

# GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NATIONAL SECURITY

Nine Policy Briefs on Building Stronger Institutions that Deliver Genuine Security



## 03.

### Governing Security, Preventing Violence

# Why We Do This

Fragility, conflict and violence massively disrupt development. But in response, too often we focus on the urgent, not the important. One essential building block for stability is to foster functioning, accountable national security sector institutions that are sustainably financed. The United Nations, in partnership with the World Bank, has commissioned a cadre of experts and research institutions to develop nine Policy Briefs on the role of security sector reform and governance (SSR&G) in preventing conflict and sustaining peace. Together, these Briefs offer a timely analysis of the risks of weakened dysfunctional security institutions, of the exorbitant cost of predatory behaviour by security providers, and of poor public financial management of security expenditures. They explore new SSR&G solutions in which the UN and the World Bank may cooperate to help countries build more affordable, accountable, and inclusive institutions that support them to transition out of fragility and create safer environments conducive to sustainable development and well-being.

This Policy Brief Series is part of the programme “Advancing Policy Tools for Sustainable SSR”, designed and led by the United Nations Office of Rule of Law and Security Sector Institutions (OROLSI), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank Group (WBG), and funded by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) Partnership Facility.”

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### **Acknowledgements**

This policy brief was authored by Vincenza Scherrer, Head of Policy Engagement, DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

The analysis builds on research supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, under the DCAF project ‘Unpacking Prevention through a Security Sector Governance and Reform Perspective’. DCAF gratefully acknowledges Switzerland’s support, as well as the valuable insights of the experts who contributed to the project through questionnaires and an expert workshop.

The author extends sincere thanks to representatives of the World Bank and the United Nations Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force—at headquarters and in the field—for their insightful comments and interviews. Special thanks go to Daniël Prins, Germana Dalberto, and Christophe Pradier of the United Nations Security Sector Reform Unit, as well as to Graham Thompson of DCAF, for their thoughtful review. Gratitude is also extended to members of the United Nations Security Sector Reform Advisory Network for their helpful comments.

The author is grateful to Taynja Abdel Baghy, Alba Bescos Pou, and Dawn Lui for their research assistance, and to Kimberly Storr and Jill Gaston for their support with copy editing.

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Good Governance in National Security –  
Nine Policy Briefs on Building Stronger Institutions  
that Deliver Genuine Security to All –  
03. Governing Security, Preventing Violence

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This report is made possible with the support of the Humanitarian – Development – Peacebuilding and Partnership Facility (HDPP) hosted by the Peacebuilding Support Office.

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# Executive Summary

## Why Prevention Is More Urgent Than Ever

The case for prevention has never been more compelling. Violence is not only increasing but also becoming more complex. From armed conflict to organized crime and gender-based violence, today's threats are increasingly interconnected—cutting across political, criminal, and social spheres. Emerging dynamics—from digital technologies to climate-related pressures—are further shaping how violence manifests and spreads.

Yet despite repeated policy commitments, preventive action remains chronically underfunded and has struggled to gain sustained political traction. Critically, the security sector remains an underused entry point for early and sustained prevention.

This paper draws on lessons from 15 diverse country contexts to examine how security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) can make a more meaningful contribution to violence prevention. It highlights how the security sector shapes both risk and resilience, outlines SSG/R priorities through a prevention lens, proposes 10 risk assessment factors, and offers practical policy recommendations.

## Rethinking the Role of the Security Sector in Prevention

Reframing the security sector as a pivotal element in prevention highlights its dual capacity to either undermine or support peace and stability.

### 1. Security Sector Governance is Central to Upstream Prevention

The way the security sector is governed directly shapes public trust, perceptions of state legitimacy, and the drivers of violence. When security actors uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and deliver services fairly, they reinforce the social contract and reduce the risk of violence. But when they are perceived as abusive, corrupt, or politically manipulated, they fuel grievances and instability.

Despite this, prevention efforts often take a narrow view of the security sector—focusing on its role in responding to crises, while overlooking how poor governance within the sector can be a root cause of violence.

## 2. Leveraging the Security Sector's Systemic Influence on Risk

The security sector's impact extends well beyond the delivery of security and justice—it also influences risks related to power and governance, land and resource disputes, and access to basic services. These interconnections demand an integrated prevention approach that considers how the security sector shapes risk across sectors.

Policymakers must move beyond siloed thinking and adopt a more problem-solving approach: one that recognizes how security sector governance intersects with other drivers of fragility and how security actors can be part of multisectoral solutions.

## 3. Harnessing the Security Sector's Role in Building Resilience

While often viewed as a source of risk, security institutions can also play a constructive role in resilience. In some contexts, they have helped de-escalate local conflicts, improve service delivery, and strengthen public trust.

Unlocking this potential requires more than just risk mitigation—it calls for long-term investment in good governance, stronger links between security and development, and greater engagement by international financial institutions to support sustainable, governance-focused reforms.

## Strategic Priorities to Advance Prevention Through SSG/R

Country experiences highlight four recurring priorities where targeted action can help reduce risk and bolster resilience:

- 1 Balance Accountability and Effectiveness:** Security institutions must be both accountable and capable. Without effective oversight, they risk abuse and politicization. Without operational capacity, they fail to meet public needs. Prevention depends on strengthening both dimensions together.
- 2 Promote Inclusive Security Delivery:** Exclusion from the security sector—whether based on ethnicity, religion or gender—can fuel grievances and lead to violence. Ensuring inclusive representation and opportunities for social mobility within security institutions is essential. Gender inclusion, in particular, plays a critical role in reducing abuse rooted in patriarchal systems. Security institutions must provide fair and unbiased services to prevent tensions and conflict.

- 3 Address Regional Inequalities and Local Governance Gaps:** Horizontal inequalities—especially disparities in access to security and basic services between regions—are key drivers of grievance and violence. Closing these gaps is critical for strengthening state legitimacy and building resilience to violence. This requires enhancing coordination between security and development efforts, ensuring that initiatives to expand access to justice and security are both viable and sustainable.
- 4 Engage with Hybrid Security Governance:** In many contexts, non-state security actors fill gaps left by formal institutions. While they may provide security, they can also deepen divisions and reinforce parallel authority structures. Understanding and managing the interaction between state and non-state security actors is critical to effective prevention.

## Ten Risk Factors for Prevention-Oriented Assessments

To sharpen upstream prevention efforts, the paper introduces ten risk factors to guide more nuanced and context-specific SSG/R assessments—grouped across structural, institutional, and individual levels:

### Structural factors:

- 1 Security and justice issues**, such as security vacuums, discrimination, and tensions with non-state security providers.
- 2 Power and governance concerns**, including repression of civil society, arbitrary arrests, and insecurity that affect voter participation.
- 3 Land, water, and resource challenges**, such as resource exploitation, biased enforcement of land policies, corruption, and illegal land grabs.
- 4 Basic services**, including corruption risks and poor fiscal management of the security sector that divert resources from essential services.

### Institutional factors:

- 5 Accountability deficits**, such as lack of judicial impartiality, parliamentary oversight, and transparent budgeting.
- 6 Effectiveness deficits**, including poor leadership, unclear mandates, insufficient equipment and training, and national security policies that lack coherence or alignment with institutional capacity.
- 7 Inclusiveness deficits**, such as the lack of representation of different groups within the security sector and local governance gaps.

### Individual factors:

- 8 Socio-economic vulnerabilities**, such as low salaries and lack of adequate living conditions.
- 9 Institutional vulnerabilities**, including prevailing social norms, a culture of patriarchy, and lack of career opportunities for certain groups.
- 10 Personal vulnerabilities**, such as psychosocial trauma in the form of PTSD, and the appeal of extremist narratives.

