Confronting the Development Challenges of Fragility, Conflict, and Violence

Nearly half the world’s extreme poor live in countries affected by conflict or violence. In these countries people not only lack security; they also are more likely to lack adequate food and basic services such as clean water and electricity, and their children, if fortunate enough to survive, are less likely to go to school. Failure to meet these basic needs will lead to greater poverty while also fueling unrest and more violence.

The World Bank has made addressing fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV) a strategic priority. Its approach to fragile states has evolved over the years, but the emphasis has always been on prevention and early action. In recent years the Bank has increased its lending and technical assistance to FCV countries. The International Development Association, the part of the Bank that helps the world’s poorest countries, more than doubled its commitments to FCV countries in 2018, to about 20 percent of its total. The Bank also helps fund the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs providing socioeconomic support to ex-combatants.

Research provides the intellectual groundwork for addressing the challenges in the transition of FCV countries. While the broad nexus between security and development is obvious, the underlying causes of conflict are unique to each FCV situation, leading to a need for in-depth analytical work.

In this issue of the Research Digest features recent Policy Research Working Papers that highlight challenges facing FCV countries. The first four focus on causes and consequences of conflict. One paper shows that domestic socioeconomic policies matter for global security because disgruntled youth are susceptible to radicalization into violent extremism at home or abroad. Another study shows that insecurity and violence in Uganda led to significant welfare losses for rural households. Yet another, based on a survey of displaced people of Mali, highlights the role of employment and security in decisions on whether to return. And a paper focusing on Myanmar’s ongoing transition offers insights into how broad processes of democratization and globalization are changing relations between citizens and the state.

The remaining papers discuss policies and programs aimed at recovery and stabilization. Two papers demonstrate the importance of investing in infrastructure and public works programs for improving livelihoods. Another paper looks at how mass media can increase women’s participation in the postconflict political process. Two other papers investigate the local welfare effects from military and development aid in Afghanistan and a DDR program in Burundi. The last paper addresses an important methodological issue in measuring the impact of food aid in FCV countries.

Collectively, these studies can help inform policy makers and donors seeking to bring stability and development to FCV countries. But much more remains to be done. Over the coming years we expect the World Bank to invest more in FCV countries and in the research to provide the necessary analytical support. Stay tuned.
What Drives the Radicalization of Foreign Terrorist Recruits?

A lack of economic opportunities in countries located closer to the Syrian Arab Republic is among the factors explaining Daesh recruiting successes.

The world has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of terrorist attacks since 2000 and especially since 2011. More than 100 countries were affected in 2016, with OECD countries suffering the highest number of casualties since the 9/11 attacks. The transnational nature of terrorism has become more salient with the emergence of multinational terror groups such as Al-Qaeda or, more recently, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS or Daesh, its Arabic acronym). The United Nations estimates that more than 25,000 foreign fighters went to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq between the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011 and September 2016 to fight for either Daesh or the Al-Nusra Front.

Some of these fighters have engaged in extreme levels of violence in Syria and Iraq, others have perpetrated terrorist attacks in third countries, and those who ultimately return to their home country may constitute threats to domestic security. The unprecedented levels of international recruitment by terrorist organizations make efforts to curb radicalization at home all the more pressing. Yet the question of what drives radicalization into violent extremism is still being debated.

A new paper by Abdel Jelil, Bhatia, Brockmeyer, Do, and Joubert addresses this question using a data set that contains information on 3,965 foreign recruits of Daesh. The information includes the recruits’ age, education, country of residence, and self-reported knowledge of Islam. The data come from a leaked cache made available to journalists, who in turn shared the information with academics and policy research institutions.

Analysis of the data highlights interesting facts. First, Daesh has been able to attract recruits from all around the world (map 1). A total of 61 nationalities are represented in the sample of foreign recruits. Admittedly, countries closer to Syria and Iraq and with a larger Muslim population have more of their citizens joining the ranks of the terrorist organization. But a handful of countries with a small Muslim population, most of them in Western Europe, are the origin of up to 12 percent of all Daesh foreign recruits.

Second, as has been documented in earlier studies, aspiring Daesh recruits have not less but more education than the average for men in their country of origin. This goes against commonly held views that terrorism originates from poverty and desperation. Exclusive information on self-reported knowledge of Sharia and desired role in the organization sheds further light on the terrorists’ aspirations. Those who choose to be administrators are relatively more likely to...
The Cost of Fear

Households in conflict settings suffer welfare losses from insecurity as well as from direct exposure to violence. What is the relative size of these costs?

Despite the large and persistent costs associated with conflict and, more broadly, violence, we have only a limited understanding of the origin of these costs, particularly the role of insecurity (that is, the risk of violence). The broader literature on risk and shocks suggests that the costs associated with large covariate shocks, such as conflict, could be very large. But the literature focuses primarily on direct exposure to violence, obscuring the potential role of indirect exposure through insecurity.

