that a radio program that included perspective taking elements actually led to less tolerant behaviors towards the outgroup. Here, the author suggests, the program may have lacked sufficient guidance to listeners on how to engage in perspective taking.

These findings suggest that the intensity and delivery mode of perspective taking interventions may affect the magnitude, direction, and persistence of results. Additional

research is needed to better understand the mechanisms driving changes in behaviors and to observe outcomes over longer time horizons. Moreover, the majority of perspective taking studies evaluate programs that are asymmetric in nature, where members of a majority group are provided with exercises that enable them to take the perspective of the minority group, but minority group members are not offered the same experience.²⁰ More research is needed to understand programming that offers a two-way exchange of perspectives.

111. [In someone else's shoes: Reducing prejudice through perspective taking \(2024\)](#),

Rodríguez Chatruc and Rozo, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Colombia | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers evaluated the impact of two online, low-cost perspective taking programs aiming to reduce prejudice among Colombians toward Venezuelan forced migrants.
- Researchers randomly assigned participants to either an online video, game, or comparison group. In the online video group, participants could view a video on the journey and testimonies of Venezuelan migrants. In the game group, participants could play a text-based role-playing game where participants take on the role of a Venezuelan migrant and make life decisions.
- Immediately following the interventions, participants in the video or game groups were 11 percentage points (16 percent) more likely to donate to a charity that supports Venezuelan migrants than those in the comparison group. They were also more likely to believe that migrant poverty was not a result of low effort and improved their assessment of government assistance to migrants. Only the game improved trust toward migrants.
- Researchers found that the video was more effective at improving pro-sociality overall (e.g., altruism and attitudes) when considering per minute spent on each intervention, given its shorter duration. The video was also easier to disseminate and demanded less involvement from participants, suggesting it may be a more scalable way to address prejudice in the short term.

²⁰ One notable exception is a small-scale lab experiment conducted by Bruneau and Saxe (2012), which provided opportunities for both dominant and non-dominant groups to practice perspective giving (sharing their own experience) and perspective taking (listening to the other's experience). The approach was tested in two controlled experimental settings—one in Arizona between White Arizonans and Hispanic Arizonans six months following the passage of an anti-immigration bill and the other in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians roughly two and a half years following the 2nd Intifada and six months following the Israeli invasion of Gaza. The study revealed greater improvements in attitudes for members of non-dominant groups who participated in perspective-giving and for members of dominant groups who participated in perspective taking.

112. [Building inter-ethnic cohesion in schools: An intervention on perspective taking \(2021\)](#), Alan, Baysan, Gumren, and Kubilay, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Location: Turkey | **Method:** RCT | Link to [policy briefcase](#)

GCCI-funded

- To test how perspective taking can improve interactions among different ethnic groups in diverse classrooms, researchers partnered with the Ministry of Education in Turkey to conduct a randomized evaluation of a curriculum called “Understanding Each Other” (UEO). The program, which used interactive activities and games to encourage students to consider others’ perspectives, was delivered to elementary school students in two districts of Southeastern Turkey where there are high populations of Syrian refugees. Notably, the curriculum never explicitly mentions ethnicity, though it may be inferred in some activities.
- The program improved students’ perspective taking ability and decreased impulsivity, lowered incidents of peer violence, and reduced social exclusion and increased interethnic social ties. Students who participated in the program also demonstrated more socially positive behaviors, such as trust, reciprocity, and altruism. Finally, the program improved refugee children’s Turkish language skills.
- These findings suggest that classroom time can be used to not only teach academic skills but also soft or non-cognitive skills and, when classrooms serve an ethnically mixed group of students, using extracurricular time to teach positive social skills may ease integration.

113. [Seeing the world through the other’s eye: An online intervention reducing ethnic prejudice \(2018\)](#), Simonovits, Kézdi, and Kardos, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Hungary | **Method:** RCT

- In Hungary, the country’s Roma minority faces prejudice and social exclusion by the majority, with ethnic tensions at times leading to violence.
- Using an encouragement design, researchers randomly assigned Hungarian youth to one of two online game conditions: (i) a perspective taking, choose-your-own-adventure game, which recounted the story of a Roma adolescent arriving in Budapest told through a second-person narrative or (ii) a placebo game (i.e. the comparison group).
- Participation in the perspective taking game led to reductions in anti-Roma sentiments. The program also reduced antipathy towards refugees, another group facing prejudice in Hungary. Both effects persisted for at least one month following the intervention. It also led to a decrease in voting intention for the far-right political party (which was associated with racist policies).

114. [Perspective taking can promote short-term inclusionary behavior toward Syrian refugees \(2018\)](#), Adida, Lo, and Platas, *PNAS*

Location: USA | **Method:** Survey experiment

- Two weeks prior to the 2016 US presidential election, researchers conducted a nationally representative survey in which respondents were randomly assigned into one of three conditions: (i) a perspective taking exercise, which prompted respondents to put themselves in the shoes of a refugee as they answered a series of questions about fleeing persecution; (ii) an information group, which provided objective details of the US approach to resettling refugees, relative to other countries; or (iii) a comparison group. The survey also asked willing respondents to write a letter to the next US president in support of refugees.
- Respondents who participated in the perspective taking exercise were more likely to subsequently write a letter in support of refugees. While this effect was strongest among Democrats with prior positive attitudes towards refugees, the authors also observe positive changes among Republican respondents. By contrast, the information intervention did not have a statistically significant impact on letter writing.
- However, these results were short-lived—they did not last after one week of completing the survey. Furthermore, while the exercise prompted short-term changes in behavior, the authors found no evidence that the intervention led to any meaningful changes in attitudes towards refugees.
- The researchers find that respondents with higher baseline inclusionary attitudes were more likely to subsequently write a letter in support of refugees, suggesting the exercise nudged them into action (closing what the authors refer to as “the attitudinal-behavioral gap.”)

Personal narratives, through which individuals share their experiences and perspectives in their own words, offer another technique for promoting empathy, trust, and understanding between groups that may lead to reductions in prejudice and conflict. A lab-in-the-field experiment from Kenya ([Audette, Horowitz, and Michelitch 2025](#)) found that sharing personal narratives recorded by Somali refugees and Kenyans of Somali descent led to declines in xenophobic attitudes towards Somalis and shifted policy attitudes on salient issues like citizenship.

115. [Personal narratives reduce negative attitudes toward refugees and immigrant outgroups: Evidence from Kenya \(2025\)](#), Audette, Horowitz, and Michelitch,

Working Paper

Location: Kenya | **Method:** Lab-in-the-field experiment

- During a nationally representative public opinion survey in Kenya, researchers randomly assigned respondents to either a comparison group or to listen to one of two “personal narrative” audio recordings. The refugee hardship narrative emphasized the challenges refugees face both when fleeing violence in Somalia and while living in Kenya (while also expressing appreciation for refuge), while the anti-terror narrative combatted common perceptions that Somalis support militant groups like Al-Shabab by expressing shared opposition to terrorism across religious lines.

- Both forms of personal narratives led to positive improvements in policy attitudes and decreases in xenophobic opinions towards Somali refugees. Among other findings, the hardship narrative increased support for keeping the Dadaab refugee camp open (rather than forcibly repatriating Somalis) and the anti-terror narrative improved perceptions of Somalis as being peaceful. These effects were equally large for individuals with more negative baseline attitudes towards Somalis.
- Personal narrative recordings such as those evaluated in this study offer a low-cost, scalable solution for shifting attitudes and prejudice towards out-groups. These findings run contrary to the often-limited findings from other informational interventions that have sought to correct misinformation, rather than emphasize personal accounts.

New GCCI Research

GCCI is currently funding one study examining the impact of a perspective-taking intervention implemented in an active conflict setting:

Civilian protection by direct combatant interventions: What works and what doesn't? A field experiment leveraging combatant incentives through IHL training and combatant empathy through perspective taking (Sanchez de la Sierra)

Significant evidence suggests that individuals are motivated by moral sentiments to join armed groups and express them using violence—to redress grievances and recover dignity lost as a result of victimization and abuse by other groups. These sentiments can drive revenge and ingroup-outgroup barriers, leading to outgroup civilian abuse. At the same time, evidence suggests that such participation motives are subject to erosion—being in an armed group offers opportunities for extortion, and greed can erode moral sentiments and commitment to the cause over time, such that grievance turns to greed. This erosion may lead in turn to negative behaviors that also affect ingroup civilians. This project examines the (d)evolution of motivation for active militia fighters and designs, and tests the effectiveness, of interventions aimed at reducing civilian abuse by active militia fighters. The researchers randomly assign new combatants to either: 1) undergo a training in international humanitarian law; 2) participate in a perspective taking curriculum, aimed at promoting empathy to civilians; 3) receive both interventions; or 4) receive no intervention. Early findings suggest that participants of the perspective taking program were more likely than non-participants to exit the armed group, suggesting the program was effective in building empathy for civilians. The researchers are now conducting follow-up work to measure empathy of those who exited the group and to assess how program effects persist over time, including when booster perspective taking sessions are added.

Media interventions

Media interventions, such as radio, television, or online programs, are commonly used by nonprofits working on peacebuilding and conflict resolution as a cost-effective and far-reaching method to spread information about peace. This includes education entertainment (“edutainment”) programs that aim to shift social norms and behaviors around complex topics, often by taking the form of soap operas or other dramatized content ([La Ferrara 2016](#)).

There is an emerging body of experimental literature that evaluates whether media interventions can be used to shift social norms, build social capital, contribute to peace, and even encourage defection from armed groups. Multiple studies suggest that media interventions can positively impact social norms and attitudes around dissent, dispute resolution, reintegration, and tolerance or trust toward outgroups, and can encourage interpersonal discussion following conflict ([Paluck and Green 2009](#); [Blair et al. 2021](#); [Siegel and Badaan 2020](#); [Blouin and Mukand 2019](#); [Paluck 2010](#)).

However, media interventions can also have unintended consequences on attitudes and behaviors associated with conflict. For example, media programming that encouraged perspective taking (i.e. “the thoughtful consideration of the world from other viewpoints”) in eastern DRC led to increased intolerance, discussed further below ([Paluck 2010](#)). At the same time, radio propaganda and mass media have also historically been used as tools for inciting violence.²¹

While information campaigns have often been found ineffective at changing individual behavior (see [Chapter 3](#)), the below studies suggest that trusted sources (e.g., religious leaders), peer influence—in these cases often through group discussion—and dramatization are important avenues through which messages are understood and translated into group behavior (see also [Chapter 6](#) for a discussion of media messaging and edutainment as a strategy for combating gender-based violence). Given the differing impact of the interventions detailed below on attitudes and behavior, however, more research is needed to understand the mechanisms underpinning the impact of media interventions.

116. [Trusted authorities can change minds and shift norms during conflict \(2021\)](#), Blair, Littman, Nugent, Wolfe, Bukar, Crisman, Etim, Hazlett, and Kim, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*

21 See, for instance: Adena, Maja, Ruben Enikolopov, Maria Petrova, Veronica Santarosa, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2015. “Radio and the Rise of the Nazis in Prewar Germany.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130, no. 4 (November): 1885-1939. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv030>.; DellaVigna, Stefano, Ruben Enikolopov, Vera Mironova, Maria Petrova, and Ekaterina Zhuravskaya. 2014. “Cross-Border Media and Nationalism: Evidence from Serbian Radio in Croatia.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 6, no. 3 (July): 103-132. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.6.3.103>.; Yanagizawa-Drott, David. 2014. “Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129, no. 4 (November): 1947-94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju020>.

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- The conflict with Boko Haram has harmed and displaced millions of Nigerians. Many former members seek to reintegrate, however, communities are often hesitant to accept them due to fear and mistrust. In collaboration with Mercy Corps, researchers evaluated whether radio messages from trusted authorities, in this context being religious leaders, could influence community members' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions related to the acceptance of former Boko Haram members.
- Researchers randomly assigned participants from 67 urban and semi urban neighborhoods and camps for internally displaced persons to listen to either a radio message from a religious leader emphasizing forgiveness or a placebo message about unrelated health practices.
- The message from religious leaders significantly increased support for reintegration and willingness to interact with ex-fighters in social, political, and economic life. It also shifted perceptions, with people believing that others in their community were more supportive of reintegration.
- These findings suggest that religious leaders can be effective messengers for promoting tolerance and reconciliation. Moreover, this intervention offers a scalable and cost-effective approach for fostering reintegration, as messages can be disseminated widely through various channels.

