Helpdesk Research Report: Impact of Professional Election Security

17.02.2012

Query: Identify and summarise the evidence on the impact of professional election security on elections / a country's development.

Enquirer: DFID

Author: Oliver Walton (oliver@gsdrc.org)

Contents

1. Overview
2. Case Studies
3. References
4. Additional information

1. Overview

This report assesses the evidence on the impact of professional election security on elections and, more broadly, a country's development. Professional election security refers to security forces that understand and apply election laws and maintain respect for human rights. Professional security forces are engaged in a range of activities including: the 'protection of electoral stakeholders (e.g. voters, candidates, poll workers, media and observers); electoral information (e.g. vote results, registration data, and campaign materials); electoral facilities (e.g. polling stations and counting centres); and electoral events (e.g. campaign rallies) against death, damage or disruption' (USAID 2010, p.7).

The role of security forces (including police and the military) is widely seen as critical to successful and peaceful free and fair elections in the policy literature (UNDP 2009, Ndulo & Lulo 2010, USAID 2010). The professionalism of security personnel is highlighted in a recent UNDP report (2009, p.45) as 'the key to effective security sector engagement'. Conversely, 'security forces that are poorly trained, unequipped, erratically paid or politicized can exacerbate electoral conflict through forceful tactics and incompetence' (USAID 2010, p. 9).

Donor support for elections has been particularly significant in post-conflict contexts (Fischer 2002). 'In such cases as Bosnia and Herzegovina, East Timor, and Kosovo, international military and civilian police security forces, in partnership with local authorities, have been deployed to provide protection to people, facilities, materials, and data' (Fischer 2002, p.20).
No rigorous studies that assess the impact of election security, either on elections or on broader development, were identified during the preparation of this report. One way of examining the impact of election security is to assess donor programmes that seek to create or improve the provision of professional election security in contexts threatened by electoral violence. There is a lack of rigorous assessments of the results of electoral assistance, which is partly linked to the inherent difficulty in identifying useful performance indicators (Haider 2011). Reflecting this broader trend, there are few programme reports or evaluations that seek to assess the effectiveness of donor efforts to improve election security. Often, these interventions are accompanied by a range of other electoral support activities (such as supporting the creation of electoral commissions, the provision of election observers, and support for the adjudication of elections), which makes it difficult to trace impacts back to election security initiatives.

Due to the lack of rigorous, cross-country studies on the impact of electoral security, this study draws primarily on case study literature. This case study literature is made up of (i) assessments and evaluations by donors about programmes to professionalise electoral security, and (ii) broader country literature on elections that involves an assessment of the impact of electoral security on the conduct of elections.

**Key Findings from the Case Studies**

**The evidence from the case study literature is fragmentary.** Few independent assessments of donor interventions in the area of electoral security were available, and most of the available literature was produced by the organisations that implemented programmes, potentially compromising the independence of their assessments. Donor assessments of electoral security interventions in a number of countries (including Burundi, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Lesotho, and Haiti), found that efforts to professionalise electoral security (usually by training police) were effective in improving the conduct of elections and reducing violence. More independent assessments of security-related electoral support found that these interventions led to reductions in violence in Guinea (Carter Centre 2010).

In the cases of Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, security-related donor interventions led to improvements in electoral administration and a reduction in violence, but only as part of an integrated programme of electoral support that also addressed a number of other areas. In Nigeria, donor-supported efforts to generate an electoral code of conduct for police were successful, but mainly because the code was drawn up jointly after consultation with a range of actors including the police, political parties and civil society (UNDP 2009). These cases confirm the broader point from the general literature on electoral support that, in order to be effective, efforts to improve electoral security need to be accompanied by a range of other activities. These activities include comprehensive risk assessments, building the capacity of national and local bodies that can prevent and resolve election-related conflict, and other democratic development policies and activities such as support for gender equality, anti-corruption activities, legal reform, and media monitoring (Fischer 2002, Ndulo & Lulo 2010, Haider 2011). The literature stresses that efforts to improve electoral security should be accompanied by broader and more long-term efforts to reform the security sector, and broader security planning programmes (Fischer 2002, Ndulo & Lulo 2010, Haider 2011).

Some cases highlighted problems with efforts to professionalise security. In Sudan, training for police was less successful in Darfur, where police were less experienced and most were illiterate (UNMIS 2010). In Timor-Leste, international efforts to boost electoral security were hampered by tensions between international and domestic security actors (ICG 2009). Training to police in Kenya
was provided too late in the electoral cycle to be effective. The Kenyan police’s lack of professionalism was shown to have exacerbated the electoral violence that occurred in 2007 (UNDP 2009).