In a recent paper Rockmore explores the relative effects of insecurity and direct exposure to violence on the welfare of rural households in northern Uganda. Because measures of insecurity do not exist, the author uses the spatial-temporal variation in the placement of violence to estimate spatially disaggregated measures of insecurity. The identification is based on the random nature of violence experienced in villages attacked by the Lord’s Resistance Army.

The community-level measures of subjective and objective risk are created using the geo-located data from the Northern Uganda Baseline Survey 2004 and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project. This estimation uses the distance of the community from historical attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army. These measures of risk are combined with measures of exposure to violence (community and household, current and historical) to disaggregate the effects of direct and indirect exposure to violence on households per capita consumption.

As expected, direct exposure to violence causes higher losses than indirect exposure (10 percent as compared with 6 percent at the sample mean). But even households directly exposed to violence experience important losses from perceived risk (amounting to 37 percent of the total losses from violence). Although the estimated effect of the risk of violence is smaller than that of the direct experience of violence, only a modest fraction of the overall population experiences violence. In contrast, virtually the entire population suffers from the risk of violence. Indeed, the results indicate that more than 60 percent of overall losses in rural areas of northern Uganda arise from risk (table 1).

The results suggest that a large share of the overall costs from conflict arise from costly ex ante risk mitigation strategies and are borne by a broader segment of the population. Consequently, aid and policy responses should focus not just on those who directly experience violence but also on the broader risk-affected population. These responses to the risk of violence likely also explain some of the poorer postconflict outcomes, such as in nutrition or education. Importantly, since these losses occur ex ante, they occur regardless of whether violence actually takes place. Moreover, to the extent that perceived insecurity differs from actual risk levels, these losses may persist after the “official” end to violence, suggesting a continuum of responses between conflict and postconflict periods.

The study also raises methodological concerns. The effects of violence are typically estimated by comparing directly and nondirectly affected households (or regions). Because insecurity is not measured, the estimated coefficients for exposure to violence capture the joint effect of the risk of violence and its realization. To the extent that directly affected households suffer from more risk on average than nondirectly affected households, the effects of exposure to violence will be overestimated.

By using household per capita consumption, the study aims to capture the aggregate costs that might not be apparent when looking at narrow household responses, such as labor market responses or changes in crop portfolios. But a better understanding of how risk shapes these “narrow” responses and whether they occur on the extensive or intensive margins is essential for designing more efficient and better-targeted responses in conflict and postconflict settings.

### Table 1. Aggregate Costs of Conflict for Rural Households in Northern Uganda, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Preferred model</th>
<th>Full controls</th>
<th>Conservative estimate</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location of losses (% of total)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Never-attacked households</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>175</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attacked households</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>82.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Disaggregation of costs (% of total)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposure to violence</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exposure to risk</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>56.3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cost as % of GDP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>From risk</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
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Source: Calculations based on data sources described in text.

As displaced people integrate more and more in their host communities, the likelihood that they will return decreases with time

Around the world today, an estimated 65 million people are displaced, including 24 million refugees and asylum-seekers. These numbers represent the second largest refugee crisis since World War II. To provide new solutions to this crisis, international institutions aim to combine their humanitarian and development know-how. Yet knowledge about what drives the decisions of those who are forcibly displaced is limited, not least because it is hard to follow people who are on the move or who live in precarious conditions in the proximity of conflict zones.

The Listening to Displaced People Survey got around these challenges by using mobile phones for interviews, allowing it to collect information from people who tend to be neglected in traditional surveys. The survey focused on refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and returnees from the crisis in northern Mali. Erupting in late 2011, this crisis was initially driven by Tuareg groups seeking independence. But over time, as opportunistic bands, jihadist groups, and intercommunal violence gained prominence, the conflict created a generalized state of insecurity.

Respondents were interviewed during a face-to-face baseline interview between June and August 2014 and followed during 12 consecutive waves through monthly mobile phone interviews. This yielded not only one of the few descriptive data sets available on forcibly displaced people, but also a unique longitudinal data set for studying migration decisions.

This data set is used in a recent paper by Hoogeveen, Rossi, and Sansone. Besides producing new descriptive statistics on refugees, IDPs, and returnees, the paper analyzes how employment and safety affect the willingness to return, depending on whether respondents were refugees (living in a camp) or displaced. To this end the paper examines intention to return, a question asked of all displaced and refugee respondents who had left their homes between April 2012 and January 2013 and had not yet returned.

The paper finds that if displaced people had not already returned by August 2014 (the time of the baseline), the likelihood of actual return during the 12 subsequent months was very low. The probability of transition from being internally displaced to returning was barely 2.4 percent and even lower for refugees, at 0.3 percent. Despite the low rate of return to the location of origin, refugees and, to a lesser extent, IDPs expressed overwhelming interest in returning. 93 percent of refugees and 81 percent of IDPs wanted to go back. Despite this discrepancy between stated and actual preferences, the paper finds a positive correlation between the two. Those who declared that they planned to return to northern Mali were more likely to return in subsequent waves of the survey, and refugees showed a higher preference for going back, once other explanatory variables were controlled for. Among those who did not want to go back, the main reason was insecurity in the North, followed by “life is easier here,” lack of means, or business reasons.

