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GOVERNANCE, CRIME, AND CONFLICT INITIATIVE EVIDENCE WRAP-UP

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

June 2021

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INTRODUCTION

What are the most promising strategies for reducing crime, violence, and conflict? The past decade has 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 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 £15-million investment by FCDO launched in 2017 to produce new research on effective policies to promote peace and good governance, reduce crime, and support individuals and communities recovering from conflict.¹

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 justice provision, including criminal justice and corrections/prisons?
- 3) What works in shifting individuals' behaviors away from crime and violence in high-risks settings?
- 4) How do violent organizations 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?

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 Program](#) webpages.

2021 UPDATES

When this wrap-up was first released in July 2019, it was intended to be a living document that would be semi-regularly updated as the evidence base in this area expands. Some of the key updates to this 2021 second edition include:

- Adding 57 new studies and updating countless others as new working and published papers have been released;
- Reorienting the evidence on policing to examine not only strategies for more efficiently deploying limited police resources, but also interventions to improve police performance, through training and other efforts to reduce bias and excessive use of force;
- Broadening the discussion of justice provision in fragile and conflict-affected states to consider potential complementarities and trade-offs between state and non-state forms of dispute resolution;
- Expanding the peacebuilding literature to include additional interventions aimed at promoting recovery and rebuilding trust and cohesion, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, as well as perspective taking and personal narratives;
- Developing "deep dives" on hot topics like cognitive behavioral therapy and intergroup contact, highlighting where key open questions remain for future research; and
- Adding an entirely new chapter focused on the growing evidence base around preventing and addressing violence against women, which covers evidence on shifting social norms, providing economic support, improving women's access to police, and more.

EVIDENCE BASE

The wrap-up focuses primarily on the results of randomized evaluations (randomized controlled trials, or RCTs) from low- and middle-income country 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 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.

First, a caveat. Because the goal of this wrap-up is to highlight RCT evidence, it has little to say regarding the effectiveness of two large categories of programs: those that are either not well suited to experimental evaluation (perhaps because randomization is not feasible, or the number of participants is limited) or those that have not yet been evaluated. While the GCCI investment is intended to produce new evidence in areas that have not yet been a focus of rigorous impact evaluation (and this wrap-up will be updated periodically as new evidence emerges), some programs will remain best suited to other forms of evaluation.

With this caveat in mind, this wrap-up should not be read as a comprehensive list of programs in which FCDO or others should be investing. The hope is instead that it offers rigorously produced insights into the broader mechanisms driving *how* programs to reduce violence and conflict are working.

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 cvi@povertyactionlab.org.²

² This note was prepared by Aprille Knox, Cillian Nolan, Isabela Salgado, and Aimee Barnes of J-PAL's Crime, Violence, and Conflict sector and Nessa Kenny of IPA's Peace and Recovery Program with input from academic co-chairs, Chris Blattman and Oeindrila Dube.

Contact: Aprille Knox, aknox@povertyactionlab.org

EMERGING THEMES

The emerging insights drawn from randomized evaluations detailed in this wrap-up include the following:

- Criminal behavior responds to the deterrent effect of policing in different ways, and some policing and other municipal interventions may be more appropriate for some types of crime than others;
- Civilians may be less inclined to engage in crime or violence when economic incentives create higher returns to peaceful activities, suggesting there is scope for further refinement of programs aimed at improving peaceful livelihoods and creating employment opportunities;
- Interventions that target the highest-risk individuals may be more effective than blanket approaches in reducing violent behavior in high-crime or conflict settings;
- Reconciliation and dispute resolution programming can contribute to higher levels of social cohesion and can increase social capital in some contexts, but it is important to better understand and guard against potential unintended negative impacts; and
- Programs focused on reducing the prevalence of violence against women should seek to systematically address the pervasive gender norms that lead to this form of violence by engaging participants in gender transformative activities, such as training and edutainment.

In many cases, the most significant contribution from randomized evaluations has not been to reveal the effectiveness of a specific intervention, but rather to help reframe how to understand specific problems or to identify potential new types of solutions. New research, including studies currently being funded through GCCI, is expected to shed further light on the following:

- What is the most effective use of interventions designed to promote “intergroup contact” to reduce prejudice and potential for conflict between different groups?
- If women and men have very different experiences of policing in many communities, what works to better strengthen police efforts to respond to violence against women and girls and to support other marginalized groups?
- Are there strategies for drawing on the success of cognitive behavioral therapy-inspired interventions in reducing violence among young men to tackle crime and violence among more violent individuals or violent organizations?
- Can cash transfers be used to make shifts away from violence or illicit activities more sustainable (either as part of bundled interventions or standalone measures)?
- How do different material and non-materials incentives drive either individuals or armed groups to engage in crime or violence? What implications does this have for programs built around shifting these incentives?



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CHAPTER 1: WHAT WORKS IN POLICING AND BUILDING POLICE CAPACITY?

Crime and violence are highly concentrated: both geographically among a small number of areas (particularly in urban settings) and among a small population who are responsible for a large share of criminal and violent activity (Abt 2019). For example, Blattman et al. (forthcoming) find that in Bogotá, Colombia, just 2 percent of the city's 137,000 streets accounted for all murders and a quarter of all crimes from 2012–15.

Furthermore, there is robust evidence that crime is generally deterred by increases in police manpower and redeployments. But what form and what kind of policing approaches are most effective remains a question for new research (Chalfin and McCrary 2017). Because increases in police manpower and redeployments are generally expensive investments, another important question for research remains how best to target policing approaches.

Open questions also remain regarding how best to organize, manage, or demographically compose police teams and how these decisions impact their effectiveness and responsiveness to certain issues—for instance, tackling gender-based violence or responding to the needs of other marginalized groups. A related stream of research is exploring the effects of various forms of skills training—from investigative skills to interpersonal competencies—on improving police performance, reducing excessive use of force, and combating discriminatory behaviors.

While there is a relatively large literature on policing in the United States (and in the United Kingdom), some policing strategies that have shown promise in quasi-experimental research designs, such as problem-oriented policing and focused deterrence, have not often been evaluated experimentally. Until recently, few RCTs had been conducted on policing interventions elsewhere, particularly in low- and middle-income country settings. This is now starting to change, with recent randomized evaluations of policing strategies and capacity-building programs in Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, and more providing an important complement to US/UK evidence, as outlined in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into two main sections: police deployment and resource allocation strategies, and strategies for strengthening police capacities and institutions. The first section highlights interventions that broadly address ways of efficiently using police resources—including by shifting resources to high-crime areas through strategies like hot spots policing, or by deploying police to communities to strengthen police-community relationships. This section also includes strategies like focused deterrence, which emphasizes using police resources to identify specific offenders and to shift their behavior, as well as strategies tailored to combating organized crime. The second section highlights ways of developing police capacity by diversifying police teams to be more responsive to communities' needs and by implementing skills-based trainings. A new subsection on countering police violence includes strategies involving police monitoring devices, procedural justice trainings, and implicit bias trainings.

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, improving police-community relations, shifting offender behaviors, and combating organized crime.

TARGETING POLICE RESOURCES TO HIGH-CRIME AREAS

Incidents of crime in urban areas tend to be highly concentrated—a forthcoming study by Blattman et al. 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—most of which has been conducted in the United States. While the balance of this evidence suggests that targeting hot spots with increased policing is effective in reducing crime in these areas, many of these studies have featured relatively small sample sizes and have not always rigorously examined displacement effects—i.e. whether intensified policing shifts crime elsewhere (Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2014).

New research, mostly from Colombia, is contributing to the evidence base on what types of crimes are likely to be deterred or shifted by hot spots policing. In two Colombian studies, hot spots interventions led to declines in thefts and some other non-violent crimes (Collazos et al. 2019; Nussio and Norza Céspedes 2018). However, a third study from Colombia found that a hot spots policing intervention pushed property crimes onto neighboring street segments that had not received increased police surveillance (Blattman et al. forthcoming). In all cases, violent crimes proved harder to affect—the Colombian studies saw limited or no reduction in violent crimes, but also saw 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. **Place based interventions at scale: The direct and spillover effects of policing and city services on crime (forthcoming)**, 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 significant effects on its own, while in segments that received both treatments, reported crimes fell by 57 percent. However, this estimate is based on just 75 streets receiving both interventions.
 - An analysis of displacement effects nevertheless suggests that these interventions pushed property crime, but not violent crime, onto neighboring streets. When considering these spillovers, the joint interventions had a relatively small or null effect on city-wide crime (no more than a 2-3 percent reduction).
 - Because the broader literature has generally found that more police are associated with lower crime, testing whether increasing general police presence alongside more intensive policing in hot spots might be a promising next step. 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.

2. **Hot spots policing in a high crime environment: An experimental evaluation in Medellín (2019)**, Collazos, García, Mejía, Ortega, and Tobón, Working Paper
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.

3. **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 new quasi-experimental study in Medellín, Colombia evaluates the effect of surveillance cameras on crime in hot spots, finding that offenders were deterred from committing crime without shifting crime to surrounding areas.

4. **The deterrent effect of surveillance cameras on crime (2020)**, Gómez, Mejía, Tobón, Working Paper

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 did not change in areas under surveillance. This may be because 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.

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 30 studies, which included nine RCTs, found only modest impacts on crime control (Braga, Welsh, and Schnell 2015). The strongest impacts were generated by “community and problem-solving interventions designed to change social and physical disorder conditions at particular places.” This is consistent with the general theme that policing approaches that seek to target specific places can be successful at reducing crime.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

Two new studies currently being funded through GCCI will contribute to the literature on targeting police resources to specific areas:

Street police patrols and crime against women in public spaces: Experimental evidence from urban India (Fiala, Amaral, Borker, Prakash, Roy, and Sviatschi)

In this study, researchers are partnering with police in Hyderabad, India to evaluate a hot spots street police patrolling intervention targeting gender-based violence in public spaces. The researchers and Hyderabad City Police have jointly developed an evaluation to test the role of increased police presence through patrolling and policing visibility (i.e., uniformed vs. undercover officers) to better understand whether increased quantity and quality of police presence can help curb street harassment of women. Each police team must also include at least one female officer while patrolling as part of this project. ([Evaluation summary](#))

Militarized policing to reduce homicides and other violent crimes: A field experiment in Cali, Colombia (Blair and Weintraub)

In Latin America, governments commonly use their armed forces to combat high homicide rates, especially in urban areas. Advocates view these strategies as necessary to bring violent crime under control and allow social programs to take root, while opponents counter that militarized policing undermines human rights and exacerbates insecurity. However, little rigorous evidence exists on either side of this debate. This study evaluates the impact of a militarized policing program that deploys intensive, recurring army patrols to neighborhoods with the highest homicide rates in the city of Cali, Colombia, one of Latin America's most violent cities. Researchers will compare the program to a comparison group that receives no militarized policing as well as a spillover group adjacent to blocks where militarized policing operates. The study will test the impact of the program on homicides and other violent crimes, as well as on citizens' perceptions of security and trust in government.

IMPROVING OR ESTABLISHING POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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 in order 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.³

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

³ A later section in this chapter also discusses how police-community relations and police legitimacy can be supported by combating police violence and excessive use of force.

