

The Reach of Radio: Ending Civil Conflict through Rebel Demobilization

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Abstract

“We examine the role of FM radio in mitigating violent conflict. We collect original data on radio broadcasts encouraging defections during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency, one of Africa's longest running conflicts. This constitutes the first quantitative evaluation of an active counterinsurgency policy that encourages defections through radio messages. Exploiting random topography-driven variation in radio coverage along with panel variation at the grid-cell level we identify the causal effect of messaging on violence. Broadcasting defection messages increases defections and reduces fatalities, violence against civilians, and clashes with security forces. In response to manpower losses the LRA resorts to increased looting for survival. Income shocks measured by exogenous movements in commodity prices have opposing effects on both the conflict and the effectiveness of messaging. Conflict-enhancing (-reducing) commodity price shocks weaken (strengthen) the pacifying effects of defection messaging. This highlights the role of economic incentives in the success of counterinsurgency policies.”

Speaker Profile

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