All groups lost jobs during the displacement. Nevertheless, most returnees managed to find work again once back, and in the last waves of the survey they reached high employment rates similar to those for IDPs in Bamako. Employment rates among refugees, however, remained low and deteriorated over time. This may explain the higher willingness to return among this group.

Regression results confirm that respondents who found employment during displacement were less likely to return. Households whose respondents worked during displacement were considerably less likely (up to 33 percentage points less likely) to return. The importance of employment in the decision to return supports the hypothesis that economic factors are key. This is underlined by the noteworthy absence of evidence that perceptions of personal safety were pivotal to the decision to return. Whether respondents considered northern Mali safe or whether they felt safe at home alone did not significantly affect migration decisions. That said, people who personally experienced difficulties with the police were more likely to return, and gun ownership was also associated with a higher willingness to return.

While the paper finds that the decision to return is responsive to economic incentives, it is remarkable that over the course of the 12 monthly waves few additional households returned. Most displacement was of short duration, and most displaced people had already returned before the survey. Even though the expressed willingness to return among those who were still displaced was high, actual return rates during the 12 months of the study were low for both IDPs and refugees. The sobering policy conclusion that follows from this is that most people who remained forcibly displaced at the time of the study are likely to remain displaced in the foreseeable future. As displaced people integrate more and more in their host communities, the likelihood that they will return decreases with time.

How Myanmar’s Reforms Are Playing Out in Rural Villages

Changes in village governance, in expectations of the state, and in connectivity are reshaping state-citizen relations in Myanmar

Myanmar has undergone significant social, political, and economic reforms since 2011. Much of the academic and policy literature examining these reforms focuses on how they have played out at the national level. But how have they played out in the rural villages where 70 percent of Myanmar’s people live? How have local social institutions responded to new sources of contention accompanying these reforms? Is the social contract in Myanmar—the terms on which citizens engage with one another as well as the basis on which core rights and responsibilities are negotiated with and upheld by the state—being rewritten?

In a recent paper Pursch, Woodhouse, Woolcock, and Zurstrassen use four years of data from a large-scale longitudinal panel study on village life in Myanmar, the Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring (QSEM) research program, to examine how rural citizens’ interactions with the state are changing. Their findings show that since Myanmar’s reforms began in 2011, how rural communities engage with state institutions has been altered significantly as a result of changes in three areas: village governance, citizens’ expectations of the state, and connectivity. Since 2012 national legislative reforms in village governance have resulted in a realignment of the centers of power and influence at the local level. Though the core functions of these institutions—maintaining social order and acting as interlocutors between community members and external actors—remain, there has been substantial change in how these functions are carried out and in what kind of influence the main actors have.

At the beginning of the reform period, village administrators were widely perceived to be the most important actor for managing village affairs. The 2012 Ward and Village Tract Administration Law changed this. The law contained provisions for indirectly elected village tract administrators (a formal state position representing several villages) and omitted mention of village administrators. This led to rapid change. Village tract administrators steadily became more important than village administrators, assuming greater control over important administrative functions, such as land registration and applications for SIM cards. Pressure also grew on village tract administrators to be more responsive to villagers and their needs; at the same time, villagers became more vocal and willing to lodge complaints with township officials. This was likely affected by news of successful advocacy efforts elsewhere in the country. “Before, village leaders wielded power,” said one village leader. “Now the villagers wield power.”

Meanwhile, significant changes took place in how villagers interacted with and viewed the “everyday state.” Before Myanmar’s reforms began, the state was coercive, with strict regulations determining how villagers used land, grew crops, and engaged in political activities. The state provided few services in return: the share of government expenditure on social sectors was among the lowest in the world. This began to change as Myanmar’s reforms took root. National reforms emphasized the importance of producing local results, with expenditure on social sectors increasing significantly. In the QSEM panel villages, government projects increased threefold, and approaches to service delivery began to include some local autonomy in implementation and decision making. Villagers also grew to expect more of the state, becoming more willing to advocate for themselves when faced with perceived administrative barriers or poor services.

Greater connectivity—primarily through greater mobile connectivity and migration but also through expanded road infrastructure and increased access to markets—also affected social accountability. Although Myanmar villagers were already “networked” before the reforms, they became significantly more connected after the government began to roll out telecommunications reforms in 2013. In 2009/10 only 4 percent of households nationwide owned a mobile phone; by April 2015, 55 percent did. This provided people with access to alternative sources of information, and community organizations in panel villages increasingly used social media to mobilize in response to disaster, to raise funds, and to advocate around land issues. Meanwhile, migration rates doubled in panel villages, further opening up people’s networks and introducing the potential for socioeconomic and demographic change.