(Connell, Miggins, and McGloin 2008). Under these principles, police and communities are considered co-producers of public safety.

A 2015 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.

A collaborative research initiative coordinated by [Evidence in Governance and Politics \(EGAP\)](#) will help expand the evidence base on whether community policing can reduce crime and build community trust in different contexts. Six research projects across Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, Uganda, and the Philippines have implemented a community policing program with two common components. First, each program encourages citizens to share information on local problems to the police and for police to share information on police programs to citizens. Second, each program includes a problem-oriented policing component where police are tasked with addressing the problems identified through the increased community engagement (EGAP 2020). The synthesized results of these six projects are forthcoming. However, preliminary results from Uganda are already available and detailed below (Blair, Grossman, and Wilke 2021).

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 2020).

5. [Can community policing improve police-community relations in an electoral authoritarian regime? Experimental evidence from Uganda \(2021\)](#), Blair, Grossman, and Wilke, Working Paper

Location: Uganda

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- 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 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 Community 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. Further, increased police-citizen interactions led to more opportunities for bribe-seeking, leading to a small increase in unofficial payments to the police.
- However, evidence suggests that citizens were more likely to report crimes to police, likely because they better understood the rules around reporting.

- The limited impacts may be a result of low compliance: the police were asked to travel to villages and meet with citizens regularly, but were not given additional resources to make this more feasible, and many expected police-citizen interactions never occurred.
- In response to Covid-19, Blair, Grossman, Curtice, and Dow, are expanding the scope of the project to evaluate if interactions with police officers increased individuals' willingness to comply with public health guidelines. They will also examine changes to migration and money transfers (remittances) to measure the impact of Covid-19 on various forms of economic activity.

6. **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. Citizens were also less likely to perceive the police as abusive and more likely to perceive them 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.

7. **How does the state replace the community? Experimental evidence on crime control from South Africa (2020)**, Wilke, Working Paper

Location: South Africa

Method: RCT

- Researchers 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 could find out if they committed a crime.
- Households receiving alarms were also less likely to say they were willing to engage in vigilante violence. This effect was concentrated among households who initially had the lowest prior beliefs about police capabilities and the risks of being arrested for vigilantism.
- This study suggests that communities may be more likely to rely on police instead of vigilante violence when police have a greater capacity to intervene and when the perceived risk of vigilantism is higher, which in this case was brought about by a new channel of communication between households and police.

8. **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 beginning in mid-2014.
 - The program increased knowledge of Liberian law and the police among communities, enhanced 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.
9. **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.
10. **Impact evaluation of USAID’s community-based crime and violence prevention approach in Central America: Regional report for El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Panama (2014)**, Berk-Seligson, Orcés, Pizzolitto, Seligson, Wilson, Latin American Public Opinion Project
Location: El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama
Method: RCT
- USAID introduced a set of community-based crime prevention programs in high-crime municipalities in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, including elements of community policing that encouraged community organizations (like churches, schools, and community development associations) to collaborate with police on crime prevention strategies. Other program elements included outreach and vocational training programs for young people and environmental design programs like removing graffiti.

- The community-based crime prevention programs together reduced crime victimization and violence, increased citizens’ perceived security and satisfaction with police performance, and decreased measures of perceived neighborhood disorder such as loitering or gang presence.
- This study demonstrates that building trust and collaboration between community organizations and the police can be an effective way to reduce crime, potentially because community actors have valuable information to share with police and rapport with individuals at risk of committing crime.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

Two new studies currently being funded through GCCI will contribute to the evidence base of how to improve police-community relationships in important ways:

Community policing, citizen feedback, and public trust (Cheema, Shapiro, and Hasanain)

Researchers are conducting an RCT in Pakistan to evaluate the impact of two **problem-oriented policing** programs, a strategy through which police engage with the community to understand the root causes of crime and design targeted solutions. The first program arm is citizen-centric problem-oriented policing (CPOP) and the second is gender inclusive citizen-centric problem-oriented policing (CPOP-G). The CPOP arm incorporates community engagement and problem-oriented policing. The CPOP-G arm engages women in addition to men. The key outcomes that will be examined include citizen perceptions of crime and safety; police perceptions of citizens; police activity as measured through surveys and administrative data; and crime levels measured through administrative data. In response to Covid-19, researchers will also evaluate if positive interactions with the police from the initial intervention increased individuals’ willingness to comply with policies banning social gatherings, limiting transportation, as well as incidence of violence against women. ([Evaluation summary](#))

Making schools safe for learning: An evaluation of "Escola Segura, Família Forte" in Campo Grande, Brazil (Ferraz and Soares)

Researchers are conducting an RCT in Mato Grosso state in Brazil to evaluate the effectiveness of patrols by trained police officers in and around schools in promoting security and schooling outcomes. In addition to the patrols, this government policy has the goal of bringing police closer to the school communities, by enabling direct communication between the police, teachers, and parents through WhatsApp groups. ([Evaluation summary](#))

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. 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

There is limited experimental evidence on focused deterrence strategies outside of three noteworthy RCTs from the United States, which generally found the strategy to be ineffective at reducing criminal behavior. These studies

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 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.

focused on bringing people who had been convicted of crime to meet with community leaders, criminal justice practitioners, or social workers. Ultimately, none of the interventions altered the number of crimes probationers committed, conviction rates, or time until the next arraignment or conviction (Chermak 2008; Uchida et al. 2019; Hamilton, Rosenfeld, and Levin 2018).

Contrary to the limited evidence from randomized evaluations, 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).

One study on police efforts to reduce drunk driving in Rajasthan (Banerjee et al. 2019) 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 incentives-based approach to combating crime and violence; otherwise, the risky behavior being targeted may simply continue elsewhere.

11. **The efficient deployment of police resources: Theory and new evidence from a randomized drunk driving crackdown in India (2019)**, Banerjee, Duflo, Keniston, and Singh, NBER Working Paper

Location: India

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- In 2010, researchers worked with the Rajasthan police to evaluate if surprise roadblocks to identify drunk drivers were more effective at reducing traffic fatalities than fixed roadblocks. 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 chief or randomly rotating between three locations); (3) implementing personnel (regular police or reserve force personnel provided with special incentives); versus (4) a comparison group.
- Police stations implementing surprise roadblocks saw a reduction of about 30 percent in nighttime traffic accidents and deaths relative to comparison stations. However, fixed roadblocks 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.

COMBATING ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime can pose unique challenges to law enforcement, and standard policing strategies may need to be tailored to adequately confront organized criminal groups. There is a substantial theoretical and observational literature on how organized crime and gangs compete with the state in providing governance institutions and public services, including property rights enforcement and dispute resolution services (for example, see Alexeev, Janeba, and Osborne 2004; Skarbek 2011; Milhaupt and West 2000). Nevertheless, there is limited experimental evidence

on how police and other state actors can respond most effectively to organized crime and gang activities at an institutional level.⁵

This is beginning to change. A quasi-experimental study in Rio de Janeiro from 2008-2015 examined the impact of a *favela* pacification strategy in areas where gangs and paramilitary groups often exercised control (Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo 2020). Along with evaluating the effects of the pacification policing strategy, the study outlines a theoretical model of when state interventions against organized crime are likely to exacerbate violence and when interventions can improve security.

More recently, in Colombia, researchers combined experimental and quasi-experimental evidence to better understand the incentives underlying gang governance in Medellín’s combo-ruled neighborhoods (Blattman et al. 2021). They find no evidence that increased state presence—in the form of street-level liaisons—reduced gang rule in these areas. Rather, accompanying qualitative and quasi-experimental evidence suggests that increased state presence may actually crowd in gang rule as gangs seek to maintain their activities, including lucrative illegal drug trading. Thus, interventions that seek to tackle gang revenue and lower the profitability of drug markets represent an area for future evaluation.

12. **Gang rule: Understanding and countering criminal governance (2021)**, Blattman, Duncan, Lessing, and Tobón, NBER Working Paper

Location: Colombia

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- A majority of poor and middle-income neighborhoods in Medellín are governed to varying degrees by criminal gangs. Between 150 and 300 local youth gangs called *combos*, managed and controlled by larger, mafia-like organizations called *razones*, exert state-like powers such as resolving disputes, enforcing contracts, policing and preventing crime, managing markets, and taxing businesses in their neighborhoods. Combos also monopolize local illegal markets, especially retail drug sales, prostitution, and loan-sharking.
- In partnership with the City of Medellín and community officials, researchers randomly assigned intensified municipal services to half of 80 “sectors” (small informal neighborhoods) over a period of 20 months. The city assigned each sector a full-time street-level bureaucrat (“liaison”) responsible for organizing and communicating state services, referring civilians to state agencies, and holding regular meetings with city officials and agencies, among other activities. The program aimed to expand access and visibility of state services, rather than explicitly crowd out or challenge gang rule.
- The researchers found no evidence that increased state presence reduced gang rule in treated sectors. They suggest these findings may reflect the difficulty of changing perceptions of state legitimacy, particularly in the short run, or a potential modest, yet strategic, response by combos to increased state presence.
- Accompanying qualitative and quasi-experimental evidence suggests that gangs choose to govern for myriad reasons, including not only to sell protection, but also to minimize state and police presence and foster civilian loyalty, thereby protecting other illegal businesses. As a result, simply increasing and improving state services and governance may not be sufficient in crowding out gang rule and may, in fact, increase gang rule in areas where the state threatens its activities.

⁵ There is some experimental evidence on the related topic of how to prevent people from joining gangs or supporting exit from gangs by shifting the incentives tied to certain behaviors (see [Chapter 3](#)).

13. **Killing in the slums: Social order, criminal governance, and police violence in Rio de Janeiro (2020)**, Magaloni, Franco-Vivanco, and Melo, *American Political Science Review*

Location: Brazil

Method: Difference-in-differences

- Police Pacifying Units (UPPs) were assigned to provide a permanent increased police presence in about 20 percent of the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro and were encouraged to develop more positive relations with residents. The introduction of UPPs was part of a strategic effort to take a militarized approach to pacification and incorporate elements of community engagement inspired by community policing approaches. Around the same time, the city introduced a “pay-for-performance” incentive scheme that paid rewards to police units in the city that were able to reduce homicides or killings by the police.
- Assignment of UPPs was not random, nor did it target the highest-crime areas of the city. Instead, a decision was made to target relatively peaceful neighborhoods (particularly as the Olympics and World Cup approached).
- The study found that UPPs led to little impact on homicides between inhabitants on average, but decreased police violence by about 40 percent or 1.3 fewer killings by police for every 100,000 people per month.
- Criminal groups operated differently and had different relationships with the state and local residents across neighborhoods; in some areas, violence actually rose with the increased police presence. But where the UPP presence led to reductions in violence, public support for continued police presence increased.

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.

