



Peter Caton / Mercy Corps

“IF YOUTH ARE GIVEN THE CHANCE”

Effects of Education and Civic Engagement on Somali Youth Support of Political Violence

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› Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Instability in Somalia	8
Recent Political History	8
Armed Actors in Somalia	8
Theories Tested	10
Education and Political Violence	10
Civic Engagement and Political Violence	11
Somali Youth Learners Initiative Program Overview	12
Research Design and Methodology	14
Survey	15
Key Informant Interviews	16
Limitations	17
Key Findings	18
Effects of Provision of Improved Access to Secondary Education	19
Effects of Provision of Civic Engagement Opportunities	22
Discussion and Conclusions	24
Recommendations	26
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Annex 1 Select Survey Questions and Regression Tables	27
Annex 2 Additional Details of Study Design and Methodology	35
References	37

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› Executive Summary



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Understanding and addressing the root causes of conflict to promote long-term stability is a perennial focus of development programs, yet policymakers still struggle to find proven, effective solutions. Underlying this challenge is a dearth of evidence regarding violence-reduction approaches. Though an increasing number of empirical studies have focused on evaluating the impact of development programs on attitudes and behaviors related to violence (including Mercy Corps' research in Somaliland and Afghanistan), questions remain about the relative effectiveness of different types of interventions and about the conditions under which some interventions may or may not succeed in reducing violence.

The motivation behind this research study is to help fill these knowledge gaps. In particular, this research seeks to test the impact of two common violence-reduction approaches—education and civic engagement—on youths' level of support for armed violence. By expanding our previous study from Somaliland to examine education, civic engagement, and political violence in South Central Somalia and Puntland, this study also allows us to understand whether the effects of the same education and civic engagement interventions persist across different contexts.

Somalia faces many challenges and opportunities when it comes to violence reduction. Though the nation is striving to move beyond decades of unrest and violent conflict and toward stability and broad-based development, the security situation remains tenuous. The two truck bombs that exploded on October 14, 2017, killing more than 500 people in Mogadishu, highlight both how deadly armed opposition groups continue to be and Somalia's continued vulnerability to violence. Armed groups have proven repeatedly how resilient they can be, constantly adapting to new threats—both internal and external—to ensure their own survival. A steady source of resilience for armed opposition groups is a large pool of frustrated youth whom they can recruit and indoctrinate. To promote stability, several youth development programs in Somalia seek to engage vulnerable youth and address their needs, including Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI), which focused on increasing access to secondary education and civic engagement opportunities for youth. Evaluating the SYLI program provided an opportunity to better understand if and how improved access to formal secondary education and increased opportunities for civic engagement can reduce young Somalis' support for armed groups and the use of violence to achieve political aims.

From an impact evaluation that surveyed 1,220 young people in these two violence-affected regions of Somalia, we found that both SYLI-supported secondary education alone and SYLI-supported secondary education combined with civic engagement opportunities pulled Somali youth away from supporting violent groups. We also identified possible explanations for these reductions in support: both versions of the intervention led engaged youth to be more optimistic about their future job prospects and more confident in the use of nonviolent means to achieve change in their communities. These two significant pathways suggest that the SYLI program enabled youth to feel more capable of shaping their own futures and influencing their communities, which in turn may explain the reduced support for armed opposition groups that feed off young people's frustrations and feelings of disempowerment.

Recommendations

As national governments, international organizations, civil society, and communities seek to understand how they can better support young people and reduce the appeal of armed opposition groups, these results have important ramifications for designing youth programming with violence-reduction and stability objectives. Thus, Mercy Corps makes the following recommendations for policy and programming in Somalia and similarly fragile and conflict-affected contexts:

› **When it comes to education, combine concrete skills with opportunities to apply them.**

The greatest reduction in youth support for political violence comes from the combination of participation in quality secondary education (which transfers knowledge and skills needed for future employment) and civic engagement opportunities (which empower youth to positively contribute to their communities). Given that these findings hold across three different regions—Somaliland, South Central Somalia, and Puntland—we can say with some confidence that this approach can be an important strategy in efforts to combat political violence throughout Somalia, and perhaps in other contexts with similar conditions. To create more opportunities for young people to apply what they have learned, efforts to expand equitable access to education for youth should be coupled with linkages between students and potential employers to help ensure better market absorption of future graduates, leading to better livelihood opportunities and outcomes.

› **In countries emerging from conflict, prioritize expanding access to public services, but do not neglect the underlying grievances that threaten long-term stability.**

While secondary education decreased support for violence in South Central Somalia and Puntland, it had the opposite effect in Somaliland. The key difference is how education affects youths' perceptions in different contexts: it increased optimism about livelihoods and improved perceptions of the government in South Central Somalia and Puntland, while it led to pessimism about livelihoods and dissatisfaction with government services in Somaliland. This finding indicates that in countries emerging from conflict with few, if any, functioning systems, simply investing in basic services such as education can be a quick win for governments and donors focused on promoting stability. In the long term, however, this is not enough. As the rest of Somalia slowly develops and becomes more developed and peaceful like Somaliland, our research suggests that education will raise young people's expectations, but it will not address the grievances that drive them to support political violence.

› **Simultaneously seek solutions to macro-level structural challenges while implementing micro-level development programs.**

Our analysis found that the level of violence in a community made a difference in the effectiveness of the programming: SYLI-supported secondary education led to a significant reduction in support for political violence only in sites with relatively low levels of violence. This indicates that addressing immediate instability may be an important prerequisite for the success of longer-term investments in youth development. A recent systematic review of the impact of development aid in countries affected by civil war reinforces this result: in order for aid to reduce violence, the environment must first be secure enough for violence-reduction programming to be implemented.¹ More generally, the results indicate that broader contextual factors influence the ability of development programs such as SYLI to succeed in reducing support for violence. Insecurity, the political environment, and economic growth continue to be important dynamics that shape the nature of conflict in Somalia. Without changes to these broader dynamics, the success of potentially impactful development programs will be limited.

1 Zürcher, 2017.

› Introduction

Somalia is working to move beyond decades of unrest and violent conflict and toward a path of stability and broad-based development. The federal government of Somalia officially launched a National Development Plan (2016–2021), which includes strategies to create more economic opportunities for youth, and signed a bilateral agreement with the US government to support Somalia’s education system and build the capacity of educational institutions. The country has enjoyed increased financial investment from diaspora returnees and foreign companies, leading to the opening of a new international bank in the capital and improved infrastructure around major transportation and business hubs.

Even with these positive developments, however, security threats remain. Last year was a relatively quiet year in Mogadishu compared to 2016, but this modest sense of security was shattered on October 14, 2017, when two truck bombs detonated. These coordinated explosions killed more than 500 people, including dozens of children, and injured hundreds more, making it the deadliest attack in Somalia’s recent history.² While Al-Shabaab, a Somali terrorist organization affiliated with Al-Qaeda, has not claimed responsibility for this attack, Somali government agencies assume it is the perpetrator.

Despite increased efforts to establish a functioning central government and direct military engagement by Somali armed forces and the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), the October 14 attack highlights both Somalia’s sustained vulnerability to violence, including political violence, and how deadly armed opposition groups continue to be. Armed groups have proven repeatedly how resilient they are, constantly adapting to new threats—both internal and external—to ensure their own survival. One source of this resilience is the effective recruitment and indoctrination of young people. According to the International Crisis Group, the number of young people—both men and women—who

seem willing to act on behalf of groups like Al-Shabaab is impressive, especially considering the increased security activity.³

Armed groups, including violent extremist organizations, prey upon young people’s social, political, and economic grievances, making youth the majority of today’s new supporters and recruits. As a past Mercy Corps study found, “Young people take up the gun...because they are angry.”⁴ From the United Nations to individual countries to international and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), young people are a target population for policymakers and practitioners trying to counter the appeal of support for or participation in organizations like Al-Qaeda and Daesh. Somalia is of particular interest. The lack of educational, civic engagement, and employment opportunities, in addition to marginalization and injustice, fuel frustration.⁵ In response, the federal government of Somalia is prioritizing efforts to support youth development so that the country’s young citizens are empowered to be productive members of society, which will hopefully in turn also reduce the appeal of political violence and armed opposition groups like Al-Shabaab. In particular, the federal government of Somalia calls for investment in formal education as a part of this agenda.

While Somalia’s National Strategy and Action Plan for Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism asserts that “education is an essential part of preventing violent extremism,” questions remain about if and how education alone decreases the appeal of armed opposition groups. Thus far, evidence of the effect of education on the support for and participation in political violence is mixed and of variable quality. We have undertaken research to help fill this knowledge gap. Mercy Corps’ Somali Youth Learners Initiative⁶ (SYLI) program, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provided an opportunity to better understand if and how improved

2 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2017b.

3 International Crisis Group, 2014, p. 17.

4 Proctor, 2015, p. 2.

5 Central Intelligence Agency, 2018.

6 The program was previously called the Somali Youth Leaders Initiative.

access to education and increased opportunities for civic engagement⁷ influence young Somalis' support for armed opposition groups and acceptance of the use of violence to achieve political goals.

Our research took place in South Central Somalia and Puntland and builds on Mercy Corps' past studies on the SYLI program in Somaliland and Puntland.⁸ As with these past studies, the current research aims to offer more refined evidence on the effectiveness of ongoing approaches to reduce youth support for armed opposition groups in Somalia. More broadly, the research contributes to the body of evidence on what works to reduce support for and engagement in political violence in fragile, conflict-affected contexts.

This report first provides background on the security and economic situation in Somalia and then details existing theories on the links between education, civic engagement, and support for political violence, particularly among young people. Next, it describes the SYLI program and its implementation by Mercy Corps, followed by a presentation of the study design and results. The report then provides a discussion of the key findings and closes with recommendations for practitioners and policymakers on how youth programming can be designed to best reduce the appeal of armed opposition groups and political violence in Somalia and beyond.



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7 Few opportunities for constructive civic engagement are open to Somali youth, particularly for those who lack clan connections. The SYLI program sought to provide young people with the following civic engagement opportunities: peer-to-peer dialogue to allow youth to engage in regional and national issues; interaction within communities through youth-led service learning and awareness activities; structured and positive interactions with peers to build self-confidence, leadership skills, and nonviolent resolution skills through sports and recreational activities; and participation in the design and implementation of government policies.

