

The Impact of Youth Education on Intergroup Violence in Burkina Faso: A Pilot Study



Burkina Faso has a strong history of peaceful coexistence among ethnic and religious groups, but in recent years has seen a rise of organized violence by Islamic extremists and a fracturing of social cohesion, particularly in rural areas. This pilot study assesses the effectiveness of a school-based peace and dialogue curriculum to strengthen social trust, resolve disputes non-violently, discourage radicalization, and rebuild communal norms of tolerance among youth. This pilot will inform the viability of a scaled up evaluation.

Policy Issue

Fragile states are characterized by a delicate societal order, in which state institutions frequently struggle to deliver important public goods and services, including peace and security, to their people. In settings where state institutions are weak, other authorities often step in to fill this vacuum, such as gangs, extremist organizations, and other armed groups. In conflict and crisis-affected contexts, armed groups can offer economic stability and a sense of belonging to marginalized youth.

Youth-focused educational programs that seek to strengthen tolerance and decrease radicalization have the potential to discourage youth from participating in violence (USIP 2019)¹. Such programs may work by fostering and reinforcing a communal sense of identity and belonging, by teaching shared history and values. However, there is currently little evidence on programs with this aim. Understanding the role that youth can play in promoting peace and resilience to extremism in their communities can, in turn, support government and donor-supported policies to counter violent extremism.

Evaluation Context

Despite a previous history of peaceful coexistence among ethnic and religious groups in Burkina Faso, the country has experienced a rise of intercommunal and extremist violence since the removal of the former president in October 2014. Over the last few years security in rural areas has significantly deteriorated, and “the absence of any form of regulation across much of the countryside has led to a rise in banditry and land disputes, as well as the emergence of self-defence groups.”² Islamic militants

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COUNTRY

Burkina Faso

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PROGRAM AREA

Peace and Recovery

TOPICS

Community Participation, Conflict, Violence, Youth

TIMELINE

2019-2020

have further expanded their presence within the precarious security context, with 2019 marking a particularly violent year.

The program is being implemented by ProgettoMondo.MLAL (PMM), an EU-funded international NGO that promotes dialogue, human rights, and peace-building around the world. PMM will draw on its experience implementing a tolerance curriculum in Morocco to develop a school-based curriculum specific to the Burkina Faso context.

Details of the Intervention

Researchers are conducting a pilot study to assess the impact of the school-based peace-and dialogue curriculum on tolerance, intergroup disputes, and radicalization among adolescents in Burkina Faso. The intervention focuses on 15 schools, with four classrooms each, spread throughout the cities of Bobo Dioulasso and Ouagadougou as well as six communes in the rural Kenedougou province.

The curriculum seeks to support adolescents to be tolerant of others and resilient to radicalization by combatting two potential sources of alienation: (1) societal alienation due to lack of self-confidence and self-esteem (individual-level), and (2) lack of social cohesion as a result of fractured national or communal identity (community-level). By addressing these two mechanisms directly, the curriculum aims to increase intergroup tolerance, decrease intergroup disputes, and prevent radicalization.

In this pilot phase, researchers will evaluate the short-term effects of the PMM curriculum for 1,457 youth aged 12-18 in five schools in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, and seven schools in Kenedougou, a rural province close to the front lines of violence. Half of the schools in the sample will receive the curriculum while the other half will serve as the comparison.

The primary outcome variables of the study are interethnic/intercommunal trust and tolerance, and intergroup violence. The study will also measure several gender-related outcomes, including questions regarding sexual violence and attitudes towards women. In addition, researchers will collect data (one month prior to the intervention, the five weeks of the intervention, and one month following the intervention) on violent events within each commune, including instances of violence in schools, instances of intercommunal violence reported to local authorities, instances of successful non-violent conflict resolution by local authorities.

Results and Policy Lessons

Study ongoing; results forthcoming.

Sources

[1] "Preventing Extremism in Fragile States: A New Approach." United States Institute of Peace, February 2019.

<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/preventing-extremism-in-fragile-states-a-new-approach.pdf>.

[2] Crisis Group. "Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence," February 24, 2020.

<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences>.