The interplay between the changes in these three areas—village governance, expectations of the state, and connectivity—is reshaping state-citizen relations in Myanmar and enabling new, local social accountability mechanisms to take root. Yet it will also likely lead to greater local complexity, as previously glossed-over fault lines come to the surface. “Managing” this transition requires emphasizing the legitimacy of the change process and the mechanisms for addressing the contestation it generates. The research identifies three areas where policy can be strengthened to achieve this: enhancing the role of village institutions, building a more systematic framework around decentralization, and providing more timely information to communities. Investing in further grounded field research will be crucial in providing additional evidence to assist Myanmar citizens and public officials in shaping their own evolving democratic institutions.

Obstacles on the Road to Economic Growth in the West Bank

How much does road connectivity affect growth? A new study uses data on road closures in the West Bank to address that question

The infrastructure connecting people to markets typically evolves only slowly and in a nonrandom way. This makes quantifying the effect of market access on economic performance a challenge. Studies examining the effect of investments in roads, railroads, and waterways typically find sizable returns to improving connectivity. Research examining the impact of changes in borders has reached similar conclusions. Virtually all such studies examine either large accumulated changes in transport infrastructure over long periods or changes in accessibility brought about by large isolated shocks.

A new paper by van der Weide, Rijkers, Blankespoor, and Abrahams tackles this long-standing question of the returns to market access from a different angle. It exploits unique short-run variation in travel times within the West Bank resulting from the deployment and reconfiguration of road closure obstacles by Israel to identify its impact on local GDP, proxied by nighttime lights. The obstacles—taking the form of manned physical barriers, including roadblocks, checkpoints, trenches, earth mounds, and a separation barrier wall—are part of a broader closure regime instituted by the Israeli army to safeguard the security of Israel and its settlers. Because the placement of obstacles is not (directly) driven by local economic performance but by security considerations, and because the number, intensity, and configuration of obstacles are subject to frequent and unanticipated changes, this context offers a unique quasi-natural experiment by which to assess the impact of short-term fluctuations in market accessibility on economic performance.

The authors build town-level market access measures by combining road network data and annual obstacle deployment data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with estimates of the time cost of traversing each checkpoint at any given time during the sample period (2005–12) collected through repeated interviews with OCHA officials starting in 2009. Using these data, the authors calculate optimal travel routes, and attendant travel times, between West Bank localities and West Bank commercial centers for each year. The estimated travel times are combined with population count data to obtain a measure of market accessibility for each locality and each year in the sample period, which coincided with a gradual alleviation of mobility restrictions.

This approach accounts for the type and intensity of obstacles as well as for their positioning. This is important, because one strategically placed checkpoint can reduce accessibility more severely than a multitude of roadblocks where alternative connections are available. Simple count measures of obstacles, popularized by previous studies of the impact of mobility restrictions in the West Bank, fail to capture these interdependencies and so might yield misleading estimates of the effect of changes in obstacles on market access.

Moreover, the fact that a locality’s market access is affected not only by checkpoints in that locality but also by those deployed elsewhere in the West Bank helps in establishing causality. By isolating changes in market access that are driven not by local obstacles but by obstacles deployed in a radius of 10–25 kilometers from the locality, the authors are able to circumvent concerns about local market access and local economic growth being driven by local factors that they might not be able to capture in their regression analysis.

The resulting data quantify the impact of localized, temporary, and reversible shocks to market access in an economy no larger than the average U.S. county. This allows the study to complement the existing literature on market access, which typically focuses on the economic restructuring experienced after a once-in-a-generation transport network extension in such countries as China, India, and the United States. The authors focus instead on the “intensive margin,” quantifying the economic losses and gains caused by year-to-year enhancements or deteriorations in intercity transit.

Despite these profound contextual differences, market access is shown to positively predict changes in nighttime light emissions, the preferred measure of local economic performance given the absence of spatially disaggregated GDP measures for the West Bank. This result is robust to controlling for conflict, arguably the most likely confounder of a relationship between local economic growth and market access, and to controlling for access to external markets.

According to the authors’ preferred estimates, a 10 percent improvement in market access increases local output by 0.6 percent, assuming a lights-to-GDP elasticity of 0.3. A back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that in the absence of obstacles, GDP per capita in the West Bank would have been 4.1–6.1 percent higher each year over the sample period. These estimates must be interpreted with caution, however, because they are sensitive to the assumed relationship between travel times and market access and because uncertainty and distortions in the West Bank economy may have dampened its output response to the alleviation of mobility restrictions over the sample period.

Can Public Works Help Postconflict Communities Escape Poverty?

Governments often rely on public works to provide short-term employment during periods of uncertainty. Can this policy work in postconflict settings?