117. [#No2Sectarianism: Experimental approaches to reducing sectarian hate speech online \(2020\)](#), Siegel and Badaan, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Online & Lebanon | **Method:** RCT & survey experiment

- Researchers conducted an online experiment on Twitter that randomly assigned “counter-speech” sanction messages that emphasized a common Muslim or Arab national identity, both with and without religious or political endorsement, respectively, to respond to hostile anti-Shia content from Arab Twitter users who regularly posted hate speech. All sanction messages alerted the Twitter users that their online content was causing “fitna”—an Arabic word for sectarian discord or strife.
- Of the various counter-speech messages tested, the message that emphasized a common Muslim identity with endorsement from religious elites was the most effective in combating the proliferation of hate speech on Twitter.
- To complement the online experiment, researchers conducted a nationally representative survey experiment in Lebanon exposing participants to similar identity messages followed by subsequent sectarian (anti-outgroup) or counter-sectarian (pro-intergroup relations) messages. Researchers found similar results to the online experiment, with messages endorsed by religious elites on shared Muslim identity leading to lower tolerance of subsequent sectarian messages and higher support for counter-sectarian messages. By contrast, messages emphasizing shared

national identity (not endorsed by elites) led to a backlash effect, increasing support for sectarian tweets and their messengers.

- Combined, these results suggest that religious elites may play an important role in communicating social norms around acceptable behavior.

118. [**The reach of radio: Ending civil conflict through rebel demobilization \(2020\)**](#),

Armand, Atwell, and Gomes, *American Economic Review*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** Instrumental variables/Georeferenced panel data

- Researchers exploited random topography-driven variation in radio program coverage, combined with a grid-cell level panel dataset, to study the effects of defection messaging targeted towards members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) on return rates, fatalities, and violence.
- Defection messaging led to reductions in LRA-related fatalities, decreases in violence against both civilians and security forces, and increases in defection rates. These effects were amplified in areas where there was a higher intensity of messaging. However, areas with higher intensity defection messaging also experienced increased looting of many goods, including food, clothes, medicines, weapons, and money.
- The researchers also observed that changes in the prices of key commodities (cotton and groundnuts) either supported or detracted from the effectiveness of defection messaging. Positive price shocks to cotton (a labor-intensive crop) increased the effectiveness of messaging, whereas positive price shocks to groundnuts (an easily looted crop) reduced messaging effectiveness. (These findings are consistent with those on economic shocks discussed in [Chapter 4](#).)
- Taken together, these results suggest that radio messaging may offer an effective low-cost, non-violent counterinsurgency policy. However, the authors suggest that more research is needed to understand which forms of messaging—e.g., those appealing to emotions or those conveying logistics—are most effective in driving these results.

119. [**Erasing ethnicity? Propaganda, nation building, and identity in Rwanda \(2019\)**](#),

Blouin and Mukand, *Journal of Political Economy*

Location: Rwanda | **Method:** Lab-in-the-field experiment

- By exploiting geographic variation in access to a government-owned and operated radio station (Radio Rwanda), researchers implemented a series of lab-in-the-field experiments to assess how government radio propaganda influenced ethnic attitudes following the Rwandan genocide. In Rwanda, radio has historically been one of the most important channels of news distribution, particularly in rural areas, though the country's mountainous topography has caused gaps in transmission to some villages. Radio Rwanda is known for its generally pro-government news coverage and emphasis of a united national Rwandan identity.
- In villages exposed to the radio program, ethnicity appeared less salient—individuals were less likely to characterize others on the basis of ethnicity. Interethnic

trust also increased—individuals exposed to the radio program were more likely to partner with someone from another ethnic group to complete a cooperative task and more likely to report trusting members of other communities (though they were no more likely to increase trust in members of their own community).

- These findings suggest that it is possible for government to shift the salience of and attitudes towards ethnic identity, though the authors caution that these results may not be generalizable to other countries recovering from conflict given the complexity of the Rwandan post-genocide context.

120. [Is it better not to talk? Group polarization, extended contact, and perspective taking in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo \(2010\)](#), Paluck, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*

Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** RCT

- In Eastern DRC, researchers evaluated the relative effectiveness of a weekly radio talk show, paired with a related soap opera about a fictional conflict, compared to the soap opera only on promoting intergroup tolerance and cooperation. The talk show was designed to promote perspective taking about intergroup conflict and cooperation and encouraged listeners to engage in discussion with others on relevant themes.
- After one year of broadcast, listeners of the talk show were less tolerant of outgroups across a variety of indicators, including attitudes and helping behaviors, as measured through behavioral games. Researchers suggest that this could be because the talk show highlighted intergroup grievances and provided only “light-handed” guidance encouraging perspective taking (Paluck 2012).
- The talk show, however, was found to increase levels of interpersonal discussion among listeners.
- While the radio talk show was designed by the research team and grounded in theoretical predictions about the benefits of discussion about conflict, the show had significant counterintuitive and unintended negative effects. The research team suggests that this demonstrates the need to be sensitive to the context when applying psychological theory, especially on topics as important as conflict.

121. [Deference, dissent, and dispute resolution: An experimental intervention using mass media to change norms and behavior in Rwanda \(2009\)](#), Paluck and Green, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Rwanda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers studied a year-long post-genocide radio program in Rwanda that aimed to promote reconciliation. The radio soap opera, called New Dawn, told the story of two fictional communities, and attempted to discourage blind obedience and reliance on direction from authorities and promote independent thought and collective action in problem solving and dispute resolution.
- Study communities represented salient political, economic, and ethnic categories of present-day Rwanda, including: genocide survivor communities (most Tutsi), Twa

communities (the Pygmy minority), prisons, and general population communities from four regions. Members in each community listened to the broadcasts in groups.

- While this intervention had little impact on beliefs or attitudes about interaction with members of other groups, the radio program had a substantial impact on several social norms and behaviors. It increased listeners' willingness to express dissent and improved the way they resolved communal problems by increasing active negotiation, open expression about sensitive topics, and cooperation.
- This study suggests that some social norms about dissent, difference, and dispute resolution can be shifted in the short run by media interventions.

New GCCI Research

GCCI is currently funding three studies that explore various ways of engaging an array of media and edutainment platforms to promote peace and cohesion:

Bridging the gap: Promoting cohesion through an edutainment web series on Venezuelan migrants (La Ferrara and Kim)

Venezuelan migrants in Colombia often encounter xenophobia and exclusion, heightened by misinformation circulated on social media. To help counter these dynamics and improve public perceptions of migrants, Colombian audiovisual company Dirty Kitchen is partnering with the World Bank on a new edutainment intervention—a web series designed to engage and inform through storytelling that seeks to enhance message retention and emotional processing. Produced in Colombia, the series tackles challenges faced by migrants, emphasizing their resilience. Its novel format of short episodes distributed on digital platforms aims to reach audiences prone to misinformation on social media while remaining low-cost and scalable. In collaboration with Dirty Kitchen and the World Bank, researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of the edutainment web series. To do this, researchers plan to vary the frequency, content, and format of the web series, while also grouping participants by gender and initial attitudes towards migrants.

Broadcasting tolerance: Using radio for prejudice reduction to promote social cohesion in refugee-host communities in Kenya (Grossman, Margalit, Wibbles, Torreblanca, and MacDonald)

With over 117 million people forcibly displaced worldwide—85 percent hosted in LMICs—the global refugee crisis increasingly tests the limits of public systems and

social cohesion. In Kenya, progressive reforms like the 2021 Refugees Act and the Shirika Plan seek to promote refugee integration. Yet in resource-scarce, marginalized settings, such policies can unintentionally heighten perceived competition and deepen identity-based divisions. This study evaluates a scalable and cost-effective theory-driven media intervention to promote two-way social cohesion. Researchers will test the impact of a multi-episode serialized radio drama rooted in social psychological theory, using narrative transportation and norm change to build empathy, reduce prejudice, and foster mutual trust. Implemented through a clustered randomized controlled trial across 100 villages, the design leverages randomized encouragement and variation in radio coverage to estimate direct and spillover effects.

The costs and benefits of interventions reducing political violence: Evidence from Brazil (Blattner and Rasocha)

Political violence is on the rise in low-, middle-, and high-income democracies around the world. In Brazil, the context of this study, 187 acts of political violence were recorded in the first half of 2024 alone. Researchers will run a series of field experiments with an international non-profit, two local Brazilian nonprofits, and several national Brazilian media outlets randomizing several thousand partisans to an intervention that involves political deliberations with opposing political groups and exposes several million partisans to a public messaging campaign on social media. They will test whether the interventions impact partisans' support for political violence and democracy.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes have become a hallmark of peacebuilding programming. These interventions are often incorporated as formal components of peace agreements and typically take a multidimensional approach, providing a host of economic and livelihood interventions meant to incentivize former combatants to lay down their weapons and help them to reintegrate economically, socially, and politically into society, thereby minimizing their likelihood of rejoining armed groups if peace agreements fail to hold.

Few rigorous, causal evaluations have examined the impact of these programs, in part because they are often designed and delivered in quick succession following the end of hostilities and commonly delivered alongside other complementary security interventions. However, a handful of non- and quasi-experimental studies have provided important insights as to how DDR processes may have varying impacts based on the characteristics of those who participate. These findings align with a growing

observational literature, which points to the mixed and often limited impacts of DDR interventions ([Sharif 2018](#); [Levely 2014](#)).

In Sierra Leone, for example, Humphreys and Weinstein ([2007](#)) leverage survey data which was systematically gathered on ex-combatants following their participation in the country's DDR process to assess which characteristics are most important in supporting former combatants to reintegrate following conflict.²² They find that ex-combatants who were previously involved in the most abusive military factions had the hardest time integrating socially whereas those with higher levels of education and wealth had the most difficult time reintegrating economically and politically. People with the strongest ideologies, men, and younger ex-combatants remained most connected to their former units. These findings suggest that DDR processes may not be as effective in breaking down allegiances and successfully reintegrating former combatants as previously supposed, though the authors caution that more robust evidence is needed.

One quasi-experimental study in Burundi ([Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii 2012](#)) exploits an exogenous bureaucratic "failure", which delayed the delivery of DDR programming in one region, to evaluate the program's impacts on the economic and political reintegration of former combatants. The authors similarly find heterogeneous impacts based on former combatant characteristics, as well as little indication of improvements in political reintegration or attitudes towards peace.

Vocational training and employment programs (such as the agricultural program in Liberia evaluated by Blattman and Annan, described above—[see study #58](#)) often make up one component of DDR programming, as do behavior change and social skills programming and community reconciliation processes (see [Chapter 3](#), as well as earlier sections of this chapter for more detail on these types of interventions). While behavior change interventions like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) show promise for supporting reintegration of populations at high-risk of violence, particularly when paired with economic incentives for participation (see for example [study #51](#) and [study #52](#)), vocational training programs have shown more mixed effects on both economic and behavioral outcomes ([Carranza and McKenzie 2024](#); [Doleac 2023](#); [Blattman and Ralston 2015](#)). Additional research examining the efficacy of these bundled approaches is therefore needed. Open questions remain regarding the efficacy of individual versus collective approaches to reintegration and the impacts of DDR processes on civilians, in addition to former combatants.

²² The authors also call for future randomized evaluations on DDR processes, calling out that "strikingly few rigorous attempts have been made to identify factors that may explain why some individuals and not others are able to successfully reintegrate after conflict... (and) no studies have systematically compared the reintegration success of those that have and have not participated in demobilization and reintegration programs." While this assessment was made more than a decade ago, relatively limited progress has been made in unpacking this research agenda over the subsequent years.

122. [Reintegrating rebels into civilian life: Quasi-experimental evidence from Burundi \(2012\)](#), Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*

Location: Burundi | **Method:** Quasi-experimental

- Researchers exploited a bureaucratic “failure” that delayed the delivery of DDR programming in one region of Burundi to assess the intervention’s impact on former combatants’ economic and political reintegration. The DDR program was comprised of various components, including reinsertion cash assistance (30,000-185,000 Burundian francs per month depending on rank), various forms of counseling, and a “socio-economic reintegration package” that allowed participants to choose from a menu of opportunities including (i) continued education (e.g., secondary schooling or university); (ii) vocational training; or (iii) in-kind start-up materials for an income generating activity.
- The program led to increases in income among former combatants in the lowest income brackets and improved livelihoods. However, there was no evidence that the program led to improvements in political reintegration—former combatants were no more likely to support the peace accord or change their views towards the current government following the DDR intervention.