## Policy Directions to Elevate SSG/R in Prevention Efforts

To help translate these findings into action, the following policy directions outline key considerations for elevating SSG/R within national and international prevention efforts.

- 1 Position the Security Sector as a Strategic Prevention Tool.** External security sector assistance is expanding in fragile settings. But without adequate governance safeguards, it risks reinforcing the very dynamics that drive violence and insecurity. To mitigate these risks, SSG/R should be positioned as a strategic prevention tool—one that is leveraged as a core component of public sector reform. This can help align security and development investments and support more integrated, accountable, and sustainable prevention efforts.
- 2 Use Risk as the Starting Point for SSG/R Engagement.** Strengthen SSG/R assessment methodologies by systematically analyzing risks at multiple levels—examining how security institutions may fuel perceptions of injustice, exclusion, and inequality; identifying governance deficits in accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness; and addressing individual-level factors such as institutional culture and bias.
- 3 Include Security Sector Risks in Broader Assessments.** Ensure that wider risk frameworks—such as UN Common Country Analyses or World Bank risk and resilience assessments—explicitly capture security sector-related risks that drive grievances over service delivery, political power, land, and resource control.
- 4 Design SSG/R Programs Around Context-Specific Risks and Opportunities.** Effective prevention requires programming that responds directly to the specific risks and drivers of violence in each context. Generic reforms are unlikely to succeed unless they engage with the underlying causes. This also means identifying critical junctures—such as elections or transitions—when violence is more likely to escalate, and understanding the cultural and social norms that shape behavior and influence how reforms take root.

**5 Integrate SSG/R into National Prevention Efforts.** Support integrated policy frameworks to help overcome the fragmentation of prevention agendas. This means ensuring that SSG/R is included in national strategies for violence prevention—whether through a standalone framework or by being systematically reflected across sectoral strategies, from preventing violent extremism to addressing gender-based violence.

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# 1. Introduction

Preventing violence is more urgent—and more challenging—than ever. Violence is rising in both scale and complexity—ranging from large-scale armed conflict and violent extremism to organised crime, non-state violence, and gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> These threats increasingly cut across political, criminal, and social spheres, driven by overlapping factors and producing far-reaching consequences. Prevention is essential not only to save lives, but also to reduce the long-term human, financial, and institutional costs of violence.<sup>2</sup>

Recent initiatives—such as the United Nations Secretary-General’s *New Agenda for Peace and the Pact for the Future*—have sought to renew and reframe prevention as a central national responsibility.<sup>3</sup> Rooted in the conviction that peace and security are vital for development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have also launched an important call to action in a target on violence reduction.<sup>4</sup> While the imperative for preventive action is widely acknowledged in policy discourse, efforts remain underfunded and politically underprioritized.<sup>5</sup>

Preventing violence requires early engagement, often before ‘symptoms’ are evident. Although there is growing recognition of factors contributing to violence—ranging from inequality, exclusion, and injustice to poor governance of public institutions—the challenge lies in connecting these factors to anticipate where violence and conflict might ignite. To better anticipate these risks, **this paper argues that strengthening security sector governance is crucial to upstream prevention efforts.**<sup>6</sup> Security sector actors wield significant influence and can either support peace or exacerbate violence.<sup>7</sup>

The role of security sector governance and reform (SSG/R)<sup>8</sup> in prevention is reflected in UN Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020).<sup>9</sup> Still, despite strengthened policy frameworks, integrating prevention into SSG/R support remains challenging. First, while policy frameworks recognize the security sector’s role in prevention, they lack clarity on which reform elements should be prioritized. Second, many international and national actors have framed their engagement in preventive terms to align with the new prevention mandate, but this has rarely resulted in meaningful shifts in practice.

Viewing SSG/R through a prevention lens demands a nuanced, empirically grounded understanding of security sector risks and resilience factors. This paper examines the experiences of security sectors across 15 countries from five diverse regions.<sup>10</sup> These include countries with significant international engagement—such as Mali and the Central African Republic—as well as contexts with more limited international presence, including Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines. The analysis covers contexts where tensions have escalated to violent conflict (e.g., Kyrgyzstan) and those where stability has been maintained despite rising tensions (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The research framework builds on the United Nations-World Bank *Pathways for Peace* report, which identifies grievances as the primary driver of violence but emphasizes that the risk of violent conflict depends largely on how leaders and groups perceive and manage those grievances.<sup>11</sup> While each context is unique, risks are highest in societal arenas characterized by contested access to: i) political power and governance; ii) land, water, and extractive resources; iii) basic services; and iv) security and justice. Addressing risks in these ‘arenas of contestation’ is essential for prevention.

This paper explores the dual potential of the security sector to either mitigate or exacerbate grievances across these arenas. It begins by reviewing the policy foundations and conceptual frameworks of prevention, then examines how the security sector shapes the grievances that drive violence and conflict. It goes on to identify priorities for SSG/R through a prevention lens, and concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen the use of SSG/R as a prevention tool.

## 2. What do we mean by Prevention?

While the *Pathways for Peace* report has helped build a foundation for a shared understanding of prevention, policy debates and practice continue to reflect uncertainty about its scope and implications. In this paper, ‘prevention’ refers specifically to the prevention of violence and (violent) conflict.<sup>12</sup>

**Conflict** itself is a natural and inevitable feature of all societies. It can serve as a powerful engine for positive change—for example, by driving social movements that advance universal values.<sup>13</sup> However, efforts to pursue such change are often met with resistance, particularly from dominant groups. History shows that this resistance can increase the likelihood of violent conflict. The objective, therefore, is not to eliminate conflict but to prevent its violent expression. This requires building systems and incentives that enable disputes to be managed through peaceful means.<sup>14</sup>

**Violence** is understood as all forms of violence, including interpersonal, communal, and state-sponsored violence, occurring within and beyond conflict settings. It is recognised that different forms of violence, such as extremist acts, violent crimes, and gender-based violence, contribute to an environment conducive to conflict by eroding social cohesion, deepening grievances, and undermining trust in institutions. Moreover, all forms of violence can have devastating consequences: fuelling instability, contributing to fragility, and undermining development.<sup>15</sup> Violence can thus serve as a catalyst for the escalation of conflict, and in turn, violent conflict can perpetuate and intensify violence.<sup>16</sup> Systemic approaches are therefore necessary to ensure that multi-dimensional and multi-layered risk and resilience factors for violence and conflict are addressed.<sup>17</sup>

There is growing consensus that effective prevention requires addressing the underlying drivers of violence and conflict.<sup>18</sup> While various schools of thought exist on what fuels violence—as reflected in long-standing debates such as “greed versus grievance”—the *Pathways for Peace* report places emphasis on grievance as a central factor. It observes that “a significant proportion of contemporary violent conflicts are rooted in group-based grievances around exclusion that forge deep-seated feelings of injustice and unfairness.”<sup>19</sup> According to this framework, prevention efforts must focus on mitigating

risks in key arenas of contestation—those societal spaces where grievances are most likely to escalate into violence. These include inequitable access to political power and governance, land and natural resources, basic services, and security and justice.

Any country may have or may develop vulnerabilities to violence and conflict; therefore, prevention efforts must occur continually, across the entire peace continuum. Violence is also a universal concern, with implications for safety, stability, and human rights across all countries. For example, according to Swiss data, the economic cost of violence in Switzerland is estimated to be approximately USD 66.3 billion, equivalent to 8.3 percent of the country’s GDP.<sup>20</sup> Prevention is fundamentally a **national responsibility**, even if international actors may play a role in supporting efforts to address underlying risks and drivers of conflict.<sup>21</sup> However, when international actors are involved, the multidimensional nature of violence requires “complementary, coherent and co-ordinated responses”.<sup>22</sup>

**Risk factors** are conditions that heighten the likelihood of the outbreak of, escalation of, or return to violence,<sup>23</sup> while **resilience factors** strengthen societies’ ability to withstand those risks. There is no universally agreed definition of risk factors, but they typically encompass both immediate triggers—such as contested elections or human rights violations—and deep structural drivers, including exclusion, inequality, and injustice.<sup>24</sup> No single risk factor alone causes violence; rather, it is the interplay of multiple factors that shapes violence dynamics.

