Reintegrating Former Members of Nonstate Armed Groups

STATE OF EVIDENCE AND DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

As communities become more divided along ethnic, economic, and ideological lines due to escalating violent conflicts, how can former members of non-state armed groups who emerge from these conflicts be effectively reintegrated into society? How can critical evidence gaps regarding program design, impact, and cost-effectiveness be addressed to improve the evidence base for more informed policy decisions?

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OVERVIEW: NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS AND REINTEGRATION

CONTEXT

Contemporary violent conflicts often arise within states and divide communities along ethnic, economic, and ideological lines. Internal armed conflicts involving non-state armed groups (NSAGs)[1] have emerged as both the most common form of armed conflict and the leading driver in the rise of violent armed conflict globally. NSAGs increasingly exploit social fragmentation, operating within countries and localities characterized by low state capacity and trust in government institutions. Through this, NSAGs emerge as rivals to local governments in the administration of justice and the provision of security and basic services. In these complex contexts, traditional political resolutions to armed conflict are faltering, pushing governments and international organizations to seek out alternative strategies to engage NSAGs and former combatants as peace partners and to incentivize their transition to sanctioned political, social, and economic activity. Although there are critical open questions regarding the effective engagement of combatants in peace processes, this policy brief focuses chiefly on the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life.

While the field of peacebuilding research is expanding, rigorous causal evidence, especially concerning "what works" for the reintegration of former combatants, remains limited and highly context-specific. Drawing primarily from experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations, this policy brief examines the evidence base of reintegration programs, including economic reintegration, reconciliation, and psychotherapy. It further identifies key evidence gaps and open questions for further study.

The existing causal evidence base on the reintegration of former members of NSAGs is not yet sufficiently developed to support strong policy recommendations. Instead, this

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[1] This brief defines non-state armed groups as organized entities that operate independently of recognized state authorities and possess military capabilities, often engaging in armed conflict, insurgency, terrorism, or other forms of violent resistance or opposition to established governmental structures. These groups may include rebel forces, guerrilla organizations, militias, paramilitary organizations, or insurgent movements, among others. In practice, there may be good reasons for adopting different strategies to reintegrate different groups e.g. paramilitaries, rebel groups, and vigilantes. However, this brief includes evidence on all these groups in order to maximise the amount of research from which it can learn.

brief identifies key priorities for building a rigorous evidence base on program impact and cost-effectiveness, as well as generalizable insights from the broader literature on economic and social inclusion programs.

This brief is intended to support policymakers and practitioners in making evidence-based choices about policies and programming toward the reintegration of (former) members of NSAGs. That said, impact evaluations are only one component of a broader evidence base on peace and recovery, which includes the many other sector-specific and/or largely non-experimental studies and reviews, particularly on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration interventions (for example Hill, Taylor and Temin 2008, Humphreys and Weinstein 2007, Schulhofer-Wohl and Sambanis 2010, Sharif 2018). Accordingly, this review is meant to complement and be considered alongside those other sources of evidence.

Moreover, there is a broader evidence base of impact evaluations on the social integration of other excluded groups (not linked to NSAGs) on relevant questions or interventions in particular contexts. Although these evaluations apply to other excluded groups with no direct combat experience, there may be some parallels with NSAGs; for example, facing similar challenges of social exclusion, economic marginalization, and community reintegration due to factors such as religion, ethnicity, place of origin, or political views. For this reason, these studies are included in this brief, although more research is needed to determine the extent to which these findings can be applied to the case of the integration of former NSAG members.

Key Recommendations for Impact Evaluation and Program Design

Implementing the following evaluation and program design recommendations will help establish the evidence base needed for informed policy decisions.

- **Test variations of multi-component economic reintegration programs** for former combatants to understand their effectiveness on economic and social outcomes. While combining skills-building training programs with cash transfers or in-kind support has been shown to lead to positive reintegration results in some contexts, more evidence is needed to understand what components can drive effective and sustained change. However, detecting differences between various program treatments would require notably large-scale evaluations.
- **Conduct replication studies of psychotherapy programs** focused on the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life. Evidence suggests that

behavior change programs hold promise to promote positive adjustment and successful transition back into civilian, non-criminal life. However, their effectiveness among former combatants requires further evaluation. For instance, programs inspired by cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) [have shown promise](#) in reducing antisocial and violent behavior among high-risk individuals.