In addition, the past decade has seen increased interest in understanding the effects of training and other behavioral interventions on reducing excessive use of force and discriminatory behaviors in policing, in part due to high-profile instances of police brutality in the United States. Communities subject to police violence or excessive use of force may begin to doubt police legitimacy, minimizing their willingness to engage with security actors (see the discussion of improving police-community relations above for more on this topic). However, existing evidence remains mixed on the effectiveness of many interventions that aim to reduce excessive use of force and bolster police legitimacy—like body-worn cameras and procedural justice trainings—and evidence is largely limited to the US context. This remains an area ripe for further evaluation.

BUILDING DIVERSE POLICING TEAMS

In theory, diversifying police teams may make some citizens more willing to cooperate with officers and to support law enforcement efforts, for example if they are more comfortable or trusting confiding in officers from the same or similar demographic groups. Further, more diverse police teams may use less discriminatory policing tactics 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, socialization, and pressure on new hires to follow existing norms (Ba et al. 2021). Quasi-experimental evidence is beginning to address this ambiguity, as will ongoing 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. 2019). 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, running counter to what may be expected from these type of reforms (Karim et al. 2018).

14. **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.
- Providing Sunni respondents with information that the police are integrated reduced 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.

15. **Policing ethnicity: Lab-in-the-field evidence on discrimination, cooperation, and ethnic balancing in the Liberian National Police (2019)**, Blair, Karim, Gilligan, and Beardsley, Working Paper

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.

16. **International gender balancing reforms in postconflict 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

Three new studies 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:⁶

Engendering policing: Evaluating reforms to increase women’s access to security and justice (Sukhtankar, Kruks-Wisner, and Mangal)

In Madhya Pradesh, India, researchers are conducting an RCT to evaluate whether the establishment of police station-level Women’s Help Desks (WHDs), as well as the deployment of additional female personnel to these WHDs, improves the responsiveness of frontline officers to women, as well as levels of crime and crime reporting. ([Evaluation summary](#))

POLICE SKILLS TRAINING

Police training can take many forms, including sessions aimed at improving police officers’ investigative, interpersonal, conflict mediation, or patrolling skills, among others. In India, a training program that focused on investigative and interpersonal skills increased crime victims’ satisfaction with police investigations (Banerjee et al. 2021). Another study in Colombia found that a soft skills training program reduced homicides, home burglaries, and brawls in initially high crime areas (Garcia, Mejía, and Ortega 2013).

Additional research (described in more detail in the following section) is examining how **procedural justice training**—which emphasizes police transparency and responsiveness to community concerns—can be used to both combat police use of force and increase perceived legitimacy. 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. 2016; Mazerolle et al. 2012; MacQueen and Bradford 2015).

17. **Building effective, resilient and trusted police organizations in Mexico (forthcoming)**, Canales, Working Paper

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.

⁶ Two of these studies have already been mentioned above—one by Cheema, Shapiro, and Hasanain looking at gender focused community policing in Pakistan; the second, an ongoing study by Fiala et al. evaluating a police patrolling intervention targeting GBV in public spaces with teams including at least one female police officer.

- 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 were smaller 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.

18. **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 15-29 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 both 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.

19. **Police reform, training and crime: Experimental evidence from Colombia’s Plan Cuadrantes (2013)**, Garcia, Mejia, 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.

COMBATING POLICE VIOLENCE AND EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE

Police violence and excessive use of force harms individuals, police-community relations, and the perceived legitimacy of the police, especially when police actions are viewed as unjust and discriminatory (Ang 2021; Legewie and Fagan 2019). This in turn can diminish public safety as individuals may be reluctant to report crimes to or cooperate with a police force viewed as illegitimate (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk 2016; Skogan and Frydl 2004). Exposure to police violence has also been shown to impact the educational and psychological well-being of students in the United States, particularly Black and Hispanic students who face greater exposure (Ang 2021; Legewie and Fagan 2019).

While the experimental evidence on reducing police violence is growing, it is currently concentrated in the United States (Wood, Tyler, and Papachristos 2020; Ariel, Farrar, and Sutherland 2015).⁷ However, police violence threatens community safety and perceived police legitimacy globally (Ariel et al. 2016).

One area of research where experimental evidence is expanding focuses on examining the effectiveness of police monitoring devices like **body-worn cameras (BWCs)**. 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 of both RCTs and quasi-experimental evidence from the United States, United Kingdom, and Uruguay 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). For example, an RCT involving 2,224 police officers in Washington D.C. found that requiring officers to use BWCs for at least seven months did not impact police use of force or citizen complaints, while a smaller year-long intervention in Las Vegas found that BWCs reduced both police use of force and citizen complaints (Yokum, Ravishankar, and Coppock 2019; Braga et al. 2018). Given the contrasting results in the literature, it is unclear under what conditions BWCs are likely to reduce police use of force.

⁷ Because most of the experimental evidence on reducing police violence is concentrated in the United States, this chapter does not summarize individual studies in detail, given the focus of this wrap-up has been on low- and middle-income countries. For more on this topic, see a recent series of [policy assessments](#) developed by the Council on Criminal Justice in conjunction with the Crime Lab at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy. Topics covered include: enforcement policies (e.g. chokeholds and other neck restraints, duty to intervene, and no-knock warrants and police raids) and law enforcement training (e.g. police training, de-escalation policies and training, procedural justice training, and implicit bias training).

A second area of research on reducing police use of force is focused on **procedural justice trainings**. Procedural justice policing is designed to build legitimacy by emphasizing that police should act transparently, listen to and respectfully respond to the concerns of communities, and explain and implement policies fairly (Wood, Tyler, and Papachristos 2020). In Seattle, Washington, researchers experimentally evaluated a program using elements of cognitive behavioral therapy and a supervisor-led conversation about applying the principles of procedural justice to a recent encounter (Owens et al. 2018). Officers assigned to meet with their supervisors for the intervention were less likely to be involved in incidents leading to arrest or use of force. A recent quasi-experimental study found that a one-day training program for 8,480 police officers that emphasized procedurally just policing strategies in Chicago, Illinois reduced complaints against the police by 10 percent and use of force against civilians by about 6 percent over two years (Wood, Tyler, and Papachristos 2020). Taken together (in combination with findings from procedural justice interventions discussed in the preceding section), these findings suggest that procedural justice training may support shifts in officer behavior, though it remains to be seen whether these changes persist over time.

Lastly, a nascent area of research centers on interventions aimed at combating **implicit bias** among police officers, which may address prejudicial behaviors. Researchers have acknowledged the potential role of implicit bias or stereotyping in police judgements, such as who to stop or when to use force (Glaser 2015). Still, randomized evaluations aimed at combating police implicit bias remain rare, although there exist a number of laboratory studies in the field of psychology that examine the issue of police implicit bias (for example see Correll et al. 2011; Plant and Peruche 2005). One example of a randomized evaluation of implicit bias trainings for New York police officers found that trainings increased officers' knowledge of implicit bias as a concept, but did not change their behaviors or reduce racial and ethnic disparities in arrests (Worden et al. 2020). Overall, more research is needed to understand effective approaches to combating implicit bias and racial prejudice in policing, and the possible resulting reductions in police violence and use of force.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

One study currently being funded through GCCI will expand the evidence base of strategies to reduce police use of force:

Do body-worn cameras affect police behavior and citizens' perception? Evidence from an RCT in São Paulo (Monteiro, Biderman, and Piquet)

Brazil is one of the most violent countries in the world, with the highest absolute number of violent deaths. Worryingly, police forces are responsible for over 20 percent of homicides in some Brazilian states. Many police departments are increasingly investing in body-worn cameras (BWC) as a technological solution to improve policing accountability and reduce use of force during citizen-police interactions. However, the evidence on the impact of this enforcement mechanism remains limited. This study will use an RCT to assess the impact of the use of BWC by police officers on police brutality, obedience to police, citizen's perceived safety, and police trust.

PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As discussed above, there is robust evidence that crime is generally deterred by increases in police manpower and redeployments but an important question for further research is how these efforts can be best targeted and what policing strategies work best for deterring different types of crime. RCTs may be well-placed to fill the following evidence gaps:

- 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. Policing strategies focused on targeting *individuals* at high risk of criminal behavior (rather than places) may be a more effective strategy in areas where crime is easily displaced. There is also more research to be conducted on what kinds of policing activities are the most effective crime deterrents, and which strategies are most impacted by community participation and collaboration.
- 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.⁸ But none of these studies have taken place in low- and middle-income countries, 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, in an effort to disentangle which elements of the strategy adopted in different instances may have been most important for success.
- Similar to focused deterrence strategies, there is a need for further evaluations of interventions to combat police violence, including in low- and middle-income countries. While police violence and excessive use of force may damage police legitimacy in many countries, the experimental literature is currently concentrated in the United States and may not address potentially distinct drivers of police violence across different contexts.
- 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 gender-based violence, more efforts to tease out what may make some community-oriented policing strategies more effective than others are necessary.

⁸ 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?

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.⁹ Much of the evidence that does exist comes from the United States, where researchers have begun to forge long-term partnerships with the court system. 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.

IMPROVING CRIMINAL JUSTICE

New research in the United States has used behavioral nudges to help improve criminal justice outcomes by reducing negative consequences for both citizens and the criminal justice system.¹⁰ An evaluation of an intervention that used re-designed summons letters and text message reminders for defendants in the New York City court system found that, when paired together, these simple innovations could reduce the rate at which defendants fail to appear by up to 26 percent (Fishbane, Ouss, and Shah 2020). Other quasi-experimental evaluations—including in Miami, Philadelphia, and New York—are leveraging administrative data and machine learning models to assess potential bias in judges' bail decisions (Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang 2018; Kleinberg et al. 2017).

⁹ In a recent edition of *Science*, 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.

¹⁰ The [Access to Justice Lab](#) (A2JL), based at Harvard University, is currently undertaking a number of 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).

20. **Behavioral nudges reduce failure to appear in court (2020)**, Fishbane, Ouss, and Shah, *Science*
Location: New York City, USA
Method: RCT/Regression discontinuity design
- Researchers conducted two evaluations to study interventions aimed at making court information more salient for defendants, in an effort to reduce failures to appear. The first study (which used a regression discontinuity design) examined a redesigned summons letter that made clearer practical information, like appearance date and court location, as well as consequences of failure to appear (i.e. issuance of arrest warrant). The second study augmented these redesigned forms by randomly assigning defendants to receive text message reminders in advance of their court dates that emphasized the consequences of failing to attend and/or encouraged defendants to make a plan to attend court. Both studies focused on criminal summonses, which are issued for minor criminal offenses—such as disorderly conduct, park trespassing, or open containers—and typically do not involve pretrial detainment or posting of bail.
 - Both interventions reduced failures to appear. The redesigned summons form reduced failure to appear by roughly 13 percent (relative to a 47 percent baseline). Receiving any form of text message also reduced failures to appear by 21 percent (relative to a 38 percent baseline), though text messages that emphasized the consequences of failing to appear were more effective—reducing failures to appear by 23 to 26 percent.
 - These findings suggest that failures to appear in court are not simply a result of defendants intentionally skipping court, but instead may be due to information barriers. Pairing redesigned summonses that emphasize salient information with reminder text messages offers a cost-effective solution for reducing failures to appear, providing benefits to both defendants and the criminal justice system in terms of cost savings.
21. **Racial bias in bail decisions (2018)**, Arnold, Dobbie, and Yang, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*
Location: Miami and Philadelphia, USA
Method: Instrumental variables/Marginal treatment effects
- 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 22.2 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.

