

# Peacekeeping missions can actually increase criminal violence, research finds

2 August 2019, by Sheila Kiggins



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The presence of UN peacekeeping missions can inadvertently make criminal violence worse by providing the security necessary for organised crime to flourish, and creating a 'peacekeeping economy' which criminals can exploit, finds a new study by Dr. Jessica di Salvatore of the University of Warwick.

Dr. di Salvatore set out to examine whether peacekeeping missions are as effective at reducing criminal violence as they are at deterring conflict-related violence.

Using data collected from 58 countries which have experienced civil war, and also focusing on the specific experience of the UN mission in South Sudan, Dr. Jessica di Salvatore investigated the impact of hosting a peacekeeping mission on local homicide rates.

She found that:

- Countries with significant UN military missions experience higher levels of homicides compared to others with low or

no UN presence

- The presence of UN police resources has a positive impact on curbing criminal violence
- When peacekeepers and civilian police are deployed together both political violence and criminal violence are reduced.

Dr. di Salvatore commented: "The problem of crime in conflict areas is not new, but at the same time is also very urgent. My findings clearly highlight that to focus only on battlefield violence and political actors as a pathway to peace is short-sighted.

"It is not surprising that UN missions can inadvertently create conditions more favourable to [criminal violence](#). By reducing political violence peacekeeping missions help to create the stability which gives organised crime the security to flourish. By disarming combatants, peacekeeping missions can expand the pool of individuals willing to re-invest skills acquired as insurgents for criminal purposes. And by creating a local 'peacekeeping economy' a mission can provide more opportunities for criminal activity."

She added: "It is very important to note that not all UN missions have the same effect. My study found that UN police deployments, such as joint operations with national police, training activities, patrolling and community policing, were associated with a decline in criminal [violence](#)."

"These findings suggest that UNPOL should be deployed alongside troops in a co-ordinated way in order to ensure that criminal groups do not undermine progress towards peace. Alternatively, consideration should be given to deploying peacekeeping forces with a mandate to engage with non-state armed actors, not just insurgents."

**More information:** Jessica Di Salvatore. Peacekeepers against Criminal Violence—Unintended Effects of Peacekeeping Operations?, *American Journal of Political Science*

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