8 Tesfaye, 2016; Butichi & Wolfe, 2013.

› Instability in Somalia

Recent Political History

The combination of state collapse, insurgencies and terrorism, weak governance, inter-clan conflicts, international military intervention, and famine has ravaged Somalia for three decades. The country consistently ranks toward the top of the Fragile State Index and was number two—behind only South Sudan—in 2017.⁹ Despite multiple attempts to form transitional and internationally backed governments, no central government has governed the entire country fully since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991.¹⁰ Somalia's tenuous federal system means each state oversees its own affairs, and the federal government's linkages to and control over the states are still limited.¹¹

But there are signs of progress. Somalia held a presidential election in February 2017, the second since the dissolution of the transitional federal government in 2012. While initially planned as a one-person, one-vote national poll of all adult Somalis, security concerns caused the plan to shift to an electoral college system. Former Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as Farmajo, defeated the incumbent after multiple rounds of voting from within the heavily fortified Mogadishu airport compound. Somalis have high expectations for Farmajo to reduce corruption and finally move the country forward after 25 years of stalled development.

Somalia's future can be bright if the government, private sector, and civil society are able to harness the potential of the country's young people: more than three-quarters of the population are 24 years old or younger,¹² and the median age is just 18.1 years.¹³ Currently, however, the lack of educational opportunities is a significant source of frustration for this group. Somalia has one of the world's lowest enrollment rates for both

primary and secondary school-aged children (30 percent and 26 percent, respectively).¹⁴ Somalia's youth dependency ratio is 92.1,¹⁵ which signals a strong need for investment in education and youth programming.

Armed Actors in Somalia

Al-Shabaab, which translates to "the youth," is an armed organization fighting to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state in Somalia. The group's origin dates back to 1991, during the civil war and the collapse of the Siad Barre regime.¹⁶ It only established itself as an independent entity, however, in 2006, after severing ties with the Islamic Courts Union.¹⁷ During the past decade, Al-Shabaab has fluctuated in strength and territorial control, at various points controlling parts of Mogadishu and the major port city Kismayo. Recent estimates suggest the group has 7,000–9,000 fighters,¹⁸ of whom children may constitute more than half.¹⁹ Today its internal reach is limited mostly to rural parts of South Central Somalia, but the organization has expanded into Kenya both to recruit members and execute deadly attacks. The United Nations reported that more than 4,500 civilians were killed or injured in Somalia between January 1, 2016, and October 14, 2017; Al-Shabaab was responsible for 60 percent of these casualties.²⁰

Al-Shabaab maintains support through sustained recruitment and indoctrination of young people. The group lures new recruits—socially and politically marginalized youth between 10 and 15 years old—with promises of monthly salaries up to \$700, free Islamic education, and marriage.²¹ Al-Shabaab recruiters also undertake extensive messaging efforts through radio; public forums and meetings; and social media, such as Twitter and YouTube, to promote their achievements and ideology within and outside Somalia and call on others to join their cause.

9 Messner et al., 2017.

10 "Most-Failed-State," 2016.

11 International Crisis Group, 2017.

12 United Nations Population Fund, 2017.

13 Central Intelligence Agency, 2018.

14 Somalia Education Cluster, 2017.

15 The CIA World Factbook defines the youth dependency ratio as the ratio of the youth population (ages 0–14) per 100 people of working age (ages 15–64) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018).

16 See Tesfaye, 2016, and Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, for a more detailed history of the group.

17 United Nations Security Council, 2016.

18 "Who Are Somalia's al-Shabab?" 2017.

19 United Nations Security Council, 2016.

20 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2017b.

21 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2017a; Counter Extremism Project, 2017.

Some research shows that civilian support for Al-Shabaab, direct or implied, is a response to government corruption and dysfunction rather than approval of the group.²² Al-Shabaab manipulates civilians' skepticism of and anger toward the government, which is one reason why some think the group has not claimed responsibility for the October 14 attack.²³

In addition to Al-Shabaab, Somalis face violence from a mix of other internal and external actors. The 2017 United Nations report attributed 13 percent of casualties between 2016 and 2017 to clan militias.²⁴ Clan and sub-clan structures, which define

Somali identity and drive Somali politics,²⁵ fought to fill the power void left after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. These inter-clan conflicts continue today, with different groups aligned with their politicians seeking economic and political control. This clan system informs how all other actors operate within the country, from politicians to warlords to armed opposition groups.²⁶ Further, there have been numerous documented cases of national and international security forces injuring and killing civilians.²⁷ The same UN report attributed 4 percent of casualties to AMISOM and 11 percent to state actors, including the police and army.²⁸



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22 International Crisis Group, 2017.

23 Ibid.

24 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2017b.

25 Schaefer & Black, 2011

26 Schaefer & Black, 2011.

27 Sheikh, 2017; Grubeck, 2011; Gaffey, 2016; "African Union Troops," 2016.

28 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2017b.

› Theories Tested

Rigorous evidence on the links between education and political violence and between civic engagement and political violence is limited. While some encouraging studies have been carried out, which are detailed below, they have led to more questions than definitive answers. For example, if education reduces the likelihood that people either engage in political violence directly or support other people and actors engaging in political violence, is it because of the education itself (i.e., increased knowledge and skills) or because access to education increases people's trust in their government's ability to provide services? Past research on the interaction between trust in government and political violence, including violent extremism, indicates that improved perceptions of government legitimacy may affect stability,²⁹ yet the specific impacts of education provision on perceptions of government and perceptions of armed groups are currently unclear.

The evidence regarding civic engagement and support for violence is similarly limited. Mercy Corps examined why youth in 13 sub-Saharan African countries support political violence and found that civically engaged youth often feel compelled to act on injustices.³⁰ Therefore, work is needed to understand under what circumstances increasing civic engagement may have a positive impact on youths' attitudes toward political violence—for example, by simultaneously improving government accountability so that youth see the government as responsive to their engagement.

Mercy Corps conducted the single most relevant study, which evaluated the same SYLI program as examined in this report, but in Somaliland, a less violence-affected, self-declared independent region of northwestern Somalia with a functioning administration. That research found that the provision of SYLI-supported secondary education alone

increased support for violent groups (by 11 percent), but combining SYLI-supported secondary education and civic engagement programs reduced support for those same groups (by 20 percent).³¹

Education and Political Violence

Much of the relevant literature informing this study focuses on the effect of education on support for terrorism (transnational and domestic), rather than on political violence more broadly. Initial political science theories from the 1960s stipulated that formal education would reduce incentives for illegal activities, including violence.³² The data remain inconclusive, however. Some empirical studies at the national level have found that education has little effect overall on support for transnational terrorism,³³ while others report that secondary school education and literacy have a significant negative association with transnational and domestic terrorism.³⁴ In contrast, tertiary education has been shown to be significantly associated with increased incidents of transnational³⁵ and domestic³⁶ terrorism. Similarly, studies at the individual level in Palestine find evidence that higher education levels are associated with support for and participation in political violence.³⁷ Finally, others have noted the divergent impact of favorable socioeconomic, political, and demographic conditions. Brokhoff, Krieger, and Meierrieks find that increased education leads to increased terrorism in countries that are poorly governed and economically stagnant, suggesting that education's impact on violence is influenced by political and economic participation in society.³⁸ Gambetta and Hertog similarly suggest that education may raise expectations of self-fulfillment in countries characterized by poor governance and lack of social and economic opportunities.³⁹

29 Oyefusi, 2008.

30 Tesfaye & Wolfe, 2014.

31 Tesfaye, 2016.

32 Becker & Landes, 1974.

33 Krieger & Meierrieks, 2011; Drakos & Gofas, 2006; Kurriid-Klitgaard, Justesen, & Klemmensen, 2006.

34 Azam & Thelen, 2008, 2010; Bravo & Dias, 2006.

35 Testas, 2004.

36 Urdal, 2006.

37 Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Berrebi, 2007.

38 Brockhoff, Krieger, & Meierrieks, 2014.

39 Gambetta & Hertog, 2016.

Civic Engagement and Political Violence

While research shows that alienation from political processes and decision making may drive youth to support violence in order to have a meaningful voice,⁴⁰ studies on the effects of civic engagement on youth support for political violence are less abundant. Some research suggests that civic participation reduces violence, including fighting and homicide.⁴¹ Other studies have found that participation in organized Islamic religion may, in fact, be in competition with, rather than a gateway into, Islamic terrorism.⁴² Mercy Corps investigated predictors of youth support for political

violence in Kenya,⁴³ Liberia,⁴⁴ and Lebanon⁴⁵ and discovered that civically engaged youth or youth engaged through positive social outlets are less likely to employ violence as a tool for change. In contrast, other Mercy Corps research in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa found that civic engagement did not inform Arab youths' propensity to support political violence; however, their frustration with government institutions did.⁴⁶



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40 Hilker & Fraser, 2009; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008.

41 Putnam, 1993; Vieno et al., 2007; Lee & Bartkowski, 2004.

42 Spiegel, 2015; Bergen & Pandey, 2005.

43 Kurtz, 2011.

44 Tesfaye & Wolfe, 2014.

45 Mercy Corps, 2011. The data revealed that civically engaged youth in Lebanon were also more likely to have better formal employment, so the precise contribution of civic engagement to reducing the propensity for violence requires further research.

46 Kurtz, 2012.

› Somali Youth Learners Initiative Program Overview

Mercy Corps' Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) was based upon the theory that improving Somali youths' access to both education and civic engagement opportunities has the potential to reduce their likelihood of supporting or participating in armed groups in general and political violence in particular. The program presented an opportunity to test this theory. Though the program had several interrelated components, the evaluation focused on two interventions:

› Increase access to improved formal secondary education.

Under this component, the SYLI program expanded secondary school access for youth across Somalia through the construction and rehabilitation of schools, training of teachers, and development of Community Education Committees. In total, the program opened 60 secondary schools in Somaliland, Puntland, and South Central Somalia, which provide access to education for an estimated 45,000 Somali youth. The SYLI consortium, in collaboration with both central and regional Ministry of Education officials, assessed and selected secondary schools through a participatory process. In addition, the program equipped the new schools with teaching and learning materials, desks, and other necessary supplies and equipment. Community Education Committees were established to oversee the maintenance of all schools. SYLI provided members of these committees with training on community mobilization and participation in

education as well as monitoring and supervision of schools. To ensure high standards for the quality of education provided in the schools, SYLI also provided training to more than 3,000 teachers on curriculum development and pedagogical skills and supported almost 250 women in completing two-year teaching diplomas.