22. **Human decisions and machine predictions (2017)**, 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 mispredict risk level.

STRENGTHENING STATE INSTITUTIONS FOR JUSTICE PROVISION

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

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 to programs that bring justice systems closer to citizens, reducing barriers to access. 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.

23. **Rural institutional innovation: Can village courts in Bangladesh accelerate access to justice and improve socio-economic outcomes? (2020)**, Mattsson and Mobarak, *3ie Impact Evaluation Report*

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, which lack enforcement capacity and are often perceived to be biased in favor of existing local power structures. A 2006 law created a semi-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.
- Researchers partnered with IPA, the Government of Bangladesh, and the UNDP to randomly roll-out access to a pilot program—Activating Village Courts in Bangladesh (ACVB)—that provided increased human and physical resources to establish such courts and provide related information to citizens.

Awareness campaigns focused in particular on improving the ability of women and the poor to access courts.

- The ACVB program successfully supported the activation of village courts, which in turn were better functioning and more frequently used. Researchers found that the program also improved perceptions of harmony between neighbors and, for those who had reported a dispute at baseline, satisfaction with the justice system improved.
- However, relative to the broader dispute resolution landscape in the country, even after the program was implemented village courts were only utilized for resolving a small fraction of disputes—therefore not radically changing the way by which disputes were resolved. The program also had no effect on overall measures of wellbeing—including on subjective measures of unresolved disputes, crime, and trust.

24. **Information and bargaining through agents: Experimental evidence from Mexico's labor courts (2020)**, Sadka, Seira, and Woodruff, NBER Working Paper

Location: Mexico City, Mexico

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- 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 encouraging potential plaintiffs to consult with a public lawyer and/or by providing personalized statistical predictions of expected case outcomes and legally-mandated entitlements.
- In the statistical prediction treatment, researchers leveraged data on 5,000 concluded cases filed in 2011 and used machine learning techniques to estimate predictive models on the outcomes of each individual case.
- They found that both treatments (the consultation and statistical prediction) nearly doubled the rate of settlement on the day the treatment was provided, but only when the plaintiff herself was present to receive the information. Post-treatment results indicated that lawyers do not convey the information provided through the intervention to their clients.

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.

25. **Trust in state authorities and non-state actors in Pakistan (2020)**, Acemoglu, Cheema, Khwaja, and Robinson, *Journal of Political Economy*

Location: Punjab, 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 #9](#)). 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 #8](#)).

26. **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.
- The impacts of legal assistance were felt strongest amongst groups who may have otherwise been disadvantaged by customary justice practices, particularly women.

NON-STATE APPROACHES TO JUSTICE PROVISION

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. Thus far, there is little evidence to support the effectiveness of ADR programs, and the randomized evaluation detailed below is the first to address the topic in a conflict-affected context.

27. **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 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](#) 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.
- Researchers suggest that it is difficult to view this intervention as cost effective, as the amount spent on the intervention only “breaks even” after three years if the resolution of each dispute is valued at twice the annual average income in Liberia.

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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 (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. While the existing experimental literature largely focuses on issues of criminality rather than insurgency or rebellion, theory suggests there is much in common between the factors that drive individuals to engage in both criminal and violent activities. For this reason, this chapter draws on a broad evidence base that encompasses questions ranging from the nature of criminal motivations to why individuals rebel.

In particular, this chapter examines emerging insights from evaluations of the following categories of interventions:

- **Psychosocial interventions**, including **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)-inspired programs** that focus on developing non-cognitive skills and correcting maladaptive mental processes by teaching people to evaluate and modify the way they think and make decisions.
- **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.
- **Informational campaigns** that emphasize the costs of engaging in crime or violence.
- **Early childhood interventions** that offer families access to early childhood stimulation resources, including nutritional supplements, nurse visits, and learning strategies.

As highlighted in [Chapter 1](#), one emerging research question is whether 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. Furthermore, if crime is potentially easily displaced by place-based strategies, strategies that focus on individuals, rather than places, may be more effective.

The following are among some of the key emerging findings from recent randomized evaluations, and other high-quality quasi-experimental studies:

- 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 CBT-inspired programs in the United States and Liberia suggest that this may be a cost-effective approach to reducing youth engagement in criminal activities.
- Vocational training and employment programs have generally failed to live up to policymaker expectations. 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.
- Strategies focused on deterring crime and violence through informational campaigns—that emphasize the costs of engaging in these activities without other methods of supporting behavior change—tend to be ineffective and may even increase involvement in criminal activities. Programs in the United States focused on drug resistance education (such as D.A.R.E. and Scared Straight) have shown disappointing results.
- Multi-pronged approaches to violence reduction that pair pro-social and behavioral support with family-based interventions and monitoring have been found to be effective in reducing criminal activity later in life.

PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

A growing number of crime and violence prevention programs have sought to draw on psychosocial techniques as a strategy for shifting behaviors and attitudes. In particular, **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**—a psychotherapeutic practice often used to address mood and anxiety disorders by shifting participants’ thoughts and behaviors—has been increasingly applied in diverse contexts as an approach to reduce antisocial and violent behavior.

CBT-inspired interventions—which may include a mix of individual counselling, group therapy, and workshops—are typically designed to help participants evaluate and modify the way they think and make decisions, improve their self-image, and relate and adapt to their environments. A goal of some of these programs is to help participants plan ahead or slow down automatic reactions in the face of high-stakes situations; this may be one way in which they can help reduce violent or criminal activity, particularly when targeted towards individuals living in high-risk environments. In contrast to policing approaches, such as increased enforcement, or broad social initiatives, such as employment programs, CBT is targeted and short-term, making it a relatively inexpensive policy option.

A 2007 meta-analysis ([Lipsey, Landenberger, and Wilson](#)) of 58 studies—19 of which were randomized evaluations—reinforces the potential of CBT 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, [three large-scale randomized evaluations](#) of CBT-based programs in Liberia and the United States have found that therapy reduced criminal behavior and recidivism, and increased graduation rates when delivered in school. Notably, these studies evaluated iterations of long-standing interventions, rather than CBT programs that have been adapted and introduced into new environments. More recent studies, including an evaluation of a CBT-based

program in [Mexico City](#) (Avitabile et al. 2019), have revealed challenges in incentivizing youth to take up this type of programming when introduced into a new environment, given possible stigma surrounding participation. Thus, additional debate remains over how CBT generalizes across contexts, to different types of criminal activity (e.g. disorganized vs. organized crime), and target populations (e.g. older youth or adults). Further research is also needed to better understand the precise mechanisms through which CBT interventions bring about behavior change.

28. **Preventing violence in the most violent contexts: Behavioral and neurophysiological evidence (2019)**, Dinarte and Egana-delSol, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper

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 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. Unlike previous studies, 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 amongst 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.

29. **Reducing crime and violence: Experimental evidence from cognitive behavioral therapy in Liberia (2017)**, Blattman, Jamison, and Sheridan, *American Economic Review*¹¹

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-inspired 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.
- 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

¹¹ A long-term follow-up of this study is currently ongoing, with results expected in late 2021.

impulsivity and improvements in self-esteem). These results were more pronounced for participants who received *both* therapy and cash.

- These results demonstrate that CBT, combined with unconditional cash transfers, can be an effective method of reducing criminality, violence, and drug use, at fairly low cost.
- Providing young men with opportunities to continue practicing CBT techniques could be an effective way to reinforce recipients' changed skills and behaviors. Programs that provide additional reinforcement, such as periodic “booster” therapy sessions, could be important to sustaining effects.

30. **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

- Researchers conducted three randomized evaluations of CBT-inspired 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, arrests per student decreased by 12 percent by the end of the program, and recipients were 9 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.

Cognitive behavioral therapy has also been evaluated as an approach for helping populations recovering from conflict or experiencing forced displacement cope with the trauma inflicted by these experiences and strengthen their economic and livelihood trajectories.

31. **Group-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) training improves mental health of SME entrepreneurs: Experimental evidence from conflict-affected areas of Pakistan (2019)**, Saraf,

Rahman, and Jamison, Working Paper

Location: Pakistan

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan have suffered from armed conflict for the last three decades, resulting in large-scale displacement and severe damage to the infrastructure and economy of the region. Epidemiological studies from these areas have shown high rates of common mental disorders (such as depression and anxiety) among the general population.
- Researchers evaluated the effects of supplementing a cash grants program with a five-week group CBT program on depression, anxiety, and well-being among SME entrepreneurs in conflict-affected areas of Pakistan. The CBT training program—Problem Management Plus for Entrepreneurs (PM+E)—was facilitated by local non-specialist health providers. The training content was designed to provide

entrepreneurs with a skillset that could be applied to stressful situations in their everyday life and work to help them negotiate such challenges in an adaptive fashion.

- The study found that CBT led to significant improvements in mental health outcomes in the short run (three months post intervention), with a notable reduction in the intensity and prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms and higher reported levels of well-being. Across all outcomes measured, impact was larger at three months post-intervention than immediately after at five weeks, indicating that the CBT intervention may have incremental benefits.

32. **Effectiveness of a brief psychological intervention for women in a post-conflict setting in Pakistan: A single-blind, cluster, randomised controlled trial (2019)**, Rahman et al., *The Lancet*

Location: Pakistan

Method: RCT

- Researchers randomly assigned groups of women, to receive the WHO’s Problem Management Plus (PM+) CBT-based program in rural Swat district, Pakistan—an area that had experienced armed conflict between the Pakistani military and Taliban insurgents from 2007 to 2011.
- The program was delivered to women in groups of six to eight over five sessions delivered over the course of one week. The sessions were facilitated by locally trained women, offering a safe space for participants to discuss their feelings and experiences.
- Three months following the intervention, women who participated in the group PM+ program had significantly lower rates of anxiety and depression, relative to the comparison group.
- These findings suggest that CBT-based programs delivered by locally-trained facilitators may be an effective means of improving psychological outcomes in conflict-affected, rural environments.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

Two studies currently being funded through GCCI will expand the evidence base on psychosocial programming in FCV settings:

Integrating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-based Interventions and Employment Programs for Youth in Sierra Leone (Betancourt, Akram, and Siddiqi)

In this study, researchers are evaluating the effects of a group mental health intervention on social functioning, emotion regulation, and economic stability. The Youth Readiness Intervention (YRI), is a group-based intervention designed to be delivered by lay workers (such as community health workers and youth employment workers), that draws on elements of CBT. ([Evaluation summary](#))

Thinking Twice: Does Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Influence Police Officer Behavior? Experimental Evidence from Mexico City Police (Rodrigo Canales, Juan Santini)

Policing is an occupation with distinctive characteristics that can prompt mental health disorders. Research shows that police officers are exposed to a variety of traumatic and stressful events over the course of their careers that have large negative impacts on mental and physical health, job performance, interactions with citizens, and violence. It is essential for police organizations, therefore, to identify interventions that can support the mental health of their workers, and reduce their use of excessive force. Collaborating with the Mexico City Ministry of Citizen Security, researchers will implement an RCT to measure whether cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) affects police officers’ emotional stability and violent behavior. The research aims to shed light on the linkages between CBT and officers’ mental health, job performance, and use of excessive force in the streets.