- **Invest in long-term, rigorous evaluations and cost-effectiveness analyses** of programs targeting former combatants, such as reintegration, reconciliation, and psychotherapy, to accurately measure sustained outcomes. Multi-year studies are necessary to assess lasting effects on social cohesion, mental health, and post-conflict recovery, considering both positive impacts and potential unintended consequences across different dimensions. Prioritizing cost-effectiveness analyses would [help identify the best approaches](#) to allocate resources and integrate program components in specific contexts.

- **Tailor reintegration program components to local economic conditions.** Evidence from economies with few firms and where most income-generating activity involves self-employment in small trade or agriculture suggests that in-kind capital, [cash transfers](#), or [cash for work](#) could provide the capital needed to start [small trading activities](#). One impact evaluation of an [agricultural skills training](#) program suggested that returning fighters can successfully transition to farming, highlighting that cash and capital injections can be as important as skills training.

- **Leverage low-cost, wide-reaching platforms.** Media interventions can offer scalable solutions in violence-affected communities by amplifying the voices of trusted leaders who advocate for tolerance and reconciliation. Pro-peace and inclusion messages from respected authorities can be inexpensively [delivered via radio programs](#) and social media. However, proactive harm reduction methods should be applied, including piloting, pre-testing, rigorous monitoring, and adapting the intervention to the context in which it is being implemented.

- **Iterate on existing designs of reconciliation programs** to better promote social cohesion while addressing and ameliorating trauma. Existing programs, which often involve public discussions of war or facilitate direct dialogue between victims and perpetrators, have the potential to promote forgiveness and strengthen social cohesion at the community level. However, they can also inadvertently impact [individuals' psychological well-being](#), potentially exacerbating war trauma. New reconciliation programs should be designed and tested to account for potential trauma responses, aiming to preserve community benefits while simultaneously improving individual psychological outcomes.

- Tailor program designs to the scale and severity **of the target population and problem.** To reintegrate an entire fighting force, programs should offer political and economic incentives to demobilize and reenter into civilian life. Broad-based active labor market programs, media interventions, and reconciliation programs are often designed for this purpose. However, to reach former combatants who remain deeply involved in violent and criminal activities, the evidence suggests that highly targeted, highly intensive multi-component programs may be necessary. These can be combined with or without enforcement measures, such as withholding cash transfers or other disincentives.

STATE OF THE EVIDENCE: NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS AND REINTEGRATION

STATE OF THE EVIDENCE

Marginalization and precarity heighten the risk of recidivism of former combatants returning to resource-constrained communities. Surveys of former Liberian and Colombian combatants, for example, identified poverty, unemployment, social/familial exclusion, and security concerns as key drivers for their potential return to armed conflict, underscoring the need for comprehensive, well-supported reintegration programming (Hill et al. 2008, Bøås and Hatløy 2008, Kaplan and Nussio 2018). In response, policymakers have supported initiatives such as reintegration, reconciliation, psychotherapy, and related programs to rebuild social cohesion and aid post-conflict recovery. As noted previously, involving NSAGs in peacebuilding processes is important for sustained peace and stability; however, there is currently insufficient rigorous causal research on this topic to make strong causal claims.

Therefore, this section focuses on the existing and emerging evidence on effective reintegration strategies for former combatants, exploring the various approaches used to facilitate their transition back into society after conflict. It highlights the need for further robust research by examining the effectiveness of economic reintegration, reconciliation, social cohesion, and psychosocial programs. There are limitations in generalizing from these results, however, and caution is needed when applying these findings to former members of armed groups. Particularly noteworthy is the relative scarcity of gender-disaggregated findings across the literature due to the high barriers

to participation faced by female former combatants and women affiliated with armed groups.