In a bid to improve public confidence in the government, the handing over of the completed work in 2017 took place through government-led ceremonies in which the government was given the opportunity to explain its effort to provide quality basic services to the community. The speeches by the government officials and community members acknowledged the USAID contribution in supporting the government effort to provide quality education to their region and community and pledged ongoing government and community support in ensuring the sustainability of the facilities. After the program ended in June 2017, 59 of the 60 schools were functioning.

› Empower youth to contribute positively and productively to society through civic engagement.

This component of the program focused on supporting youth as leaders in their communities through skill building and organizing community action campaigns. The SYLI program sought to provide young people with soft skills, including leadership skills and nonviolent conflict resolution skills, through sports and recreational activities, and structured



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Increasing Access to Education for Girls:

The SYLI program team in South Central Somalia and the Galmudug Ministry of Education jointly conducted a five-day Girls Empowerment Forum (GEF) training for 30 girl leaders, female teachers, and Community Education Committee representatives. A key objective of SYLI was to improve the capacity of communities to effectively participate in and manage education at the school level and to increase access to education, particularly for girls. GEF leaders training was geared toward enhancing the learning environment for girls as well as integrating gender into the overall program. At the end of the training, the GEF leaders developed an action plan at the school level to improve girls' access to education.

and positive interactions with peers to build self-confidence. The program also provided youth with civic engagement opportunities, including peer-to-peer dialogue allowing youth to engage in regional and national issues, interaction within communities through youth-led service learning and awareness activities, and participation in the design and implementation of government policies.

The program specifically identified youth leaders in each of the constructed or rehabilitated secondary schools and youth currently not enrolled in school to serve as peer mobilizers. These youth were trained in the areas of conflict analysis, team building, and leadership. Youth leaders then applied their leadership, team building, and mobilization skills to work on concrete issues at the local level that arose from their

own daily experiences. Youth leaders mobilized their peers to plan together and carry out youth-led community action projects that would highlight the value of civic participation and civic responsibility and model the principles of good governance and peaceful action. This exercise gave youth firsthand experience on how to identify, plan, and execute projects working with the wider community to achieve social impact. Furthermore, the program provided youth opportunities to engage with politicians from both the state and federal government to help inform policies and laws affecting youth, such as individual youth policies for each region.

The scale of the SYLI program’s achievements is notable. Table 1 provides a snapshot of some of these achievements across all three regions where it was implemented.



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Civic Engagement in Action:

In Puntland, SYLI-trained youth conducted culture and arts promotion events with assistance from Mercy Corps and the Ministry of Labor, Youth, and Sports. These one-day arts and culture events increased Somali youths’ interest and skills in art as an instrument for peace building; enhanced youths’ financial earning potential by helping them develop marketable artistic skills; helped revive the arts culture in Somalia; and used cultural arts and literature as a tool for community cohesion, integration, communication, and messaging. Government delegates, including the Sanag governor, the mayors of Baran and Eyl, and members of parliament; religious leaders; traditional leaders; business people; and women’s groups, attended these events.

Table 1. Somali Youth Learners Initiative Key Achievements by Region

	PUNTLAND	SOUTH CENTRAL	SOMALILAND	TOTALS
Schools constructed, expanded, or rehabilitated	17	21	22	60
Educators who successfully completed training, coaching, or mentoring	663	1278	1083	3024
Student clubs established	13	15	11	39
In-school youth leaders trained	215	899	136	1250
Out-of-school youth leaders trained	381	670	547	1598

› Research Design and Methodology

The study ultimately sought to understand if improving access to secondary education alone or when combined with increased civic engagement opportunities reduces support for armed opposition groups by Somali youth. Further, we attempted to identify potential causal pathways that connect secondary education and civic engagement programs to support for political violence.

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesized pathways between the SYLL interventions (predictors) and the levels of support for armed opposition groups and the government (outcomes).

Mercy Corps and its partners employed a quasi-experimental mixed methods evaluation to test the following hypotheses on the impact of the SYLL program in Puntland and South Central Somalia:

Access to Education:

H1: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to formal education if youth perceive their government as being more legitimate, responsive, and fair due to the equitable provision of basic services.

H2: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to formal education if youths’ expectations for their future livelihood prospects are raised and they perceive that they are adequately prepared and capable of pursuing those employment opportunities.

H3: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to formal education if youth feel less socially isolated from their community.

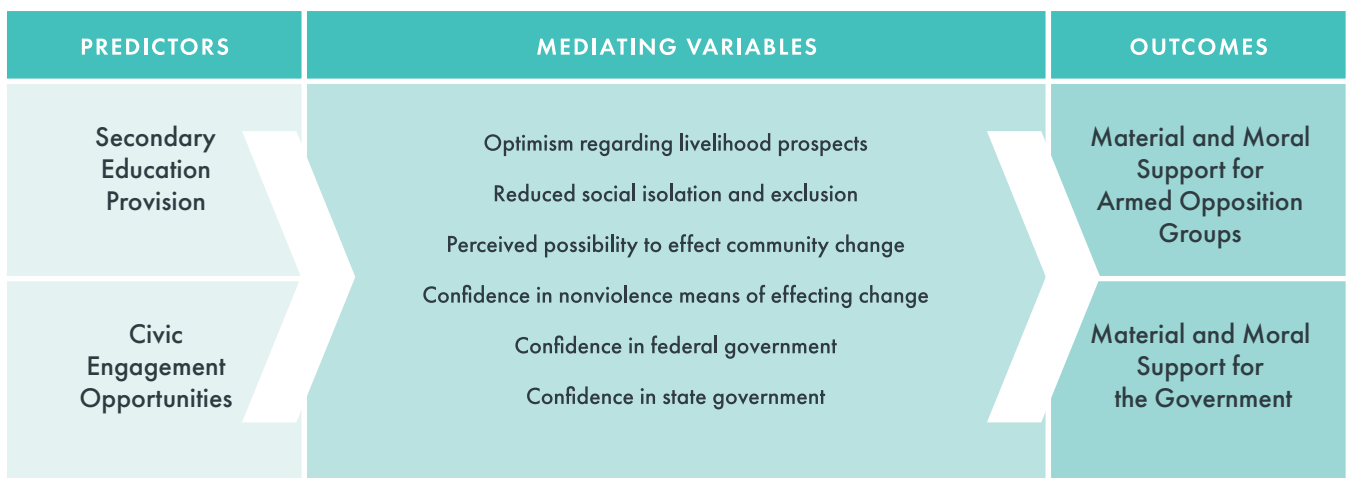
Civic Engagement Opportunities:

H4: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to civic engagement opportunities if youth perceive that they are able to effect improvement in their communities, their country, and their lives.

H5: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to civic engagement opportunities if youth gain skills and confidence in nonviolent means of promoting change.

H6: Support for political violence among Somali youth will decrease because of increased access to civic engagement opportunities if youth feel less socially isolated from their community.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Research



Survey

Data Collection and Sampling

Data collection occurred between April and May 2017 and was carried out by a hired research firm. A total of 1,220 youth participated in the survey. Figure 2 details the breakdown of survey participants by treatment group, location, and school enrollment status. The treatment groups were assigned based on whether or not Mercy Corps implemented any SYLI programming in the location. Within each of the eight locations, in-school and out-of-school youth ages 15–24 years old were invited to take part in the survey at community centers and schools.

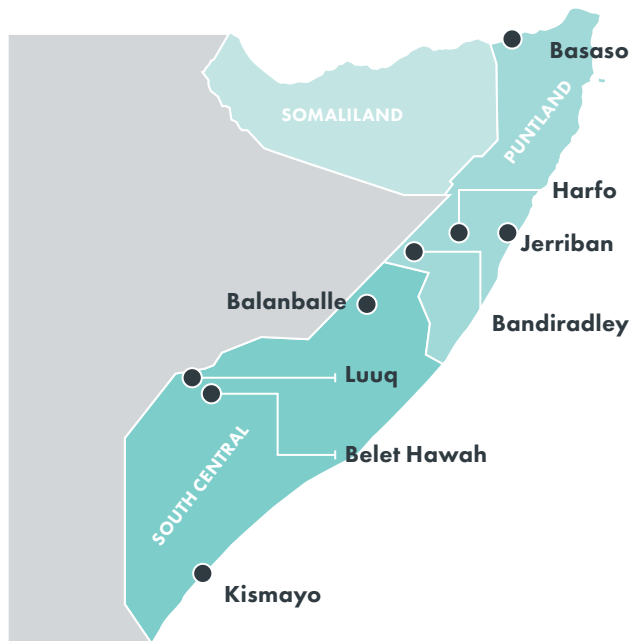
To create a valid comparison group for the impact evaluation, we employed a two-stage matching strategy for the survey component. This first stage used coarsened exact matching⁴⁷ to identify communities from which to sample individuals; then individuals who participated in the survey were equated using propensity scores.⁴⁸

Variables of Interest

Our predictor variables were enrollment in secondary education provided through the SYLI program alone and enrollment in SYLI-supported secondary education plus participating in a civic engagement opportunity through the school.

Our primary outcome variable (support for armed opposition groups) measured self-reported willingness to lend moral or material support to armed opposition groups. To avoid respondent bias, we asked all (save one) sensitive questions relating to support for political violence in randomized response or list experiment form. We used these questions to modify the schema developed by Roger Petersen⁴⁹ to create a scale to match this study. The full modified scale ranges from -2 to 2. Negative values correspond to support for the government, while positive values correspond to support for armed opposition groups. A score of 2 represents willingness to provide material support; a score of 1 represents willingness to provide moral support.

Figure 2. Overview of Study Participants by Treatment Group and Location



SOMALIA

SAMPLE SIZE BY TREATMENT GROUP

Untreated: 283 respondents

Treatment 1 (Education Only): 215 respondents

Treatment 2 (Education and Civic Engagement): 722 respondents

Total Study Participants: 1,220

47 Coarsened exact matching is a method of matching treatment and control groups based on set criteria in order to identify the average treatment effect on the treated group. The matching is done by temporarily coarsening the selected relevant variables into substantively meaningful groups; the subsequent analysis is performed using the original, uncoarsened data. For this study, we used three criteria on which to match potential sites, which resulted in four meaningful groups.

