

Essays on Microfoundations of Peacebuilding in War-Torn Societies: Hypotheses and Evidence from a Field Experiment in Rural Liberia

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ABSTRACT

Can international peacebuilding efforts in war-torn societies have positive influence on democratic outcomes at the grassroots level? Does any such influence occur through military channels (e.g., security provision) or civilian channels (e.g., democratic education)? How do different local settings respond to various activities carried out by outside interveners?

A key objective of contemporary peacebuilding interventions is to transform war-torn societies into stable, liberal democratic polities, based on the premise that democracy is the best way to achieve stable and self-sustaining peace because democracies are more respectful toward their citizens and peaceful toward their neighbors (Barnett 2006). Toward this end, in addition to providing security, international interveners typically undertake a wide range of activities to democratize existing structures both at the macro-level and micro-level. There are important variations in local settings in which peacebuilding activities tend to be carried out. Surprisingly, there have been few systematic efforts to investigate whether and how differences in local settings shape the performance and outcomes of peacebuilding interventions, in particular to ascertain the effectiveness of efforts to promote democratic norms and liberal values at the grassroots level.

This dissertation attempts to fill this gap—theoretically and empirically. It draws on social science theories to outline specific hypotheses about when and how various activities carried out by outside actors may be effective in promoting liberal democratic outcomes in different local settings. These hypotheses are tested empirically through a nine-month field experiment carried out in 142 villages in postwar Liberia, in partnership with a United Nations peacekeeping mission and two local civil society organizations. Empirical findings reveal that the effects of outside interventions on democratic outcomes at the grassroots level critically depend on context types, but the saliency of local contexts is more pronounced for some outcome areas (e.g., political participation) than others (e.g., social cohesion). Theoretical and policy implications of

these results will be discussed.