Sierra Leone was in the grips of a civil war from 1991 to 2002. Since then the government has made generating employment for youth a priority. Such efforts not only can contribute to economic stability, they also can help reintegrate ex-combatants, rebuild social trust, and build community infrastructure. The need for these efforts was heightened in 2009 following the food and financial crises. In 2010, with the support of the World Bank, the government of Sierra Leone therefore launched a labor-intensive public works program—known as the Cash for Work Program. The aim was to provide short-term employment to vulnerable youth (ages 15–35) in poor communities.

Are public works an effective anti-poverty strategy in postconflict settings? Theoretically, yes. Because they directly provide stable incomes to struggling households, they can help protect—or even increase—spending on essentials and human capital during difficult periods. But while a few studies have shown positive effects of public works on household income and expenditure, direct evidence of their antipoverty potential is scarce.

The debate is heightened in postconflict settings. The benefits of public works can be greater in these contexts where youth employment and reintegration of ex-combatants are central to postconflict recovery. A bonus is the rebuilding of infrastructure damaged during conflict. But public works programs entail large costs and substantial administrative effort, both of which are difficult for postconflict countries. They also involve much scope for corruption and mismanagement.

A recent paper by Rosas and Sabarwal takes advantage of the phased rollout of Sierra Leone’s Cash for Work Program to rigorously estimate its short-term effects on household welfare. In early 2012, 276 communities were randomly divided between a treatment group (143 communities), which received the program in April 2012, and a control group (133 communities), which did not receive the program at that time. The study measured program impacts by comparing control and treatment communities three to four months after the treatment communities received the program. Longer-term effects could not be assessed because control communities received the program after August 2012.

Poor communities eligible for participation were identified using estimates of poverty and food insecurity. The program relied on community-based targeting to identify beneficiary households within these communities. This targeting helped identify the poorest households that included at least one member between ages 15 and 35 who was willing and able to work. The beneficiaries were entitled to a minimum of 50 days and a maximum of 75 days of work at a wage rate of about $1.80 a day. This rate was designed to be lower than the market wage to discourage nonpoor applicants from participating.

Within three to four months the program showed significant effects on households’ labor allocation and consumption patterns. It had substantial employment effects, beyond participation in public works. The share of household members who were not participating in the program but were participating in paid work was 6 percentage points higher in treatment households (28 percent) than in control households (22 percent). This relative increase in nonprogram labor force participation was stronger among women and in rural areas. There was no increase in child labor.

Cash income among program participants increased by nearly three times in treatment households. What did the households do with the additional income? They increased spending on food and durable goods. They also invested in better health for their families. The treated households increased their use of health services, especially for male children. On average, they undertook 12 percent more health facility visits than the control group. And the share of boys ages 0–5 who were taken to a health facility was 23 percent higher in the treatment households. In addition, treated households reported spending 16 percent more on drugs and medications than the control group.

Treated households also invested directly to secure future earnings. They increased their participation in informal savings groups by 16 percent. They also increased their investment in housing improvements by 33 percent overall. And in rural areas they increased their investment in existing businesses by 39 percent. Most crucially, participating households created new enterprises—mostly petty trade businesses—at four times the rate that control households did.

These results demonstrate that public works have promise as productive safety nets in postconflict settings. They can provide immediate income support while also opening avenues for investment in the productive capacity of poor households. Most importantly, the results show that poor households plan for their future. They use temporary earnings to improve their quality of life not just in the present but also in the future.

Can Mass Media Increase Women’s Political Participation after Civil War?

Mass media can increase women’s political participation in conflict settings in the short run. But it will take more to reshape gender norms

Overall around the world, the participation rate for women in national, local, and community politics remains low—despite efforts to increase it. This encompasses women’s participation in elections as well as in national and local legislative bodies and community decision-making committees. Even when women do assume leadership positions, their ability to influence decision making or voice policy preferences is often limited. The situation is worse in war-torn settings, where women are disproportionately affected by the consequences of conflict.

One hypothesis has been that poor access to information may keep women from participating in election activities. To counter this possibility, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in the run-up to the 2011 general elections in that country, launched a radio program that broadcast information about the elections and about the importance of participation. An experimental study by Mvukiyehe assessed the effects of exposure to UNMIL’s radio programming on women’s political behaviors and attitudes in the context of the elections.

The experiment used a multistage randomization process (for selecting communities, households, and individuals). It provided women in randomly selected communities with direct access to a radio and organized them to participate in a series of weekly group sessions listening to UNMIL Radio’s special electoral programs. The group design was expected to offer women an opportunity for discussion and provide a space for communal forms of political participation. Listening groups were set up randomly in treatment communities. The groups met alone three times a week to listen to a specific electoral program in real time. For a fourth weekly meeting, groups were joined by staff from the implementing partner organization to listen to and discuss a prerecorded program. The intervention consisted of at least 15 listening sessions over a period of five weeks during the two months before the elections.

The study then conducted a survey on a broad range of informational, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes to assess the effects of the intervention on political participation as well as on gender gaps. The survey covered 600 individuals (two-thirds women, one-third men) in 40 communities (20 treatment and 20 control communities). The small sample size was one limitation in estimating impacts (that is, for the results that are positive and significant, only just under half the estimates are statistically significant at conventional levels of 1 percent and 5 percent).