48 Propensity score matching is a method used to estimate the effect of an intervention when it is not possible to conduct a randomized controlled experiment. The technique matches untreated participants with treated ones based on pre-intervention characteristics that determine the predicted probability of being selected to receive the intervention; thus, the researchers can compare the matched individuals to assess the impact of the treatment.

49 Petersen, 2001.

Given our interest in causal pathways, we also included six hypothesized mediating variables: potential to be disappointed by livelihood prospects, social isolation, belief in one’s capacity to effect community change, confidence in nonviolent means of change, confidence in the federal government, and confidence in the state government. The survey questions used to define these mediating variables are detailed in Table A.1 in Annex 1.

Our control variables are gender, wealth and hunger indices, level of violence in the community, level of urbanization, and duration of intervention implementation. We included these to remove the effects of these factors, as they might be related to the outcome variable.

Analysis

Based on the youth surveyed, and given the aforementioned research questions and hypotheses, we ran variations of two regression models. For our analyses, we employed a limited version of the Petersen scale (0–2) and a binary version of this scale (1 = any level of support for armed opposition groups) because they proved more sensitive to our predictors and controls than the full scale. Annex 2 provides more details on the development and testing of these scales.

For the secondary education intervention, we compared youth enrolled in SYLI-supported secondary schools to all out-of-school youth. For the secondary education with civic engagement intervention,⁵⁰ we compared in-school youth who were invited to a civic engagement activity to in-school youth who were not invited and to all out-of-school youth.

We refer to any in-school youth who answered yes to the following question as having participated in a civic engagement activity: *Q5. Have you been reached out to or involved in activities organized by student club leadership?* This language was used to distinguish SYLI-supported civic engagement opportunities, which were run through student clubs, from other similar activities youth may have been involved in. The analyses include all students who said yes to this question. Of the 121 youth who indicated that they had either been invited to participate or participated in civic engagement activities, 23 were from schools without SYLI-supported civic engagement activities. Because we consider these youth as having been treated, our findings are conservative intention-to-treat estimates of the impacts of the combined intervention.

We ran the following analyses:

1. Unmediated analyses

We assessed direct (i.e., unmediated) program effects in two different ways: (1) comparing estimators (mixed-effects logistic versus fixed-effects ordinary least squares [OLS]) and (2) rerunning the controlled fixed-effects OLS model while stratifying by gender, local levels of violence, urbanization, and program duration.

2. Fixed-effects OLS estimations of the intervention on six hypothesized mediating variables

We then employed fixed-effects OLS regressions to elucidate potential pathways between each of the interventions and support for armed opposition groups. These regressions examined the impact of the two treatments on the six hypothesized mediating variables.

Key Informant Interviews

Data Collection and Sampling

Forty youth ages 18–30 years old were interviewed in four locations in South Central Somalia (Luuq and Belet Hawa in Gedo Province and Fanole and Farjano in Kismayo) during October–November 2017. The locations in Gedo Province did not receive any component of the SYLI program; both locations in Kismayo received secondary education and civic engagement programming through SYLI. In each location, five men and five women were randomly selected from the community to be interviewed. In some cases, interviewees had participated in the quantitative component of the research; this, however, was not a criterion for selection.

The interviews were conducted in Somali and moderated by the contracted research firm. Facilitators used an interview guide that incorporated semi-structured questions and storytelling components.

Analysis

Multiple members of the research team reviewed the interview transcripts and identified the main themes. We then mapped these themes onto the survey results and hypotheses to pinpoint areas of agreement and disagreement between the data sources, as well as identify alternative explanations.

50 We use the phrases “civic engagement component,” “civic engagement opportunities,” and “the combined intervention” interchangeably to refer to the combination of access to SYLI-supported secondary education and invitation to participate in civic engagement opportunities in SYLI-supported schools. We never evaluate the civic engagement component of the SYLI program separately from the formal education component.

Limitations

Somalia’s challenging security context informed our choice of the communities sampled for both components of the study. None of the sites included were considered inaccessible due to security, which could influence how youth perceive armed opposition groups, the Somali government, and their own ability to influence their communities.

The limitations of the quantitative research design derive from three basic shortcomings. First, because this was an ex post evaluation, we relied on two matching strategies, as explained above. Second, the sampling of in-school youth occurred only in treatment communities, possibly introducing bias. Third, no communities were sampled in which only civic engagement programming was implemented, disallowing evaluation of interaction effects between education and

civic engagement programs. The cumulative effect of these limitations—but especially the first—is that this study cannot definitively claim to identify causal explanations.

Regarding the qualitative research, researchers were able to conduct key informant interviews in only four communities within one of the two regions covered by the survey. As a result, the qualitative findings, if assessed on their own, should be seen as a collection of insights provided by a group of young people in Somalia. While the contents of the interviews are wide-ranging and touch on potentially sensitive topics, including Al-Shabaab and police violence, corruption, and forced marriage, many of the interviewees described their reluctance to talk openly about armed opposition groups and political violence for fear of retaliation.



Lindsay Murphy / Mercy Corps

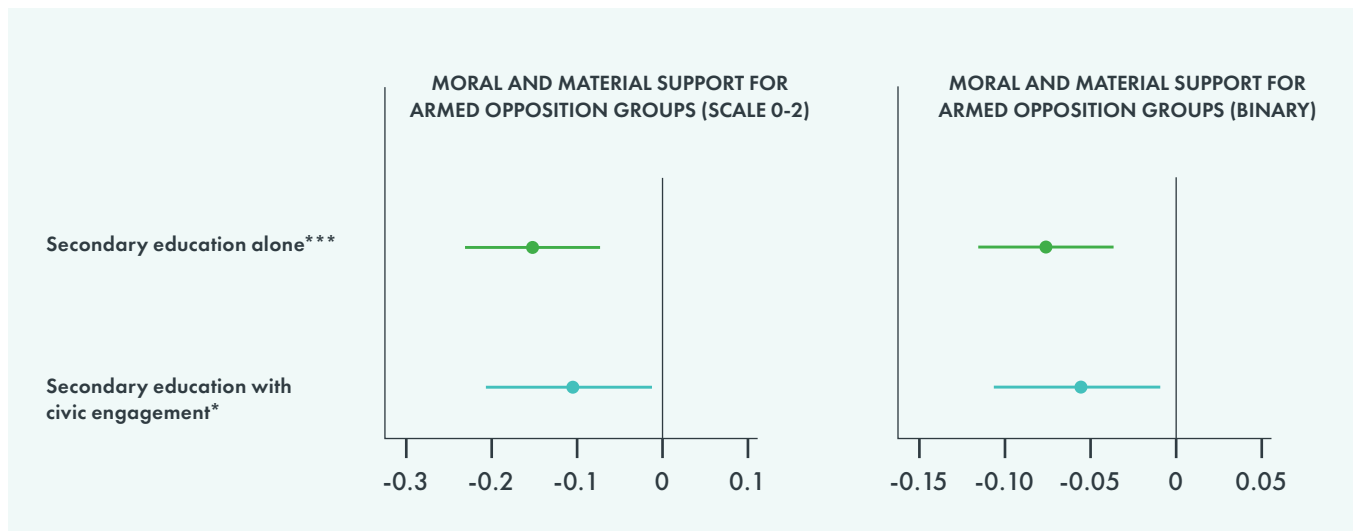
› Key Findings

- › Both components of the SYLI intervention evaluated—secondary education and civic engagement—decreased youth support for armed opposition groups. These findings were robust across multiple models (see Figure 3).
- › Youth who gained access to improved secondary school through SYLI were nearly half as likely (48.2 percent) as out-of-school youth to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence.
- › Students in SYLI-supported schools invited to participate in civic engagement opportunities were 64.8 percent less likely as nonengaged youth to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence.
- › Significant effects of SYLI-supported education persisted with or without the inclusion of civic engagement program effects, but the two interventions combined reduced support for political violence even further. Young people

benefiting from access to SYLI secondary schools, who were already less likely to support armed opposition groups than out-of-school youth, were further pushed away from support for armed opposition groups and violent tactics through the addition of civic engagement programming.

This section is divided into two parts, first looking at the effects of SYLI-supported secondary education and then examining the effects of SYLI-supported secondary education combined with civic engagement opportunities. Within each subsection, we present the results from the survey⁵¹ paired with relevant qualitative data when appropriate to answer three main questions: Were the interventions effective in reducing the propensity to support political violence? If so, for whom? And why?

Figure 3. Effect Sizes of Both Interventions on Two Measures of Youth Support for Political Violence⁵²



*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

51 Unless noted otherwise, the results presented in this section are from the controlled fixed-effects OLS model. Annex 1 presents the full regression tables, which include results from the controlled and uncontrolled mixed-effects logistic models and the fixed-effects OLS models.

52 The bars in Figure 3 indicate 90% confidence intervals. Bars that cross zero indicate no significant program effect. Unless otherwise noted, all figures in this report present 90% confidence intervals.

Effects of Provision of Improved Access to Secondary Education

As detailed in the “Research Design and Methodology” section, survey analyses examining the impact of SYLI-supported secondary education compare students enrolled in SYLI-supported schools with similar out-of-school youth who were not reached by the program.

Does Access to SYLI-Supported Secondary Education Reduce Support for Political Violence?

The results reliably show that the education component of the program reduced support for political violence (Figure 3). As a result of improved access to secondary education through the program, in-school youth were nearly half as likely (48.2 percent) as out-of-school youth to exhibit moral or material support for political violence.⁵³ When considering the 0–2 Petersen scale, we see that support for armed opposition groups among students in SYLI-supported schools dropped by 0.13 points (Table A.2).

Youth who participated in key informant interviews cited education as one of the most influential factors capable of reducing support for armed opposition groups. A 21-year-old man in Luuq said:

“Once youth are given constant capacity building for them and above everything are given a quality education, which I believe can make them understand or spot the dark side of...extremism. With knowledge, I believe that we can make things change the attitude of youth...”