**Grievances** can become risk factors for violence when they are widespread, deeply felt, and unresolved, especially if they intersect with other risk factors like political instability. *Pathways for Peace* recognizes that underlying grievances, such as inequality, injustice, and exclusion, can drive violence and conflict. The way security institutions respond to these grievances, whether through repression, neglect, or meaningful reform, plays a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating the risk of violence. SSG/R can therefore help the security sector become a source of resilience, or if not carefully implemented, can inadvertently perpetuate or even exacerbate these grievances which can contribute to multiscale risks.

Figure 1. Overview of the ‘arenas of contestation’ identified in Pathways for Peace<sup>25</sup>



# 3. The Security Sector and Violence Prevention: What National Experiences Reveal

This section draws on national experiences to examine the dual role of the security sector in prevention. First, it assesses how the security sector's response to crises can either escalate or contain outbreaks of violence. Second, it explores how the sector's governance can either fuel or mitigate the underlying grievances that drive violence, shaping longer-term structural prevention.

## 3.1 Responding to Crises and Escalations of Violence

The security sector's role in violence prevention begins with its mandate to uphold the state's legitimate monopoly on the use of force. This makes it the first line of defence against the escalation of violence. However, governance deficits—including unclear mandates, weak coordination, or politicized leadership—can undermine this role. Poorly managed responses to crises may not only fail to de-escalate tensions but exacerbate violence and fuel long-term grievances.

For example, during the 2014 protests in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the security sector played contrasting roles: while violence was prevented in some regions, other areas saw heavy-handed policing against protesters and journalists which contributed to escalating the crisis in those regions.<sup>26</sup> Political disagreements over command structures also led to delayed responses. In Mostar, timely intervention by a cantonal special police unit which acted on its own initiative helped avert serious bloodshed. A UN assessment of the dynamics of these protests highlighted that if the police had not intervened at the moment they did, the likelihood that events could have erupted into civil war was very high.<sup>27</sup> It concluded that two factors were key to prevention: capable, responsive security forces, and addressing underlying grievances that keep tensions high.<sup>28</sup>

Such experiences show that effective crisis response depends not just on the technical capacity of individual

services, but on the **coherence, accountability, and responsiveness** of the entire security system—from political leadership through to frontline actors. Failures often stem from leadership that condones or incentivizes heavy-handed approaches, unclear rules of engagement, and inadequate oversight mechanisms. This has often been most evident in militarised approaches to addressing threats of violent extremism. In the **Philippines**, for instance, the military has been accused of committing human rights violations in the context of responding to extremist attacks.<sup>29</sup>

**Capacity gaps**—such as inadequate training, staffing, or equipment—can further compound these risks by limiting the ability of security actors to respond effectively in times of crisis. For instance, in **Kenya**, after the disputed December 2007 presidential election, widespread violence erupted. The police were criticized both for failing to prevent organized attacks and for committing violence against demonstrators. Their response was seen as inconsistent and politically influenced, highlighting how the absence of impartial and adequately resourced policing can allow electoral disputes to spiral into large-scale violence. The events also highlighted the dual challenge of weak capacity and political interference, making comprehensive police reform essential to restore public trust and prevent future conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Crises also expose how **issues of inclusion** shape the legitimacy and effectiveness of the security response. The 2010 crisis in **Kyrgyzstan** is a case in point. At the time, ethnic minorities (i.e. Uzbeks) constituted only about 2 per cent of the country's police forces, a level far below their representation in the southern part of the country.<sup>31</sup> When violence broke out in Osh in 2010, the loyalties of police were cemented along ethnic lines; reportedly, police and army officers began shooting at Uzbeks without waiting for the command of political leadership.<sup>32</sup> Inadequate training in how to deal with ethnically fuelled civic unrest, as well as equipment shortages, contributed

further to poor management of the crisis. Indeed, in this case, the police and armed forces de facto “became part of the conflict, rather than a solution”.<sup>33</sup>

While institutional, political, and structural dynamics shape the security sector’s response to crisis, responses can also be influenced by individual-level factors. **Mental health and particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is an often-overlooked factor affecting security sector performance in crisis. Exposure to high-stress or life-threatening situations can have profound effects on the mental health of security sector personnel, impairing judgment and increasing the risk of violent behaviour.<sup>34</sup> Research shows that individuals repeatedly exposed to trauma may begin to perceive violence as exciting or rewarding.<sup>35</sup> This underscores the importance of integrating mental health services into the management and reform of security institutions, both to support personnel and to reduce the likelihood of abusive behavior.<sup>36</sup>

## 3.2 How the Security Sector Shapes Grievances and Risk

Beyond its direct response to crisis escalation, the security sector can play a crucial role in structural **prevention** by either mitigating or exacerbating long-term grievances. Despite a tendency to view the security sector as relevant only to the arena of security and justice, experience shows that it interacts in one way or another with each of the four arenas of contestation identified in the Pathways for Peace report, namely: security and justice, power and governance, land and resources, and basic services.

### 3.2.1 Security and Justice

The security and justice arena is central to understanding and preventing violence. **The security sector is often the most visible representation of the state to its citizens.** When it operates with corruption or predation, communities may come to view the state itself as a threat rather than a protector. Because of this, how security is provided—and by whom—is a fundamental pillar of the social contract between the state and its people.

#### State Perpetration of Violence

In many contexts, the breakdown of public trust has become so severe that civilians fear state security forces

more than non-state armed groups. Such dynamics can delegitimize state institutions, reinforce extremist narratives, and create openings for alternative security providers.<sup>37</sup> The scale of the challenge is underscored by data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which found that in 2020, state forces remained the most active conflict actor and the primary perpetrators of violence against civilians, despite the rise of violent non-state actors.<sup>38</sup> From **Nigeria** to **Burkina Faso** and **Mali**, violent abuses committed by security sector actors have not only directly fuelled violence but are also recognized as key drivers of extremism.<sup>39</sup> A UNDP study found that state actions are a common grievance among individuals who join extremist groups: 71 percent reported that the killing or arrest of a family member or friend was a key factor in their decision to join.<sup>40</sup>

#### Access Gaps and the Rise of Hybrid Security Providers

Beyond direct abuse, one of the most persistent sources of public grievance is the inability of national security and justice institutions to provide consistent and adequate coverage, particularly in rural or hard-to-reach regions. In these geographic peripheries, security vacuums are frequently filled by non-state armed actors. For instance, in **Burkina Faso**, the absence of police and military presence in many rural areas enabled the emergence of self-defence groups, initially tolerated by the state for their perceived role in combating crime and terrorism.<sup>41</sup> However, in the absence of regulation or oversight, many of these groups contributed to human rights abuses, deepening communal tensions and escalating cycles of violence.<sup>42</sup>

A similar dynamic played out in **Kenya**, where limited police coverage in remote oil exploration and extractive regions led communities to rely on the Kenya Police Reserves—untrained, armed civilians who were paid a stipend by the Government. Initially intended to provide community-based security, these actors were gradually drawn away from their original roles by the lure of higher wages offered by extractive companies. As a result, surrounding communities were left more vulnerable to cattle raiding, banditry, and other forms of violence.<sup>43</sup> This shift illustrates how hybrid arrangements may serve short-term needs but can inadvertently deepen insecurity for broader populations.