Given growing interest in CBT-based approaches as a means of reducing criminal and violent engagement amongst 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 THERAPY¹²	
UNDERSTANDING MECHANISMS (i.e. when does CBT work and why?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Given CBT-based 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?)
IMPROVING PROGRAM DELIVERY (i.e. what are the optimal and necessary implementation conditions?)	<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?
VARYING THE INTENSITY AND DURATION OF CBT	<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?
EXPANDING MEASUREMENT	<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).
COMPARING VIS-À-VIS OTHER INTERVENTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does CBT compare to other, lighter touch psychosocial 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)?

¹² 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.¹³ 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.

However, there is mixed evidence regarding the potential effectiveness of employment and vocational training programs in reducing crime, recidivism, and violence. There is relatively little experimental research on the ability of job skills training programs to reduce violence in fragile or conflict-affected settings where there are often more limited opportunities for formal sector employment. 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 is often 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

¹³ 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/10.2307/2094589>; 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.; Brück, Tilman, Neil T. N. Ferguson, Valeria Izzi, and Wolfgang Stojetz. 2019. “Can Job Programs Build Peace?” HiCN Working Paper 297.

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.

33. **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 2,579 “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 seven months and attitudes eventually reversed to increased support for the Taliban.
- When combined with livelihood training, cash 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.

34. **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 psychosocial assistance—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 men’s location—e.g. out of hot spots and not in mercenary work.

35. **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.

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 three studies of summer youth employment programs (SYEP) in US cities (each described below) 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 Chicago, New York City, and Boston, placing youth from neighborhoods at high-risk of crime into summer jobs programs reduced violent crime arrests, incarceration, and arraignment for property or violent crime, respectively.

In all cases, these effects persisted multiple months beyond when the programs ended, while improvements to employment prospects did not, suggesting that employment in and of itself may not have reduced engagement in criminal activities, but rather the social and emotional skills gained through these programs may have had longer term impacts on participants’ behaviors. These findings are consistent with those of CBT-based programming (described above).

36. **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

- 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.
- Using administrative data, they found that the program reduced violent crime arraignments by 35 percent and property crime arraignments by 29 percent 17 months after program participation. However, while the total number of arraignments decreased, the program did not affect whether participants were likely to have *ever* committed a crime in the months following employment. In the medium-term, reductions in criminal justice outcomes were greatest for male youth.
- The author suggests these reductions were driven by improvements in conflict resolution skills, rather than through employment, based on findings from pre-/post-surveys with program participants.

37. **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 and led to a meaningful reduction in participant incarceration and mortality.
 - The results suggest that the reduction in deaths may be substantially 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.
 - SYEP had little impact on employment after the program year, suggesting the program may have changed participants’ behaviors, rather than merely prevented youth from engaging in violence by keeping them busy on the job.
38. **Summer jobs reduce violence among disadvantaged youth (2014)**, Heller, *Science*
Location: Chicago, USA
Method: RCT
Link to [evaluation summary](#)
- Researchers tested whether an 8-week summer jobs program for youth from high-violence Chicago schools could impact rates of violent-crime arrests.
 - Youth who received an offer of summer employment and mentorship had lower rates of violent-crime arrests throughout the following year—they were 43 percent less likely to be arrested for violent crimes. However, the program had no effect on other types of arrests.
 - 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.

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.

INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Information campaigns typically seek to deter youth from participating in crime and violence by sharing information on the costs of engaging in these activities. Consistent with evidence across other sectors, evaluations of these programs have shown that information alone is not enough to deter these behaviors—merely exhorting youth not to engage in crime is not effective.

To illustrate this finding, a meta-analysis of more than 20 RCTs shows that D.A.R.E.—Drug Abuse Resistance Education, which has been implemented widely throughout the United States—has no long-term impacts on drug use (Pan and Bai 2009). In a similar vein, “Scared Straight” programs—which operate on the theory that bringing youth or juvenile offenders on organized visits to prison facilities will deter them from engaging in future criminal activities—have been found to be ineffective in reducing future criminal behavior. In some cases, researchers even find that these programs increased crime and delinquency among participants (Klenowski, Bell, and Dodson 2010).

It is possible that more comprehensive, integrated approaches to prevention that combine information campaigns with other proven strategies, like CBT, may offer more promise. In addition, the format in which information is delivered may play a key role. For example, education entertainment—or “edutainment,” which dramatizes a situation with the aim of spreading information and changing attitudes and behaviors—may be a more effective approach. Read more under the media interventions section of [Chapter 5](#).

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS

Meaningful efforts at preventing crime and violence may begin at birth. Evidence from several randomized evaluations suggests that high-quality early childhood interventions can lead to lasting reductions in crime in conjunction with holistic life course improvements.

A long-term randomized evaluation of the Nurse Family Partnership program—which provides regular home visits by nurses to first-time, low-income mothers—found that by age 19, first-born children of mothers visited under the program were less likely to have ever been arrested and less likely to ever been convicted, relative to their peers who did not benefit from the program during their youth (Eckenrode, Campa, and Luckey 2010). These results are complemented by long-term follow-up studies of similar early childhood interventions in Jamaica and Michigan, which showed reductions in violent behavior and arrests, respectively, for adults who had benefited from these interventions as children (Walker et al. 2011; Schweinhart 2007).

39. [Early childhood stimulation benefits adult competence and reduces violent behavior \(2011\)](#),

Walker, Chang, Vera-Hernández, and Grantham-McGregor, *Pediatrics*

Location: Jamaica

Method: RCT

- In the mid-late 1980s, researchers identified 129 stunted children aged 9-24 months from low-income, disadvantaged Kingstown neighborhoods and provided their mothers with weekly visits from health aides for two years to teach appropriate play and learning activities. They simultaneously provided micronutrient supplements to a random subset of participants.
- At the end of the intervention period, weekly home visits changed the way parents interacted with their children and shaped their home environments.
- At 22-years-old, adults who had participated in the stimulation program reported less depression and social inhibition. Stimulation group participants were also less likely to be involved in fights or other serious violent behavior, although there were no differences in arrest or conviction rates.

40. **Long-term effects of prenatal and infancy nurse home visitation on the life course of youths (2010)**, Eckenrode, Campa, and Luckey, *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*
Location: USA
Method: RCT
- Researchers conducted a long-term follow-up of the Elmira Nurse Family Partnership program—a prenatal and infancy home visitation program—to assess the program’s impact on 19-year-olds whose mothers had participated in the program.
 - Relative to 19-year-old youth who did not benefit from the program, girls whose mothers were program participants recorded fewer lifetime arrests and convictions and were generally less likely to be engaged in the criminal justice system. Notably, however, the same impacts were not observed for boys.
41. **Crime prevention by the high/scope perry preschool program (2007)**, Schweinhart, *Victims & Offenders*
Location: USA
Method: RCT
- In 1962, three- and four-year old black children from poor households in Michigan were provided with preschool programming, weekly home visits, and parent group meetings. Researchers followed participants from childhood through age 40 to study the program’s effects of IQ, education achievement, earnings, and criminal activity.
 - Adults who were offered to participate in the program as children had much less involvement with the criminal justice system later in life—including fewer lifetime arrests, fewer arrests for violent crimes, and reduced likelihood in being sentenced to prison. These results were in addition to improved educational and labor market outcomes.

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-inspired 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.
- As illustrated by the discussion of early childhood interventions above, many programs 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 REBEL GROUPS MAKE STRATEGIC CHOICES BETWEEN VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT ACTION?

This chapter reviews the evidence on how criminal organizations, rebel groups, and other non-state armed organizations make strategic decisions between violent and non-violent actions in order to recruit supporters and carry out their operations. The existing experimental evidence base on this topic is fairly limited; thus, this chapter draws primarily on quasi-experimental research.

Theories of industrial organization would suggest that these groups, and their leaders, are rational actors who are calculating, self-interested, and maximizing, making strategic choices between using violent force or taking other approaches to achieve their objectives. For example, an insurgency group must strategically navigate when to use force versus when to prioritize non-violent action in order to recruit and motivate its soldiers. Similarly, a drug cartel's success depends on its ability to recruit individuals to all parts of the drug supply chain and incentivize them to participate in illicit activities.

The sections that follow present emerging lessons from a mixture of experimental, quasi-experimental, and qualitative research on the strategic decisions that organizations make in response to economic shocks or resource competition, as well as influxes of foreign aid or counterinsurgency efforts.¹⁴ This chapter also briefly introduces some qualitative evidence of how these types of groups may leverage non-material incentives—such as social capital, pride, or grievances—to achieve their objectives.

¹⁴ This literature is also closely linked to individual occupational choices behind engaging in criminal or violent activities. For more on individual choices, see Chapter 3.

ECONOMIC SHOCKS AND RESOURCE COMPETITION

Over the past decade, a relatively large quasi-experimental literature has emerged examining the relationship between exogenous 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.

As laid out in Dal Bó and Dal Bó (2011), sudden 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 (2020)—which draws on the results from 46 natural experiments that use difference-in-differences designs—finds that shifts in commodity prices, on average, do not affect the likelihood of conflict. 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, whereas 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.

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 to different forms of both labor- and capital-intensive commodities may lead to conflict, providing evidence for the specific theoretical channels discussed above.

42. **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, they find that 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:

43. **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 increase conflict in grid cells producing more of these minerals and present evidence suggesting that armed groups are financed by predating on these resources.
 - For example, spikes in mineral prices inside an ethnic homeland lead to spatial diffusion of fighting by armed groups outside the homeland; and appropriation of a mining area by rebel groups increases the chance they perpetrate violence elsewhere.
44. **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 increase conflict onset, incidence, and intensity; however, these effects are smaller in the interior of the country where there is less trade.
 - They also show that when the data is aggregated to the country level, there is an insignificant effect on conflict onset, but conditional on country outbreak, conflicts are more likely to start in the most open locations.
 - 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, Sviatashci (2019) 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.

45. **Making a narco: Childhood exposure to illegal labor markets and criminal life paths (2019)**, Sviatschi, Working Paper
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.
 - When coca production became more profitable, parents were more likely to use child labor for illegal coca cultivation. 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 born 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.
- 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.

46. **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 affect 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.
- Researchers also found a negative relationship between maize prices and cartel presence, as well as killings perpetrated by these groups, suggesting that price changes affected the strategic decisions of cartels, which moved into economically depressed territories where farmers were willing to supply illicit crops.
- These results suggest that the economic impact of price changes on households and their subsequent decisions to grow illicit crops may ultimately affect the industrial organization of violence in Mexico. As such, policies designed to mitigate household economic shocks may influence the operations and geographic locations of cartels.

ENVIRONMENTAL SHOCKS

Another set of studies utilize rainfall shocks to highlight how armed groups and individuals respond to economic downturns in ways that lead to conflict. In India, for example, Fetzer (2020) observes that access to a national employment safety net program appeared to protect against the negative economic shocks triggered by reductions in agricultural output as a result of heavy monsoons, thus reducing conflict and some forms of crime by increasing the opportunity cost of engaging in these activities.