Placing women in peacebuilding roles

There is limited evidence from randomized evaluations on whether women’s inclusion in peacebuilding and development programs leads to improved stability or lower levels of violence or disputes. However, the evidence base provides a few building blocks towards an eventual answer, having established that:

- Across a variety of contexts, reserving local leadership roles for women leads to different policy decisions about public goods provision and can shift attitudes regarding women’s participation (See the [J-PAL Policy Insight](#));
- Involving women in decision-making bodies can change attitudes—Mandating women’s participation in a community-driven development program in Afghanistan increased women’s political participation and changed men’s attitudes to women’s participation ([see study #123](#));
- Placing women in visible leadership positions may influence crime reporting—Increasing women’s representation in local government through gender quotas in India led to an increase in the number of documented crimes against women, primarily due to higher reporting of incidents ([see study #124](#));
- Mixed-gender decision-making bodies may be more effective, in some instances, at promoting collective action than single-sex groups—Gains in collective action at the village level, driven by a community-driven reconstruction program in Liberia, only emerged when participants were asked to form mixed-gender teams ([see study #93](#)); and

- Men and women may respond differently to state and customary authority—in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, women were more likely to express a preference for community police officers in an area with no previous police presence, and this was even more the case when those officers were female ([see study #13](#)).

These initial findings suggest there is promise in studying whether women's inclusion in development programming may affect violence and peacebuilding outcomes, even if they do not point towards a particular answer. New studies that evaluate the impact of women's inclusion in interventions that are designed to promote change across a range of outcomes could be encouraged to explore impacts on measures of violence and stability. There is also scope for designing interventions around women's inclusion that are focused on improving stability and reducing violence.

There is a growing body of both experimental and non-experimental research on whether having women in decision-making roles (e.g., legislators, chief executives, police officers, community leaders, etc.) leads to different policy outcomes. Broadly, this research suggests that the gender of decision-makers can have an impact on policy choices and social norms, but more experimental research is needed to understand both the impact of women leaders on peace and security policies, and the mechanisms behind this impact.

Relevant findings from studies covered in other parts of this wrap-up include the following examples:

- A randomized evaluation of a CDD program in Sierra Leone that required women to serve on village committees tasked with making funding decisions found that the program had positive impacts on the set up of village-level organizations and produced higher-quality local public goods (such as functioning primary schools), but did not lead to fundamental changes in how women participated in community meetings or the likelihood that they would occupy leadership roles ([see study #95](#)).
- A randomized evaluation of a CDR program in Liberia found that only when community-level groups were composed of men and women (instead of women alone) did they observe higher levels of social cooperation ([see study #93](#)). Researchers suggest that female-only groups may have relied on traditional women's networks unaffected by the intervention to make decisions, while the intervention improved communities' ability to solve mixed-gender collective action problems.
- In India, researchers partnered with the Madhya Pradesh Police department to evaluate the impact of a program that introduced designated women's help desks (WHDs) in police stations throughout the state alongside training for officers. The study found that officers in stations with WHDs were more likely to register cases of GBV, particularly when female officers were assigned to run the help desks ([see study #15](#)).

- A randomized evaluation of the introduction of uniformed community police officers in rural Papua New Guinea found that the presence of any community police officer increased the probability that incidents of violence against women would be reported, and this was particularly true when the officer was female ([see study #13](#)).
- In contrast, a lab-in-the-field experiment that randomly varied the gender composition of policing teams comprised of Liberian National Police officers found no evidence that increasing the concentration of women improved group sensitivity to sexual or gender-based violence or shifted men's beliefs about women's roles in policing ([see study #18](#)).

Randomized evaluations on the impact of gender on policy demonstrate that women in positions of power may choose to implement different policies than men. A review of eleven randomized evaluations on gender quotas in Afghanistan, Lesotho, and across 24 states in India, for instance, found that reservation quotas influenced women's political participation and policy outcomes and increased the provision of public goods aligned with female voters' preferences ([J-PAL 2018](#)). While female leaders' policy preferences differed from men, they also differed from one another based on geographic location and background, cautioning against the assumption that women as a group have homogenous policy preferences.

Are women leaders more likely to pursue peaceful policies? The question is different from whether women as individuals are likely to do so, in part because the considerations are much broader and insofar as women's choices may differ, they appear to depend on context. A review of established democracies between 1970-2000 found that having a higher proportion of female legislators was associated with less state conflict behavior and lower defense spending ([Koch and Fulton 2011](#)). The same study found that female executives displayed increased conflict behavior and defense spending, which the authors suggest may in part be due to efforts by women leaders to combat gender stereotypes.

A quasi-experimental study by Dube and Harish ([2020](#)) of the effect of female rule on European polities between 1480-1913 found that polities led by queens were 27 percent more likely to engage in inter-state conflict than those led by kings. Married and unmarried queens faced different conditions and made different choices: unmarried queens were more likely to be attacked than unmarried kings, while married queens were more likely to attack than married kings.

123. [Empowering women through development aid: Evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan \(2013\)](#), Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers drew on data from the same randomized evaluation of the National Solidarity program in Afghanistan ([see study #82](#)) to test how mandating the involvement of women affected women's participation in decision-making and attitudes towards their involvement. Community development councils were required to be gender-balanced and to fund at least one project that targeted women.
- Researchers found that the program led to increased women's participation in village governance, community life, and economic activities. Men in program villages became more open to female participation in local governance.
- Empowerment impacts were nevertheless largely limited to the spheres in which the program operated; there were no broader changes in attitudes toward the role of women in the household or in society more broadly, an important caveat for future programming.

124. [The power of political voice: Women's political representation and crime in India \(2012\)](#), Iyer, Mani, Mishra, and Topalova, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

Location: India | **Method:** Quasi-experiment

- Researchers studied the consequences of a 1993 constitutional amendment that called for a random one third of village council leaders ("Pradhan") positions to be reserved for women. Specifically, they assessed how greater political representation of a traditionally underrepresented and disadvantaged group affected crime outcomes, including the number of reported crimes against women.
- Researchers found that the introduction of mandated quotas for women leaders led to an increase in the number of documented crimes against women, though no increase in crimes against men or gender-neutral crimes. They suggest this rise was primarily due to an increase in reporting of incidents to police, rather than due to an increase in the number of actual crimes against women committed.
- Quotas also heightened police responsiveness to crimes against women. Following the implementation of quotas, the number of arrests increased for both overall crimes committed against women as well as for kidnapping of women. Placing women in more visible roles may have lowered barriers to reporting and put additional pressure on police to record cases.

Priorities for future research

The experimental evidence base on peacebuilding, reconciliation, and post-conflict recovery is growing, but key evidence gaps remain. The evaluations that do exist identify some unexpected and counterintuitive outcomes, and as a result, there is need for additional research. In particular, more evidence is needed around preventing and responding to armed conflict, protecting vulnerable populations in conflict settings, peacebuilding in displacement-affected settings, and effective recovery strategies. Broadly, future studies should aim to test fundamental theories of peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, such that their findings are applicable across contexts and across types of programming.

Randomized evaluations may be particularly well placed to explore the following example evidence gaps:

- While there is an emerging body of evidence on social networks and intergroup contact theory, most existing experimental evidence has focused on activities that form relatively weak bonds between individuals and groups. Future research could extend these findings by experimenting with the creation of deeper horizontal linkages as a means of constructing peaceful bargains, such as the creation of financial linkages between groups, for example, though the study of trade associations, unions, or business associations in conflict-affected contexts (see [study #110](#) above as an example). Can creating deeper intergroup bonds prevent future conflict? (For more open questions on intergroup contact, see the [“deep dive”](#) above).
- While reconciliation and dispute resolution programming have been shown to build social capital and strengthen dispute resolution norms, these impacts have come with significant negative, unintended consequences on outcomes such as psychosocial wellbeing and extrajudicial punishment. How can future interventions be designed to preserve the positive impacts of such programming, while also mitigating the harmful effects?
- More broadly, what other types of interventions can restore broken ties and promote social capital in the aftermath of conflict? What programming can help protect vulnerable populations in post-conflict settings, or build social cohesion and maintain peace between refugees and host communities in displacement-affected settings? What role can behavior change programs play in promoting positive decision-making and social cohesion for conflict prevention and reintegration?
- What programs—including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration—can effectively incentivize recruited members to disengage from armed groups or reduce their incentives and ability to commit violence in ways that stick? What strategies are most effective in breaking down command chains and group identities and how does the composition of reintegration programs (e.g., based on age, rank, or education of former combatants) impact their effectiveness?

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Chapter 6: What works in combating violence against women?

Gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) in particular—including sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological violence or abuse—presents a pervasive global challenge. Worldwide, roughly one in three women have suffered physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes, with far-reaching physical, psychological, and economic consequences for survivors and their families.²³ Some of the well documented consequences of intimate partner violence (IPV) include injuries, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, long-lasting mental disorders, and, in the most extreme cases, death ([Chang et al. 2020](#)).

This chapter highlights a growing body of experimental literature on addressing these global challenges. Given the prevalence of GBV among women, this chapter focuses primarily on efforts to prevent and respond to VAW including by shifting harmful gender norms and attitudes, increasing economic empowerment, and improving the responsiveness of institutions to survivors.²⁴ In addition, it closes with a brief discussion on

23 World Health Organization. 2017. "Violence against women." Accessed June 4, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

24 This review does not include studies addressing GBV perpetrated against girls, LGBTQI+ persons, boys, and men. For more on the impact of life skills training on violence against girls, please see J-PAL's Policy Brief on "[Boosting Adolescent Girls' Agency Through Life Skills Training](#)".

a related growing literature focused on the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence, exploring when, how, and why some armed groups (including state and non-state actors) perpetrate sexual, physical, and psychological violence during conflict.

This review does not seek to be exhaustive in terms of available studies and methodologies, but should serve to complement other existing resources, such as those developed by FCDO's [What Works to Prevent Violence](#) program, the WHO's [RESPECT](#) framework, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative's (SVRI) [research resources](#), and IPA's policy brief on [preventing individual-level violence in conflict settings](#), as well as work funded through their [Intimate Partner Violence Initiative](#).

Key Takeaways

Emerging insights based on the literature in this chapter include:

- Gender-transformative programming has shown mixed but generally promising impacts on reducing IPV, though effects vary based on training format and intensity. It appears that adapting content to culturally relevant practices may improve participation and IPV outcomes, but further research is needed to isolate which components of gender training drive the strongest and most durable changes.
- Media and edutainment campaigns can shift attitudes and awareness around GBV across diverse contexts. However, evidence on whether these attitude changes translate to reduced violence is too limited to draw conclusions. Public screenings of anti-VAW content have also shown promise for shifting community-level acceptance of GBV.
- Evidence suggests that effectiveness of economic interventions may depend on the type. Cash and food transfers seem to be a promising way to reduce intimate partner violence. These interventions may work by increasing women's empowerment and economic independence, and by reducing household conflict. In some cases, however, a limited evidence base suggests that effects may be heterogeneous—in some settings, even when cash transfers reduced IPV overall, certain subgroups experienced increases—suggesting a need for more research to understand when backlash may occur.
- Evidence on strengthening security-sector responsiveness to GBV is growing but still nascent. Early findings suggesting that making it easier for women to report violence—such as by increasing the presence of female officers who are supported by the institution or establishing women-focused spaces in police stations—can increase crime reporting and/or registration.

Social norms

This section examines the evidence around interventions looking to reduce the incidence of VAW by shifting societal views that can justify this form of violence. These include gender training, couples' dialogues, and media campaigns. Although these programs can vary widely in terms of activities and target groups, they all share the same goal of addressing gender attitudes and norms around violence to reduce IPV prevalence. Some programs, depending on the context and format, have shown more promise than others. Nonetheless, this growing body of evidence has reinforced the need to invest in programming that actively tackles gender inequality as a way of generating sustainable change.

Transforming norms through training and dialogue

Gender-transformative programming (such as gender training) usually includes activities designed to develop participants' critical thinking around gender norms and shift their attitudes and behaviors with the goal of, ultimately, leading to healthier and more peaceful relationships among couples and community members. This transformative approach seeks to actively examine and challenge the potential norms that underlie imbalances of power between men and women, such as perceptions of gender roles and notions of masculinity. Gender training may reduce incidents of IPV through various mechanisms, including by reducing acceptance of VAW, fostering increased awareness of women's rights, improving communication and negotiation skills, or increasing help-seeking behaviors.

Training interventions can be conducted either with women or men alone or with couples and families as a whole. Common activities include sessions on sexual health practices, dialogue, and role-playing exercises. When working with women, the programs sometimes leverage the existence of self-help groups (SHGs)—informal groups of individuals who come together to address common problems. This type of programming is grounded on a large stream of work from the public health field. The Stepping Stones program in South Africa, for example, was one of the first interventions to test this approach ([Jewkes et al. 2008](#)). The studies detailed below represent some of the most recent rigorous impact evaluations of gender transformative programs.