Economic reintegration programs

Economic reintegration programs aim to contribute to peacebuilding and stabilization efforts by providing opportunities, such as vocational training, job placement, entrepreneurship training, and cash transfers, to facilitate former combatants' reintegration. However, the few existing impact evaluations of multi-component economic reintegration programs indicate mixed results on economic and social outcomes. Further evidence is needed to determine whether cash transfers are likely to be more cost-effective than cash-for-work or in-kind capital transfers in conflict or post-conflict settings. Moreover, findings on vocational training remain inconclusive, with some studies indicating stronger impacts when combined with other economic interventions.

The few rigorous evaluations of economic reintegration programs targeting former members of NSAG include:
- In a randomized study in Liberia, Blattman and Annan (2016) evaluated a multi-component program that combined intensive agricultural training, cash transfers, and psychotherapy for former combatants involved in illicit activities. This integrated intervention resulted in increased agricultural work and a modest reduction in illicit activities. However, it did not have significant effects on attitudes towards violence and democracy, anti-social behaviors, or community engagement.
- In a quasi-experimental study of a multi-component program in Burundi, Gilligan, Mvukiyehe, and Samii (2012) found mixed effects on former combatants' economic and political reintegration. The program–which included cash assistance, counseling, education, vocational training, and start-up materials–increased income and improved livelihoods for those in the lowest income brackets. However, it did not enhance political reintegration, as former combatants did not show greater support for the peace accord or change their views toward the government.
- In a non-experimental study in Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) analyzed survey data from former fighters to assess the impact of interventions like cash transfers and skills training on reintegration outcomes. They found that these programs were ineffective at promoting full reintegration for higher educated, higher rank, and ideologically motivated former combatants, as well

as former members of abusive military factions. Past involvement in abusive factions was predictive of a failure to socially reintegrate; whereas, wealthier, more educated combatants faced greater challenges in reintegrating economically and politically.

The broader literature on active labor market and cash transfer programs in poor and fragile settings suggests that capital injections, including cash and asset transfers, as well as cash-for-work can boost employment and long-term earnings and this, in turn, may reduce engagement in criminal and violent activities (Blattman and Ralston 2015, Bagga et al. 2023). For example, cash transfer programs in Sub-Saharan Africa have largely been shown to improve household income-generating activities and agricultural investment across Sub-Saharan Africa (Daidone et al. 2019). However, these studies do not measure the impact on the social reintegration of former combatants into civilian life.

Additionally, careful program design is crucial to ensuring that economic reintegration programs achieve their goals while minimizing the risk of unintended negative consequences. For instance, programs aimed at improving the material well-being of conflict victims may inadvertently hinder the acceptance of ex-combatants if not thoughtfully designed. In a non-randomized evaluation of the BRA-KDP program in Aceh, Barron et al. (2009) examined a community-driven reintegration initiative that provided grants and other support to conflict-affected areas. The program sought to improve the material conditions of conflict victims while fostering social cohesion and trust in government. However, the study found reduced acceptance of ex-combatants in participating villages. Researchers suggested this outcome might stem from ex-combatants receiving funds intended for civilians, frustration over limited benefits, or the empowerment of communities to resist ex-combatant demands.

As illustrated in this section, most existing evidence comes from low-income countries, often in sub-Saharan Africa, and from less ideologically polarized conflicts, where opposing groups have less deeply rooted divisions based on religion, ethnicity, or political affiliation. Further research is needed to assess how these programs perform in different contexts, such as middle-income countries with higher institutional capacity or conflicts with more ideologically rooted positions.

Reconciliation and social cohesion programs

One of the main goals of peacebuilding programs is to foster reconciliation and enhance social cohesion among different communities, ultimately reducing the risk of future conflict. In fragile and conflict-affected settings, reconciliation, intergroup contact, and perspective-taking interventions aim to promote acceptance, inclusion, and improved social capital. Media platforms can be cost-effective program delivery mechanisms. These approaches, discussed in more detail below, encourage the adoption of prosocial norms within and between groups, such as reciprocal information exchange, peaceful negotiation, and reduced intergroup tensions. While some studies reviewed here do not directly assess the impact on former combatants, they offer promising strategies for reintegrating former members of NSAG into society and peace processes. However, the variety of approaches and mechanisms used in these programs make it challenging to draw generalizable conclusions. Furthermore, without additional cost-effectiveness analyses, evidence-based policy recommendations for scaling up reconciliation and social cohesion programs remain unavailable.