Multiple young people interviewed stated that they see education as a tool to make youth more resistant to recruitment efforts by armed groups. Education, both academic and vocational, is an important step toward gaining employment, the other most cited factor in reducing support for political violence. Although other research indicates that jobs alone are not a main driver of youth joining armed groups,⁵⁴ interviewees said their peers were more likely to engage with armed opposition groups when they did not have jobs because the group promises much-needed salaries.

Interestingly, multiple key informants also spoke about the need for a broader type of education to enable youth to make positive life decisions and think critically, especially when faced with propaganda from groups like Al-Shabaab. The SYLI program worked to address this need by informing young people about the Humanitarian Charter⁵⁵ and concepts of equality and human rights as well as providing them with a broader global view of the world. Many felt that armed groups, including violent extremist organizations, intentionally recruit younger people because they are less able to think critically, thus making them more receptive to the group’s messaging. Interviewees stressed the need for youth to have knowledge about the risks and dangers associated with violence—both to themselves and the country overall—and guidance from parents, elders, politicians, and other influential leaders on what is right and wrong. While this finding does not specifically relate to formal education or the hypotheses tested in this study, it is noteworthy that young people in these four communities see a need for education beyond formal curriculum that helps support their critical thinking.

Thus, some key informants see improved access to formal secondary education as a way to help ensure that youth are prepared to enter the workforce and support themselves and their families. Further, they think critical thinking skills would help enable youth to make positive life decisions, including rejecting recruitment efforts by groups like Al-Shabaab.

What Types of Youth Did SYLI-Supported Secondary Education Affect Most?

We next attempted to identify how the impacts of the SYLI-supported secondary education program component differed among relevant subgroups of youth, in terms of their support for violence. We stratified our analyses by gender, levels of violence in the location, urbanization, and program duration (see Figure 4 and Table A.3). These results held among both young men and women, though the effect on women was more pronounced. This is particularly noteworthy given the active roles women and girls play within armed opposition groups, including Al-Shabaab, and the limited attention women and girls often receive from practitioners and policymakers focused on stabilization and violence reduction in fragile and conflict-affected states. Further, the overall results were primarily driven by the effects seen in less violent, urban places with long-running interventions.

53 This result is from the controlled mixed-effects logistic model with the binary version of the Petersen scale as the outcome variable.

54 Proctor, 2015.

55 The Humanitarian Charter provides the ethical and legal backdrop to the Protection Principles and the Core Standards and minimum standards in the SPHERE Handbook.

Interviewees shared stories that help explain why the impact of the education component of the program may be weaker in areas that are more violent. They detailed numerous stories of torture, rape, abuse, and killing by both Al-Shabaab and security forces. There were stories of the atrocities of Al-Shabaab, particularly the killing of innocent civilians, that created less support for the group and even led some to join the government to fight. There were also stories of abuse or injustice by state actors or international forces that pushed individuals to join armed opposition groups. A 19-year-old woman in Luuq described a situation from three years ago that led several young people to join Al Shabaab:

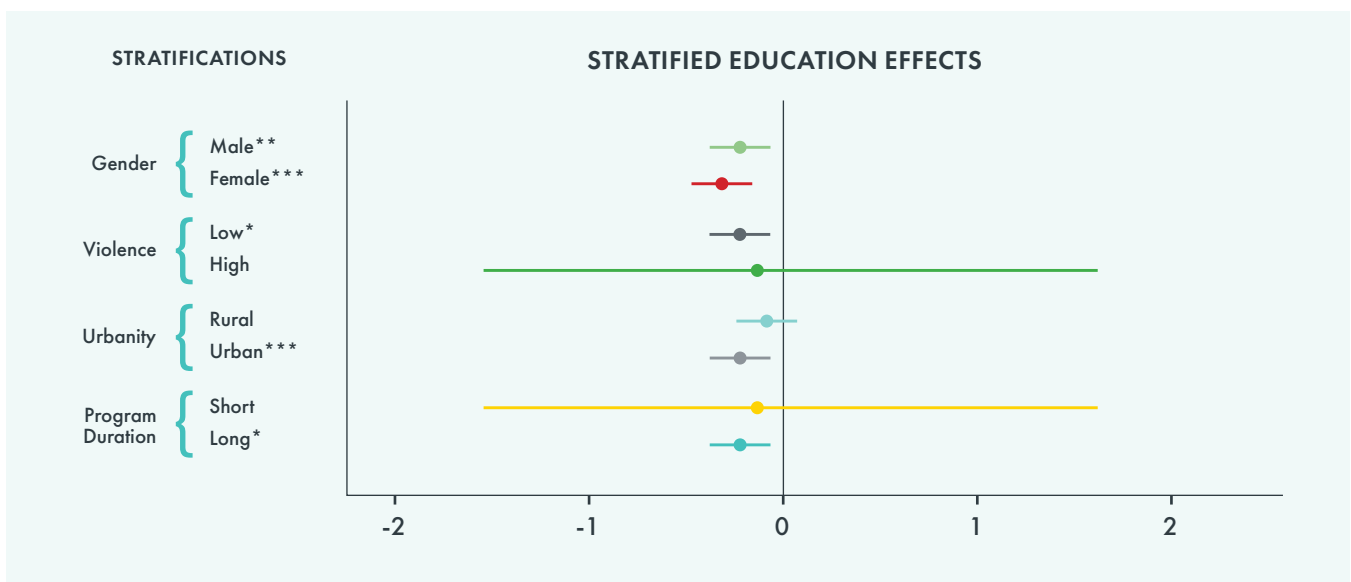
“...A team of youth having coffee at a restaurant were surrounded by police vehicle and all were taken to jail with no valid [reason]. Some were beaten so seriously because they argued with the police, asking them of whether they have a warrant from the district court... All were taken to jail for seven nights and after one week some were released with 100 USD as fine. Others were tortured and beaten seriously and later released without taking them to court. Now some of those youth have joined Al Shabaab as a result of frustrations and fear caused by the corrupt policemen while others went on to take the desperate journey to Europe (tahrīb).”

This story and others like it point to the possibility that when individuals are living in a context of chronic violence, decisions relating to support for or against political violence and armed opposition groups are caused by more immediate and visceral factors in their environment. While we did see a reduction in support for political violence in spite of these security challenges, the environment in which the youth are living will likely influence how impactful medium- to longer-term programs like the SYLI program can be.

Why Does Access to SYLI-Supported Secondary Education Reduce Support for Political Violence?

Our analysis next sought to identify why greater access to secondary education gained through the SYLI program resulted in reduced support for political violence among in-school youth. We analyzed the four pathways, or intermediate outcomes, specific to the hypotheses that exclusively consider access to improved secondary education, as detailed in the “Research Design and Methodology” section—confidence in state and federal government, optimism about livelihood prospects, and social isolation. Although they are not linked to secondary education-specific hypotheses, we also tested the other two intermediate outcomes—perceived ability to bring about change in one’s community and confidence in nonviolent means of achieving change—to determine if they may be pathways that link secondary education to a reduced propensity to support

Figure 4. Stratified Effects of Access to SYLI-Supported Secondary Education on Support for Political Violence Among Somali Youth (derived from Table A.3)



*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

political violence. Tables 2 and A.4 illustrate the estimated effects of the secondary education component of the SYLI program on each of these hypothesized mediating variables.

Our survey results show that enrollment in SYLI-supported secondary education significantly decreased participants’ potential to be disappointed in their future livelihood opportunities. The qualitative data help us understand some of the challenges youth face when seeking employment, making the survey result all the more noteworthy. Somali youth spoke at length in the key informant interviews about their frustrations with how access to work was determined by favoritism within the clan structure rather than a fair review process. They said that having the required education and qualifications are not enough because the person with the right connection will get the job instead. This feeling of helplessness was repeated throughout the interviews. An interviewee in Kismayo recounted one man’s struggle:

“A young boy completed his university level and at the end of the day, he failed to get a job because he was a minority clan and the community neglected him. This caused him to leave and join the extremists. This type of clannism is a great injustice and is the reason a lot of youth opt to leave the community...”

Despite facing these significant obstacles, Somali youth who benefited from the SYLI program felt better prepared and able to pursue future employment opportunities.

The survey results also show that enrollment in SYLI-supported schools significantly increased participants’ confidence in the government, at both the federal and state levels. One possible explanation is that young people may see the government supporting the provision of education through the SYLI program, a service they want and see as the

responsibility of the government to provide. Again, however, this improved confidence in government was against a backdrop of overall negative perceptions of the performance of local and national government among the interviewed youth. Key informants did not appear to hold the government in high regard. They seemed to perceive the government as functioning neither well nor in the best interest of the country. A 30-year-old woman in Kismayo said:

“The politicians don’t work for the youth but they only look out for their own benefit. Once the youth see this injustice, then it can lead them to take on this bad concept like joining extremism.”

Interestingly, we see that enrollment in SYLI-supported secondary schools significantly increased participants’ confidence in nonviolent means of change but decreased participants’ belief in their own capacity to effect change in their communities. This latter finding mirrors what key informants discussed in their interviews. Several of these youth described clannism as a disease, affecting employment and access to justice, and despaired that they as individual young people could do nothing to address it. Despite SYLI-supported secondary education decreasing participants’ belief in their own ability to effect change, enrollment did raise their confidence in the effectiveness of nonviolent means of change. In multiple interviews, youth eagerly spoke about wanting the resources and training required to be able to improve their communities, suggesting a desire to be engaged in a more meaningful way.

Table 2. Effects of Access to SYLI-Supported Secondary Education on Hypothesized Mediating Factors of Support For Political Violence Among Somali Youth (derived from Table A.4)

Optimism about future livelihood prospects	Social isolation	Confidence in ability to change community	Confidence in non-violent tools for change	Confidence in federal government	Confidence in state government
*	Null	**	***	***	***

Grey=negative impact; Yellow=no impact; Green=positive impact // // *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Effects of Provision of Civic Engagement Opportunities

When assessing the combined impact of civic engagement opportunities with access to SYLI-supported secondary education, we compared enrolled students who participated in a civic engagement opportunity to nonengaged students and out-of-school youth.

Do Civic Engagement Opportunities Reduce Support for Political Violence?