Overall, the evidence on gender training remains mixed given differences in programs' formats (e.g., implementation models, target audiences, and combination of services), but in general it appears to constitute a promising approach. Researchers found that providing sexual harassment awareness training to college men reduced harassment against women in their peer groups and increased perceived disapproval of such behavior, illustrating the effectiveness of engaging men ([Sharma 2023](#)). Adapting gender-transformative trainings to culturally relevant practices seems to be one way to improve participation and boost impact, as shown by [Doyle et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Sharma et al. \(2020\)](#). These trainings have been found effective in increasing women's empowerment by improving their decision-making power within the household

([Subramanyam et al. 2017](#)). An innovative couples-focused program that prioritized relationship quality over addressing violence directly showed promise in reducing IPV without provoking backlash (Boyer et al. 2022). Emerging evidence also points to the potential of new digital delivery models, with a WhatsApp-based virtual support group program for men in Peru showing promise in reducing sexual violence (Boyer et al. 2025). Further research is needed to understand which specific elements of gender trainings are most impactful and to more critically assess the importance of involving men in such trainings.

While this review does not focus on violence against girls, there is limited and mixed evidence on the impact of life skills training on the prevalence of violence against girls and girls' attitudes toward violence. Two examples include a program in Malawi ([Decker et al. 2018](#)) that reduced past-year sexual violence prevalence by 9.2 percent, while a program in Liberia ([Özler et al. 2020](#)) had no significant effects on a sexual violence index. In a third example, Tanzanian girls and their boyfriends participated in activities to improve sexual and reproductive health and shift attitudes toward masculinity, gender-based violence, and sexual relationships, ultimately reducing intimate partner violence against the girls ([Shah et al. 2023](#)).²⁵

125. [Guy talk: Catalyzing peer effects on IPV through virtual support groups for men \(2025\)](#), Boyer, Field, Lehrer, Morrison, and Piras, *Working Paper*

Location: Peru | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Peru, where IPV rates are among the highest in the world, researchers collaborated with the International Rescue Committee and IPA Peru to evaluate *Hablemos entre Patas*, a WhatsApp-based relationship improvement program for men. Approximately 2,700 men in relationships were randomly assigned either to: (1) a WhatsApp group of 50 members, which received daily practical, behavioral challenges aimed at improving relationships for a period of 30 days, or (2) to a comparison group.
- The program reduced the probability that female partners of WhatsApp group members reported sexual violence by 20 percent, with strongest impacts observed among younger men, men whose partners reported no alcohol use, and men with a prior history of violence.
- The program reduced sexual violence by similar magnitudes among men regardless of whether they initially viewed IPV as sometimes justified or not, and it did not meaningfully change attitudes toward violence, suggesting impacts operated less through shifts in norms and more through improvements in emotional regulation.

25 For more on this evidence, see J-PAL's Policy Brief on "[Boosting Adolescent Girls' Agency Through Life Skills Training](#)."

- WhatsApp group composition also appears to have driven results. Groups with an overall higher likelihood for violence prior to the intervention experienced larger decreases in sexual violence, suggesting an important role of peer effects and demonstrating the importance of sorting groups according to key baseline characteristics.

126. [Sex, power, and adolescence: Intimate partner violence and sexual behaviors \(2023\)](#), Shah, Seager, Montalvao, and Goldstein, *Working Paper*

Location: Tanzania | **Method:** RCT

- In collaboration with BRAC Maendeleo, researchers evaluated the impact of two interventions in Tanzania: a goal-setting activity for young females aimed at improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes, and a soccer-based curriculum for their boyfriends designed to transform attitudes and behaviors regarding masculinity, gender-based violence, and sexual relationships.
- Both interventions led to reduced reports of intimate partner violence among females, with greater efficacy observed among sexually active participants at baseline.
- The soccer curriculum improved male attitudes towards violence and risky sexual behaviors, while females that participated in the goal-setting activity took more control of their SRH by leaving violent relationships.
- The researchers suggest the reduction in female experience of IPV stems from improvement in boys' attitudes towards IPV and risky sex, as well as girls forming strategies for improved SRH and leaving violent relationships. Future research should focus on the potential long-term effects of targeting gender dynamics in adolescent relationships.

127. [Tackling sexual harassment: Short and long-run experimental evidence from India \(2023\)](#), Sharma, *Working Paper*

Location: India | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- The researcher partnered with local NGO, Safecity, to evaluate the impacts of a sexual harassment awareness training targeted to college students in New Delhi. The training consisted of providing legal information on sexual harassment and ways to identify it, as well as perspective-taking, empathy-building, and bystander intervention exercises.
- The training took place in three colleges. In two of the colleges, the researcher randomly assigned the men in 93 classes to either receive the training or not. In one college, they randomly assigned the women in 69 classes to receive a low- or-high intensity version of the training.
- The training reduced sexual harassment perpetrated by men as reported by women in their peer groups and increased men's perception of peer disapproval against sexual harassment, even if it did not change their intrinsic attitudes towards

it. The program also reduced interpersonal relationships between men and women, which appears to be driven by women's choices.

- These results highlight that not only is engaging men effective in reducing harassment against women, but a group-based approach may be important in eliciting peer behavior change.

128. [Improving family functioning and reducing violence in the home in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo: a pilot cluster-randomized controlled trial of Safe at Home \(2023\)](#), Falb, Asghar, Blackwell, Baseme, Nyanguba, Roth, and Hategekimana, *BMJ Open*

Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers conducted a pilot study of IRC's Safe at Home program in conflict-affected Democratic Republic of the Congo from November 2019 to September 2021. The study aimed to measure the program's impact on co-occurring violence within homes, acceptance of harsh discipline of women and children, power sharing in couples, and gender attitudes.
- Safe at Home combines IPV and violence against children (VAC) programming through single-sex discussion groups and family discussion groups in order to reduce co-occurring violence within households and acceptance of harsh discipline.
- 202 heterosexual couples were recruited and randomly assigned to treatment or waitlist. The 104 couples receiving treatment met weekly for single-sex discussion groups and monthly family discussion groups. In total, the program included 24 sessions for men, 18 sessions for women, and five family sessions.
- Though the pilot study did not find improved family functioning for women in the program, women did report a reduction in co-occurring violence by their partners. Specifically, women who participated in Safe at Home programming with their partners reported greater reductions in physical, sexual, and emotional IPV, as well as in harsh disciplining of children than women who were waitlisted for the program.
- Similarly, men enrolled in the program reported reductions in their perpetration of IPV in all forms, as well as reductions in their use of harsh discipline on children.
- The study also found more equitable attitudes, skills, and behavior among couples.
- This pilot study points to the interconnectedness of multiple forms of violence within homes and emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to reducing IPV and VAC.

129. [Religious leaders can motivate men to cede power and reduce intimate partner violence: Experimental evidence from Uganda \(2022\)](#), Boyer, Paluck, Annan, Nevatia, Cooper, Namubiru, Heise, and Lehrer, *PNAS*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Uganda, where IPV prevalence is high, researchers evaluated *Becoming One*, a faith-based couples counseling program delivered by local faith leaders. Couples were randomly assigned to participate in a 12-session group counseling course that focused on improving couples' relationships in a way that benefited both women and men, rather than on violence specifically, or to a comparison group.
- One year later, couples offered the program experienced a 12 percent reduction in IPV, as well as reductions of violence within the household more broadly. Both

men and women also experienced improvements in their relationships, reporting greater trust and intimacy, less depression, improvements in sexual intimacy, and more time spent together.

- Women participating in the program gained control and decision-making power, mainly through increased participation in decisions about what to do with men's earning. By contrast, men reported a loss of control and decision-making power, but this did not appear to provoke backlash or increased violence among participants.
- The positive effects, both on the reduction of violence and on couple dynamics, were closely linked to improvements in the couple's communication and conflict resolution skills.

130. [Intimate partner violence \(IPV\) prevention using a cross-sectoral couple-based intervention: Results from a cluster randomised control trial in Ibadan, Nigeria \(2022\)](#), John, Adebayo, Boychuk, and OlaOlorun, *BMJ Global Health*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers implemented a multifaceted intervention aimed at reducing IPV among heterosexual couples in urban and periurban Nigeria. Women were randomly allocated to receive one of four programming bundles: (i) gender socialization (GS) intervention, (ii) GS and financial literacy, (iii) GS, financial literacy, and contraceptive counseling, or (iv) no intervention. The GS intervention consisted of a training for couples that promoted gender equality within the relationship.
- Women in the GS-only and GS plus financial literacy groups reported significantly less physical IPV compared to women in the comparison group. They also observe reductions in emotional IPV but no impact on sexual IPV.
- Across intervention arms, qualitative data indicated that couples experienced improvements in communication, trust, conflict management skills, and mutual respect, likely contributing to reduced violence in their relationships.
- These findings suggest multifaceted interventions targeting traditional gender norms and providing relationship education may be able to sustainably reduce physical IPV by addressing diverse relationship dynamics and societal norms.

131. [Effectiveness of a culturally appropriate intervention to prevent intimate partner violence and HIV transmission among men, women, and couples in rural Ethiopia: Findings from a cluster-randomized controlled trial \(2020\)](#), Sharma, Leight, Verani,

Tewolde, and Deyessa, *PLoS Medicine*

Location: Ethiopia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers implemented a gender-transformative training called Unite for Better Life (UBL) in the context of the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony (which serves as a forum for community-level discussions) to evaluate the program's effectiveness on reducing IPV and HIV risk behaviors. Villages in southern Ethiopia were randomly assigned to one of four groups: (i) only women received UBL; (ii) only men received UBL; (iii) both men and women (couples) received UBL; or (iv) a comparison group.

- All three forms of delivery (women only, men only, and couples) showed positive impacts in reducing HIV risk behaviors, improving intra-household decision-making, and increasing male involvement in household tasks. However, the UBL training was only effective in reducing male perpetration of sexual IPV in the previous year when delivered exclusively to men.
- Taken together, these results suggest that male engagement can be important for the success of IPV interventions such as UBL. They also highlight that participants may need time to engage with their peers in same-sex groups, especially on sensitive topics, in order to enable reflection, challenge norms, and change behaviors.

132. [Effective prevention of intimate partner violence through couples training: A randomised controlled trial of Indashyikirwa in Rwanda \(2020\)](#), Dunkle, Stern, Chatterji and Heise, *BMJ Global Health*

Location: Rwanda | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers partnered with CARE Rwanda, the Rwandan Men's Resource Center, and the Rwanda Women's Network to evaluate the impact of a gender transformative couples training on incidences of IPV. The researchers randomly selected fourteen villages to provide a couples training program to members of the local savings and loan association (VLSA). The remaining fourteen villages only participated in a VLSA. The training focused on power dynamics, personal reflection, and fostering healthy relationships.
- Participants in the training program experienced reductions in IPV compared to those in the VLSA alone, with women 56 percent less likely to experience IPV and men 46 percent less likely to perpetrate it after 24 months. Couples in the training program also experienced decreased household conflict, improved communication and trust, and declines in children's exposure to violence at home.
- The results demonstrate that a couples training can be beneficial when staffed by highly trained facilitators and with strong referral networks.

133. [Effectiveness of a multi-level intervention to reduce men's perpetration of intimate partner violence: A cluster randomized controlled trial \(2020\)](#), Christofides, Hatcher, Rebombo, McBride, Munshi, Pino, Abdelatif, Peacock, Levin, and Jewkes, *Trials*

Location: South Africa | **Method:** RCT

- In Johannesburg, researchers collaborated with Sonke Gender Justice, to evaluate CHANGE, a gender transformative program that aimed to reduce men's perpetration of IPV through community mobilization, human rights and GBV education, and local advocacy. Researchers identified 18 areas that were randomly assigned to either receive the CHANGE program or not.
- The program, overall, did not impact men's use of physical or sexual IPV, including severe IPV in the past year. Additionally, there were no differences between intervention and comparison communities in non-partner rape perpetration, gender attitudes, transactional sex, or social cohesion.
- Limited program success was linked to inconsistent implementation and low attendance. Most men engaged through short door-to-door discussions, while intensive workshops faced low attendance, potentially due to job-seeking.