Reconciliation programs, such as transitional justice interventions, aim to rebuild relationships between divided groups, promoting healing, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence in post-conflict societies and can play an important role in fostering community acceptance and inclusion of former combatants. Transitional justice approaches bring together conflict victims and perpetrators, as well as other community members, through public forums and are premised on the idea that open discussions of grievances foster both societal and individual healing. Approaches, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, aim to rebuild social ties after conflict.

In one of the first randomized evaluations of reconciliation programs, Cilliers, Dube, and Siddiqi (2016) assessed the effectiveness of community-level forums in post-civil war Sierra Leone. The forums enabled victims to share their experiences of war atrocities and perpetrators, including former combatants,[2] to seek forgiveness for their actions. The findings revealed mixed outcomes: the program was shown to promote forgiveness and improve social capital by strengthening social networks, boosting participation in community organizations, and increasing contributions to public goods. At the same time, it also exacerbated psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is worth considering that the intervention took

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[2] The study defines former combatants based on a self-reported measure and whether they indicated that they were abducted and forced to carry a gun after getting abducted.

place a decade after the civil war in Sierra Leone, implying that individuals do not self-heal over time as evidenced by the effects on forgiveness and social cohesion.

As the need for reconciliation might endure long after conflicts cease, these findings underscore the importance of designing interventions that mitigate psychological harm while preserving the societal benefits of reconciliation programs. A quasi-experimental study of village tribunals for truth and reconciliation after the genocide in Rwanda showed similar results–those participating in these courts experienced higher levels of depression and PTSD (Brounéus 2010). It is important to note that existing reconciliation programs implemented by organizations and governments, such as the ones studied in Sierra Leone and Rwanda, are not designed to address war trauma and the psychological consequences of raising potentially traumatic war memories. To date, there have been no rigorous evaluations of reconciliation programs created explicitly to address war trauma. Thus, further research is needed to examine the full potential of these types of interventions to promote effective reintegration across a variety of conflict settings.

Taking a different approach, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation with university students in Chile to assess the impact of museum visits on attitudes toward restorative transitional justice policies and democratic institutions, finding the intervention increased support for both. Findings suggest that emotional appeals in museums can influence reconciliation, regardless of ideological views (Balcells, Palanza, and Voytas, 2022).

Each of the studies discussed takes place in specific contexts; to determine which reconciliation strategies are most effective across diverse post-conflict environments, further research is needed.

Intergroup contact programs rely on the idea that bringing people together in a non-adversarial, collaborative way can change attitudes and behaviors about the outgroup, fostering social cohesion (Allport 1954). Evidence suggests that intergroup contact has the potential to lead to small reductions in discrimination; however, individuals are more likely to change their daily behaviors towards those they often interact with rather than their generalized attitudes toward outgroups broadly. Findings on the effects of intergroup contact programming come from a number of randomized evaluations from a range of contexts, showing mixed impacts. However, these studies have neither targeted former combatants nor been proven to offer generalizable

insights for reintegration or social cohesion outcomes. Therefore, the existing evidence must be interpreted with caution, particularly given the unique challenges posed by post-conflict environments.

While we currently lack evidence directly linking intergroup contact to the reintegration of former combatants, the underlying theory suggests that bringing members of different groups together, under certain necessary conditions, can reduce prejudice and improve social cohesion. This idea holds promise for ex-combatant reintegration programs. However, more research is needed to effectively apply these insights to programs targeting former NSAG members. Nonetheless, there are a few notable evaluations involving conflict-affected communities, including:

- A recent study in Mozambique on community meetings between host community members and internally displaced persons (IDPs) found improved social cohesion outcomes. The structured interactions positively impacted host-IDP relationships, increased short-term religious tolerance, and reduced extremist beliefs (Pita Barros 2024).
- In post-ISIS Iraq, another study focusing on sports found that mixed Christian-Muslim soccer (football) teams promoted more tolerant behaviors among Christians towards their Muslim peers, however, the program did not reduce overall prejudice among Christian participants toward the broader Muslim community (Mousa 2020).
- In Afghanistan, a study of a vocational training program aimed at fostering positive contact between locals and IDPs showed no reduction in prejudice towards IDPs among locals, indicating the difficulty in changing prejudicial beliefs in wartime settings (Zhou and Lyall 2024).
- Another study of a vocational training program, this time bringing together Christian and Muslim young men in Nigeria for computer training, found no overall change in prejudice. However, participants in mixed classes discriminated less against out-group members than those in homogeneous classes, where increased discrimination was observed, likely due to reduced intergroup interaction (Scacco and Warren 2018).

While these studies provide evidence suggesting the potential of intergroup contact interventions to reduce prejudice, more recent research has produced mixed results. For example:

- In Pakistan, a study assessed the impact of inter-sectarian contact and inclusionary messaging from religious leaders on participants' willingness to hire

services from an outgroup member. They found that each intervention separately had null effects. However, when intergroup contact was combined with supportive messaging from religious leaders, significant positive effects on intended hiring behavior were observed ([Chaudhury and Hussein 2023](#)).

- A recent evaluation examined the effects of intergroup contact and empathy education on Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities. Participants were randomly assigned to classrooms with peers from the same or mixed backgrounds and to either an empathy education curriculum or a nutrition and health curriculum. The study found that intergroup contact had no clear impact on attitudes toward the outgroup and actually decreased the desire for future interactions between groups. In contrast, empathy education reduced prejudice without negatively impacting behavior. Combining both interventions provided no additional benefits, and there were no spillover effects on household members (Mousa, Naumann, and Scacco, forthcoming working paper).

Perspective-taking programs teach individuals to view situations from another's point of view, which can help reduce aggression, build trust, and increase cooperation. Similar to intergroup-contact interventions, this approach has shown mixed results in challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy toward outgroup members in conflict settings and among conflict-affected populations. These varied outcomes may be attributed to differences in measurement, program design, or the specific context of each setting. For example, a randomized evaluation by [Alan et al. (2021)](#) in Turkey found that a perspective-taking curriculum, taught in elementary school classrooms with Syrian refugee and host-community children, led to lower ethnic segregation and more socially positive behaviors, among other outcomes. In contrast, Paluck (2010) observed unintended negative effects in a perspective-taking study conducted in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that assessed a radio show designed to promote listener discussion about intergroup conflict and cooperation. Moreover, studies in Uganda ([Larson and Lewis 2024](#)) and the United States ([Adida et al. 2018](#)) showed only circumscribed effects. These mixed results highlight the importance of the delivery mechanisms employed in social cohesion interventions, which are crucial to their effectiveness and warrant careful consideration. The effectiveness of social cohesion interventions is also influenced by delivery mechanisms, such as the use of media platforms, which require careful consideration.

Media platforms, in particular, have shown mixed results in this context. Media interventions, including radio and television programs that promote reconciliation

messages, have proven effective in shifting social norms, enhancing social capital, and supporting peacebuilding efforts. Trusted figures, such as religious leaders and other moral authorities, can be instrumental in shaping attitudes and influencing social norms. However, mass media has also been used to incite violence historically, underscoring the need for caution when utilizing this platform (GCCI 2021).

In a randomized evaluation in Northeastern Nigeria, Blair et al. 2021 found that recorded messages from religious leaders promoting the full reintegration of former Boko Haram members significantly increased individual support and perception of wider community support for reintegration. However, even when used with good intentions, media interventions can have unintended negative influences on attitudes and behaviors. For example, an experimental study in Eastern DRC showed that a general-audience radio program that encouraged perspective-taking[3] led to an increase in intolerance (Paluck 2010).[4] In another example from central Africa, a quasi-experimental study found that a radio program targeting Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) members had positive outcomes, including reduced fatalities, reduced violence, and increased rebel defections, with the notable side-effect of increased looting (Armand, Atwell, and Gomes 2020).