The results indicate that civic engagement opportunities reduce support for political violence among youth accessing SYLI-supported schools (see Table A.5): Students in SYLI-supported schools invited to participate in civic engagement opportunities were 64.8 percent less likely than nonengaged youth to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence.⁵⁶ When considering the 0–2 Petersen scale, we see that the combined intervention significantly reduced support for armed opposition groups, by 0.1 point, among students in SYLI schools. This suggests that young people in SYLI-supported secondary schools, who were already less likely to support armed opposition groups than out-of-school youth, could be further pushed away from those groups and violent tactics through additional civic engagement opportunities.

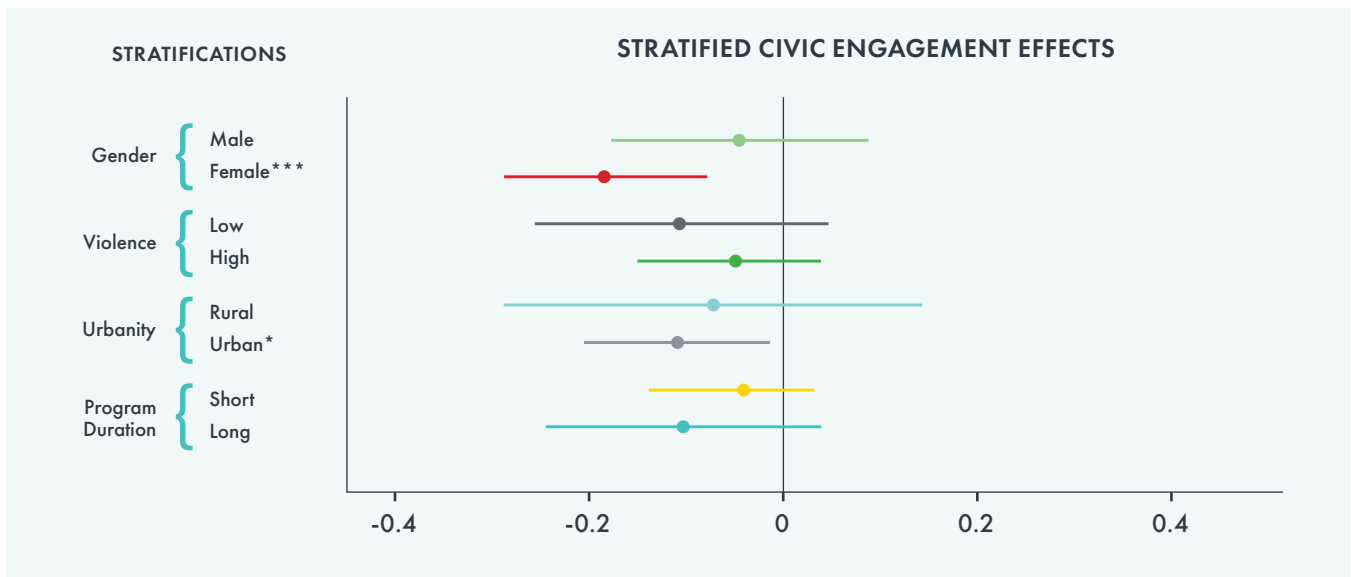
This survey result fits with youths’ perspectives on the importance of having the chance to participate in the kind of civic engagement activities supported by the SYLI program. Several key informants felt that providing opportunities for youth to engage with their communities is critical in the fight against armed opposition groups. A 24-year-old man in Belet Hawa said:

“The situation can change if youth are truly involved to address the issue of street violence, etc. Because I believe they are the only people that have the power to stop the violence with the help of the community despite the fact that in every fight, the majority of the fighters are youth.”

What Types of Youth Did Civic Engagement Opportunities Affect Most?

We stratified the analysis to assess how the program impacted different groups of young people or communities. The results mirror some of those from the secondary education–only intervention analysis. When we stratified the civic engagement analyses by gender, we found that the program had a stronger effect on women (see Figure 5 and Table A.6). This could be because Somali women and girls have less access to these types of opportunities and thus engage with them more seriously than their male counterparts. Youth in urban areas also seemed to experience a greater

Figure 5. Stratified Effects of Access to SYLI-Supported Secondary Education and Civic Engagement Opportunities on Support for Political Violence Among Somali Youth (derived from Table A.6)



*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

56 This result is from the uncontrolled mixed-effects logistic model with the binary version of the Petersen scale as the outcome variable.

impact than those in rural communities. The program’s impact in sites with long program durations (three years) was about twice as high as sites with short durations; similarly, the program’s impact in low-violence areas was about double what was found in high-violence areas. The small number of respondents, however, pushes both of these effects into nonsignificance.

Why Do Civic Engagement Opportunities Reduce Support for Political Violence?

When considering how the SYLL civic engagement component might influence students’ propensity to support political violence, we tested all six mediating variables. Table 3 (Table A.7) illustrates the estimated effects of civic engagement programming among students enrolled in SYLL schools on each of the mediating variables. Being involved in the civic engagement opportunities significantly decreased students’ potential disappointment in their livelihood prospects while increasing their confidence in nonviolent means of change. None of the other hypothesized pathways—social isolation, perceptions of governance, or belief in one’s ability to cause change—were significantly impacted by participation in the civic engagement intervention.

As noted earlier, youth are hungry for opportunities to work within and for their communities even if they do not necessarily feel that they currently have the necessary skills or resources to do so. Key informants highlighted the importance of multiple forms of positive youth engagement, including having space for themselves and other young people to come together to reflect on the challenges they face and discuss solutions, providing resources and opportunities

for youth to utilize new skills, creating opportunities to connect with mentors, and incorporating young people into community decision-making processes. The SYLL-supported civic engagement activities, which included actions ranging from improving a school library to pursuing community-wide service events, appeared to provide this type of space. Key informants described a variety of issues that they think they and their peers could address, if empowered and supported to do so, including clannism, corruption, early and forced marriage, and Al-Shabaab propaganda. They also think young people could help improve schools, economic opportunities, and the security situation. A 19-year-old woman in Luuq described young people as an untapped asset for the community:

“I have no doubt that the situation can change because if youth are given the chance to mobilize the community and given some small incentives, they can change the community since they are young and so energetic to do the work at ease without getting tired or become reckless.”

A 24-year-old man from Belet Hawa said that youth need to feel like they are part of the system, and added:

“If youth are allowed to participate in issues regarding the community then I am sure youth can do marvelous by doing mobilization and showing good examples to the rest of the community.”

It seems that youth see themselves as potential change agents, but not currently active ones because of their own limitations as well as the limitations of the context in which they live.

Table 3. Effects of SYLL-Supported Secondary Education and Civic Engagement Opportunities on Six Hypothesized Mediating Factors of Support for Political Violence Among Somali Youth (derived from Table A.7)

Optimism about future livelihood prospects	Social isolation	Confidence in ability to change community	Confidence in non-violent tools for change	Confidence in federal government	Confidence in state government
***	Null	Null	***	Null	Null

Grey=negative impact; Yellow=no impact; Green=positive impact /// *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

› Discussion and Conclusions



Lindsay Hamsik / Mercy Corps

This research set out to understand if education and civic engagement interventions influence youth propensity to support political violence, and if so, why. Overall, we saw that improved access to SYLI-supported secondary education alone and combined with civic engagement opportunities helped reduce levels of support for political violence among Somali youth. However, when comparing the current findings with the findings from our previous research on the SYLI program in Somaliland in 2016, we find contradictory results regarding the effect of participation in secondary education alone. In the Somaliland study, improved access to secondary education alone increased support for political violence, while the current research found that secondary education alone reduced that support. This divergence is most likely explained by the different security and socioeconomic situations in Somaliland versus South Central Somalia and Puntland. Somaliland is more peaceful and more economically developed and has a more functioning government, while the other two regions are less developed and less stable. Any increased provision of these types of public services in South Central Somalia and Puntland, which young people see as important, will likely improve young

people's perceptions of their futures and of governance, in turn reducing the appeal of opposition groups.

When we dug deeper to discern how the two interventions in South Central Somalia and Puntland may have led to the observed reductions in support for political violence, only some of our hypotheses were confirmed.

In addition to reducing support for armed opposition groups, enrollment in SYLI schools both boosted participants' perceptions of the performance of state and federal government and drove down their potential to be disappointed in their future livelihood prospects. Both of these findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2: that increased access to formal education will reduce the appeal of armed opposition groups through improving youths' perceptions of the government and through improving youths' optimism about their future employment opportunities, respectively. These results add to a growing body of work that suggests that people's beliefs about their government being responsive to their needs can influence their levels of support for violence.⁵⁷ Notably, this was the case even in a context

57 Nash et al., 2017; Buchanan-Clarke & Lekalake, 2015, 2016; United Nations Development Programme, 2016; Proctor & Tesfaye, 2015.

where youth perceptions of government are very negative to begin with and where many remain distrustful of government officials and institutions. It remains unclear what role the SYLI program played in students having more positive views of the government than their out-of-school peers. It is possible that students give credit to the government for their improved access to secondary education because of the inclusion and visibility of government officials throughout and at the handover of the SYLI program. The fact that youth in Somaliland credited the government for their education—over NGOs, local leaders, and other stakeholders—strengthens this possibility.⁵⁸

Further, while key informants indicated that Somali youth generally face many obstacles in seeking employment, our survey results show that youth in SYLI-supported schools were less likely than their out-of-school counterparts to be pessimistic about their future economic prospects. This is interesting to consider, given other research focused on how actual employment levels affect support for political violence and armed opposition groups.⁵⁹ Looking at Somalia specifically, at least one study with former Al-Shabaab fighters found that the promise of financial gain was a primary reason youth reported joining the group.⁶⁰ Our findings shed light on the potential for increased optimism about employment opportunities—rather than actual employment status—playing a role in reducing youth support for political violence and armed groups.

In this study, we saw the combined intervention bring additional impacts beyond those resulting from secondary education alone, by pushing an already less supportive group—students enrolled in SYLI-supported schools—further away from armed opposition groups. Some of our hypotheses on why this happens were supported by the data, but others were not. The boost to engaged students' confidence in nonviolent means for change synchronizes with Hypothesis 5, which surmises that civic engagement opportunities can lead youth to internalize skills related to nonviolence, which will then lead to a decrease in support for political violence. Past research on the relationship between skill-building programs for youth and reducing support for political violence reinforces this finding.⁶¹

Despite this increased belief in the power of nonviolent means of effecting change, we found that the combination of SYLI-supported education and civic engagement opportunities did not significantly impact participants' beliefs about their ability to actually bring about change in their community, which we hypothesized (Hypothesis 4) would decrease support for armed opposition groups. When combined with the significant decrease of youths' belief in their own ability to effect change in their communities because of enrollment in SYLI-supported schools alone, this finding potentially suggests that Somali youths' perception of themselves as change makers is not a major factor required to reduce youth support for political violence. More research on how other aspects of psychosocial well-being are linked to violence outcomes is needed.