134. [Results from a cluster-randomized trial to evaluate a microfinance and peer health leadership intervention to prevent HIV and intimate partner violence among social networks of Tanzanian men \(2020\)](#), Maman, Mulawa, Balvanz, McNaughton Reyes, Kilonzo, Yamanis, Singh, Kajula, *PLOS ONE*
Location: Tanzania | **Method:** RCT
- In Tanzania, researchers partnered with local organizations to evaluate a program that combined small loans and business training with peer health leadership in male social groups (“camps”).
 - Peer leaders were trained in leadership, gender-based violence, HIV prevention, and communication skills to promote HIV testing and reduce violence among their social groups. Sixty camps were randomly assigned to receive the program immediately or after the study ended.
 - After 30 months, there was no reduction in intimate partner violence or sexually transmitted infections. However, men in the program were more likely to get tested for HIV and reported less support for harmful gender norms.
135. [Impact of the Change Starts at Home Trial on women’s experience of intimate partner violence in Nepal \(2020\)](#), Clark, Shrestha, Ferguson, Calvert, Gupta, Batayeh, Bergenfeld and Oakes, *SSM - Population Health*
Location: Nepal | **Method:** RCT
- In Nepal, researchers evaluated a 9-month radio drama combined with weekly couples’ listening and discussion groups (LDGs) and community mobilization activities such as street theatre, film screenings, and leader-led forums.
 - Across three districts, 36 communities received either radio-only, radio plus LDGs, or radio plus LDGs and community engagement.
 - Though researchers found no significant change at the broader community level, frequent LDG participation reduced physical, sexual, and financial IPV (e.g.,, restricting women’s income or taking earnings) and improved couples’ decision-making.
136. [Engaging men to transform inequitable gender attitudes and prevent intimate partner violence \(2020\)](#), Vaillant, Koussoubé, Roth, Pierotti, Hossain, Falb, *BMJ Global Health*
Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** RCT
- In partnership with the International Rescue Committee, researchers evaluated the Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls: Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP) program, where men joined weekly peer discussion groups to reflect on gender roles, power, and violence, aiming to shift norms and reduce intimate partner violence.
 - EMAP significantly reduced men’s intention to commit violence and improved gender-equitable attitudes, relationship quality, and men’s involvement in housework. However, it did not reduce women’s reported experience of IPV.
 - Findings suggest that changing attitudes and behaviors is feasible, but reducing IPV may require additional components—such as emotional regulation, economic support, or community norm change—to achieve sustained impact.

137. [Gender-transformative Bandedereho couples' intervention to promote male engagement in reproductive and maternal health and violence prevention in Rwanda: Findings from a randomized controlled trial \(2018\)](#), Doyle, Levto, Barker, Bastian, Bingenheimer, Kazimbaya, Nzabonimpa, Pulerwitz, Sayinzoga, Sharma, and Shattuck, *PLoS ONE*

Location: Rwanda | **Method:** RCT

- In Rwanda researchers evaluated the gender-transformative program called Bandedereho (meaning "role model" in Kinyarwanda). Couples from local communities were recruited to participate in the program, which engaged men and their partners in participatory, small group sessions of critical reflection and dialogue around issues such as gender and power, fatherhood, couple's communication and decision-making, IPV, and more.
- Twenty-one months after the start of the intervention, about 33 percent of women in the treatment group reported experiencing physical or sexual IPV in the previous year, relative to 57 percent in the comparison group. Both men and women also reported more male engagement in household tasks and less male dominance in decision-making.
- These results point to the importance of culturally adapted gender-transformative interventions (conducted with both men and couples) in working to reduce persistent gender disparities and influence a variety of health- and gender-related behaviors.
- A six-year follow-up study (Doyle et al. 2023) found that reductions in IPV, increased male involvement in household tasks, and more balanced decision-making were sustained over time, along with other long-term improvements in health and gender-related behaviors. The organization has partnered with the Rwandan government to train local community health workers to deliver the program nationally (Doyle et al. 2025).

138. [A cluster randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of SAFE on spousal violence against women and girls in slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh \(2018\)](#), Naved, Mamun, Mourin, and Parvin, *PLoS ONE*

Location: Bangladesh | **Method:** RCT

- In 2012, researchers assessed the impact of Growing up Safe and Healthy (SAFE), a 20-month gender training to reduce IPV in slums of Dhaka. SAFE consisted of interactive group sessions, community mobilization, health and legal services, and training and advocacy. All communities involved in the program received the awareness campaign and health and legal services, but researchers randomly assigned communities to one of three training conditions: (i) both men and women participated in trainings; (ii) only women participated in trainings; or (iii) no training sessions were held.
- Overall, researchers did not find significant impacts of the training on IPV. However, among adolescent girls (aged 15-19), SAFE lowered their risk of experiencing physical IPV by 21 percent when delivered to both men and women in the community.

- These findings are especially important, as evidence suggests that adolescent girls are at higher risk of experiencing IPV than older women. Results also highlight the importance of including men in gender trainings.

139. [Working with men to prevent intimate partner violence in a conflict-affected setting: A pilot cluster randomized controlled trial in rural Côte d'Ivoire \(2014\)](#), Hossain, Zimmerman, Kiss, Abramsky, Kone, Bakayoko-Topolska, Annan, Lehmann, and Watts, *BMC Public Health*

Location: Côte d'Ivoire | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers evaluated the relative impact of adding a male-focused intervention aimed at shifting pervasive gender norms and notions of masculinity through group discussions to a community-wide GBV prevention program in Côte d'Ivoire—a conflict-affected setting.
- While the evaluation did not provide evidence on the program's impact of IPV between couples, it did find men participating in the supplemental intervention reported decreased intentions of using physical IPV. Additionally, they showed improved acceptance for a woman to refuse sex with her husband, increased ability to control their hostility, and greater participation in household tasks.
- Researchers highlighted a decline in IPV levels between baseline and follow-up surveys between intervention and comparison communities, suggesting that the existing comprehensive community GBV programming may also have influenced the violence perpetrated by men exposed to the community program. The men's discussion groups may further this trend by decreasing factors commonly associated with the perpetration and normalization of IPV.

140. [Findings from the SASA! Study: A cluster randomized controlled trial to assess the impact of a community mobilization intervention to prevent violence against women and reduce HIV risk in Kampala, Uganda \(2014\)](#), Abramsky, Devries, Kiss, Nakuti, Kyegombe, Starmann, Cundill, Francisco, Kaye, Musuya, Michau, and Watts, *BMC Medicine*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT

- In Uganda, researchers collaborated with Raising Voices and CEDOVIP to evaluate SASA!, a community mobilization intervention. Local community members were trained to facilitate informal activities that promoted critical analysis of gender power imbalances. No specific activities were mandated, but examples included conversations, door-to-door discussions, training sessions, and public events.
- In SASA! communities, community members were more likely to have progressive attitudes and support women refusing sex and less likely to accept men's use of violence against women. While reports of physical and sexual IPV decreased, these results were imprecisely estimated. There was also evidence suggesting the program reduced men's acceptance of violence against their partners.
- As these results were collected at the community level and not limited just to individuals with high exposure to the program, these findings provide evidence in support of the community diffusion process at the heart of this intervention and highlight the importance of involving multiple strategies and different community stakeholders in these programs.

New GCCI Research

Four GCCI-funded studies underway will produce evidence on various training and norms interventions tailored to address sexual violence and harassment:

[Training local leaders to prevent and reduce gender-based violence in their communities](#) (Field, Aldana, and Romero)

In Peru, researchers partnered with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations to evaluate the effectiveness of an intensive training for rural village leaders designed to reduce acceptance of gender-based violence and provide practical methods for community members to identify and report these crimes. The training includes topics on beliefs and stereotypes surrounding gender roles, norms regarding violence, and strategies to identify and prevent GBV, as well as training in soft skills such as leadership, decision-making and empowerment. ([Evaluation summary](#)).

[Preventing gender-based harassment and violence on public transport: A randomized evaluation of normative and bystander interventions in Bengaluru](#)

(Barnhardt, Mookherjee, and Mamidi)

This study evaluates interventions designed to shift the permissive social norm that tolerates the harassment of women on public buses in Bengaluru, India. Anchored in Bicchieri's theory of social norms—which posits that behavior is shaped by empirical expectations (what people believe others do), normative expectations (what people believe others think should be done), and optionally sanctions—the project tests whether targeted campaigns can alter social beliefs and public behavior in a high-density, weak-deterrence environment. Researchers are implementing a four-arm randomized evaluation across Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation bus routes. The arms include: (1) a normative expectations campaign to create a shared definition of harassment and it being wrong, (2) a sanctions campaign to encourage informal enforcement through bystanders, (3) a combined campaign, and (4) a comparison group.

Improving women's safety at work in the urban retail sector in India (Beaman, Alfonsi, Sharma, and Sharma)

This study evaluates the impact of a targeted sexual harassment (SH) training program on workplace safety and climate within small urban firms in India. The project examines whether structured training sessions can mitigate workplace harassment, improve employer and employee safety practices, and improve workplace dynamics, with a specific focus on urban settings where gender-based safety issues pose significant barriers to equitable work environments. The project design will also help to understand the characteristics of firms and firm owners that can be induced to take up such training successfully in a context when there is no monitoring of workplace practices of such firms and where rights of workers are extremely limited. The intervention includes a comprehensive SH training program tailored to meet the needs of small and informal firms in densely populated areas.

Empowering girls, engaging boys: Reducing gender-based violence in Pakistan through school-level interventions (Serra, Malhi, and Ahsan)

This project evaluates the impact of school-based interventions aimed at reducing GBV and empowering adolescent girls in Punjab, Pakistan, where harassment restricts girls' mobility and school attendance. In collaboration with the University of Health Sciences and the School Education Department, researchers conduct a clustered randomized evaluation in gender-segregated public middle schools. Girls in treatment schools will receive self-defense training focused on situational awareness, assertive communication, and verbal and physical response strategies. Boys in treatment schools receive GBV sensitization and bystander intervention training. The study will assess the impacts of the programs on girls' mobility, experiences of harassment in public spaces and education outcomes, and on boys' awareness, attitudes toward GBV and willingness to intervene.

Mass media campaigns

As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), media interventions, such as radio and television programming, are increasingly being evaluated as tools for shifting social norms that can lead to violence. As demonstrated across a broad range of countries, education entertainment—or “edutainment,” which dramatizes a situation with the aim of spreading information and changing attitudes and behaviors—has shown potential to reduce acceptance and incidence of violence against women, while also encouraging reporting. These interventions provide a far-reaching and low-cost way of spreading information to large numbers of people, which can be especially appealing in fragile settings ([Paluck et al. 2010](#)). While this approach is emerging as a promising strategy, the evidence is still mixed, highlighting the need for more research to identify the formats and conditions under which it is effective.

Even where positive impacts are observed, the mechanisms driving these results remain unclear. For instance, does screening videos *publicly* amplify reductions in VAW by influencing perceptions of what others think as desirable? Or is the dramatized delivery of anti-violence messaging sufficient in shifting norms and behaviors?

In Uganda, Green, Wilke, and Cooper ([2020](#)) highlighted the importance of screening VAW videos publicly to large audiences. They suggest that screening videos in public settings may have helped shift societal norms around acceptance of GBV, given viewers were simultaneously taking in these messages with others in their community. Building on this work, Green and co-authors ([2023](#)) partnered with IPA to evaluate a locally tailored radio program on gender-related attitudes and behaviors in Tanzania. They found the drama was effective in reducing support for early and forced marriage (the core message), as well as increasing support of gender equality. Notably, more than a year after exposure, participants also expressed less condoning attitudes toward intimate partner violence. These findings underscore edutainment’s potential to influence norms beyond its immediate narrative and to sustain attitudinal change over time.

141. [**Increasing awareness of gender-based violence outside of the household: Experimental evidence from a field experiment in rural Tanzania \(2025\)**](#), Montano, Emmanuel, Green, Groves, and Rahmani, *Working Paper*

Location: Tanzania | **Method:** RCT

- In 34 villages in Tanzania, researchers evaluated a 90-minute radio drama, *Boda Bora*, that raised awareness about sexual violence in public spaces. The story follows a young motorcycle taxi driver who mobilizes his community to stop abuse.
- The drama increased awareness of sexual assault risks, boosted willingness to testify against perpetrators, and raised the priority of GBV as a community issue. These effects lasted over a year and spread to spouses and teenage children of male listeners.

- The study shows that narrative media can shift norms and increase willingness to act. Engaging men as household influencers helped spread change across families, suggesting a scalable path to community mobilization against GBV.

142. [Effects of digital chatbot on gender attitudes and exposure to intimate partner violence among young women in South Africa \(2023\)](#), De Filippo, Alexandra, Bellatin, Tietz, Grant, Whitefield, Nkopane, Devereux, Crawford, Vermeulen, and Hatcher, *PLOS Digital Health*

Location: South Africa | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers sought to evaluate the impact of digital, interactive chatbots on the prevalence of IPV and gender attitudes among young women (aged 18–24) in South Africa. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four treatment arms delivered via WhatsApp: (1) *Attention* featured an interactive chatbot with sexual health information, (2) *Gamified* offered a gamified chatbot with behaviorally-informed content, (3) *Narrative* utilized a narrative-based chatbot with behaviorally-informed content, and (4) the comparison group received no intervention. In the gamified chatbot, young women were guided through interactions with a WhatsApp chatbot that aimed to help them navigate intimate relationships.
- All treatments improved beliefs in gender equity relative to the comparison group. Women who participated in the *Gamified* chatbot reported less IPV, while the *Narrative* treatment had no impact on IPV exposure.
- The authors suggest reductions in IPV could be attributed to the *Gamified* chatbot's tailored feedback on gender beliefs, support for users in identifying unhealthy relationship behaviors, and assistance with implementing skills to ensure personal safety—recognized as important elements for fostering safety in relationships. Technological solutions like behaviorally informed chatbots could complement existing services and improve youth's access to care.