47. **Can workfare programs moderate conflict: Evidence from India (2020),** Fetzer, *Journal of the European Economics 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.

48. **Conflict, climate and cells: A disaggregated analysis (2014)**, 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.
- They find that negative climate shocks that occur during the growing season of the main crop cultivated in a particular cell have persistent effects on increased conflict incidence. Cells that experience conflict in one growing year have a higher probability of experiencing conflict again in the subsequent year.
- Climate shocks outside of the growing season have no apparent effect on conflict, suggesting that conflict is 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 ethnic cleavages may also 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.

49. **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.

50. **Economic shocks and crime: Evidence from the Brazilian trade liberalization (2018)**, Dix-Carneiro, Soares, and Ulyssea, *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 liberalization policies triggered larger trade-induced 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.

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 rebels 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 government has at its disposal to spend in particular sectors, from security to administrative capacity. These resources can enhance state capacity vis-à-vis rebel groups, making it easier for the government to repress insurgency, thereby reducing conflict.
- **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 rebel 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 in the midst of ongoing hostilities may increase the duration and lethality of civil wars.¹⁵

¹⁵ 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*

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. 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.

51. **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 #60](#)).
- 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.

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.

52. **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.
 - Their findings suggest that programs were effective when secure enough to be implementable; where their design was sufficiently informed about community preferences to be valued; and when implementation was conditional on government controlling the territory, which implies cooperation (i.e. information sharing). Smaller Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) projects (under US\$50k) reduced insurgent violence, but only in interaction with a larger number of troops.
53. **Building peace: The impact of aid on the labor market for insurgents (2011)**, Iyengar, Montan, and Hanson, *NBER Working Paper Series*
Location: Iraq
Method: Difference-in-differences
- Researchers leveraged variation in the implementation of CERP 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.
54. **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 the CERP—reduced insurgent violence, particularly for smaller projects and since the “surge” began in 2007.

MIXED RESPONSES TO AID

Elsewhere, research has revealed that reactions to aid and development assistance can vary substantially based on location and insurgent characteristics. In Afghanistan, Lyall (2019) and Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov (2017) 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.

55. **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 investigated over 1,000 civilian casualty incidents from 2011-2013. Researchers leveraged the program's as-if random design to assess the impact of humanitarian assistance on Taliban attacks against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Afghan forces, and civilians.
 - ACAP II aid was associated with a reduction in Taliban attacks against ISAF, but not Afghan forces or civilians, for up to two years after the initial incident. The program was most effective in locations close to ISAF military bases and when responding to events with only moderate numbers of civilian casualties or property damage.
56. **Can development programs counter insurgencies? Evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan (2017)**, Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov, Working Paper
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.
57. **Guns and butter? Fighting violence with the promise of development (2017)**, Khanna and Zimmerman, *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 increase in Maoist-related violence in the short-run (primarily driven by an increase in police-initiated attacks, but also driven partially by an increase in insurgent attacks on civilians) and increased the number of captured Maoists.
- 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 the poor. 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 rebel groups are more likely to initiate attacks where the costs and likelihood of retaliation are low. 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.

58. **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 matters: 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.

59. **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.

60. **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.
- Results are consistent with the hypothesis that insurgents may strategically try to sabotage development programs for political reasons: the successful implementation of government-supported projects would weaken insurgents' positions among the population by repairing negative attitudes of local communities toward the government.

61. **US food aid and civil conflict (2014)**, Nunn and Qian, *American Economic Review*

Location:

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.
- They find 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.
- 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. Ghropade (2020) shows how greater exposure to conflict in Pakistan reduced likelihood of accessing government-run aid programs. Similar to 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.

62. **Calamity, conflict, and cash transfers: How violence affects access to aid in Pakistan (2020)**, Ghropade, *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.¹⁶

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:

- 1) **Grievance theory** suggests that alienation from mainstream political processes and decision-making, marginalization, and economic deprivation may drive participation;
- 2) **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
- 3) **Social sanction theory** suggests that social norms and pressures may motivate participation.

For all of the above reasons, individuals may be motivated to join a rebel group or organized crime cell. Moreover, armed groups themselves can make strategic choices in order 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, in order 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. Beber and Blattman (2013) suggest 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, they observe that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) used extreme

¹⁶ The authors plan to further build out the discussion of this literature in our next iteration of this evidence review.

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.¹⁷ This research suggests that punishment or coercive recruitment is more likely when recruits have poor outside options and coercion is “cheap”—as when there is little civilian support to lose, or foreign powers insensitive to human rights violations fund the movement, or when militaries fail to protect civilians. Possible strategies to counteract or deter the forcible recruitment of children include counterpropaganda—to counter the indoctrination and misinformation strategies that rebels employ—and escape training, as well as enforcement of international penalties or prosecution, such as by making aid conditional on human rights behavior.

Large unanswered questions also remain in understanding the drivers of radicalization. For example, there is very little rigorous empirical evidence on non-material incentives such as religion and the role of religious institutions, or social alienation and the role of social structures in driving radicalization.

¹⁷ 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).

CHAPTER 4 REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 5: WHAT WORKS IN PEACEBUILDING, RECONCILIATION, AND POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY?

This chapter provides an overview of the emerging empirical evidence on peacebuilding, reconciliation, and other post-conflict recovery programming. Many of the interventions evaluated in studies reviewed here have emerged from a non-experimental literature, largely grounded in social psychology, that argues strengthening social capital—that is to say, the strengthening of social networks and the development of prosocial norms within and between communities—may help to defuse intergroup tension and conflict. This literature argues that social ties can allow for both information exchange and peaceful bargaining between groups.

Can interventions designed to foster social capital allow for people and groups to more peacefully negotiate, restore the trust and social bonds that often deteriorate during conflict, and prevent potential violence? This chapter reviews evidence on six broad categories of programming:

- 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.

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

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT AND RECONSTRUCTION INTERVENTIONS

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 (Rao and Mansuri 2013).

Most existing research has evaluated these programs’ (mixed) successes in generating improvements in governance outcomes, such as service delivery and support for democratic institutions (Rao and Mansuri 2013). Evaluations of the impact of CDD/R on social capital and conflict outcomes has shown 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 Rao and Mansuri (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 (Croft, Felter, and Johnson 2014, [Study #60](#)), 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 (Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2017, [Study #56](#)), 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.

Existing evidence in this area suggests that CDD/R interventions may be less effective than the other types of interventions at creating the horizontal linkages that allow for peaceful bargaining, even over the long term. 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.

63. **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 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 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).

64. **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 treatment 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.

65. **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 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.

66. **Healing the wounds: Learning from Sierra Leone's post-war institutional reforms (2012)**, Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel, NBER Working Paper

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 quality 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 the likelihood that they would occupy leadership roles.
- Results from a [long-term follow-up study](#) (Casey, Glennerster, Miguel, and Voors 2018) 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 observable 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) suggests that at least in some cases, transitional justice programming may harm individual healing. While the evaluated reconciliation program did lead to greater forgiveness of war perpetrators and strengthened

social ties, as intended, it came at a significant cost to individuals' psychological wellbeing, increasing depression, anxiety, and PTSD in villages that received the intervention.

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 likeliness to contribute to public goods, etc.) at a much lower cost.

67. **Do museums promote reconciliation? A field experiment on transitional justice (forthcoming)**, Voytas, Balcells, and Palanza, *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 opposed to military governments, more distrustful of the police, and more likely to support victim compensation and pardons for perpetrators.
- The authors suggest that transitional justice museums can provide subtle support to reconciliation processes by increasing support for transitional political systems and fostering agreement on divisive political issues.

68. **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](#), [policy brief](#)

- 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, coming to the conclusion that “intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice.” However, a more recent [paper](#) by Paluck, Green, and Green (2019)—which reviews evidence from 27 randomized evaluations—finds that contact interventions that addressed racial or ethnic bias often produced much weaker effects, compared to interventions addressing other forms of prejudice. This suggests that there are still a number of important questions to be answered in assessing whether contact is an effective policy tool.

Notably, these reviews highlight the dearth of existing experimental evidence on whether contact interventions are an effective means of altering how individuals interact with one another in contexts experiencing or recovering from conflict. Moreover, less is known about whether contact can help reduce conflict among divided groups and the channels through which contact can ultimately promote peace. 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, but additional research is needed to discern whether these efforts ultimately translate into lower levels of conflict or higher degrees of cooperation and collaboration among groups (see the table below for more on open questions in intergroup contact research).

69. [Types of contact: A field experiment on collaborative and adversarial caste integration \(2021\)](#),

Lowe, *American Economic Review*

Location: India

Method: RCT

- In Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, the researcher randomly assigned 1,261 young men from different castes to either participate in month-long cricket leagues or to serve in a comparison group. Players who were recruited were randomly assigned to either homogeneous-caste or mixed-caste teams to create opportunities for collaborative contact. Teams were also randomly assigned opponents to examine the effects of adversarial contact, given competing teams had opposing goals.
- The results showed that when members of different castes were assigned to “collaborative contact”—that is, playing on the same team as members of other castes—they were more likely to report cross-caste friendships after the league had ended and showed 33 percent less own-caste favoritism when voting to allocate cricket rewards.

- In contrast, “adversarial contact”—pitting members of different castes against one another on different teams—generally had either no effect or harmful effects.
- These findings provide further evidence that the economic effects of inter-group integration depend on the type of contact.

70. **Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq (2020)**, Mousa, *Science*

Location: Iraq

Method: RCT

Link to [evaluation summary](#)

- 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 highlight the potential for civic organizations that cut across social cleavages to rebuild social trust after conflict, at least in relationships key to day-to-day coexistence and community building.

71. **Prolonged social contact with internally displaced migrants does not reduce prejudice among locals in wartime settings (2020)**, Zhou and Lyall, Working Paper¹⁸

Location: Afghanistan

Method: RCT

- As international displacement (as a result of conflict and other humanitarian emergencies) reaches record numbers, researchers sought to understand the effects of prolonged, positive 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 both locals and IDPs.
- The authors find no effects of program participation on prejudice reduction towards IDPs, regardless of course duration or participant characteristics. Locals were no more likely to engage with IDPs following the intervention, though they also did not express any increase in animosity towards this group (who could feasibly be viewed as threatening locals’ employment prospects). These null effects persisted up to eight months following the intervention.
- The authors note that these findings suggest “that in wartime conditions, prejudicial beliefs may be too difficult to budge.” Notably, however, the INVEST program did not have an explicit prejudice reduction module, which may be an important consideration for contact programming in such contexts.

¹⁸ See also [Study #33](#) for a description of impacts on economic well-being and political attitudes.

72. **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 amongst those in homogenous classrooms may have resulted from greater opportunities for ingroup 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.