Similarly, in **Mali**, insecurity in the north and centre has been compounded by the persistent absence of effective and accountable state security and justice institutions.<sup>44</sup> This vacuum has fostered a climate of impunity and enabled armed groups to mobilize around long-standing grievances, particularly the central government's failure to provide basic services and protections to peripheral regions—grievances that have, in turn, facilitated the expansion of violent extremist groups.<sup>45</sup> When neither security forces nor armed groups are held accountable, it legitimizes further abuse and entrenches cycles of retaliatory violence and deepening insecurity.<sup>46</sup>

This pattern of limited state presence and weak accountability similarly characterizes the situation in the **Central African Republic (CAR)**, where weak security sector governance and limited state reach outside the capital have allowed armed groups to exploit local grievances and contest control over territory and natural resources.<sup>47</sup> A near-complete absence of judicial services in rural areas—due to insecurity and the refusal of civil servants to serve outside Bangui—has further entrenched impunity. Women, in particular, face multiple barriers to accessing justice, including discriminatory social norms and high levels of insecurity.<sup>48</sup> In the absence of formal options, communities turn to informal justice providers such as village chiefs or religious leaders—structures which themselves may perpetuate exclusion and corruption.<sup>49</sup>

### Border Areas and Conflict Risk

Border areas and peripheral regions are particularly vulnerable to a convergence of risks, including transnational organized crime, arms trafficking, and violent cross-border incursions. In **Lebanon**, for instance, the border with Syria has long been exposed to cross-border incursions and violent extremism resulting in greater pressures on local police forces as well as the creation of self-defence groups. In response, the Lebanese Armed Forces scaled up their presence, supported by international partners.<sup>50</sup> While this reduced some immediate threats, the use of heavy-handed tactics exacerbated local grievances and pointed to the need for complementary strategies focused on municipal policing as a more sustainable and trusted form of engagement.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, jihadist groups along the Niger-Mali border have capitalized on long-standing insecurity and the weak state presence in northern **Mali** to launch cross-border attacks against the Nigerien army. Predominantly military

responses—often backed by Western powers—have delivered limited results and, in some cases, have exacerbated intercommunal tensions by empowering non-state armed proxies. Addressing the root causes of violence requires a shift toward a more political approach that emphasizes local reconciliation and inclusive governance, rather than a continued overreliance on counter-terrorism operations alone.<sup>52</sup>

### Exclusion, Gendered Barriers and Their Consequences

Inclusion is an essential but often overlooked dimension of how populations perceive access to justice and security. When security institutions fail to reflect the diversity of the populations they serve—whether in terms of gender, ethnicity, or religion—it can undermine both their effectiveness and legitimacy.

**The underrepresentation of women** in the security sector limits its capacity to respond to gender-specific security needs. The absence of female personnel can deter survivors of abuse from reporting, create institutional blind spots on gender-based violence, and reduce access to justice for half the population. In some contexts, gender based violence (GBV) perpetrated by security actors, can drive both women and men to join armed groups seeking protection or retribution.<sup>53</sup> In **Nepal**, one study found that one-quarter of female combatants joined the Maoist People's Liberation Army after experiencing sexual abuse by state security forces.<sup>54</sup> Even when such violence is committed by non-state actors, the failure of institutions to prevent or redress it can lead women, girls, and boys to turn to armed groups in search of protection or empowerment.

Similarly, **ethnic exclusion** in the security sector can fuel grievances that drive conflict. In Nepal, the security sector struggled with ethnic and gender exclusion, which not only limited the protection available to marginalized groups but also deepened their mistrust in state institutions. The Maoist insurgency, which culminated in the 2006 peace agreement, was fuelled in part by grievances over the targeting and systematic marginalisation of lower caste minorities, grievances that were closely tied to their lack of representation within the security forces.<sup>55</sup>

In **Mali**, structural **barriers facing young people** compound these dynamics. Many young people, particularly in the north of the country, face limited economic opportunities and minimal pathways into formal security institutions. Some youths have joined armed groups because these offer a perceived pathway into the military, promising eventual economic stability and enhanced social status.<sup>56</sup> This dynamic illustrates how exclusion from legitimate security roles can push young people towards armed groups as alternative avenues for social and economic advancement, perpetuating cycles of violence and undermining long-term peacebuilding efforts.

### Addressing the Security Gap in Colombia

The complex relationship between security delivery and security sector-related grievances is well illustrated by the case of **Colombia**. In many remote rural areas of Colombia, the limited presence of the state has resulted in a power vacuum often filled by non-state actors involved in illicit activities such as drug trafficking—activities widely associated with increased instability and heightened risk of conflict.<sup>57</sup> In response, recent efforts by the Colombian government to expand access to formal security and justice services in rural areas have shown promise. By re-establishing state presence and strengthening legitimate governance, these efforts have contributed not only to reducing the risk of violence but also to preventing the re-emergence of armed group control in vulnerable communities.<sup>58</sup>

These examples highlight how improving reach, accountability, and inclusion is essential to preventing the re-emergence of armed group control and to building sustainable peace, especially in marginalized regions. More broadly, they underscore that accountability must be considered alongside effectiveness—and must extend beyond state forces to include non-state actors involved in providing security.

### 3.2.2 Power and Governance

The arena of power and governance is central to the prevention of violence. Representation in political life—who has access to make decisions and shape public policy—fundamentally shapes access to resources, security, and justice. **When diverse groups are fairly represented and their demands addressed through peaceful means, the risk of violence diminishes over time.** However,

transitions toward more democratic systems can be volatile, particularly when they challenge entrenched power structures.<sup>59</sup>

### Politicization of Security Institutions

One of the central challenges is the instrumentalization of security institutions by political elites to maintain or consolidate power. This politicization of security actors can directly undermine democratic processes and restrict access to governance for political opponents or marginalized groups. For instance, in **Burkina Faso**, the former Presidential Security Regiment was used to shield the regime from political competition, exacerbating tensions during efforts to remove constitutional term limits.<sup>60</sup>

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the use of security agencies to intimidate or suppress civil society organizations critical of the government has contributed to restricting access to political space.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in **Nepal**, the monarchy's use of the military to suppress opposition movements has been cited as a driver of the protracted violent conflict experienced by the country.<sup>62</sup>

### Weak Institutions and Elite Capture

Weak checks and balances can also entrench elite dominance and restrict broader access to power. In **Guinea-Bissau**, political and military actors routinely interfered in the judiciary, enabled by the absence of an independent budget for the courts. This power imbalance meant that military and political actors were rarely held accountable, normalising impunity for serious political crimes.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, justice, so rarely served, was unable to address public grievances.<sup>64</sup> The dysfunctionality of the formal justice system has been largely considered a trigger of conflict in the country, underlining the vital need for justice reform as crucial pillar of prevention.<sup>65</sup>

### Hardline Security Approaches and Shrinking Political Space

Governments may also restrict access to power by narrowing political space through hard-line security approaches framed as preventing violent extremism.<sup>66</sup> In **Nigeria**, for example, state-backed non-state armed groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State—ostensibly deployed to maintain order—have reportedly been used to advance political agendas,

including targeting opposition figures and intimidating political opponents.<sup>67</sup>

## Elections, Security, and Violence

Elections represent another flashpoint where security actors can either reinforce or undermine democratic access. In **Nigeria**, electoral processes have often been marred by violence, disregard for the rule of law, and security force misconduct. Security personnel, rather than safeguarding voters, have at times been implicated in intimidation and electoral interference.<sup>68</sup> In **Kenya**, past elections have similarly seen instances of police violence and biased enforcement, which have contributed to public mistrust and post-election unrest. Police conduct during elections can play a critical role in either exacerbating or mitigating violence. Reforming police training and election security protocols—such as through the Secure and Fair Elections (SAFE) Model—can thus serve as an important measure for violence prevention.<sup>69</sup>

## Security Sector as a Guarantor of Democratic Space

At the same time, the security sector can serve as a guarantor of peaceful political transitions. In **Colombia**, the armed forces played a constructive role in safeguarding democratic space during the post-conflict period. Approximately 250,000 troops were deployed across the country to reduce election-related violence and mitigate third-party interference with voters.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the National Protection Unit played a crucial role in safeguarding ex-combatants who sought to engage in the political sphere.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in **Liberia's** 2023 local elections in Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties, over 1,000 Liberia National Police officers were deployed in sensitive areas to reinforce public trust.<sup>72</sup> Such actions underscore the dual role that security forces can play in both enabling and obstructing democratic participation.