143. [Can media campaigns empower women facing gender-based violence amid COVID-19? \(2023\)](#), Christia, Larreguy, Parker-Magyar, and Quintero, *Nature Human Behaviour*

Location: Egypt | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In collaboration with the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, researchers evaluated the impact of disseminating content designed to shift norms around GBV and provide support to survivors via Facebook, WhatsApp, and television.
- Women were recruited via Facebook ads to receive women's rights information and videos. They were randomly assigned to: (i) weekly WhatsApp reminders to watch a women's empowerment TV show, (ii) weekly WhatsApp links to short empowerment videos, (iii) group WhatsApp messages with video links, (iv) weekly Facebook messages with video links, or (v) a comparison group.
- Women who received the videos or reminders to watch the TV show increased their knowledge of resources available to those exposed to GBV, but there was limited

evidence that the videos and reminders impacted underlying norms about gender equality or the acceptability of violence against women.

- The findings, consistent with similar studies, indicate edutainment may increase violence reporting but not alter attitudes. However, social media remains impactful due to its popularity, low cost, and bypassing mobility constraints, such as those caused by Covid-19.

144. **[A radio drama's effects on attitudes toward early and forced marriage: Results from a field experiment in rural Tanzania \(2022\)](#)**, Green, Groves, Manda, Montano, Rahmani, *Comparative Political Studies*

Location: Tanzania | **Method:** RCT

- In partnership with UZIKWASA, researchers evaluated the Tamapendo radio drama, a locally produced audio drama about a young girl resisting forced marriage. Thirty villages were randomly assigned to either a screening of the drama or a placebo drama about HIV/AIDS.
- Two weeks after the screening, the drama reduced support for forced and early marriage, improved perceptions of community norms, increased willingness to report underage marriage, and improved gender equality attitudes.
- Fifteen months later, effects on personal attitudes toward forced marriage persisted, albeit diminished. Effects on gender equality and attitudes toward intimate partner violence also remained.
- Findings suggest that edutainment can influence broader gender norms beyond the immediate topic of the drama, and that effects can be long-lasting even after a single exposure.

145. **[Countering violence against women by encouraging disclosure: A mass media experiment in rural Uganda \(2020\)](#)**, Green, Wilke, and Cooper, *Comparative Political Studies*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers evaluated whether videos encouraging communities to speak out about violence against women—screened during community film festivals—could change behavior, attitudes, and norms related to accepting and reporting VAW.
- Results showed the proportion of women who reported any VAW cases in their household over the preceding six months was five percentage points (16 percent) lower in villages where the videos were screened relative to villages in the comparison group.
- The impact appears to have been driven by an 18 percent reduction in the perception that those who speak out against violence will face social sanctions. However, there was little evidence that the videos had an effect on attitudes towards VAW or on views concerning gender equality more broadly.

- These findings suggest mass media campaigns that use dramatization to convey a particular message, and are screened publicly, may provide a cost-effective approach to changing behaviors around violence.

146. **How does media influence social norms? Experimental evidence on the role of common knowledge (2019)**, Arias, *Political Science Research and Methods*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers examined the mechanisms through which media influences beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors on VAW by comparing the effect of a radio soap-opera when transmitted privately versus publicly in Mexico. The soap-opera was designed to challenge norms of gender roles and discourage VAW and was either broadcasted publicly by community loudspeakers and in community meetings or privately through CDs.
- Results suggest that listeners in the public groups decreased their personal and perceived social acceptance of violence against women and increased support for equality in gender roles. However, listeners in this group also reported greater pessimism on whether violence will decline in the future. These effects were higher for individuals who listened to the broadcast in community meetings than through the village speakers alone. The “private audio” treatment, on the other hand, had no effect on individuals’ beliefs and behaviors.
- Despite the relatively small sample, the study shows how media influence can come from social effects (i.e. common knowledge and perception of social acceptance) rather than individual persuasion.

147. **Entertainment, education, and attitudes toward domestic violence (2019)**,

Banerjee, La Ferrara, and Orozco, *American Economic Association: Papers and Proceedings*

Location: Nigeria | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- Researchers studied the effect of the edutainment TV series MTV Shuga 3, which aimed at promoting positive attitudes towards HIV and changing norms around domestic violence in Nigeria.
- Men who had access to the show were 6 percentage points (21 percent) less likely to justify violence than men in the comparison group eight months later. However, the program had no impact on women’s attitudes towards domestic violence.
- When assessing how much participants remembered and identified with characters, researchers observed that changes in attitudes were mostly concentrated among men and women who remembered the characters associated with the violence plot, though not among those who identified with the characters.

New GCCI Research

One GCCI-funded study is further examining the role of edutainment and economic assistance in addressing IPV:

Reducing intimate partner violence through mass media: The roles of norms, mental resilience, and income (Mahmood, Buchmann, and Lopez-Pena)

This study will offer new causal evidence on the mechanisms driving IPV as well as the relationship between IPV and income. Using a randomized evaluation with 8,800 men in 440 rural villages in Bangladesh, researchers will evaluate two interventions: (1) educational soap operas, one challenging IPV-justifying norms, the other promoting emotional regulation and non-violent conflict resolution, produced by Bangladeshi media company Think Art Limited; and (2) a cash-for-work program providing short-term employment and income support. They will randomly vary whether the soap opera is shown privately to men at home or publicly in a community setting.

Improving women's access to economic resources

Promoting women's empowerment by providing access to economic resources—such as cash transfers, microcredit, savings groups, or employment—is a common practice in the development field ([Hidrobo, Peterman, and Heise 2016](#)). However, the effects of improved access to such resources on women's exposure to violence remains unclear. A review of 22 randomized evaluations and quasi-experimental studies of programs improving women's access to financial resources found mixed effects on their exposure to violence ([J-PAL 2022](#)).

Increased income may reduce VAW by improving men and women's economic security, thereby reducing household conflict over limited resources, increasing women's decision-making power and self-efficacy, and/or improving women's outside options from marriage, which may allow women to move away from abusive partners. By contrast, women's access to financial resources could also lead to increases in violence perpetrated against women as household conflict may be more likely to arise due to diverging preferences over expenditures or if men use violence instrumentally to extract resources from their spouses.

As emphasized in a recent systematic review summarizing the effect of cash transfers on IPV, understanding these mechanisms is not only important for expanding the set of tools available to tackle IPV, but also for addressing the potential IPV risks associated with these types of programs—especially given their reach and increased prevalence in low-income settings ([Buller et al. 2018](#)).

Cash and in-kind transfers

Programs such as cash transfers might improve households' overall well-being, particularly by reducing day-to-day conflict and stress over financial resources. Women's increased income can also improve their bargaining and decision-making power within the household. When one or both mechanisms are activated, researchers have observed reductions in IPV ([Heath, Hidrobo, and Roy 2020](#); [Haushofer et al. 2019](#); [Hidrobo, Peterman, and Heise 2016](#); [Angelucci 2008](#); [Hidrobo and Fernald 2013](#); [Roy, Hidrobo, Hoddinott, and Ahmed 2019](#)).

A limited evidence base suggests, however, even when cash transfers have reduced IPV on average, some subgroups have experienced higher levels of IPV ([Hidrobo and Fernald 2013](#); [Angelucci 2008](#); [Angelucci et al. 2023](#)) suggesting a need for more research to understand when backlash may occur. For example, a multifaceted program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that combined cash transfers with gender-transformative activities reduced IPV among women identified as high-risk but increased IPV among those considered low-risk ([Angelucci et al. 2023](#)).

Increasing women's income sometimes led to a backlash effect from partners, especially in households where there were strong imbalances in gender roles ([Angelucci 2008](#); [Kotsadam and Villanger 2022](#); [Buller et al. 2018](#); [Hidrobo and Fernald 2013](#)). An evaluation of the flagship social protection program in Mexico—which directs cash transfers to women—found that the impacts on IPV varied depending on the amount transferred and the husband's cultural beliefs. In households where women received small transfers, domestic violence fell by 37 percent. On the other hand, large transfers increased the aggressive behavior of some husbands. These differential impacts might be explained by the fact that larger transfers represented a larger increase in the wife's share of the household's total income, which might not have been acceptable for older and less educated men ([Angelucci 2008](#)).

To mitigate this potential backlash, some programs have proposed combining women's access to financial resources with programming—including training and family dialogues—that purposefully promotes gender equality, though impacts remain mixed ([Kim et al. 2009](#); [Ismayilova et al. 2018](#); [Kapiga et al. 2019](#); [Park and Kumar 2022](#); [Gupta et al. 2013](#); [Green et al. 2015](#); [Tankard, Paluck, and Prentice 2019](#); [Gibbs et al. 2020](#); [Noble et al. 2020](#); [Agüero and Frisancho 2018](#)). These types of activities sometimes seek to encourage participants to actively examine and challenge unequal gender norms that justify this form of violence, such as perceptions of gender roles and notions of masculinity.

Studies have found mixed impacts on this approach. Results from the Women for Women International's economic and social empowerment program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which combined cash transfers with a series of skills building and gender transformative activities, found women identified as high-risk for IPV experienced reductions in reported violence, while those identified as low-risk

experienced increases ([Angelucci et al. 2023](#)). Further research is needed to identify design components that consistently prevent the backlash effects of increasing women's income.

148. [Multifaceted programs targeting women in fragile settings: Evidence from the Democratic Republic of the Congo \(2023\)](#), Angelucci, Heath, and Noble, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Democratic Republic of the Congo | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In partnership with Women for Women International (WfWI), researchers evaluated a multifaceted poverty alleviation program for women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The researchers randomly assigned 500 women to receive a bundle of services through the Stronger Women Stronger Nations (SWSN) program, consisting of informational training, skill-building, resource provision, and connection to networks. They also assigned 500 women to receive these services and their spouse to join a male engagement program, and 1,000 women to receive the intervention after the evaluation.
- Women in the SWSN program showed increased consumption, rates of employment, earnings, savings, empowerment, and social support. These results persisted a year after the program ended. There were no effects on individual measures of physical or mental health, suggesting other features of the program may have offset the expected benefits of increased consumption and employment.
- Overall, the program did not affect average IPV rates at endline or one year post-completion. However, effects varied by baseline risk: women identified as high-risk for IPV experienced reductions in reported violence, while those identified as low-risk experienced increases. The positive effects of increased bargaining power may have been dominant for high-risk women (decreasing IPV rates), while negative effects like violence used to control a women's new income or male backlash (increasing IPV rates) may have been dominant for low risk-women.

149. [Cash transfers, polygamy, and intimate partner violence: Experimental evidence from Mali \(2020\)](#), Heath, Hidrobo, and Roy, *Journal of Development Economics*

Location: Mali | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Mali, where nearly 40 percent of households are polygamous, researchers evaluated how the country's national cash transfer program (which targets household heads, primarily men) affects IPV, and how household structure influences these results.
- The program, which provided unconditional cash transfers to low-income rural households, led to large decreases in IPV in polygamous households: a 7.2 percentage points decrease in physical violence, 12.6 percentage points decrease in emotional violence, and 16.1 percentage points decrease in controlling behaviors. These reductions were particularly strong among second wives, who

experienced the highest rates of IPV prior to the program. By contrast, there were no effects of the program on monogamous households.

- Potential mechanisms behind the program's impacts include decreases in men's stress and anxiety in polygamous households, due to improved economic security, and larger reductions in disputes in polygamous households compared to monogamous households.

150. **Transfers, behavior change communication, and intimate partner violence: Postprogram evidence from rural Bangladesh (2019)**, Roy, Hidrobo, Hoddinott, and Ahmed, *Review of Economics and Statistics*

Location: Bangladesh | **Method:** RCT

- In this study, researchers sought to measure whether activities that complemented cash transfers helped reduce incidents of IPV. They did so by randomly assigning women in Bangladesh to receive cash or food transfers, with or without a training on nutrition.
- Six to ten months after the program, women who received the transfer alone experienced no change in IPV. In contrast, women who received transfers conditional on attending the trainings experienced a 26 percent reduction in physical violence, compared to those who did not receive the transfer.
- The authors suggest that the sustained effects of the nutrition training seem to be a result of three mechanisms: (i) increased female bargaining power within the household and reduced acceptance of violent behavior by women, (ii) increased interactions with community members, which led to higher probability of detection and increased men's social cost of inflicting violence, and (iii) reduction in poverty-related stress and intrahousehold conflict.
- In a four year follow up study (Roy et al. 2022), the researchers found women who received the transfers conditional on attending the trainings experienced a 54 percent reduction in physical IPV. They also found the impacts on mechanisms were maintained for women that received cash and training on nutrition.