Political participation was measured across five broad dimensions: voting (voting in the 2011 elections); campaigning (contributing time or money to a political campaign, attending a political rally); contacting (having contact with one’s representative in the national assembly or senate or with a government official or agency); communing (attending community meetings, speaking at such meetings, contacting community leaders), and protesting (complaining to radio stations, participating in riots or violent protest).

Results suggest that access to UNMIL Radio had a significant positive effect on women’s political participation at both the national and local level. Among women in the listening sessions, electoral turnout increased by 9 percentage points, attendance at community meetings by 5 percentage points, and the probability of speaking out at such gatherings by 10 percentage points.

The study also explored the possible mechanisms through which UNMIL Radio may have influenced women’s political participation. The channels included political efficacy (women’s understanding of politics and their sense of empowerment to influence political leaders), liberal norms and values, and group effects and collective action. The study found suggestive evidence in support of political efficacy relating to the electoral process and of group effects. Little evidence was found for greater political efficacy relating to general issues of politics and governance or for increased liberal orientation.

Overall, the study shows that exposure to politically relevant information through mass broadcasting, even if brief, can boost women’s political efficacy and participation in electoral processes. This result could help inform policy makers, researchers, and development practitioners seeking to enhance women’s participation in election activities through methods that are cost-effective, relatively simple, and easily adaptable in conflict settings.

But the lack of impact on broader political efficacy outcomes highlights the inability of these short-term interventions to shape the “soft elements,” such as political beliefs and attitudes as well as social and gender norms. Complementary targeted interventions are needed that can address socioeconomic constraints—such as unequal access to power and resources—that perpetuate gender gaps in social and political participation. Finally, more research is needed on the channels of influence for these political participation outcomes as well as the extent to which the design of interventions, such as the scale and intensity of information campaigns, can maximize effects on political participation.
Conflict and Poverty in Afghanistan’s Transition

Afghanistan has had strong growth despite armed conflict. But declining aid and the withdrawal of foreign troops put that at risk.

Between 2004 and 2013, Afghanistan experienced record economic growth, averaging about 9 percent a year. Yet poverty remained stubbornly high. Surprisingly, however, poverty rates were persistently lower in the conflict area of the South and Southwest (below 30 percent in 2011) and higher in the more peaceful North, Northeast, and Central regions (between 40 and 50 percent).

Research suggests that conflict reduces economic well-being, especially for poor households, but Afghanistan seems to defy this trend. One explanation is the massive development and military aid that has been channeled to strategic and conflict-ridden locations. This targeting reflects the “winning hearts and minds” doctrine, according to which development aid can be instrumental in securing the most bellicose areas of Afghanistan. In addition, military deployments can benefit households both directly—by curbing the negative effects of armed conflict on their welfare—and indirectly—presumably because the demand for goods and services to support the troops boosts local labor earnings.

In 2014 a dramatic transition started in Afghanistan, involving a reduction in the number of international troops and their replacement by Afghan troops as well as a reduction in foreign aid. Earlier research had suggested that other sources of economic growth—such as commercial agriculture and mining corridors—would mitigate transition shocks. But in general these hopeful scenarios overlooked the interrelation between conflict, development aid, and economic well-being. The security situation in Afghanistan was already deteriorating in 2012, and the intensity of conflict has markedly increased since that time.

A paper by Floreani, López-Acevedo, and Rama is among the few studies to analyze the relationship between armed conflict, aid, troops, and economic well-being in Afghanistan—a relationship that explains the puzzle of lower poverty rates in areas more severely affected by conflict. The paper also analyzes the impact of the reduction in international troops on household welfare.

The paper uses a two-pronged approach. First, it analyzes and models the relationship between armed conflict, troop deployment (both domestic and foreign), foreign aid, and household expenditure. Second, it uses this model to simulate the consequences of any reductions in foreign aid and international troops.

The analyses rely on a unique provincial-level data set constructed for the paper. The data include information on armed conflict, troops, aid, and household characteristics over the period 2007–14. These data are used to model armed conflict at the provincial level, depending on current and lagged presence of troops. The data also help to model the determinants of consumption per capita and assess the contribution from armed conflict, international aid, and troop deployment.

The results show that the overall impact of conflict on household expenditure is positive not only at the national level but also in each of the provinces. The impact is particularly strong among the provinces in the East, South, and Southwest. Household expenditure is 10–18 percent higher in these provinces than in the province with the lowest level of conflict intensity, despite the prevalence of armed conflict. Conversely, the impact is weakest in the more peaceful North and the Northeast provinces. These findings help explain the puzzle of higher poverty prevalence in the Afghan provinces and regions less affected by armed conflict.