### 3.2.3 Land and Resources

Evidence across diverse contexts reveals that **security actors can play a direct—and often destabilizing—role in land and resource governance**. In many contexts, they have enforced discriminatory land policies, used control over resources as a form of leverage, or engaged in land grabs for personal or institutional gain. These risks are

heightened when militaries operate as economic actors—either to offset underfunded defence budgets or, in fragile settings, as a survival strategy for unpaid personnel. At the same time, weak institutional capacity and limited political will to uphold land tenure and resource governance laws can exacerbate perceptions of injustice, fuelling grievances that increase the risk of violence and instability.

## Customary Systems, Forum Shopping, and Local Tensions

In **Burkina Faso**, for example, security forces have reportedly exhorted herders amid ongoing disputes over rights to pastoral lands. The 2020 Pastoral Law remained largely unimplemented, contributing to a sense of injustice.<sup>73</sup> These tensions have been exploited by armed groups, who recruit among communities facing land-related injustices.<sup>74</sup> While customary actors are often relied on to support the resolution of localised conflicts such as these, Burkina Faso illustrates some of **the challenges of hybrid justice systems**. Village development councils that govern land disputes at a local level are often perceived to favour the farmers while customary authorities are seen to favour the herders. This has resulted in a phenomenon referred to as ‘forum shopping’, whereby each party in a conflict seeks favour through competing centres of authority, ranging from the councils to the village chiefs, to the police and formal justice system.<sup>75</sup> This competition among parallel authorities undermines the coherence of conflict resolution and perpetuates cycles of violence.

## Resource Extraction and Armed Violence

Control over **natural resources**, particularly high-value commodities like minerals and oil, has also proven to be a persistent driver of violence. This competition frequently involves both state security forces and non-state armed groups, each vying for control over resource-rich territories. In the **DRC**, for instance, both the armed forces and non-state armed groups are engaged in illegal resource exploitation and trade of natural resources.<sup>76</sup> The DRC's security forces have frequently been accused of complicity in land grabs and in maintaining their own illegal tax regime derived from mining operations.<sup>77</sup> The exploitation of resources fuels corruption, exacerbates inequalities, and marginalizes local communities, further destabilizing

affected regions and perpetuating cycles of violence and conflict.

Resource politics have also shaped large-scale conflict dynamics. For example, highly sought-after oil reserves in **Libya** have been a significant factor in its civil wars. In 2019-2020, groups loyal to the commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces seized control of oil fields in the East, starving the country of much-needed revenues from oil production.<sup>78</sup> Estimates that the country would lose \$55 million in daily revenues contributed to fuelling widespread tensions.<sup>79</sup>

### Land Grievances and Post-Conflict Fragility

In post-conflict environments, rising property values may motivate elites to displace local communities through land grabs, exacerbating grievances and heightening the risk of renewed conflict. In **Kenya**, police have been deployed to carry out forced evictions, often resulting in unlawful displacement and the excessive use of force.<sup>80</sup> These dynamics illustrate how land disputes, combined with elite capture and compromised security actors, can erode the social contract and perpetuate cycles of violence.

Similarly, in **Liberia**, a 2017 Ministry of Defence order to evict ex-combatants and their families from military barracks compounded already existing grievances among these ex-combatants, who claimed they had not been properly compensated following the Accra Peace Agreement. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) played a key mediating role, prompting a presidential decision to temporarily suspend the eviction to prepare for a peaceful departure.<sup>81</sup> While resolved peacefully, the incident underscored how post-conflict grievances—particularly those tied to land, recognition, and status—can remain highly volatile without inclusive and equitable governance arrangements.<sup>82</sup>

### Security Sector as an Enabler

The security sector can also play a constructive role in resolving land disputes and mitigating tensions, particularly in contexts where formal systems are absent or mistrusted.<sup>83</sup> In **Guinea-Bissau**, for instance, police have at times stepped in to mediate land conflicts in the absence of functioning courts or to support community's on issues

such as cattle rustling.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, in the **Philippines**, the military's efforts to clear explosive remnants of war and support the construction of temporary shelters have enabled the return of displaced populations in certain locations.<sup>85</sup> Yet risks persist: Destruction of homes often results in loss of land titles, and the designation of these sites as military reservations gives the security sector significant discretion over who can return and reclaim land. How this power is exercised—whether to enable or restrict returns—can determine whether the military becomes a source of stability or renewed grievance.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.2.4 Service Delivery

Finally, **the security sector plays a critical, though often underappreciated role in shaping access to basic services**. In some contexts, disproportionate investment in the security sector diverts resources from essential services such as health, education, and infrastructure, undermining development and state legitimacy. When communities feel that their needs for basic services and economic opportunities are being overlooked (in favor of increased militarization), it can intensify resentment and contribute to the instability that higher security spending aims to prevent. In others, the absence or uneven provision of security—especially in marginalized or remote areas—limits access to services and reinforces perceptions of exclusion and neglect. When these disparities are perceived through ethnic, regional, or political lenses, they can entrench societal divisions and fuel instability.

### Security Spending and Development Trade-offs

For example, in **Mali**, military expenditure more than doubled as a share of GDP following the outbreak of conflict in 2013, leaving the government with limited capacity to provide basic services, including food and education. This trade-off was cited as a major grievance fuelling violent protests.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, in **Burkina Faso**, the state's emphasis on counter-terrorism sidelined efforts to address long-standing grievances such as land disputes and security force abuses.<sup>88</sup> As a result, trust in the government's ability to deliver essential services declined. These cases underscore the need to integrate security sector budgeting within broader public financial management frameworks that carefully balance security priorities with sustained investments in service delivery.

## Infrastructure, Access, and Service Delivery

Access to services and access to security are also deeply intertwined. Poor infrastructure, including roads, water, and electricity, can severely hamper the deployment of police and justice actors, especially to remote or underserved regions. In **Liberia**, for instance, regional security and justice hubs established to decentralize service provision were in some cases abandoned, as personnel cited poor conditions and infrastructure in isolated localities.<sup>89</sup> This reveals a self-reinforcing cycle in which weak infrastructure limits the reach of the state—including its security and justice arms—while also leaving communities more vulnerable to violence and neglect.

At the same time, major infrastructure investments—such as those in water, sanitation, irrigation, and roads—can trigger competition over access and control and become a channel for the spread of illegal economic activities.<sup>90</sup> Yet, the governance and security implications of these investments are not always sufficiently considered, increasing the risk of contestation and conflict.

## Security Sector as an Enabler of Service Delivery

To effectively address grievances related to service delivery, the security sector, particularly the police and armed forces, can play a supportive role. By establishing a secure environment, law enforcement can pave the way for other government agencies to operate more effectively and provide essential services.<sup>91</sup> In **Colombia**, for example, the military has helped improve access to services in communities affected by the conflict, for example, in furtherance of the peace accords – which outlined the need to improve rural roads to create better conditions for people outside the capital. Working closely on road development has strengthened the relationship between these communities and the armed forces.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, in the **Philippines**, the military has been actively involved in assisting local governments and state agencies in delivering services to remote areas, ensuring that even the most marginalized populations have access to essential resources.<sup>93</sup> Such initiatives demonstrate how security forces can contribute positively to service delivery and community well-being, ultimately promoting stability and development.