**There are few studies that examine the link between successful elections and broader development.** There has, however, been a lot of debate about whether or not post-conflict elections serve as an effective tool for conflict resolution, which in turn may promote long-term development. Although much of the existing literature suggests that elections by themselves do not reduce the likelihood of conflict recurrence, a recent quantitative analysis by Matanock (2012) suggests that post-conflict elections can help terminate conflict and promote lasting peace. Successful examples of conflict-affected regions where post-conflict elections have contributed to stability include Mozambique and Namibia (Ndulo & Lulo 2010).

*Lessons from the general policy literature*

The general policy literature on election security has highlighted a number of key lessons:

- **Election security has been most effective when it has involved a partnership of equals between the civil police and the military** (Fischer 2002).

- **Training should be timely.** As demonstrated by the cases of Nigeria and Sierra Leone, training for police officials that comes too late in the electoral cycle is often ineffective (UNDP 2009).

- **‘Police training should be multi-dimensional**, comprising both written materials and interactive “face-to-face” training from superiors or front-line officers and, at a minimum, cover the nature of the electoral legislation and an overview of the electoral process, human rights issues in relation to the police’s role, standards of police conduct and communication mechanisms between the police forces and the electoral commission’ (Ndulo & Lulo 2010).

- **The role of the police force should be clearly defined**, for the benefit of forces themselves and the general public. Police roles during different phases of the electoral cycle (pre-election, election day and postelection), should also be clearly defined (Ndulo & Lulo 2010). Police roles should be fully understood at all levels of the organisation, down to front line officers (Graham 2006).

- **Donor engagement with local security actors should focus on ‘training, restraint, public-order policing, dispute-resolution skills, and the specific provisions of electoral law** (such as managing crowds or preventing campaigning at polling stations) or to ensure an orderly balloting process’ (UNDP 2009).

### 2. Case Studies

**Sierra Leone**

A review of the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections by UNDP (2009) attributes their success to the integrated provision of electoral support from international actors including the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) and UNDP. These interventions helped to ensure that the
2007 elections ‘met higher levels of credibility and legitimacy than any previous election and that they would mark an advancement in electoral administration in Sierra Leone’ (UNDP 2009, p.87).

Support came in a number of areas including the establishment of a more credible electoral management body, the establishment of mechanisms for the prompt adjudication of electoral disputes, and more professional and neutral performance of the Sierra Leone police. A critical aspect of UN support for elections in Sierra Leone was long-term planning – preparations for the elections started two years before they were due, ‘a factor many recognize as an important element for the success of the elections’ (UNDP 2009, p.88). Another important factor was the care taken to develop an electoral code of conduct, which was agreed after consultation with the police, civil society and representatives of the main political parties. These efforts were supported by a range of security-related measures. Efforts to strengthen the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) were seen as vital. ‘The sustained training of and logistical and operational support provided to the SLP were instrumental to ensure that it could perform its role and provide services in most instances in a timely, efficient, independent, professional manner and in compliance with international standards’ (UNDP 2009, p.90). The UN Peacebuilding Fund also played an important role – it ‘allowed for prompt availability of funds as well as creative and responsive solutions to address evolving and unforeseen security-related problems’ (ibid.). The provision of adequate security ‘meant higher voter turnout. The widespread presence of well equipped and well-trained police forces, and the consequent perception of the SLP as a homogeneous, independent and functional body, provided a sense of confidence to Sierra Leonean voters’ (ibid.).

**Nigeria**

Since a return to multiparty democracy in 1999, Nigeria has experienced political competition and social tensions that make electoral processes volatile and often violent. Much of this volatility has been attributed to the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), and there have often been allegations of bias among security forces in favour of the ruling party. Police often deliberately disrupted the electoral process. As a result, there has been a ‘strong focus on developing professionalism with the police force to assist in providing neutral and effective ways of complying with national and international standards of conduct’ (UNDP 2009, p.84).

‘UNDP managed the Joint Donor Basket Fund (JDBF) project together with the INEC, the National Human Rights Commission, and the Police Service Commission, which was organized to provide training to district level police officials from throughout Nigeria. Some 1,600 district officers participated in the program. UNDP Country Officer Anand Kumar noted that the training sought “to inculcate the values to protect the constitutional and civic right of the citizens to vote and also make security forces familiar with the voting process and electoral offences. The training for the first time brought together all the institutions with the responsibility for creating an atmosphere during the election period in which citizens felt confident of exercising franchise as per their own will without any fear and also providing a level playing field for the participating political parties and candidates”’(UNDP 2009, p.85).