As discussed, social cohesion programs aim to promote prosocial norms within and between groups, fostering inclusion, trust, and cooperation to support long-term peace and reconciliation. However, as highlighted in this section, the evidence remains mixed and, for ex-combatants, quite limited. Further research is needed to identify the most effective social cohesion program approaches and delivery mechanisms for reintegrating former combatants.

Psychotherapy and behavioral techniques

Psychotherapy and behavioral change techniques programs address the psychological and social needs of former combatants by shifting the way individuals act and make decisions. This includes programs inspired by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), focusing on developing non-cognitive skills and correcting maladaptive mental processes. By teaching individuals to evaluate and modify their thinking and

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[3] Perspective taking is a psychological approach that aims to reduce bias by encouraging individuals to empathize with outgroup members. It involves sharing personal narratives and imagining oneself in others' experiences, which can increase sympathy and improve attitudes towards marginalized groups. However, its effectiveness in contexts of active or ideological conflict is less studied (GCCI 2021, p. 76).

[4] This study did not specifically target former combatants; instead, among the sample were individuals who had encountered violence, human rights abuses, forced displacement, and rape.

decision-making patterns, CBT has become a prominent, cost-effective approach in crime and violence prevention programming. Evaluations of CBT-inspired programs in both the United States and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) provide ample evidence of its effectiveness in reducing youth involvement in criminal activities, though more evidence targeting former NSAG members is needed.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), applied for crime and violence prevention, targets behavior change by modifying thoughts and actions. CBT-based interventions, including individual counseling and group therapy, aim to improve decision-making and reduce antisocial behavior.

- In a recent long-term study in Liberia (Blattman et al. 2023), researchers conducted a randomized evaluation of a CBT program coupled with unconditional cash transfers over eight weeks. The findings demonstrated significant and lasting reductions in criminal and violent behaviors among high-risk young men, including some former combatants from the Liberian civil war.
- The Becoming a Man (BAM) program provided group CBT sessions to adolescent youth during school hours in Chicago, IL. A randomized evaluation showed that BAM resulted in a short-term decrease in arrests during the one-year duration of the program and led to a notable increase in graduation rates after the program ended (Heller et al. 2017).
- The Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) in Chicago implemented CBT sessions for adolescent males, who on average had been arrested eight times prior to enrollment. A randomized evaluation of the JTDC program found a significant reduction in readmissions to juvenile detention centers, with these effects lasting for 18 months (Heller et al. 2017).
- The Rapid Employment and Development Initiative (READI), a job program paired with CBT and other social support services, was designed for men at risk of gun violence in Chicago. A randomized evaluation of READI showed that, while the program did not significantly reduce overall violence, it led to a reduction in arrests for shootings and homicides, particularly among participants referred by outreach workers, who experienced fewer violent incidents compared to those not in the program (Bhatt et al. 2023).
- In El Salvador, an after-school program featuring socioemotional skills discussions and club activities, reduced student delinquent behaviors, improved attendance, and boosted academic performance, particularly benefiting

students with higher initial misbehavior levels, while also enhancing emotional self-regulation ([Dinarte and Egana del Sol 2024](#)).

Research suggests that CBT techniques can effectively alter behavior, improve decision-making, and reduce antisocial tendencies across different contexts, contributing to crime prevention and violence reduction. While findings indicate significant and lasting reductions in criminal and violent antisocial behaviors among high-risk individuals, more research is needed to assess whether CBT or other types of psychotherapy programs can facilitate the successful reintegration of NSAG fighters transitioning into civilian life.