## Complex and Dual Roles of Security Actors

However, the security sector's impact on service delivery is not always straightforward. In the DRC, military operations targeting armed groups have inadvertently undermined health service delivery by displacing health workers, contributing to the closure of clinics, and generating broader insecurity.<sup>94</sup> Yet the same actors have also been crucial to healthcare provision in other settings—escorting vaccination teams, delivering supplies, and rehabilitating mobile clinics, thus enhancing access to healthcare services despite security risks.<sup>95</sup> These dual roles highlight the complexity of the relationship between security forces and service delivery: they can be both an obstacle and a catalyst.

# 4. How SSG/R Can Support Violence Prevention

To effectively prevent violence, SSG/R must be reimagined as a strategic instrument of prevention. Inequality, exclusion, and injustice—key drivers of grievances—are likely to persist where the security sector is politicized, corrupt, or ineffective due to deep governance deficits. While risk and resilience factors related to the security sector vary by context, **the country experiences reviewed shows that governance failures consistently underpin the emergence of security-related risks.** Preventive SSG/R efforts must therefore grapple with four recurring issues: balancing accountability with effectiveness; promoting inclusive security delivery, including gender equality; addressing regional inequalities and local governance gaps; and engaging with hybrid security governance.

## 4.1. Balancing Accountability and Effectiveness

A core lesson across diverse contexts is that accountability and effectiveness are inseparable. Without accountability, security actors may operate with impunity, become politicized, or lose public trust—dynamics that can contribute to coercive or predatory behavior. Conversely, when security institutions are ineffective—lacking the capacity, presence, or resources to meet people's needs—they are unable to protect populations or respond to crises, further eroding public confidence. Building legitimate and capable security institutions requires both strong oversight and the operational capacity to deliver results.

Yet international engagement often reinforces this imbalance. There is a growing tendency to prioritize short-term security assistance—including counter-terrorism efforts—over investments in accountable governance and long-term peacebuilding. As highlighted in the *States of Fragility* report, **the tactical expediency of security sector assistance should not come at the expense of broader prevention objectives.**<sup>96</sup> 'Train and equip' approaches that overlook governance dimensions risk empowering

unaccountable actors, increasing the potential for internal repression and unconstitutional power grabs.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, focusing on accountability without addressing basic capacity gaps also carries risks. In **Burkina Faso**, public distrust of weak state forces created space for non-state armed groups to expand. In the **Central African Republic**, years of stalled SSG/R left the country—roughly the size of Texas—with just 1,000 troops able to operate outside the capital.<sup>98</sup> These examples underscore that effectiveness—including the ability to project presence, manage threats, and protect civilians—is an essential component of prevention.

**Effectiveness must be understood not only in tactical terms, but as a function of institutional performance.**

This includes policy coherence, personnel management, and budget planning. In Mali, excessive military spending at the expense of social services was a key grievance behind the 2020 protests and subsequent coup.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, weak financial management can leave civil servants unpaid, prompting them to prey on the very communities they are meant to protect. In the **DRC**, for instance, insufficient salaries and poor living conditions for the families of ex-combatants led to desertions and alternative methods of securing livelihood.<sup>100</sup> Public expenditure reviews and other financial oversight tools should be integral to efforts aimed at improving the good governance of the security sector.

A major barrier to both effectiveness and accountability is corruption and off-budget funding of security actors by political elites. In many contexts, security actors—both state and non-state—receive direct funding from political elites, often outside of formal budgetary and oversight mechanisms. As a result, security providers may become more responsive to elite interests than to the public they are meant to serve, undermining both the legitimacy and performance of the security sector. Addressing politicization, instrumentalization, and corruption is critical to prevent the hiring of unqualified personnel based on

clientelist relations, which can severely affect service provision and increase grievances within communities.<sup>101</sup>

To move forward, SSG/R reforms must be designed to strengthen accountability and effectiveness together. Reform efforts must address resistance from entrenched interests that benefit from the status quo. Therefore, reform cannot be treated as a purely technical exercise. It must be grounded in inclusive political dialogue and national ownership. External actors should focus not only on building capacity, but on supporting political processes that foster shared agreements on security sector governance.

Despite broad recognition of these needs, **good governance remains underprioritized in many SSG/R efforts.** In Liberia, a 2012 UN Secretary-General report noted that significant international investment in security sector reforms was matched by only limited attention to accountability and governance, contributing to persistent corruption and abuse.<sup>102</sup> In Mali, the SSG/R agenda gained little traction among both the political elites, who prioritized power retention, and security actors, who focused on operational concerns.<sup>103</sup> These governance deficits were mirrored in international assistance patterns: of the USD 79 million in U.S. foreign assistance to Mali in 2020, only 1 percent supported democracy, rights, and governance, and just 5 percent went to peace and security programming outside direct aid to security services.<sup>104</sup>

**To correct this imbalance, security assistance must be coupled with sustained investments in good governance, and good governance of the security sector should be more fully integrated into broader public sector governance initiatives.** As emphasized in the *Pathways for Peace* report, a prevention approach that includes SSG/R must ensure the security sector adheres to the same principles of good governance as other sectors.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, generic good governance approaches may fall short if they fail to address the distinct risks posed by the security sector. Preventive efforts must therefore be carefully tailored to the political economy of the sector and designed to address the specific governance related risks at hand.

## 4.2. Promoting Inclusive Service Delivery

While good governance is often framed in terms of accountability and effectiveness, inclusion is an equally essential dimension.<sup>106</sup> Consistent with the principle of “leaving no one behind,” inclusive service delivery can reduce social exclusion—an enduring driver of fragility, violence and conflict.<sup>107</sup> In the security sector, this means ensuring equal access to security and justice, as well as equal opportunity to serve within its institutions.

Equal access to employment in the security sector is not only a matter of fairness—it also plays a strategic role in depoliticising security institutions, while offering long-term livelihoods and professional mobility. In many contexts, joining the security sector is a key pathway to economic and social advancement (e.g. **Mali**). When certain groups are excluded, it can heighten grievances related to systemic discrimination or inequity (e.g., **Nepal**), and even contribute to biased policing or unequal service delivery (e.g., **Kyrgyzstan**). Abuses perceived to target specific communities—whether based on ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or class—can fuel perceptions of injustice and escalate into broader violence against the state.<sup>108</sup>

Yet, in polarised or fragile environments, efforts to promote inclusion can be politically sensitive. Expanding participation may be perceived by some groups as a threat, requiring careful dialogue to manage expectations and mitigate backlash. When done thoughtfully, however, inclusion can reduce inter-group tensions and help prevent discrimination.<sup>109</sup> Removing formal barriers is only a starting point; it is equally important to understand why some groups remain underrepresented, how their exclusion shapes social dynamics, and what consequences may result. For example, in **Kyrgyzstan**, reluctance among certain minorities to join the security sector contributed to their marginalisation, which became a key factor in the violent crisis of 2010.<sup>110</sup>

Promoting **gender equality** within the security sector is essential to delivering inclusive and responsive services. Evidence shows that the presence of women in policing can help reduce excessive use of force and improve community relations.<sup>111</sup> In contrast, the underrepresentation of women is often linked to lower levels of public trust, reduced reporting of crimes—particularly sexual and gender-based violence—and gaps in service provision.

Gender disparities also mean that certain crimes, such as domestic violence or sexual assault, may be downplayed or ignored altogether.<sup>112</sup> In places like the **Central African Republic**, women face both structural barriers (such as lack of female officers or inaccessible justice institutions) and cultural norms that limit their ability to seek protection or redress. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring that the security sector meets the needs of all members of society.