These results are then used to perform a simulation exercise. This exercise suggests, in line with the latest available evidence, that conflict is taking a high toll on welfare and living standards in the country. The simulation indicates that a withdrawal of international troops and a decline in foreign aid flows would lead to an increase in armed conflict and poverty—results that match current trends in Afghanistan. While these forecasts should be interpreted with extreme caution, the paper underscores the risk that Afghanistan’s fragility challenges may worsen going forward. This would bring a severe deterioration in living standards. Safeguarding the recent achievements in human development therefore requires mitigating the negative welfare impact of declining foreign aid and international troop withdrawal.

Who Benefited from Burundi’s Demobilization Program?

Transfers to ex-combatants after the Burundi civil war led to welfare gains for beneficiaries and their villages—but only in the short run

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs are an essential part of peace-building interventions. These programs provide a series of services and financial aid to former combatants, allowing them to reintegrate into civilian society. Financed by an array of sources, including multilateral and donor funding, such programs have been implemented in more than 30 countries in the past two decades. More than 2.5 million people have benefited from some form of demobilization worldwide since 1989, at an average annual cost of more than $600 million.

In Burundi a DDR program demobilized and reintegrated 30,000 former combatants between 2005 and 2010. The peace process involved two waves of demobilization targeting two major rebel groups, with the program benefiting the CNDD-FDD from 2005 and the FNL from 2010. Burundi combatants were granted two allowances worth about $550 each, one in cash and one in kind (such as vocational training or start-up material for a small business). Each allowance was approximately equivalent to the annual earnings of a farm household or 18 months’ salary for a soldier in the army—thus a considerable amount.

What were the welfare effects of this cash transfer program? Combining panel data of households collected in 2006 and 2010 with official records from the National Commission for Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration, a paper by D’Aoust, Sterck, and Verwimp evaluates the program’s impact on the welfare of the households hosting a demobilized combatant and assesses spillovers on nonbeneficiary households.

According to economic theory, the impact of cash and in-kind transfers depends on whether beneficiaries face financial, social, or behavioral constraints that are relaxed following the transfers. If beneficiaries do not face such constraints, they should already produce at their efficient scale before receiving the transfers, suggesting that DDR allowances would be consumed. Greater demand should generate a temporary economic boom at the local level. But if beneficiaries do face financial, social, or behavioral constraints that are relieved by the transfers, DDR allowances would be invested in productive assets. In this case the impact on the consumption and assets of beneficiary households should be positive and long lasting, though the increase in consumption should be rather small. Spillovers on nonbeneficiaries at the community level would be expected to be marginal.

Whether the consumption or investment scenario prevails is an empirical question, one that the authors seek to assess. Their results show that demobilization grants had a positive and significant impact on economic outcomes for FNL beneficiaries and indicate positive spillovers for nonbeneficiary households in the short run. These results suggest that the consumption scenario prevailed in Burundi. When demobilized FNL combatants returned home, they spent a large part of their allowances on immediate needs, such as food and other basics. The demand for locally produced goods rose, which generated a short-run economic boom in villages hosting numerous ex-combatants. Consistent with these observations, the authors find that 2010 prices were higher in such villages.

For demobilized CNDD-FDD combatants, benefiting from the 2005 wave of the DDR program, the analysis identifies a downward trend in consumption and nonfood spending in the period 2006–10. Similarly, the density of demobilized combatants who benefited from this first wave of the program is negatively correlated with outcomes of interest. It is reasonable to assume that the first wave of the program, like the second one, generated a local economic boom in villages hosting large numbers of ex-combatants. Results therefore suggest that the 2005 economic boom vanished when demobilized combatants had spent all their money. In line with this interpretation, the evolution of prices between 2006 and 2010 was negatively affected by the presence of CNDD-FDD ex-combatants.

In the short run the positive direct effect of the DDR program shows that the program indeed provided a safety net to ex-combatants. The positive spillovers further show that the program not only benefited beneficiaries; it also benefited communities where ex-combatants returned. This second effect was likely to ease the return of ex-combatants to their villages, and this supports the reinsertion program implemented in postconflict countries as a short-run strategy to reduce the risk of relapse into conflict.

But results also suggest that the DDR program was not sufficient for creating a virtuous circle toward economic development, because the positive impact of cash transfers was short-lived. The return to a precarious economic situation may encourage ex-rebels to again take up arms and engage in violence. Indeed, recent empirical evidence suggests that demobilized combatants played a key role in the violence that affected the 2010 and 2015 elections in Burundi. These conclusions should be taken into consideration by policy makers when implementing DDR processes in other countries.

U.S. Food Aid and Civil Conflict Revisited: A Methodological Caution

A recent paper calls into question a causal methodology used in many studies, including one that links U.S. food aid and conflict.