73. **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 as a result of improvements in financial literacy that led individuals within the treatment group to reevaluate the economic costs of conflict.
- 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 three studies that test contact theory in Nigeria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Can social contact reduce economic conflict between farmers and herders? Evidence from Nigeria (Dube, Soeren Henn, and Robinson)

In this study, researchers will investigate whether “contact” can help resolve the endemic farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria. This study will provide micro evidence on whether, and how, contact influences conflict. The researchers will conduct a randomized evaluation that convenes inter-dialogues with farmers and herders in 189 communities. Their analysis will test whether contact can reduce conflict even when the underlying conflict is economic in nature. In addition, the study will provide evidence on potential mechanisms. Specifically, they will examine whether contact reduces conflict through more traditional economic channels of information revelation and commitment, or whether behavioral channels such as implicit bias and the creation of new social links serve as the key mechanisms.

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 amongst residents on these outcomes.

The beautiful game? Soccer, intergroup contact, and refugee-native integration in Lebanon (Mousa and Scacco)

Can intergroup contact improve native-refugee relations? Is contact better suited to improving relationships between old or new arrivals? The researchers will answer these questions using a soccer-based field experiment that brings together Syrian refugees who arrived post-2011, Palestinians descended from refugees who arrived in the 1940s – 60s, and native Lebanese youth for two-month soccer leagues across Lebanon, where refugees make up 25 percent of the population. They will randomly assign participants to a homogenous or heterogeneous (Lebanese-Palestinian or Lebanese-Syrian) soccer team in order to assess whether contact of this form can improve: (a) prejudiced attitudes, (b) discriminatory behavior, (c) norms about intergroup interactions, (d) social integration, and (e) psychological integration among refugees. They will track both players and their parents to capture possible spillovers and will also exploit variation in an accompanying educational curriculum to explore added returns to combining contact with empathy education. This study thus tests the differential potential of contact and educational programs to build social cohesion between old and new neighbors, in a context of pervasive prejudice and distrust.

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.¹⁹

¹⁹ Many thanks to Alex Scacco, Eliana La Ferrara, Matt Lowe, Oeindrila Dube, Salma Mousa, and Shana Warren for their helpful suggestions.

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?
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 that do not artificially "force" people into contact? - 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?
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? - 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? - 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"?)
VARYING THE INTENSITY AND DURATION OF CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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? Can long run analyses be conducted to shed light on these questions?
EXPANDING MEASUREMENT	<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?
COMPARING VIS-À-VIS OTHER INTERVENTIONS	<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 that outgroup suffering generally elicits less empathic responses relative to ingroup suffering (Cikara et al. 2011). In places where distrust is deeply rooted, such as countries experiencing or recovering from conflict, in some cases, outgroup suffering can even result in emotions of pleasure rather than pain (Cikara et al. 2014; Cikara 2015).²⁰

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 Sax 2012; Galinsky, Ku and Wang 2005). However, as highlighted by Bruneau and Sax (2012), few studies have examined the effects of this approach when administered to groups in active or ideological conflict.

One recent study in Turkey (Alan et al. forthcoming) finds 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, cooperation, and altruism.

Other studies of perspective taking interventions in Hungary and the United States have found similarly promising outcomes in reductions in outgroup prejudice. In Hungary, Simonovits, Kézdi, and Kardos (2018) found an online perspective taking game was effective in reducing prejudice towards both an ethnic minority group (Romas) as well as towards refugees—effects that persisted at least one month following the intervention. 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.

By contrast, a study in post-conflict Rwanda (Paluck 2010)—described below under media interventions (see [Study #80](#))—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 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

²⁰ 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.”

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.²¹ More research is needed to understand programming that offers a two-way exchange of perspectives.

74. **Building inter-ethnic cohesion in schools: An intervention on perspective taking (2020)**, Alan, Baysan, Gumren, and Kubilay, Working Paper

Location: Turkey

Method: RCT

Link to [policy briefcase](#)

- 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 ethnic segregation. Students who participated in the program also demonstrated more socially positive behaviors, such as trust, reciprocity, and altruism.
- 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 inter-ethnic group of students, using extracurricular time to teach positive social skills may ease integration.

75. **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

- 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 paired with a placebo emotion-guessing game or (ii) just the placebo game (i.e. the comparison group).
- Participation in the perspective taking game led to reductions in anti-Roma sentiments as well as increased affect towards refugees—effects that 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).

²¹ One notable exception is a small-scale lab experiment conducted by Bruneau and Sax (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 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.

76. **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 amongst Democrats with prior positive attitudes towards refugees, the authors also observe positive changes among Republican respondents. By contrast, the information treatment did not have a statistically significant impact on letter writing.
- However, these results were short-lived—they did not survive after one week of completing the survey. Furthermore, while the exercise prompted short-term changes in behavior, the authors were unable to observe whether 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 recent lab-in-the-field experiment from Kenya (Audette, Horowitz, and Michelitch 2020) 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.

77. **Personal narratives reduce negative attitudes toward refugees and immigrant outgroups: Evidence from Kenya (2020)**, 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 listen to one of two “personal narrative” audio recordings—a *refugee hardship narrative* that emphasized the challenges refugees face both when fleeing violence in Somalia and while living in Kenya (while also expressing appreciation for refuge) or an *anti-terror narrative* that combatted common perceptions that Somalis (who are predominantly Muslim) support militant groups like Al-Shabab by expressing shared opposition to terrorism across religious lines—or a comparison group.
- 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 as large or larger for individuals with lower 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 generally null findings from other informational interventions that have sought to correct misinformation, rather than emphasize personal accounts.

MEDIA INTERVENTIONS

Media interventions, such as radio and television 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. Two studies by Elizabeth Levy Paluck and co-authors suggest that media interventions can positively impact social norms around dissent and dispute resolution, and can encourage interpersonal discussion following conflict.

However, media interventions can also have unintended consequences on attitudes and behaviors associated with conflict. For example, as mentioned above, media programming that encouraged perspective taking (i.e. “the thoughtful consideration of the world from other viewpoints”) in eastern DRC led to increased intolerance (Paluck 2010). At the same time, radio propaganda and mass media have also historically been used as tools for inciting violence.²²

While information campaigns have often been found ineffective at changing individual behavior (see Chapter 3), the below studies suggest that peer influence—in these cases 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.

78. **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

²² 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>.

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.

79. **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 is one of the most important channels of news distribution, particularly in rural areas, though the country's mountainous topography causes 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 manipulate salience 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.

80. **Is it better not to talk? Group polarization, extended contact, and perspective taking in Eastern Democratic Republic of 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 amongst 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.

81. **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 one study that examines how recorded apologies from former combatants influences community sentiments and willingness to reintegrate individuals into their communities:

Improving community acceptance of returnees from Boko Haram in Nigeria (Blair, Littman, and Wolfe)

In this study, researchers are using a randomized evaluation to explore whether recordings of former Boko Haram members apologizing, and/or explaining how they have changed, reduce feelings of anger and fear and, in turn, increase willingness to accept former members back into the community in the future. This research will inform the implementation of future radio programming in Nigeria.

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.

Vocational training and employment programs (such as the agricultural program in Liberia evaluated by Blattman and Annan, described above—see [Study #34](#)) often make up one component of DDR programming, as do psychosocial assistance and community reconciliation processes (see [Chapter 3](#), as well as earlier sections of this chapter for more detail on these types of interventions). Additional research examining the efficacy of these bundled approaches is 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.

Few rigorous, causal evaluations have examined the impact of these programs, in part due to the fact that 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.

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.²³ They find that those who were previously involved in the most abusive military factions, who were higher educated and wealthier, who ranked highly as combatants, and who possessed the strongest political ideologies generally had the hardest time reintegrating, maintained distrusting views of democratic practices, and 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.

82. **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 amongst former combatants in the lowest income brackets and led to general improvements in 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.

²³ 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 14 years.

PLACING WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING ROLES

Randomized evaluations do not yet provide evidence on whether women's inclusion in development programs leads to improved stability or lower levels of violence or disputes. They do, however, provide 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;
- Involving women in decision-making bodies can change attitudes—Mandating women's participation in a community-driven development program in Afghanistan led to increased women's political participation and changed men's attitudes (in treatment villages) to women's participation;
- 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;
- 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; 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.

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:

- 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 Casey, Glennerster, and Miguel 2012, [Study #66](#)).
- 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 (measured by increased average contributions to community development projects). (See Fearon, Humphreys, and Weinstein 2015, [Study #64](#)). 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.

- 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 Cooper 2019, [Study #9](#)).
- 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 could improve group sensitivity to sexual or gender-based violence or shift men's beliefs about women's roles in policing. (See Karim et al. 2018, [Study #16](#)).

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 (IV) study by Dube and Harish (2017) 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, while married queens were more likely to attack than married kings (Dube and Harish, 2017).

83. **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 #56](#)) 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 treatment villages became more open to female participation in local governance.
- Empowerment impacts were nevertheless largely limited to the spheres in which the program operated, however: 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.

84. **The power of political voice: Women’s political representation and crime in India (2012)**, Iyer, Mani, Mishra, and Toplova, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*

Location: India

Method: RCT

- 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. 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.

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 on this question. 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 evidence gaps:

- While there is an emerging body of evidence on social networks and 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 Jha and Shay 2019—[Study #73](#)—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 are other types of interventions can restore broken ties and promote social capital in the aftermath of conflict?

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Photo: Yagazie Emezi | Getty Images | Images of Empowerment

CHAPTER 6: WHAT WORKS IN COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) pose major global health and policy challenges. It is estimated that one in every three women have suffered physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetimes.²⁴ Some of the well documented consequences of 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 will highlight some of the emerging insights from the RCT literature on addressing these global challenges. Given the prevalence of GBV among women, this chapter focuses primarily on efforts to prevent and respond specifically to violence against women (VAW)—including by shifting gender norms and attitudes, economic empowerment, and facilitating women’s access to justice—where existing RCT evidence is strongest.²⁵ 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, as well as the work funded through IPA’s [Intimate Partner Violence Initiative](#).

DEFINITIONS	
Gender based violence (GBV)	Violence perpetrated against a person because of their gender
Violence against women (VAW)	When GBV is perpetrated against a woman
Intimate partner violence (IPV)	Any form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse that is perpetrated by an intimate partner

²⁴ World Health Organization. 2017. “Violence against women.” Accessed June 4, 2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

²⁵ This review does not include studies addressing GBV perpetrated against girls, LGBTQI+ persons, boys, and men. Our hope is that future research will also include these populations, allowing us to share effective solutions to support these groups as well.

Globally, acceptance of violence against women is unfortunately common: across Africa and Asia, between 30 and 60 percent of women agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances.²⁶ These negative gender norms are often reinforced through societal structures. A growing body of evidence, therefore, has been trying to understand the effectiveness of different types of prevention strategies aimed at shifting social norms associated with the acceptance and perpetration of VAW. As described in more detail below, interventions aimed at addressing gender attitudes and norms around violence—including through training, dialogue, and mass media campaigns—have shown promise in reducing IPV prevalence.