Beyond representation, the internal culture of security institutions also shapes how they deliver services and interact with communities. The dominance of patriarchal masculinities in the internal culture of security sector institutions contributes to abusive conduct by security sector personnel.<sup>113</sup> When the security sector perpetrates sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), it undermines its legitimacy and can become a driver of further violence, as affected individuals may turn to armed groups for protection. Hence, by effectively addressing such violence, the sector can play a key role in preventing violence by mitigating the potential for gender-based violence to push women, girls and boys to seek the protection of these groups.<sup>114</sup> Preventing such outcomes requires a gendered analysis of SGBV and other systemic forms of violence, ensuring that security policies and practices are not gender-blind.<sup>115</sup>

A key priority for prevention is thus to create an enabling environment for all groups—including women and other historically excluded populations—to join and thrive within the security sector. Legal and policy reforms are critical to enabling more inclusive recruitment and retention. While quotas or affirmative action policies can help improve representation, they must be paired with adequate support and training. Without this, recruits may struggle to succeed or feel pressured to assimilate into discriminatory institutional cultures.<sup>116</sup> **Inclusion is therefore about more than numbers. It requires sustained organisational change to transform the internal cultures, norms, and practices that perpetuate exclusion and abuse.**<sup>117</sup> Only by addressing these systemic issues can security institutions become truly representative, responsive, and trusted—contributing to long-term peace and resilience.

### 4.3. Addressing Regional Inequalities and Local Governance Gaps

A growing body of evidence shows that horizontal inequalities—disparities between groups defined for example by region, ethnicity, religion, or identity—are powerful drivers of violence and conflict.<sup>118</sup> Among these, regional disparities in access to essential services, including security and justice, represent a critical form of horizontal inequality that significantly fuels violence related to security sector dynamics. In countries like **Liberia, Colombia, and Burkina Faso**, unequal sub-national access to security and justice has deeply influenced local security landscapes.

Violence often escalates in peripheral or underserved regions, where the state's presence is weak or absent. In these areas, security vacuums, delayed responses, and low institutional visibility create conditions ripe for opportunistic violence and safe havens for criminal networks and insurgent groups. This is particularly acute in areas receiving large numbers of displaced or marginalised populations, where rapid demographic shifts—driven by conflict, climate change, or economic pressures—can overwhelm fragile local systems and intensify societal tensions.<sup>119</sup>

These overlapping dynamics—unequal access, institutional absence, and societal strain—are mutually reinforcing: violence disrupts development, while lack of development, including weak infrastructure, education, and healthcare, in turn hinders the effective delivery of security and justice. In the **DRC**, for example, ongoing insecurity has severely disrupted service provision, further entrenching regional inequalities. Together, these patterns underscore the urgent need for equitable investment in security and justice institutions—particularly in marginalized areas—to break cycles of exclusion and prevent conflict.

In some contexts, decentralization has been promoted as a strategy to bring government closer to the people, improving service delivery, enhancing local accountability, and rebuilding trust—especially in regions that feel neglected by central authorities. However, if not carefully managed, decentralization can also trigger new conflicts—by increasing competition among local groups and opening space for violence.<sup>120</sup> These risks

may be heightened when decentralization efforts are not accompanied by reforms in the security sector. In **Colombia**, for example, a 1990s strategy of “pacification through decentralization” backfired. Irregular armed groups took advantage of weak local governments and increased access to local resources, leading to an escalation rather than a reduction in violence.<sup>121</sup> In such cases, “asymmetrical decentralization”—where reforms are introduced only in areas with sufficient security—has been suggested as a safer approach.<sup>122</sup> A similar pattern occurred in **Mali**, where decentralization aimed to reduce conflict but faced pushback from both central and regional elites.<sup>123</sup> Weak security reforms, especially in the north, allowed insecurity to grow and former combatants to align with trafficking networks. By 2010, state collusion with organized crime had deeply eroded public trust and government legitimacy.<sup>124</sup>

In contrast, efforts to extend state presence in underserved areas, particularly through security institutions, have shown promise in some contexts. In **Lebanon**, for example, the government deployed additional armed forces along the border to address frequent clashes and the rise of self-defence groups. However, this approach soon highlighted the need for a more community-focused strategy: investment in municipal police became essential to reduce dependence on the military, whose presence was generating local tensions.<sup>125</sup> In **Liberia**, an innovative system of regional justice and security hubs was launched in the early 2010s with UN Peacebuilding Fund support. The goal was to improve access to the police in rural areas and strengthen trust between communities and security actors. While some hubs faced operational challenges, studies show that improved police presence led to stronger property rights, lower crime rates, and higher reporting of incidents.<sup>126</sup>

Negotiated peace settlements frequently encounter their most significant challenges when the political agreements are implemented and extended at the local level across the country.<sup>127</sup> In many contexts, the security challenges faced outside of major cities differ markedly from those in urban centres, yet SSG/R efforts do not systematically engage with these. This urban bias extends to civil society organisations, which are expected to play a key role in highlighting threats to vulnerable populations but frequently lack strong roots or representation in remote areas.<sup>128</sup> A people-centred approach to SSG/R will only gain credibility if it meaningfully engages with the risks and grievances identified at the local level.

This requires intentional reorientation—starting from the assessment phase and continuing through implementation—toward greater inclusion of rural and peripheral communities.

While strengthening local-level security delivery is essential, it comes with significant challenges. First, conducting risk and grievance assessments at the local—rather than national—level demands contextual expertise, time, and funding that are not always readily available. Supporting the development of national security policies and strategies can serve as a useful entry point, as it opens space for local consultations and reflection on the distribution of security responsibilities across different levels of government.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, ombuds institutions for the security sector—through their grievance mechanisms—can generate valuable data that sheds light on patterns of exclusion or abuse that may be overlooked by other channels.

Second, extending the reach of security and justice institutions into underserved areas depends not only on political will but also on the broader development of basic infrastructure and services. Without these, the deployment of national or international personnel becomes unsustainable. Liberia’s experience illustrates this: more than half the staff at one regional justice and security hub left their posts in 2012 due to a failed water system.<sup>130</sup> Years later, the situation remained precarious—dozens of police officers departed citing hunger, lack of electricity, and the absence of safe drinking water or stipends.<sup>131</sup> In such conditions, security personnel may resort to exploiting the population to meet their basic needs, deepening existing grievances or creating new ones. These examples underscore **the importance of integrated programming that bridges the security and development sectors to ensure that efforts to expand access to justice and security are viable and sustainable.**

## 4.4. Engaging with Hybrid Security Governance Arrangements

For SSG/R to meaningfully contribute to prevention, it must engage with the realities of hybrid security governance. This concept refers to the interplay between formal and informal security actors—including customary justice mechanisms, community protection groups, militias, and private security firms—and how these relationships shape both state and individual security. It moves beyond the

simplistic dichotomy of state versus non-state actors and instead acknowledges the complexity of overlapping authorities, norms, and providers of protection in fragile and conflict-affected settings.<sup>132</sup>

In many cases non-state security actors fill critical gaps where the formal security sector lacks reach or legitimacy. Their involvement can in some instances enhance access to justice and security. In others, it can exacerbate violence and deepen inequality, especially in fragile contexts which are often characterized by reduced weak oversight mechanisms.<sup>133</sup> For instance, in **Burkina Faso**, the state's failure to address insecurity led to the formation of self-defense groups, known as "*Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie*" (VDP). While these groups were legally established to support counterterrorism efforts, they have reportedly committed significant human rights abuses against ethnic groups, fueling grievances and contributing to cycles of violence now exploited by jihadist groups.<sup>134</sup>

Hybrid security arrangements can also foster **competition over resources**, creating additional sources of tension (e.g. **Kenya**). In some fragile contexts, such competition has made some non-state actors active spoilers of reform, resisting accountability mechanisms that threaten their power. Consequently, efforts to engage non-state security actors in hybrid security arrangements with the state will need to address the vested economic interests of security actors in sustaining a certain level of insecurity and weak state presence.<sup>135</sup> This highlights the risk of international support for informal providers inadvertently reinforcing predatory interests, particularly where such efforts lack a robust understanding of the political economy.<sup>136</sup>

At the same time, in some contexts, engaging non-state actors in security governance can foster trust between communities and the state. These actors often operate in areas with limited state presence, so their involvement in security provision in remote or underserved regions can help mitigate feelings of neglect and marginalization. In the **DRC**, for example, informal security cooperatives emerged at mining sites to fill gaps left by state providers. With civil society support, some have developed collaborative relationships with local police, participating in joint meetings to resolve tensions.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, in the **Philippines**, proximity and local knowledge have enabled non-state actors to address grievances before they escalate.