Based on anecdotal evidence, research has long hypothesized a causal relationship between food aid and conflict—though without agreement on the expected direction of the effect. If aid reduces poverty and creates stability during emergencies, it may reduce strife. Alternatively, if aid resources are easily stolen or manipulated, food shipments might prolong conflict. Establishing the true relationship is notoriously difficult, primarily because of the problem of reverse causality. If aid shipments are disproportionately directed to places more prone to civil unrest, a positive correlation observed between the quantity of food aid received and the likelihood of conflict would not necessarily imply that food aid causes conflict.

A recent paper by Christian and Barrett examines the methodological solution proposed by a celebrated study reporting a relationship between aid shipments of wheat from the United States and civil conflict in recipient countries. In a context of chronic global food emergencies, the prospect that food aid might have serious unintended consequences naturally excites much policy interest. But the study, by Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian (“US Food Aid and Civil Conflict,” American Economic Review 104, no. 6 [2014]: 1630–66), is vulnerable to an underappreciated source of bias that more broadly affects a popular econometric strategy for establishing causal relationships in nonexperimental panel data.

Nunn and Qian (NQ) try to obviate the reverse causality problem by using a type of instrumental variables (IV) estimation method sometimes called a “shift-share instrument,” popular in the applied economics literature. Their IV strategy is based on the idea that wheat production shocks in the United States are strongly positively correlated with the total quantity of food aid shipped abroad by that country, but are not otherwise likely to be directly associated with conflict. Because U.S. wheat production does not vary across recipient countries, they construct a shift-share variable based on the proposition that additional food aid flows disproportionately to frequent, regular recipients. The interaction of U.S. wheat production with regularity of aid receipt becomes analogous to a continuous difference-in-differences treatment. Higher U.S. wheat production leads to more aid (the treatment) that is disproportionately sent to regular recipients (the treated group) rather than the least regular recipients (the control group).

Using data on direct shipments of wheat food aid in 1971–2006, NQ show that ordinary least squares estimates indicate a negative, statistically insignificant relationship between aid and conflict, while the IV estimates show that U.S. wheat production and aid shipments are positively and statistically significantly associated with conflict only among regular recipients of aid. They argue that the most plausible explanation is that food aid prolongs conflict.

Christian and Barrett (CB) show that this conclusion is based on flaws both in the understanding of how U.S. food aid policy changed over the study period and in the statistical reasoning that seems to have gone previously unnoticed in the literature using similar methods.

On the policy side, CB point out that the U.S. wheat price support policy ended by the mid-1990s. If this policy was driving aid allocations, as NQ hypothesize, the relationship between production and aid should attenuate in the last decade of the NQ data. Surprisingly, the opposite seems to be true, meaning that price support policy does not provide a basis for the natural experiment proposed by NQ.

CB next turn to a diagnosis of the statistical reasoning underlying the shift-share methods used by NQ. Annual wheat production does not vary much year to year. This poses two problems. First, since production shocks are likely correlated in adjacent years, levels of production in a given year cannot be treated as random relative to years just before or after. In addition, factors such as climate or commodity prices might jointly affect wheat yields and global conflict. Controlling for these joint influences through common year effects across countries that do or do not regularly receive aid is not valid. If countries that do not receive aid are not prone to conflict, this strategy effectively means using countries where conflict rarely occurs to model the determinants of conflict.

To test for spurious correlation, CB propose a new type of placebo test based on randomly assigning the identity of the aid recipients within each year. They find that the positive relationship between aid and conflict becomes much stronger when aid recipients are randomly assigned annual food aid volumes than it is in the true data. This finding calls into question the claimed causal relationship.

Finally, CB use Monte Carlo analysis to show that if both production and conflict are strongly trending variables that correlate over the study period, the shift-share strategy can identify a positive relationship between aid and conflict even if the true causal relationship is one in which aid prevents conflict.

These findings invalidate the conclusion that food aid causes prolonged conflict, while sounding a note of caution for a popular empirical strategy and offering a new tool for diagnosing issues with this panel data IV estimation strategy.

What Drives the Radicalization of Foreign Terrorist Recruits?

have a tertiary education, suicide fighters are relatively more likely to have a secondary education, and fighters are relatively more likely to have a primary education only. In addition, religious knowledge is low overall among the recruits and associated with higher levels of education.

Finally, exploiting individual-level education information for these fighters, the authors link the unemployment rate among workers of a given education level and in a given country with the size of the cohort of Daesh recruits from that same education level and country. The analysis suggests that higher unemployment rates are a push factor toward radicalization, especially in countries at a shorter distance from Syria, an increase of one percentage point in the unemployment rate leads to 42 additional Daesh recruits. This is a strong effect that is found to be restricted to countries at a relatively short distance from Syria. In countries farther away, unemployment may still lead to radicalization, with radicalized individuals engaging in local acts of violence rather than traveling to far-away Syria or Iraq.

Thus the main implication of the study’s findings is that domestic socio-economic policies have an impact on global security because disgruntled youth are susceptible to radicalization into violent extremism at home or abroad. Cross-border terrorism has turned security into a global public good, the provision of which requires policies coordinated at a multilateral level.