‘The training was carried out rapidly in four phases spread over two weeks prior to the polls, when the training program was most relevant to equip the security officers with the information and skills that would enable them to perform their duties in the expected manner on the election days. The project provided technical inputs to the Nigerian Police Service Commission for preparing the guidelines and code of conduct for the police and other security officials and also printed 300,000 copies of each of the booklet ‘Guidelines and Code of Conduct for the Police’ and a pocket card titled ‘Code of Conduct for
The guidelines and code of conduct for the security officers included specific measures about neutrality, professionalism, use of force, conduct during elections, electoral law and election-related offences, reporting protocols, and protection of the electoral process. Both these documents served as ready references for the security personnel on the election days. The training definitely changed the outlook of police and security personnel engaged for election duty to a large extent and contributed to their improved performance during 2007 elections when compared to 2003 elections’ (UNDP 2009, p.85). The case study showed that training is most effective if all institutions responsible for election security plan the training programme jointly.

Graham (2006) examines donor efforts to support police conduct during Nigerian elections in 2003. He concludes that ‘[i]t was believed by many observers that significant progress was made in achieving a more professional level of police conduct in this election’ (Graham 2006, pp.24-25).

**Sudan**

The UN Missions in Sudan (UNMIS) provided training to over 10,000 police officers in 2009 and 2010, with the goal of improving security at future elections. The programme has not been independently evaluated, but an article about the programme produced by UNMIS provided evidence of the programme’s success: “This training has brought so many improvements,” said Lt. Col. Sayid Suliman, the head of the SSPS antiriot police office in Malakal. “We now understand how to control the situation prior to, during and after an election” (UNMIS 2010, p. 4).

A 16-page handbook of election security guidelines prepared by UNMIS police identifies impartiality, restraint, respect for political speech, respect for civilian election authorities and the maintenance of order and security as the basic principles law enforcement officers must uphold during the current electoral campaign.

The courses address a variety of topics, ranging from VIP protection and crowd control tactics to an overview of the election process and relevant provisions of the 2008 National Elections Act. Similar training was provided to the Sudan National Police stationed in the Darfur region by UNAMID police advisers. Training here has been more difficult, where efforts have been hampered by high illiteracy rates among officers (65-90 per cent). Many of these policemen are former SPLA rebels who have received no training prior to becoming police officers: “Nobody in this part of Sudan has any idea of how an election is run, and they mostly see any demonstration as unrest and unlawful,” said UNMIS deputy police commissioner Klaus Dieter Tietz. “They have a military way of thinking, and it’s a question of changing the mindset,” said Mr. Sharma. “You can’t do that in a day, but we tell them about human rights, freedom of speech and the right to assemble.” Though the pace of training in Southern Sudan has lagged at times, Mr. Tietz said at least 5,000 SSPS officers will have completed election security training courses by the middle of March’ (UNMIS 2010, p.4).

**Guinea**

Efforts to professionalise election security in Guinea in the run up to the 2010 Presidential elections have been cited as an important example demonstrating the impact of improved professional election security on elections (expert comments). The Special Force for the Security of the Electoral Process (FOSSEPEL) was created by presidential decree to support the 2010 Presidential elections. Initially FOSSEPEL was supposed to be composed of 16,000 persons (8,000 police and 8,000 gendarmes) but numbers on the day of the election were below this. A report by the Carter Centre (2010, p.4) states that FOSSEPEL ‘played an important role in keeping the peace and maintaining order’. The
report also notes, however, that ‘the presence and role of FOSSEPEL security forces varied throughout Guinea’ (p.45) and that ‘unfortunately, some of the FOSSEPEL forces did not consistently display professional conduct, and Carter Centre observers witnessed excessive use of force on several occasions’ (p.46).

‘Overall, FOSSEPEL fulfilled its mandate, and there were no major security incidents on election day. Carter Centre observers noted that FOSSEPEL helped to keep a semblance of order during the first and second round at reception commissions and at the very chaotic centralization commission in Conakry. On the whole, Carter Centre observers noted that the presence of FOSSEPEL did not lead to incidents of mass intimidation or harassment nor to any impediment to the free movement of voters’ (p.46).