151. **Income changes and intimate partner violence: Evidence from unconditional cash transfers in Kenya (2019)**, Haushofer, Ringdal, Shapiro, and Wang, *Working Paper*

Location: Kenya | **Method:** RCT

- Between 2011 and 2013, households in western Kenya received unconditional cash transfers from the NGO GiveDirectly using the mobile money system M-Pesa. Transfers were randomly assigned to be received by either the man or the woman in the household.
- The transfers led to a reduction in the incidence of physical IPV when delivered to either women or men. Sexual IPV, by contrast, only reduced when transfers were delivered to women.
- Researchers suggest these differential impacts may be because physical violence is extractive, but also distasteful—i.e. men generally do not take pleasure in using

physical violence and may do so only to increase their income. In contrast, sexual violence may be pleasurable for the husband, which may result in them continuing this behavior even after receiving a transfer. Furthermore, transfers to the wives seem to have increased their empowerment and reduced IPV by making them less tolerant to it.

- Cash transfers also impacted non-recipient women living in the same villages as women who received the transfers. These women experienced an increase in their empowerment index and reductions in physical violence, but not sexual violence. This suggests that cash transfers might also have the potential to shift social norms outside of beneficiary households.
- Together, these results have direct implications for targeting: providing cash transfers to women might be a way to achieve broader impacts on IPV, while also leading to positive spillover effects.

152. [**The effect of cash, vouchers, and food transfers on intimate partner violence: Evidence from a randomized experiment in northern Ecuador \(2016\)**](#), Hidrobo, Peterman, and Heise, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

Location: Ecuador | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers evaluated whether cash, vouchers, and food transfers targeted to women from marginalized households in northern Ecuador, and intended to reduce poverty and food insecurity, also affected IPV.
- Results show that transfers reduced women's experience of controlling behaviors by 19 percent. Sexual and physical violence also fell by 30 percent, compared to households that did not receive any transfer.
- Researchers suggest the observed changes might have resulted from improvements in female bargaining power, increased engagement of men in domestic labor, and lower levels of poverty-related stress in the household. These effects did not vary by type of transfer, suggesting that transfers not only have the potential to decrease violence in the short-term, but also that cash may be just as effective as in-kind transfers.

153. [**Cash transfers and domestic violence \(2013\)**](#), Hidrobo and Fernald, *Journal of Health Economics*

Location: Ecuador | **Method:** RCT

- Researchers leveraged the randomized roll-out of Ecuador's unconditional cash transfer program, targeted towards mothers, to investigate how an increase in women's income impacts domestic violence.
- They found that the program reduced emotional violence and controlling behaviors among more educated women (i.e. women with greater than primary school education). For less-educated women, the program's impact depended on the woman's education level relative to her partner: in households where women had less schooling than their partner, the transfer decreased emotional violence,

while women who had equal or more years of education than their partner experienced an increase in emotional violence. Among all women, the transfer had no impact on physical violence.

- Researchers highlighted that in situations where outside-of-marriage options for women are not a credible threat (e.g., for less-educated women), increases in women's access to resources might lead to male backlash (i.e. men resorting to violence to exert control). Thus, women with very low levels of power in the household at baseline could be at risk of experiencing either no effects or higher levels of IPV due to cash transfers.

154. [Love on the rocks: Domestic violence and alcohol abuse in rural Mexico \(2008\)](#),

Angelucci, *The B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*

Location: Mexico | **Method:** RCT

- *Oportunidades* is Mexico's flagship poverty alleviation program, which provides cash transfers to women in low-income households conditional on children's school attendance, periodic health visits, and attendance at nutrition and health classes. Transfers increase according to households' number of eligible children. This study evaluates the impact of *Oportunidades* on men's aggressive behavior, especially domestic violence, and alcohol abuse.
- Although transfers helped reduce alcohol abuse by 15 percent, they had no overall impact on aggressive behavior. Reductions in violence seemed to be dependent on the size of the transfer and the husband's view on gender roles—measured in terms of age differences between spouses and education level.
- Aggressive behavior dropped by 37 percent among all households entitled to the smallest transfer, and among households with husbands who completed primary school. However, in households where husbands were older and less educated—which were correlated with more traditional views on gender roles—and women received larger transfers, results pointed to an increase in violence.

Other economic measures

Another common avenue for promoting women's financial empowerment is through programs that aim to improve women's livelihoods through employment, access to microcredit, savings groups, etc. Similar to cash and in-kind transfers, employment and entrepreneurship may increase women's mobility, visibility, social status, and time spent outside the home, all of which may help lower incidents of violence. However, if men feel threatened by women's changed status or roles, particularly in contexts characterized by inequitable gender norms, these changes could lead to backlash and higher rates of IPV. For example, two studies examining female employment or entrepreneurship programs found that the resulting increases in female earnings may have had adverse effects on women's vulnerability to IPV ([Green et al. 2015](#); [Bulte and Lensink 2019](#)).

Based on the existing RCT evidence, microcredit and savings groups programs alone have not shown sustained impacts on IPV. As with cash transfers, the direction of their impact can depend on context specific characteristics that determine intra-household dynamics and overall acceptance of violence ([Bulte and Lensink 2019](#)). Many of these studies have measured the impact of these interventions bundled with components that intentionally addressed violence, like gender training or family dialogues, and have found mixed results. For example, women in Liberia who participated in business and vocational skills training, along with counseling, were less likely to report emotional and physical IPV ([Park and Kumar 2022](#)). Additionally, positive effects were observed within multiple microcredit programs—three studies found reductions in participants' experience of IPV when microcredit was coupled with training ([Pronyk et al. 2006](#); [Kim et al. 2009](#); [Ismayilova et al. 2018](#)). On the other hand, evidence from four other economic intervention studies show that adding gender-sensitive components to economic interventions did not lead to reductions in IPV ([Gibbs et al. 2020](#); [Tankard, Paluck, and Prentice 2019](#); [Gupta et al. 2013](#); [Green et al. 2015](#)).

155. **Household preferences for women's employment: A field experiment in Bangladesh (2026)**, Hsu, Hussam, Kelley, and Lane, *NBER Working Paper*

Location: Bangladesh | **Method:** RCT

GCCI-funded

- Researchers randomly assigned either the husband or wife in 1,080 married couples in Cox's Bazar to a six-week paid job to evaluate how household wellbeing, intimate partner violence, and attitudes toward women's work differed depending on which partner was employed.
- During the six-week intervention, providing men with employment improved both their own and their wives' psychosocial wellbeing and reduced intimate partner violence. The same jobs for women improved only their own wellbeing and not their husbands', suggesting that households fare better overall when men work - consistent with both spouses' stated preference for male employment.
- However, fifteen months later, in households where women had previously worked, both spouses were more likely to prefer that the wife take a new work opportunity, and husbands were much less likely to express concerns about the costs of female employment, suggesting that direct experience with women's work can shift entrenched gender norms over time.

156. **Reducing intimate partner violence: Evidence from a multifaceted female empowerment program in urban Liberia (2023)**, Park and Kumar, *Working Paper*

Location: Liberia | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

GCCI-funded

- In Monrovia, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation of the Women Training and Integration (WIN) program, in collaboration with the Liberia National Red Cross Society who originally launched the program in 2009.

- The program consisted of two components carried out over the course of 12 months: (1) psychosocial therapy, including one-on-one and group counseling sessions and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and (2) business and vocational skills training. Of 395 women who voluntarily applied, 152 women were randomly selected and enrolled in the program, while 197 comprised the comparison group.
- Receiving counseling, as well as vocational and business training, was associated with a decrease in the proportion of women who reported emotional and physical IPV. The intervention also reduced the acceptability of IPV, potentially contributing to the reduction in incidences of IPV. While the program did not increase the number of women who were employed, it increased women's labor hours and monthly expenditures.
- These findings indicate a holistic approach to IPV prevention programming can be impactful. However, more research is required to understand the marginal effects of each program component.

157. [Jobs and intimate partner violence: Evidence from a field experiment in Ethiopia \(2022\)](#), Kotsadam and Villanger, *Journal of Human Resources*

Location: Ethiopia | **Method:** RCT

- Through a partnership with 27 large companies in Ethiopia, researchers randomly assigned female applicants to receive job offers in order to examine the effects of employment on IPV.
- Receiving job offers increased women's formal employment, earnings, and earning shares within couples both six and twelve months after the intervention started. The intervention reduced women's experience of emotional abuse by 5.3 percentage points (26.5 percent) but only in the six-month follow-up, and no impacts on physical violence and controlling behaviors were observed.
- Researchers suggest that job offers may not have impacted the main factors that could lead to reductions in physical abuse, such as empowerment, attitudes towards gender equality, and controlling behaviors.

158. [The impacts of combined social and economic empowerment training on intimate partner violence, depression, gender norms and livelihoods among women: an individually randomized controlled trial and qualitative study in Afghanistan \(2020\)](#),

Gibbs, Corboz, Chirwa, Mann, Karim, Shafiq, Mecagni, Maxwell-Jones, Noble, Jewkes, *BMJ Glob Health*

Location: Afghanistan | **Method:** RCT

- The NGO Women for Women International implemented a 12-month economic and social empowerment program in conflict-affected, vulnerable communities of Afghanistan. The group-based intervention was delivered once a week, and women received training on numeracy, business and vocational skills, and social empowerment topics. Participants also received a monthly transfer of US\$10; an introduction to formal and informal mechanisms to save money (e.g., self-help

groups, microfinance institutions); referrals to health, legal and financial services; and connections to other women. Women in the comparison group only received the cash transfer.

- Researchers found no impact of the program on women's experience of physical or emotional IPV in the past year, despite women's increased earnings and savings. However, there was evidence that the program led to greater gender equality and decision-making power among women—i.e. less gender inequitable attitudes, more household decision-making, and increased mobility.
- Results show that it is possible to promote changes in gender attitudes and norms by improving women's livelihoods, but these changes are still difficult to translate into reductions in IPV.

159. [**A social empowerment intervention to prevent intimate partner violence against women in a microfinance scheme in Tanzania: findings from the MAISHA cluster randomized controlled trial \(2019\)**](#), Kapiga, Harvey, Mshana, Hansen, Mtolela, Madaha, Hashim, Kapinga, Moshia, Abramsky, Lees, and Watts, *Lancet Global Health*

Location: Tanzania | **Method:** RCT

- In Tanzania, researchers collaborated with BRAC and EngenderHealth to evaluate the addition of a social empowerment intervention to an already existing microfinance loan program for women with the goal of preventing IPV. Of 66 microfinance groups, half were randomly assigned to receive the additional women empowerment course and the rest continued the microfinance program as usual.
- Women in the course reported less physical IPV and were less likely to express acceptance of IPV, including expressing beliefs that IPV is a private matter or should be tolerated. However, the course had no evidence of impact on reported sexual or emotional IPV.
- The evidence suggests adding a brief empowerment component to an existing economic empowerment platform can be a powerful tool for reducing physical IPV, particularly in contexts of high prevalence of IPV.
- In a follow-up study ([Harvey et al. 2021](#)), researchers tested the same curriculum with newly formed women's groups who were not engaged in microfinance. This intervention showed no evidence of reducing physical or sexual IPV. However, it did reduce emotional abuse and led to improvements in attitudes rejecting IPV. The findings suggest that combining social empowerment with economic strengthening may be necessary to achieve reductions in physical and sexual IPV.

160. [Women's empowerment and domestic abuse: Experimental evidence from Vietnam \(2019\)](#), Bulte and Lensink, *European Economic Review*
Location: Vietnam | **Method:** RCT
- This study examined the impact of a gender and business training program offered to low-income female entrepreneur members of microfinance organizations in rural Vietnam on their experience of IPV. Participants were randomly assigned to either take part in the program alone or with their partners.
 - Results suggest that women who participated in the training program were more likely to experience physical violence by their partner. The main driver of violence, the authors suggest, could have been an increase in women's income, despite greater female bargaining power.
 - Interventions aimed at promoting female economic empowerment should consider specific contextual factors, including the viability of the "exit option" for married women, which in more conservative societies might put women at risk of violence.
161. [An integrated approach to increasing women's empowerment status and reducing domestic violence: Results of a cluster-randomized controlled trial in a West African country \(2018\)](#), Ismayilova, Karimli, Gaveras, Tô-Camier, Sanson, Chaffin, and Nanema, *Psychology of Violence*
Location: Burkina Faso | **Method:** RCT
- In Burkina Faso, researchers investigated the effects of an economic intervention on women's empowerment status and family violence. The intervention included savings groups, financial management skills training, seed capital grants, and one-on-one mentoring and coaching, all aimed at improving women's economic livelihoods. Researchers also randomly assigned some women to receive supplemental sessions on gender-sensitive family coaching involving all household members, including women, children, and men.
 - Women who participated in both forms of the program reported improvements in financial autonomy and quality of marital relationships, on average. In addition, women in both groups reported a reduction in emotional spousal violence in the past year, with higher effects for those who received the economic intervention combined with the family training.
 - Together, these results suggest that economic interventions may have benefits that go beyond changes in financial well-being, such as increasing women's status and improving family relationships. This study also suggests the increased engagement of men in family-focused interventions can lead to positive outcomes for women, including decreases in violence.