Further, we found no significant impact on feelings of social isolation with either intervention, which we hypothesized (Hypotheses 3 and 6) would decrease youth support for political violence through increased social connections developed through school and civic engagement activities. These findings are interesting, given other work that shows that social exclusion can bolster the appeal of political violence,⁶² and that collective identity and a sense of belonging are important factors in youth joining groups like Al-Shabaab.⁶³ Because neither of the SYLI interventions affected youths' reported social isolation, it is not possible to conclude whether Somali youths' feelings about belonging within the community are a major influence on their propensity to support armed opposition groups.

Finally, our findings raise additional important questions for future research, in particular on the interaction of timing and programmatic impact: Is opening a school important as a short-term signaling mechanism or because it creates longer-term change in those who attend the school? To what extent is education important because it increases longer-term employment opportunities versus creating immediate resistance to extremist propaganda? To what extent is civic engagement important because of its immediate impact on youths' involvement in their communities versus its effect on civic attitudes and behaviors over the longer term?

58 Tesfaye, 2016.

59 Blattman, Fiala, & Martinez, 2013; Mercy Corps, 2015; Blattman & Ralston, 2015; Brück, Ferguson, Izzi, & Stojetz, 2016.

60 Botha & Abdile, 2014.

61 Tesfaye, 2016; United States Agency for International Development, 2011; Tripathi, 2011.

62 Nash et al., 2017; Kurtz, 2011.

63 Botha & Abdile, 2014.

› Recommendations

As national governments, international organizations, civil society, and communities seek to understand how they can better support young people and reduce the appeal of armed opposition groups, these results have important ramifications for designing youth programming with violence-reduction and stability objectives. Thus, Mercy Corps makes the following recommendations for policy and programming in Somalia and similarly fragile and conflict-affected contexts:

› **When it comes to education, combine concrete skills with opportunities to apply them.**

The greatest reduction in youth support for political violence comes from the combination of participation in quality secondary education (which transfers knowledge and skills needed for future employment) and civic engagement opportunities (which empower youth to positively contribute to their communities). Given that these findings hold across three different regions—Somaliland, South Central Somalia, and Puntland—we can say with some confidence that this approach can be an important strategy in efforts to combat political violence throughout Somalia, and perhaps in other contexts with similar conditions. To create more opportunities for young people to apply what they have learned, efforts to expand equitable access to education for youth should be coupled with linkages between students and potential employers to help ensure better market absorption of future graduates, leading to better livelihood opportunities and outcomes.

› **In countries emerging from conflict, prioritize expanding access to public services, but do not neglect the underlying grievances that threaten long-term stability.**

While secondary education decreased support for violence in South Central Somalia and Puntland, it had the opposite effect in Somaliland. The key difference is how education affects youths' perceptions in different contexts: it increased optimism about livelihoods and improved perceptions of the government in South Central Somalia and Puntland, while it

led to pessimism about livelihoods and dissatisfaction with government services in Somaliland. This finding indicates that in countries emerging from conflict with few, if any, functioning systems, simply investing in basic services such as education can be a quick win for government and donors focused on promoting stability. In the long term, however, this is not enough. As the rest of Somalia slowly develops and becomes more developed and peaceful like Somaliland, our research suggests that education will raise young people's expectations, but it will not address the grievances that drive them to support political violence.

› **Simultaneously seek solutions to macro-level structural challenges while implementing micro-level development programs.**

Our analysis found that the level of violence in a community made a difference in the effectiveness of the programming: SYLI-supported secondary education led to a significant reduction in support for political violence only in sites with relatively low levels of violence. This indicates that addressing immediate instability may be an important prerequisite for the success of longer-term investments in youth development. A recent systematic review of the impact of development aid in countries affected by civil war reinforces this result: in order for aid to reduce violence, the environment must first be secure enough for violence-reduction programming to be implemented.⁶⁴ More generally, the results indicate that broader contextual factors influence the ability of development programs such as SYLI to succeed in reducing support for violence. Insecurity, the political environment, and economic growth continue to be important dynamics that shape the nature of conflict in Somalia. Without changes to these broader dynamics, the success of potentially impactful development programs will be limited.

64 Zürcher, 2017.

Annex 1. Select Survey Questions and Regression Tables

Table A.1 Survey Questions Used to Calculate Hypothesized Mediating Variables

MEDIATING VARIABLE	CORRESPONDING SURVEY QUESTIONS
Potential to be disappointed by livelihood prospects	<p>Q16. For each of the following, please tell me if you expect these things in the future:</p> <p>16a. I will have a good job 16b. I will be able to take care of my family 16d. I will have enough money to live comfortably</p> <p>Q17. For each of the following, please tell me if you think you have what it takes to be able to:</p> <p>17a. Get a good job 17b. Take care of my family 17c. Have enough money to live comfortably</p>
Social isolation	<p>For the following statements, let me know if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.</p> <p>Q25. I feel isolated and excluded from my community most of the time.</p>
Belief in one's capacity to effect community change	<p>For the following statements, let me know if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.</p> <p>Q22. I feel I have the power to make a positive difference in the community. Q23. I feel I have the power to influence my local/state government. Q24. I feel I have the power to influence the federal government.</p>
Confidence in non-violent means of change	<p>Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year¹:</p> <p>Q27. Have you gotten together with others to raise an issue in your area (i.e., school, neighborhood, mosque)? Q28. Do you think this is an effective way to get improvements in your area? Q29. Have you discussed concerns with community leaders? Q30. Do you think this is an effective way to get improvements in your area? Q31. Have you made a complaint to local government officials? Q32. Do you think this is an effective way to get improvements in your area? Q33. Have you attended a lawful/peaceful demonstration or protest march? Q34. Do you think this is an effective way to get improvements in your area?</p>

¹ The analysis used only the even-numbered questions in this series.

› Annex 1. Select Survey Questions

MEDIATING VARIABLE	CORRESPONDING SURVEY QUESTIONS
<p>Confidence in the federal government</p>	<p>Q8. I am going to read out a number of issues the government is currently working to address. Please tell me if you think the federal government is doing a very good job (= 1), somewhat good job (= 2), neither good nor bad job (= 3), somewhat bad job (= 4), or very bad job (= 5) to address the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8a. Basic services like water and electricity 8b. Security 8c. Unemployment 8d. Government corruption 8e. Decent wages and salaries 8f. Education 8g. Healthcare
<p>Confidence in the state government</p>	<p>Q9. I am going to read out a number of issues the government is currently working to address. Please tell me if you think that your state government is doing a very good job (= 1), somewhat good job (= 2), neither good nor bad job (= 3), somewhat bad job (= 4), or very bad job (= 5) to address the following issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9a. Basic services like water and electricity 9b. Security 9c. Unemployment 9d. Government corruption 9e. Decent wages and salary 9f. Education 9g. Healthcare

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.2. Effects of Secondary Education Intervention on Support for Political Violence among Somali Youth

VARIABLES	Mixed-Effects Ordinal Logistic Models				Fixed-Effects OLS Models			
	Modified Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale
Individual enrolled in secondary education? = 1, In school	-0.384 (0.263)	-0.728** (0.368)	-0.361 (0.264)	-0.729** (0.368)	-0.121*** (0.0395)	-0.132*** (0.0478)	-0.0643*** (0.0219)	-0.0751*** (0.0265)
Education propensity score	0.320 (0.803)	0.500 (1.316)	0.261 (0.802)	0.481 (1.312)	0.177 (0.109)	0.137 (0.201)	0.0831 (0.0603)	0.0727 (0.111)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176	1,176
R-squared	0.022	0.028	0.015	0.022	0.015	0.024	0.012	0.020

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.3. Effects of Secondary Education Intervention on Support for Political Violence among Somali Youth, Stratified by Gender, Violence Level, Urbanization, and Duration of Program (≤ 3 years) (controlled fixed-effects OLS model)

VARIABLES	Gender		Violence		Urbanity		Treatment Duration	
	Male	Female	Low Violence	High Violence	Rural	Urban	Short	Long
Individual enrolled in secondary education? = 1, In school	-0.129** (0.0579)	0.200*** (0.0757)	-0.143* (0.0780)	-0.0776 (0.850)	-0.0776 (0.0540)	0.154*** (0.0506)	-0.0776 (0.850)	-0.143* (0.0780)
Education propensity score	0.0732 (0.142)	0.384 (0.308)	0.226 (0.197)	0.131 (0.155)	695.6 (1,736)	0.220* (0.125)	0.131 (0.155)	0.226 (0.197)
Community treatment status = 1, Treatment	0.0704 (0.129)	0.197 (0.129)	No	0.0509 (0.850)	No	0.212 (0.209)	0.0509 (0.850)	Yes
Observations	544	632	370	806	313	863	806	370
R-squared	0.016	0.021	0.009	0.017	0.029	0.014	0.017	0.009

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.4. Effects of Secondary Education Intervention on Six Hypothesized Mediating Variables (controlled fixed-effects OLS model)