**Burundi**

An end of mission report by the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB 2006) described how ONUB military successfully supported peaceful elections in 2005 by providing electoral convoys and deploying strategically in various areas of the country, establishing support for the Burundian Security Forces positioned at the polling stations.

“During the elections, United Nations police closely supported the national police and the then gendarmerie in their deployment plans and strategies. UN police were in charge of supporting the reform of the police as a whole, but more importantly for training and advising the national police corps in the field. Here, electoral workers count votes after polls closed for the Constitutional Referendum’ (ONUB 2006).

**Kenya**

UNDP support for electoral security in Kenya was viewed by the organisation to have been largely ineffective. UNDP had initially planned to reduce electoral violence by providing training to police but this training came too late: ‘By the time UNDP was able to meet with the relevant police section, the available time for the creation and implementation of a sound peer-level police training programme had lapsed and the program was not able to respond to requests for rapid response mobilization, and other capital intensive infrastructure support suggestions….Another lesson in hindsight is that training of security agencies ought to take place well before the campaign period is in top gear. This is important because, unsurprisingly, as the election draws near, campaign fever mounts and tension builds up across the country, the priority of the security agencies is not training, but of actual on-the-ground provision of security and maintenance of law and order’ (UNDP 2009). While the lack of electoral security did not trigger the post-election violence in 2007, which was largely sparked by issues relating to the tallying and announcement of results, excessive force by the police exacerbated the violence (UNDP 2009, Dagne 2011).

**Lesotho**

UNDP provided support to the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), the police and the national security service in 2003. UNDP (2009, p.81) states that ‘[t]here is widespread consensus among analysts that the LDF has transformed substantially, as can be seen from the role that it played during the past two elections, and that the efforts of UNDP have made a significant contribution in this respect’.
**Timor-Leste**

Support for electoral security provided by the UN and other international actors in Timor-Leste is widely seen as having been ineffective. This failure is largely attributed to a failure to focus sufficient attention to rebuilding the local police service, and relying too much on UN peacekeeping forces and UN police (ICG 2009). When the UN sought to engage in police development rather than simply maintaining security, however, it met with resolute opposition from domestic power holders (ICG 2009).

A report on electoral violence surrounding various elections in 2007 emphasised the importance of addressing the risks of violence at different stages in the electoral cycle (TLAVA 2009). The report found that the 2007 presidential elections were widely seen as successful and free of intimidation. This was partly due to the UN’s phased security plan with risk assessments and increased police presence. Although the campaign period and the election day were covered by this support, ‘the strategy did not address potential violence around the election results’ (TLAVA 2009). The TLAVA report (2009, p.6) recommends that ‘[t]o be most effective in the Timor-Leste context…the timeframe for implementing security strategies needs to be extended to cover all electoral phases—from the registration process through the announcement of results and redistribution of power’.

**Kosovo**

Several post-conflict elections in Kosovo have been supported by international agencies – including the UN, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), a NATO unit of 9,000 soldiers and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These forces succeeded in ensuring that several local elections were conducted in an orderly fashion (Wentz 2002, EC 2010).

**Sri Lanka**

In Sri Lanka, the EC in 2004 was given broad powers to increase the police and military presence for security and to intervene in media broadcasts that were problematic and divisive. This was considered a key reason why election-related violence declined compared to prior elections, although the creation of an independent Electoral Commission in 2001 was considered to be the most crucial change (Höglund 2008).

**Haiti**

In Haiti, Formed Police Units were used as an effective tool for managing public order during post-election demonstrations in December 2010 (Hansen 2011).

---

### 3. References


http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HDQ770.pdf


http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p253346_index.html


http://www.harvardilj.org/articles/51_Online_Ndulo_Lulo.pdf


http://unmis.unmissions.org/Portals/UNMIS/InSudanMagazine/inSUDAN-feb10-en-online.pdf


4. Additional information

Key websites:

The Carter Centre http://www.cartercenter.org/index.html
The Electoral Knowledge Network (ACE) http://aceproject.org/
USAID http://www.usaid.gov/

Experts consulted

Peter Erben, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Staffan Darnolf, IFES
Frank Vassallo, UNDP
Jørgen Elklit, Aarhus University
Peter Wolf, ACE Practitioners Network
Stina Larserud, International IDEA
Therese Pearce Laanela, Carter Centre
Jeff Fischer, Georgetown University
Lisa Kammerud, IFES
Denis Kadima, EISA
Ilona Tip, EISA

About Helpdesk research reports: Helpdesk reports are based on 2 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues, and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.