EMERGING EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE

A number of ongoing rigorous impact evaluations are building on earlier insights to understand whether contact can improve social cohesion among conflicting groups, explore strategies addressing the motivation to join armed groups, and study the impact of religious-based CBT on fostering prosocial behaviors. While not all of these studies target (former) members of NSAGs similar to the evidence discussed above, they offer potential insights for designing more effective future reintegration programs for former combatants. Examples of these ongoing studies include:

- **[Participation Motives and Abuse Prevention for Non-State Armed Actors in the DRC](#)**: Evidence suggests individuals who join armed groups are motivated by moral sentiments, such as to redress grievances, leading to revenge and outgroup civilian abuse. However, these motives can erode over time, turning grievance into greed and negatively affecting ingroup civilians. This project examines the evolution of militia fighters' motivations and tests interventions to reduce civilian abuse, building on an ongoing study investigating the reasons behind joining armed groups. Understanding individuals' motivations to join NSAGs can provide valuable insights for re-integration strategies, including addressing underlying moral perspectives or economic motivations.
- **[The Role of Emotions in Individuals' Decisions to Join Armed Groups in Eastern DRC](#)**: The motivations for joining armed and terrorist organizations, whether economic or personal, are unclear. Leveraging a long-standing relationship with an armed organization in Eastern DRC, researchers aim to understand who joins and why, and how these motives affect performance within the group.
- **[Can Social Contact Reduce Economic Conflict between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria?](#)**: The Contact Hypothesis suggests that intergroup contact can resolve

conflicts, but there is limited causal evidence of whether it produces such effects, and little understanding of potential mechanisms. Researchers are investigating whether "contact" can reduce farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria through inter-dialogues in a randomized evaluation, exploring both economic and behavioral mechanisms.

- **Islamic-Based CBT and the Promotion of Mental Health and Prosociality Among Refugees in Turkey**: Access to mental health services is often limited for individuals with psychological disorders from conflict-induced displacement, affecting intergroup trust and leading to hostility towards outgroups. Researchers are assessing the effects of Islamic-based CBT delivered by clerics on Afghan refugees' mental health and prosocial behavior towards outgroups.

OPEN QUESTIONS

In recent decades, the number of NSAGs involved per conflict and the lethality of those conflicts have only intensified. Looking ahead, research must focus on validating fundamental theories of peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution to better inform peacebuilding and reintegration policy and practice. Existing impact evaluations have revealed outcomes that are both unexpected and counterintuitive, underscoring the need for careful action and continued research.

Future impact evaluations should prioritize ensuring insights are generalizable across diverse contexts and program types. In particular, there is a need for studies that respond to current trends, such as the rise of conflicts driven by ideology and the increasing need for evidence from middle-income countries. To generate actionable policy recommendations, targeted and innovative research on the effective reintegration of NSAG members is critical. Below are key questions that require further investigation to advance the state of the evidence:

Motivations to join non-state armed groups:
- What is the role of material and non-material **incentives** in driving individuals or armed groups to engage in crime or violence, and how can programs be designed to effectively shift these incentives for conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

Effective demobilization strategies:

- How can **demobilization interventions** be designed to effectively break down allegiances and facilitate the successful reintegration of former combatants into society?
- To what extent can mediation and negotiation with armed actors (privately or in public) reduce the use of violence? Can **the influence of third parties** (e.g. religious groups or influential elders) be leveraged for demobilization and reintegration? And what adverse effects can be expected from such interventions?
- How can implementers and researchers **effectively collaborate with demobilized non-state armed groups** to conduct studies and deliver services to former combatants?
- How effective are interventions that include **women in decision-making roles** within demobilization or reconciliation programs at promoting reintegration?

Effective reintegration programming:
- Which **livelihood components within reintegration programs** delivered in conflict-affected contexts offer the highest **cost-effectiveness** and impact on target outcomes?
- How can **communities** be encouraged to **accept** demobilized former combatants or members of violent extremist groups, fostering their reintegration into society?
- Can **combining reconciliation efforts with psychological support programs** such as counseling facilitate both reintegration and psychological well-being?
- How does **intergroup contact** or **perspective-taking** influence the reintegration process of members of NSAGs into civilian communities, and what are the underlying mechanisms that facilitate or hinder this process?
- How do **government-supported and self-directed reintegration pathways** compare in effectiveness and outcomes?
- How can programs **targeting female former combatants** and women affiliated with NSAGs be better tailored to improve their reintegration outcomes?

Societal impacts of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs:
- How do NSAG demobilization and former combatant reintegration impact **trends in crime and violence** within target communities?
- How do DDR and reintegration programs **influence local communities' perceptions** of and trust in the state?

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