VARIABLES	Potential to be Disappointed in Livelihood Prospects	Social Isolation	Belief in Ability to Effect Change	Confidence in Non-Violence	Confidence in Fed. Gov't	Confidence in State Gov't
Individual enrolled in secondary education? = 1, In school	-0.150* (0.0836)	-0.105 (0.0844)	-0.186** (0.0870)	0.531*** (0.0924)	0.495*** (0.0933)	0.261*** (0.0850)
Education propensity score	-0.134 (0.361)	0.513 (0.354)	0.635* (0.365)	-0.912** (0.393)	-0.862** (0.391)	-0.335 (0.357)
Gender = 2, Female	-0.00667 (0.0710)	-0.189*** (0.0699)	0.151** (0.0719)	-0.0881 (0.0774)	-0.227*** (0.0771)	-0.230*** (0.0703)
Wealth index (mean = 0, sd = 1)	-0.0244 (0.0546)	-0.108** (0.0532)	0.0439 (0.0547)	0.161*** (0.0591)	0.0149 (0.0586)	0.0528 (0.0534)
Hunger index (mean = 0, sd = 1)	0.0757** (0.0325)	0.0844*** (0.0323)	-0.00319 (0.0332)	0.155*** (0.0368)	0.0670* (0.0356)	0.0529 (0.0324)
Community treatment status = 1, Treatment	0.299 (0.213)	0.437** (0.214)	0.465** (0.219)	0.410* (0.234)	-1.144*** (0.235)	-1.114*** (0.214)
Duration of community treatment (years)	0.304*** (0.0802)	-0.314*** (0.0820)	0.216*** (0.0832)	-0.391*** (0.0887)	0.506*** (0.0891)	0.592*** (0.0813)
Observations	1,126	1,151	1,176	1,150	1,176	1,176
R-squared	0.058	0.048	0.043	0.101	0.065	0.071

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.5. Effects of Secondary Education and Civic Engagement Opportunities on Support for Political Violence among Somali Youth

VARIABLES	Mixed-Effects Ordinal Logistic Models				Fixed-Effects OLS Models			
	Modified Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Modified Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale	Binary Petersen Scale
Invited to be civically engaged = 1, Invited for CE	-1.051* (0.539)	-0.831 (0.557)	-1.043* (0.539)	-0.0819 (0.558)	-0.111** (0.0512)	-0.104* (0.0543)	-0.0579** (0.0277)	-0.0528* (0.0295)
Civic engagement propensity score	0.546 (0.202)	0.407 (0.222)	0.561 (0.204)	0.432 (0.224)	0.130 (0.0304)	0.117 (0.0333)	0.0774*** (0.0165)	0.0738 (0.0181)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	763	736	763	736	763	736	763	736
R-squared	0.044	0.051	0.044	0.050	0.041	0.042	0.044	0.047

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.6. Effects of Secondary Education and Civic Engagement Opportunities on Support for Political Violence among Somali Youth, Stratified by Gender, Violence Level, Urbanization, and Duration of Program (≤ 3 years) (controlled fixed-effects OLS model)

VARIABLES	Gender		Violence		Urbanity		Treatment Duration	
	Male	Female	Low Violence	High Violence	Rural	Urban	Short	Long
Invited to be civically engaged = 1, Invited for CE	-0.0486 (0.0823)	-0.190*** (0.0686)	-0.113 (0.0922)	-0.0582 (0.0538)	-0.0818 (0.128)	-0.112* (0.0608)	-0.0582 (0.0538)	-0.113 (0.0922)
Civic engagement propensity score	0.113*** (0.0429)	0.160*** (0.0456)	0.186*** (0.0567)	-0.0373 (0.0303)	-0.0435 (0.0391)	0.180*** (0.0399)	-0.0373 (0.0303)	0.186*** (0.0567)
Community treatment status = 1, Treatment	0.0195 (0.169)	0.108 (0.155)		-0.0993 (0.0633)	-0.110 (0.0939)	0.149 (0.299)	-0.0993 (0.0633)	
Observations	384	379	265	498	241	522	498	265
R-squared	0.028	0.068	0.046	0.044	0.058	0.048	0.044	0.046

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Annex 1: Regression Tables

Table A.7. Effects of Secondary Education and Civic Engagement Opportunities on Six Hypothesized Mediating Variables (controlled fixed-effects OLS model)

VARIABLES	Potential to be Disappointed in Livelihood Prospects	Social Isolation	Belief in Ability to Effect Change	Confidence in Non-Violence	Confidence in Fed. Gov't	Confidence in State Gov't
Invited to be civically engaged = 1, Invited for CE	-0.351*** (0.101)	-0.0541 (0.0915)	0.111 (0.104)	0.651*** (0.109)	0.0510 (0.112)	0.0583 (0.102)
Civic engagement propensity score	0.206*** (0.0635)	0.275*** (0.0554)	0.0393 (0.0636)	0.175*** (0.0676)	0.0779 (0.0685)	-0.0224 (0.0625)
Gender = 2, Female	-0.0337 (0.0775)	0.00473 (0.0685)	0.279*** (0.0784)	-0.261*** (0.0831)	-0.327*** (0.0845)	-0.265*** (0.0771)
Wealth index (mean = 0, sd = 1)	-0.000641 (0.0395)	-0.0409 (0.0348)	0.0920** (0.0399)	0.0888** (0.0423)	0.0378 (0.0430)	0.0748* (0.0393)
Hunger index (mean = 0, sd = 1)	0.0199 (0.0501)	0.0884** (0.0431)	0.0936* (0.0495)	0.143*** (0.0532)	0.0162 (0.0533)	0.0482 (0.0487)
Community treatment status = 1, Treatment	0.615** (0.290)	0.699*** (0.259)	0.0965 (0.293)	1.197*** (0.311)	-0.346 (0.315)	-0.974*** (0.288)
Duration of community treatment (years)	0.268** (0.119)	-0.330*** (0.107)	-0.247** (0.122)	-0.728*** (0.129)	0.355*** (0.131)	0.535*** (0.120)
Observations	696	725	736	717	736	736
R-squared	0.090	0.089	0.061	0.134	0.039	0.049

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

› Annex 2. Additional Details of Study Design and Methodology

Matching Comparison Groups

At the community level, 52 communities across South Central Somalia and Puntland were eligible to receive some component of the Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) program; of those, only 41 communities actually received any part of the intervention, due to budgetary constraints. We generated a subset of matched sites using coarsened exact matching (CEM) based on the following criteria: (1) urbanization (i.e., urban, semi-urban, and rural), (2) violence level (as defined by the International NGO Safety Organisation),² and (3) the type of intervention planned (i.e., education only, civic engagement only, or education and civic engagement). Sites were matched on all criteria except whether or not the planned intervention took place. The CEM analysis initially yielded 21 sites to be sampled, to which we added 3 more locations that received only the civic engagement component, as none of those locations matched. The list of 24 sites was then cut to 8 locations because of security and accessibility concerns. Of the locations included, 3 received no intervention, 3 received education only, and 2 received the combined education and civic engagement programming.

Our analyses were somewhat hampered by the data collected:

- › With the exception of one participant, no in-school youth were surveyed in control communities due to a general lack of access to secondary schools. We were unable to compare the impact of SYLI-supported secondary education to non-SYLI-supported secondary education.
- › None of the out-of-school youth sampled in the survey were invited to participate in a SYLI-supported civic engagement opportunity.³

We used a combination of propensity score matching (in the case of education) and propensity indicators (in the case of civic engagement) to create a shadow predictor that addressed these shortcomings. For the former, propensity scores were based on statistical models of the likelihood of an individual receiving education; they were parameterized in treatment communities but also generated likelihoods for individuals in control communities. The predicted value was based on wealth and food security index variables that we created, and community violence levels. To measure civic engagement propensity, we took a mean of four different questions pertaining to previous and recent civic activity participation.

Defining and Testing the Outcome Variable

The randomized response approach asks respondents to use a randomized device (in our case, throwing a die) whose outcome is unobserved by the enumerator. Certain numbers mean the participant lies, while other numbers mean the person tells the truth. Individual responses are thus concealed through the addition of random noise, which then bolsters respondents' sense of privacy and makes them more likely to report their true beliefs or actions on sensitive issues.⁴ For the list experiment questions, respondents are read a list of scenarios; they then tell the interviewer how many they broadly support but do not specify which ones they support. Survey respondents were asked about violence in Somalia, including support for political violence, armed opposition groups, and the government. The full survey is available upon request.

We first ran ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with fixed effects at the CEM stratum on four different versions of our modified Petersen scale (outcome) in order to determine the most sensitive measure, as well as gain a sense of the robustness of basic effect sizes. Our models included

2 The International NGO Safety Organisation is a British charity that provides registered NGOs with information to support the safety and security of aid workers in high-risk contexts. The organization provides safety-related data and mapping, which was used to create a trinary violence variable describing access coefficients: 0–35 (very inaccessible), 36–65 (middling), and 66–100 (accessible).

3 Despite efforts to include sites that received only the civic engagement component, none of the three identified communities that fit this category were included because of security and accessibility concerns. As a result, the effects of civic engagement programs alone cannot be estimated. Rather, effects would have to be estimated on a unidimensional scale: (1) education programs versus (2) education plus civic engagement programs. The effect of civic engagement programs might be assumed to be that of (2) minus that of (1), though this assumption discounts the possibility of interaction effects (i.e., that the effect of both programs is either less or more than the sum of its parts).

4 Blair, Imai, & Zhou, 2015.

› Annex 2. Additional Details

education and civic engagement programs both separately and together. The four versions of outcomes were as follows:

- ›1 The Petersen scales as described earlier, ranging from -2 to +2, and for which ordinal logistic models were employed
- ›2 A modified version of the Petersen scale in which only support for political violence registered (i.e., all negative numbers, denoting pro-government support, are changed to zero), for which ordinal logistic estimators were again employed

A binary version of the latter (in which any level of support for violent extremism is recorded as a 1), for which logistic estimators were employed

A variable measuring support for political violence as the discrepancy in two list experiment responses among those who received the treatment form for one question and the control form for the other

In general, the restricted Petersen scales—whether ordinal (0–2) or binary—proved more sensitive to our predictors and controls than did the original scale. We worried that moving from a government supporter to neutral might be qualitatively

different than moving from neutral to a supporter of armed opposition groups. This was borne out in outcome tests, which generally found negative and significant effects of education on support for political violence using the restricted Petersen scales, but *positive* effects when using the full scale and uncontrolled models. The list experiment variable was in no way associated with the Petersen variables and remained largely unaffected by almost all predictors and covariates. This is in line with empirical studies testing the validity of popular survey experiment methods for sensitive questions.⁵ Due to the dual randomization processes, only 519 responses were recorded for the list experiment. Therefore, we consider it of dubious construct validity.

Similar results were found when we ran (more stable) fixed-effects OLS models of the same outcomes. In the end, we chose to use the Petersen 0–2 scale and binary outcomes.

Ethical Review

Both components of the study were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of San Diego.

5 Rosenfeld, Imai, & Shapiro, 2015.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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