162. [Women's entrepreneurship and intimate partner violence: A cluster randomized trial of microenterprise assistance and partner participation in post-conflict Uganda \(2015\)](#), Green, Blattman, Jamison, and Annan, *Social Science and Medicine*

Location: Uganda | **Method:** RCT | Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In Uganda, researchers evaluated the impact of a poverty alleviation program, implemented in two stages, on women's empowerment and IPV. The first phase provided individuals (mostly women) with business training, capital injection, and supervision and advising. In the second phase, participants were randomly assigned to take part in the same program as individuals or with a household partner.
- After the first phase, the program doubled business ownership and incomes. However, participants who reported that their partners did not treat them well earned approximately US\$18 less per month on average. Results also indicated small increases in self-reported autonomy and improvements in quality of partner relationships, as well as marital control, but no evidence of impact on IPV.
- In the second phase, researchers observed large increases in the quality of relationships but no effects on women's attitudes toward gender norms, autonomy, or IPV.

163. [Gender norms and economic empowerment intervention to reduce intimate partner violence against women in rural Côte d'Ivoire: A randomized controlled pilot study \(2013\)](#), Gupta, Falb, Lehmann, Kpebo, Xuan, Hossain, Zimmerman, Watts, and Annan, *BMC International Health and Human Rights*

Location: Côte d'Ivoire | **Method:** RCT

- This evaluation examined the impact of adding gender dialogue groups to a group savings program on levels of IPV in rural Côte d'Ivoire. Both women and their male partners participated in the dialogue groups.
- Overall, the researchers did not find evidence that adding gender dialogues to the savings program led to reductions in women's reported experience of IPV. However, women were less likely to report economic abuse and couples were less likely to accept the practice of wife beating. Attitudes towards refusal of sex, however, did not change. Women who attended more than 75 percent of gender dialogues with their partners reported declines in physical IPV.
- These findings highlight the value of addressing household gender inequities within households in conjunction with economic programming when tackling IPV.

164. [Assessing the incremental effects of combining economic and health interventions: The IMAGE study in South Africa \(2009\)](#), Kim, Ferrari, Abramsky, Watts, Hargreaves, Morison, Phetla, Porter, and Pronyk, *World Health Organization*
Location: South Africa | **Method:** RCT
- Researchers evaluated the impact of the “Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE)” program, which combined microfinance with gender and health training, on a range of social and health indicators such as risk of IPV and HIV infection in South Africa.
 - After two years, women assigned to receive IMAGE, as well as those assigned to the microfinance-only group, showed improvements in economic measures. However, only those in the IMAGE group experienced positive changes in empowerment (e.g., greater self-confidence, autonomy in decision-making, and larger social networks), IPV (including reduction in past-year experience of physical or sexual IPV), and HIV risk behavior (including increased condom use at last sex with a non-spousal partner).
 - These findings suggest that adding a complementary training component to ongoing, group-based microfinance programs may play an important role in fostering broader social and health benefits, including reductions in IPV.

Equipping institutions to better respond to VAW

Researchers are also exploring strategies to improve responses to incidents of VAW. Given the mental and physical health impacts of this form of violence, many programs equip health providers and first responders with training to support women experiencing violence. While health-focused responses remain critical, efforts are increasingly aimed at improving women’s access to police and other security actors, as well as by providing alternative forms of dispute resolution that may better respond to women’s needs.

A growing body of evidence, especially in criminology literature, is examining the role institutions can play in preventing and responding to violence against women. Like in other forms of crime, increased police presence can be an important deterrent to this type of violence, given greater likelihood of “being caught”. Moreover, the police can also help prevent VAW by responding to it—i.e. if the justice sector is able to effectively address the cases reported by women by punishing perpetrators accordingly, women may be more likely to report future incidents and perpetrators may be discouraged from perpetrating such forms of violence. An early study from India ([Iyer et al. 2012](#)) found that a gender quota program that reserved one third of village council seats for women led to a 46 percent increase in the number of documented crimes against women ([see study #124](#)). This rise appears to have been primarily due to an increase in reporting of incidents to police rather than any increase in incidence—as there was no significant change in the level of crimes not targeted against women or in crimes

against women such as murder that are unlikely to be affected by reporting biases. The increase in women elected to these village council roles also led to heightened police responsiveness and increased arrests for crimes committed against women.

While institutions can play a critical role in preventing and responding to violence against women, their involvement is not without challenges. In some contexts, police officers themselves have been implicated as perpetrators of violence, which can erode trust and deter reporting. Addressing these concerns is essential for any strategy that seeks to strengthen institutional responses. Responding to VAW for police and formal security actors can also be particularly challenging given traditionally low rates of reporting ([Palermo, Bleck and Peterman 2013](#)).²⁶ In addition to directly influencing the incidence of different forms of VAW, social norms can also prevent women from seeking help due to fear of retaliation by their partners, families, or community members, or lack of trust in the police or other state institutions.

One way to encourage reporting of violence against women is to make it easier to approach the police. In Papua New Guinea, a community policing intervention found that women were more likely to report cases of violence to police officers, especially if they were female ([see study #13](#)). Adding female police officers without specialized training or strategic roles, however, may not be an effective way of addressing this issue. A recent lab-in-the-field experiment ([see study #12](#)) estimated the impacts of randomly varying the proportion of women officers in teams of the Liberian National Police. Teams with heavier concentrations of women exhibited greater cohesion but were no more sensitive to sexual and gender-based crimes than teams with fewer women.

Considering this, new research is examining a different question: can increasing the representation of female officers in dedicated public-facing roles, combined with special training, increase both the reporting of crimes against women and their effective prosecution? A quasi-experimental study by Amaral, Bhalotra, and Prakash ([2021](#)) presents suggestive evidence from the rapid expansion in “all-women” police stations in India from 2005-13. They find that the introduction of these units, staffed entirely by female officers trained in handling crimes committed against women, led to a 29.3 percent increase in reporting. There was no increase in non-gender-specific crimes, suggesting again that what changed was women’s willingness to report these crimes.

As highlighted in [Chapter 1](#), two GCCI studies in India have contributed to the literature shedding more light on these questions. In Madhya Pradesh, [Sukhtankar, Kruks-Wisner,](#)

²⁶ [Recent global estimates](#) suggest that fewer than 40 percent of women seek help after experiencing violence, and among those that do, fewer than 10 percent report such cases to the police. Individuals affected by this violence—victims and bystanders alike—may be reluctant to speak out to friends, family, or police.

[and Mangla 2022](#) (see study #15) found police stations with Women's Help Desks (WHDs) were more likely to register cases of violence against women. Female officers in stations with WHDs were less likely to show skepticism toward women's complaints, suggesting they may have been more sensitive to gender specific police training. Meanwhile, [Amaral et al. 2025](#) (see study #1) partnered with the Hyderabad City Police to evaluate a hot spots street police patrolling intervention targeting VAW in public spaces. Overall, police patrols had no effect on sexual harassment. However, uniformed patrols reduced severe harassment (forceful touching, intimidation) and the likelihood of women leaving a hotspot due to sexual harassment. They also found while officers were generally more tolerant of milder forms of sexual harassment, progressive teams were more effective in reducing mild and severe forms of harassment.

Conflict-related sexual violence

Another important strand of literature pertains to conflict-related sexual violence. The study of “rape as a weapon of war” has grown remarkably over the past decade, especially in the fields of political science and psychology. This work has expanded the evidence base around when, how, and why some armed groups (including state and non-state actors) perpetrate sexual violence against women during conflict. Little is known, however, about effective solutions to prevent this form of violence.

This growing research has helped overcome several misconceptions around the drivers and conditions of sexual violence. For instance, Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood (2013) show that reports of widespread rape are more common in European conflicts than in Africa, and state armed groups are far more likely than rebel groups to be reported as perpetrators of sexual violence. Moreover, research challenges common assumptions about perpetrators and victims: while most sexual violence is committed by men against women, female combatants have also been documented as perpetrators, and men themselves are frequently victims of sexual violence—including rape and sexual torture—during conflict.

Evidence also shows a wide variation in the perpetration of sexual violence during conflict across armed actors ([Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013](#); [Wood 2015](#)). Data suggests that many armed organizations engage in different forms of sexual violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, and enforced prostitution, but not all do so. Intimate partner violence and other forms of VAW also tend to increase during conflict as highlighted in a recent [evidence brief](#) by IPA, which examines the current literature on preventing and mitigating GBV, IPV, and violence against children during and immediately after conflict. This variation across groups can be explained by differences in institutions, ideology, and the culture of armed organizations ([Wood 2015](#)). For instance, in some groups, leaders might choose to promote rape of civilians as a combat strategy, while in others sexual violence is strictly prohibited.

These emerging findings suggest that a deeper understanding of each actor's use of sexual violence, including targeting, forms, and motivations, is necessary before designing effective policy solutions. In particular, understanding why some armed groups do not engage in sexual violence might be a starting point to think of prevention strategies. What are the ideologies behind those groups? Can commanders effectively prevent this form of violence? Potential interventions could include increasing accountability and monitoring, promoting incentives against engaging in sexual violence, or increasing the costs of doing so ([Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013](#)).

As discussed above, gender norms are important drivers of violence against women in non-conflict settings. Guarnieri and Tur-Prats ([2023](#)) show this is also the case during war. Leveraging data on the intensity of sexual violence and the ethnic characteristics of actors across different conflicts in Africa, the authors argue that unequal gender norms and attitudes are related to higher incidence of sexual violence during conflict. More specifically, they suggest the larger the “cultural distance” between the actors involved in the conflict, the higher the intensity of sexual violence. This is particularly true when perpetrators have more unequal gender norms than victims, given they can use sexual violence to reinforce their (gender) ideals. These findings suggest that policies aimed at changing gender norms during times of peace might influence violence against women during conflict as well.

Despite these recent advancements, many key questions remain unanswered. There are few studies that have tried to measure the impact of interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of sexual violence during conflict. One of the main limitations to doing so is the lack of consensus around measurement and conceptualization of sexual violence between researchers, which hinders rigorous impact evaluations ([Cohen, Hoover Green, and Wood 2013](#)).

As researchers and practitioners expand their presence in conflict-affected settings, future research should leverage the tools and methods developed in other areas to unpack what works in combating conflict-related sexual violence. J-PAL and IPA's [Humanitarian Protection Initiative](#) (HPI) is supporting the generation of rigorous evidence to inform policies and programs that shield conflict-affected populations from physical, psychological, social, and legal harm and mitigate the effects of conflict where harm has occurred. An important strand of research this initiative aims to support centers on understanding what components of GBV and IPV reduction strategies are effective in conflict settings.

Priorities for future research

Priority areas for further research through randomized evaluations include the following:

- Interventions aimed at shifting people's attitudes and behaviors that lead to VAW, such as gender trainings and mass media campaigns, have shown mixed effects, though with some promise that they may be an effective way to prevent this type of crime. Several open questions remain, including: What are the necessary conditions and underlying mechanisms behind these programs' successes? What are the most cost-effective ways of promoting change? And to what extent is male engagement necessary to achieve desired outcomes?
- Cash transfers have the potential to reduce women's exposure to violence in the household. What types of features (e.g., transfer recipient, transfer size and duration, or delivery design) are most effective? How do impacts evolve over time, including post-intervention?
- Based on the existing evidence, it appears that economic empowerment alone may not have direct impacts on the root drivers of abuse, such as gender inequality, intra-household decision-making, and acceptance of violence. Coupling these types of programs with interventions that address these underlying factors may be a better way to fully achieve women's empowerment and freedom from violence, but more research is needed to understand context-specific characteristics that need to be addressed in order to promote change.
- The organization of the police force and its governing structures may also be influential in shaping women's willingness to report cases of violence. More evidence is needed to assess whether these interventions act as a deterrent against actual crime against women.
- Recent studies have shown that there is a large variation in the prevalence of sexual violence across conflicts and armed groups. Why do some groups perpetrate this form of violence and others do not? Can shifts in internal monitoring and incentives lead to less sexual violence during conflict?

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