Another important strand of research is examining the role of economic interventions—such as cash transfers, microcredit, and employment—in reducing IPV rates. This literature is based on the theory that access to financial resources may help alleviate familial stresses and increase women’s bargaining power in the household, thus reducing intrahousehold conflicts and risk of violence. Although this evidence remains mixed, women’s access to resources through cash and food transfers seems to be a promising way to increase women’s empowerment and economic independence, helping them to escape violence (Heath, Hidrobo, and Roy 2020; Haushofer et al. 2019). Additionally, transfers have been shown to reduce economic stress, leading to reductions in household conflict over limited resources (Hidrobo, Peterman, and Heise 2016). In some cases, however, cash transfers have led to higher levels of IPV (Hidrobo and Fernald 2013; Angelucci 2008). Evidence suggests that financial and livelihood programs are more effective in reducing IPV when paired with gender trainings or family dialogues, since these complementary programs provide an opportunity to address underlying issues, such as low decision-making power, that might affect women’s risk of violence (Kim et al. 2009; Gupta et al. 2013; Ismayilova et al. 2018; Roy et al. 2019).

Researchers are also exploring strategies for better responding to incidents of VAW—including by 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. Responding to VAW can be particularly challenging given traditionally low rates of reporting (Palermo, Bleck and Peterman 2013).²⁷ 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 or lack of trust in the police or other state institutions. Given the mental and physical health impacts of this form of violence, most programs look at equipping health providers and first responders to support women experiencing violence. Researchers have also been increasingly interested in understanding ways of improving the strategies deployed by justice systems and state security institutions in responding to this form of violence. Most of the examples cited below focus on equipping the police to better respond to cases of violence against women, including by dedicating services for receiving women in police stations or by deploying trained officers in areas with high levels of VAW.

Finally, there is a growing literature focused on the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence. This chapter closes with a brief discussion of a few important studies on this topic, which are exploring when, how, and why some armed groups (including state and non-state actors) perpetrate sexual violence during conflict.

²⁶ Anderson, Siwan, Lori Beaman, and Jean-Philippe Platteau. 2018. “Towards Gender Equity in Development.” United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research. <http://fdslive.oup.com/www.oup.com/academic/pdf/openaccess/9780198829591.pdf#page=26>.

²⁷ [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.

SNAPSHOT: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND COVID-19

With the spread of Covid-19 around the world, a new “shadow pandemic” has emerged of gender-based violence. Since March 2020, lockdowns have restricted women's mobility, increased economic strain and familial stress, thus exacerbating the threat of violence. As a result, many countries have experienced an increase in the reported cases of domestic violence.²⁸

The ongoing economic and health crises, in addition to social distancing measures, bear some similarities to those observed in settings affected by conflict when it comes to addressing GBV—populations are hard to reach, services are lacking, and levels of distrust are heightened. The extent to which results can be compared across contexts, however, is not yet clear.

Despite the challenges of conducting field work when social distancing measures are in place, many researchers have been looking at alternative ways to reach women at risk of IPV, such as through cell phone messaging and applications. While these results are not yet available, insights may be drawn from the existing evidence to inform the design of potential interventions addressing the issue of GBV.

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 in order 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 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 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. Adapting gender-transformative trainings to culturally relevant practices seems to be one way to improve

²⁸ UN Women. 2020. “The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19.” Accessed November 4th, 2020.

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 (Atre et al. 2017). 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.

85. **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 is critical for the success of IPV interventions such as UBL, especially when programs are embedded in local traditions. 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.

86. **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, Levitov, 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, women in the treatment group were roughly 25 percent less likely to experience physical or sexual IPV in the previous year. 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 addressing deeply entrenched gender inequalities and a range of health-related behavioral outcomes.

87. **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 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 and young women are at higher risk of experiencing IPV than older women. Results also highlight the importance of including men in gender trainings.

88. **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.
- The evaluation showed no differences in levels of IPV between couples that had men assigned to discussion groups versus those that only participated in the community-level intervention. However, men participating in the supplemental intervention reported decreased intentions of using physical IPV, improved acceptance for a woman to refuse sex with her husband, increased ability to control their hostility, and greater participation in household tasks.
- Despite the lack of impact of the male engagement intervention on actual incidence of IPV, 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.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

Two GCCI-funded studies underway will produce evidence on (i) the role of training community leaders in shifting views around VAW, and (ii) the efficacy of using SMS messaging to address VAW during the Covid-19 pandemic

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](#)).

Partner violence in the era of pandemic: Evaluating the impact of Covid-19 and a text-based mitigation campaign in urban Peru (Field)²⁹

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, Erica Field has been working with the government in Peru to adapt their IPV programming. The team has been disseminating a series of phone-based surveys to a large sample of couples to collect data on the households' experience of IPV caused by the lockdown, as well as evaluate the efficacy of an SMS intervention designed to help men manage emotional regulation while at heightened risk of committing expressive violence.

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 in Uganda, Mexico, and Nigeria, education entertainment—or “edutainment,” which dramatizes a situation with the aim of spreading information and changing attitudes and behaviors—is a promising approach to reducing 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 and Ball 2010).

Open questions remain as to the exact mechanisms driving these results. 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 are working with IPA to measure the impact of radio programming on gender-related attitudes and behaviors in Tanzania.

²⁹ One of the first pioneers in leveraging SMS messaging to prevent IPV has been the [Modern Man Challenge](#) project led by the IRC Airbel Impact Lab, and supported by IPA. Modern Man is a mobile messaging campaign that engages men with an aspirational and positive masculine identity to prevent intimate partner violence. It sends SMS messages to men who have opted in to practice positive behaviors with their partners. The program is currently being evaluated.

89. **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 (24 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.
90. **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.
91. **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.

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 et al. 2016). However, the effects of improved access to such resources on women's exposure to violence remains unclear.

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

A growing body of evidence finds that women's access to resources through cash and food transfers can lead to reductions in IPV, at least in the short run (Heath, Hidrobo, and Roy 2020; Haushofer et al. 2019; Hidrobo, Peterman, and Heise 2016). Researchers suggest that this may be due to a variety of factors: reductions in household negotiations on spending (including around daily food purchases) may minimize the number of marital arguments that could result in violence; improvements in financial stability and food security may improve a household's overall well-being; and access to capital may enhance women's decision making, self-confidence, and freedom of movement.

Other studies, however, have found that in some instances cash transfers increased IPV rates when women were more educated or younger than their partners (Hidrobo and Fernald 2013; Angelucci 2008). It is crucial, therefore, to carefully consider potential heterogeneous impacts. More research is needed to identify what types of transfers and targeting strategies are most effective and how different types of household dynamics can impact transfers' success.

In many cases, transfer programs include some form of complementary activity—such as joint trainings or services—or are conditional on completing specific tasks. As discussed above, it is possible that these combined trainings or other integrated activities may amplify the effects of cash or other in-kind transfers by addressing inequitable gender norms and imbalances of power between men and women. In Bangladesh, Roy and co-authors (2019) found that conditioning a transfer on attending a training on nutrition led to sustained reductions in physical IPV. On the other hand, preliminary results from the Women for Women International's economic and social empowerment program, which combined cash transfers with a series of skills building and gender transformative activities, showed no impact on rates of IPV in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Noble et al. 2020). It is possible that conditionality may activate pathways for sustained reductions in VAW after the end of an intervention, especially those aimed at shifting intra-household dynamics, though more research is needed to understand the potential effectiveness of these bundled interventions.

92. **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 point decrease in emotional violence, and 16.1 percentage point 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 and larger reductions in disputes in polygamous households compared to monogamous households.

93. **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 (ii) reduction in poverty-related stress and intrahousehold conflict. They suggest that sustained impacts may require additional program activities that lead to long-term improvements in women's status in the household and community.

94. **Income changes and intimate partner violence: Evidence from unconditional cash transfers in Kenya (2019)**, Haushofer, Ringdal, Shapiro, and Wang, NBER 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 due to the fact that 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.

95. **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.

96. **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. Amongst 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.

97. **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 domestic violence. 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.

NEW GCCI RESEARCH

One ongoing GCCI funded study will shed light on the impact of mobile-based interventions, combined with cash transfer, on IPV levels during the Covid-19 pandemic:

Financial education and intimate partner violence: Evidence from Colombia during Covid-19 (Attanasio, Bird, Cardona, and Lavado)

In this study, researchers seek to contribute new evidence on IPV prevention by evaluating the impact of an interactive WhatsApp-based couples communication, financial education, and Covid-19 information program targeting minimum-wage households in Colombia receiving pre-existing monetary subsidies during the Covid-19 emergency. Evidence on an effective behavioral intervention that can mitigate violence in the short-term while laying the base for financial resiliency could serve as a model for both the current and future crises.

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, three 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; Kotsadam and Villanger 2020; 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 Lesink 2019). Encouragingly, several studies suggest that these interventions achieved more beneficial effects when bundled with components that intentionally addressed violence, like gender training or family dialogues. These 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).

98. **Jobs and intimate partner violence - Evidence from a field experiment in Ethiopia (2020)**, Kotsadam and Villanger, *CESifo Working Paper No. 8108*
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 after six months, and no impacts on physical violence and controlling behaviors were observed.
 - The results also point to negative effects on women with initially low bargaining power—i.e. those whose partners had sole decision-making power within the household. These women were 9 percentage points more likely to experience abuse if offered a job.
 - Researchers suggest that job offers may not have impacted the main factors that could lead to reductions in abuse, such as empowerment, attitudes towards gender equality, and controlling behaviors.
99. **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.
100. **Women's empowerment and domestic abuse: Experimental evidence from Vietnam (2019)**, Bulte and Lesink, *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.

101. **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.

102. **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

- 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 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.

103. **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, adding gender dialogues to the savings program did not lead to reductions in women's reported experience of IPV. By contrast, women in the treatment group were less likely to experience economic abuse, and acceptance of wife beating also decreased among couples assigned to the dialogue intervention. 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 point to the importance of addressing household gender inequities alongside economic programming when tackling IPV.

104. **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 Pronykh, World Health Organization

Location: South Africa

Method: RCT

- Researchers were interested in assessing whether adding a gender and HIV training program to a microfinance initiative could lead to impacts on other social and health indicators, such as risk of IPV and HIV infection, in South Africa.
- After two years, women assigned to receive the Intervention with Microfinance for AIDS and Gender Equity (IMAGE) program—a combined microfinance and gender/health training intervention—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

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 #84](#)). 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.

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 (Cooper 2019, [Study #9](#)). 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 (Karim et al. 2018, [Study #16](#)) 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.

In light of 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 (2018) 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 22 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 ongoing studies in India are looking to shed more light on these questions. In Madhya Pradesh, Sukhtankar, Kruks-Wisner, and Mangal are evaluating whether police station-level Women’s Help Desks (WHDs), as well as the deployment of additional female personnel to these WHDs, can improve frontline officers’ response to women. Meanwhile, Fiala and co-authors are partnering with the Hyderabad City Police to evaluate a hotspots street police patrolling intervention targeting VAW in public spaces.

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 few years, 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, data shows that female combatants also perpetrate rape and other forms of sexual violence, and men also commonly experience 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. 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 actors' 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 (2020) 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 finds suggest that policies aimed at changing gender norms during times of peace might have an effect on violence against women during conflict as well.

Despite these recent advancements, many key questions remain unanswered. In particular, 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.

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 to be an effective way to prevent this type of crime. But a number of 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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