

# Does more education stem political violence?

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Recent evidence of above-average levels of education among genocide perpetrators and terrorists, such as those who carried out the 9/11 attacks, has challenged the consensus among scholars that education has a general pacifying effect. Is it true that more schooling can promote peaceful behavior and reduce civil conflict and other forms of politically-motivated group violence?

In a study released online today in *Review of Educational Research*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Educational Research Association, three Norwegian researchers attempt to bring clarity to this question by undertaking the first systematic examination of quantitative research on this topic.

For their analysis, Gudrun Østby, Henrik Urdal, and Kendra Dupuy of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) reviewed the last 20 years' worth of statistical studies-42 published between 1996 and 2016-on the relationship between education and political violence.

"Based on our analysis, the evidence very strongly suggests that increasing education levels in the population at all levels of the education system-primary, secondary, and postsecondary-reduces most forms of armed conflict and fosters peace," said Østby, a senior researcher at PRIO.

"This has important policy implications since, compared to other factors that affect political violence, education is something that almost all governments can do something about through national policy," Østby

said.

The researchers note that while the expansion of postsecondary education has been voiced as a concern-particularly as it relates to recruiting terrorists and promoting low-level protests-the evidence suggests there is little reason that governments should be cautious about rapidly expanding access to education.

"Although some evidence suggests that terrorists are often well educated and rarely marginalized, this does not imply that providing education in areas prone to terror will lead to more [terrorist violence](#)," said Urdal, director of PRIO. "The higher-than-average education levels among recruits to terrorist organizations are likely to be a selection effect, whereby more educated and thus qualified recruits are chosen over those who are less qualified."

"Restricting educational opportunities for [young people](#) is not likely to be a productive strategy for governments seeking to curb terrorism," Urdal said.

Overall, the researchers found that lack of male education appears to be the strongest predictor of conflict. Systematic inequalities in access to education between religious and ethnic groups also appear to fuel conflict, whether this is caused by grievances among or simply by too few opportunities for young people in the disadvantaged group. Higher levels of gender parity in educational outcomes are also associated with less violence.

"While the policy implication of our findings-invest in education-is already pursued as a broader economic development agenda, security arguments may be helpful for generating domestic and international support for education programs," said Dupuy, a senior researcher at PRIO. "There is every reason to keep up the pressure for education

expansion, especially at the postsecondary level, and for policymakers to be particularly committed to reducing educational inequalities related to gender, ethnicity, and religion."

The researchers note that there is very limited research available on the effects of religious versus secular education, including research on the possible links between curricula and [violence](#).

"We were surprised that there was no evidence on the effect of [education](#) content or quality on the risk of [political violence](#)," said Østby. "The lack of such data warrants more attention from future research."

The full article can be viewed online [here](#).

Provided by American Educational Research Association

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