Meaningful engagement with hybrid arrangements through a prevention lens requires in-depth political economy analysis to understand who benefits from the status quo, what incentives drive behavior, and how interventions may shift local power dynamics—including the representativeness and legitimacy of informal actors in relation to marginalized groups.<sup>138</sup> This is particularly important in fragile and remote areas, where hybrid arrangements are most common and least understood. In **Burkina Faso**, for instance, the evolving relationship between VDPs and the government—from cooperation to growing disillusionment—illustrates just how fluid such arrangements can be, and how vital it is to continuously revisit assumptions about their role and relevance.

However, international actors often struggle to move beyond formal state institutions. UN entities have worked with non-state armed groups, especially in DDR processes. These groups are often seen as temporary actors to be absorbed into the state or disbanded.<sup>139</sup> But comprehensive engagement with non-state security providers remains limited and often overlooks the fact that many informal providers hold real power and influence in communities, and have their own interests which may not serve all groups equally.<sup>140</sup>

Viewing SSG/R through the lens of hybrid governance helps refocus attention on how security is provided in practice, and by whom. This perspective supports a genuinely people-centred approach by acknowledging the role of both state and non-state actors in delivering security and justice. To support more constructive forms of hybrid security governance, SSG/R efforts—grounded in political economy analysis—should prioritise the facilitation of dialogue and coordination between state and non-state actors. Improving such coordination has been shown to reduce the risk of local violence and conflict and improve public perceptions of government.<sup>141</sup> This includes trust-building efforts like community dialogues, as well as oversight and accountability mechanisms—such as complaints systems and frameworks that clarify roles and responsibilities. Legal and policy recognition of non-state actors can also help formalize hybrid arrangements and ensure they operate within the rule of law. **Ultimately, however, efforts should be made to ensure both state and non-state security actors are held to the same standards of good governance, including accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness.**

# 5. Policy Directions to Elevate SSG/R in Prevention Efforts

A strategic shift is needed in how SSG/R is approached to embrace its role as a core prevention tool grounded in inclusive governance, tailored to context, and informed by risk.

## 5.1. Position SSG/R as a Strategic Prevention Tool

Country experiences point to key lessons for more effective prevention through SSG/R that challenge conventional approaches and call for a more strategic and integrated agenda that fully leverages the security sector's potential.

### From Crisis Response to Structural Prevention

SSG/R is at times framed as a means to strengthen crisis response or counter instability, particularly by addressing immediate threats and stabilization needs.<sup>142</sup> Yet this narrow focus overlooks the security sector's potential to address deeper, structural drivers of violence—such as exclusion, inequality, and perceived injustice. Moreover, international security assistance that focuses narrowly on operational capability, without strengthening oversight and accountability, risks entrenching the very dynamics that fuel insecurity.<sup>143</sup>

While the security sector plays a critical role in crisis response and efforts to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, short-term fixes must not come at the expense of the longer-term goal of strengthening good governance.<sup>144</sup> To contribute meaningfully to structural prevention efforts, SSG/R must be rooted in inclusive governance. Security institutions should be designed and supported in ways that reinforce legitimacy, trust, and social cohesion over time.

### From Sector-Specific to System-Wide Influence

The influence of the security sector on grievances that fuel violence extends far beyond its traditional remit of providing – or limiting – access to security and justice.

**Security institutions are deeply embedded in the political economy of violence and conflict—they help shape access to power, land, resources, and basic services.** As such, they influence all four arenas of contestation identified in the UN–World Bank Pathways for Peace report. A narrow focus on the sector's role in maintaining public order risks overlooking its broader, systemic impact on peace and stability.

Security actors may, for example, determine the extent to which populations can safely participate in political processes, either safeguarding civic space, or enabling its closure through intimidation and violence. In land and natural resource disputes, they can act as protectors of rights or as enablers of dispossession, depending on the political interests they serve. Their presence or absence in delivering secure access to services such as education, health care, or water infrastructure directly affects how communities perceive the state, especially in marginalized or contested territories.

This broader influence underscores the **need to move beyond siloed approaches to prevention. Policymakers must expand their understanding of how the security sector interacts with other sectors and shapes risk across the system.** Doing so opens space for more integrated, upstream prevention strategies that leverage the security sector's reach to contribute to risk or resilience factors across different domains. This also calls for more systematic consideration of how security sector governance can contribute to addressing specific challenges related to prevention—adopting a more problem-solving approach that actively includes security sector actors as part of wider, multisectoral solutions.

### From Risk Actor to Source of Resilience

In many fragile and conflict-affected settings, security institutions are sources of abuse, corruption, or political manipulation. While these risks are real, there is also growing evidence that, when properly governed and accountable, the security sector can serve as a critical foundation for rebuilding trust between the state and society.

**Reframing the security sector from a source of risk to a potential driver of societal resilience is a necessary step toward more effective engagement.**<sup>145</sup> Through effective SSG/R, the sector can help mediate tensions before they escalate, deliver justice and security fairly, and uphold the rule of law in ways that foster confidence and legitimacy. Realizing this potential requires a deliberate shift in how SSG/R is conceived and implemented. Reform processes should be designed to embed mechanisms that foster effectiveness and accountability, prevent elite capture, and promote inclusive service delivery.

## From Siloed to Integrated Security and Development Approaches

Efforts to prevent violence are frequently undermined by the persistent disconnect between security and development agendas. The country-level experiences reviewed show that without deliberate alignment, development initiatives often falter in the very contexts where they are most needed. For instance, roads, schools, health centres, or water systems—critical to addressing inequality and marginalization—are difficult to build or sustain in areas where security institutions are ineffective or predatory.

To meet the complexity of today's fragile settings, policy and programming must move beyond parallel tracks.

**Prevention depends on integrated strategies that jointly address security and development challenges—with SSG/R at the core of that convergence.** The security sector must be treated as a core component of the public sector, subject to the same principles of good governance. Strengthening its governance dimensions is not only a peacebuilding imperative—it is also essential to enabling sustainable development. Doing so requires predictable and sustained investment, including **greater engagement with international financial institutions to reinforce national capacities.**<sup>146</sup> At the same time, ensuring adequate, long-term financing for governance-focused reforms should be recognized as a foundational enabler of both peace and development outcomes.<sup>147</sup>

## 5.2. Use Risk as the Starting Point for SSG/R Engagement

SSG/R engagement continues to rely heavily on assessments that focus on institutional needs—such as legal frameworks and oversight bodies—rather than on identifying and addressing the actual sources of violence-related

risk. While these elements are relevant, they often fail to capture the political economy of reform, including the interests of those who may resist change.<sup>148</sup> To prioritize SSG/R efforts through a prevention lens, assessments must move from a compliance-based approach to one that examines how security governance affects risks for violence in practice. This means analyzing how issues such as corruption, exclusion, or coercive practices shape grievances and undermine public trust.

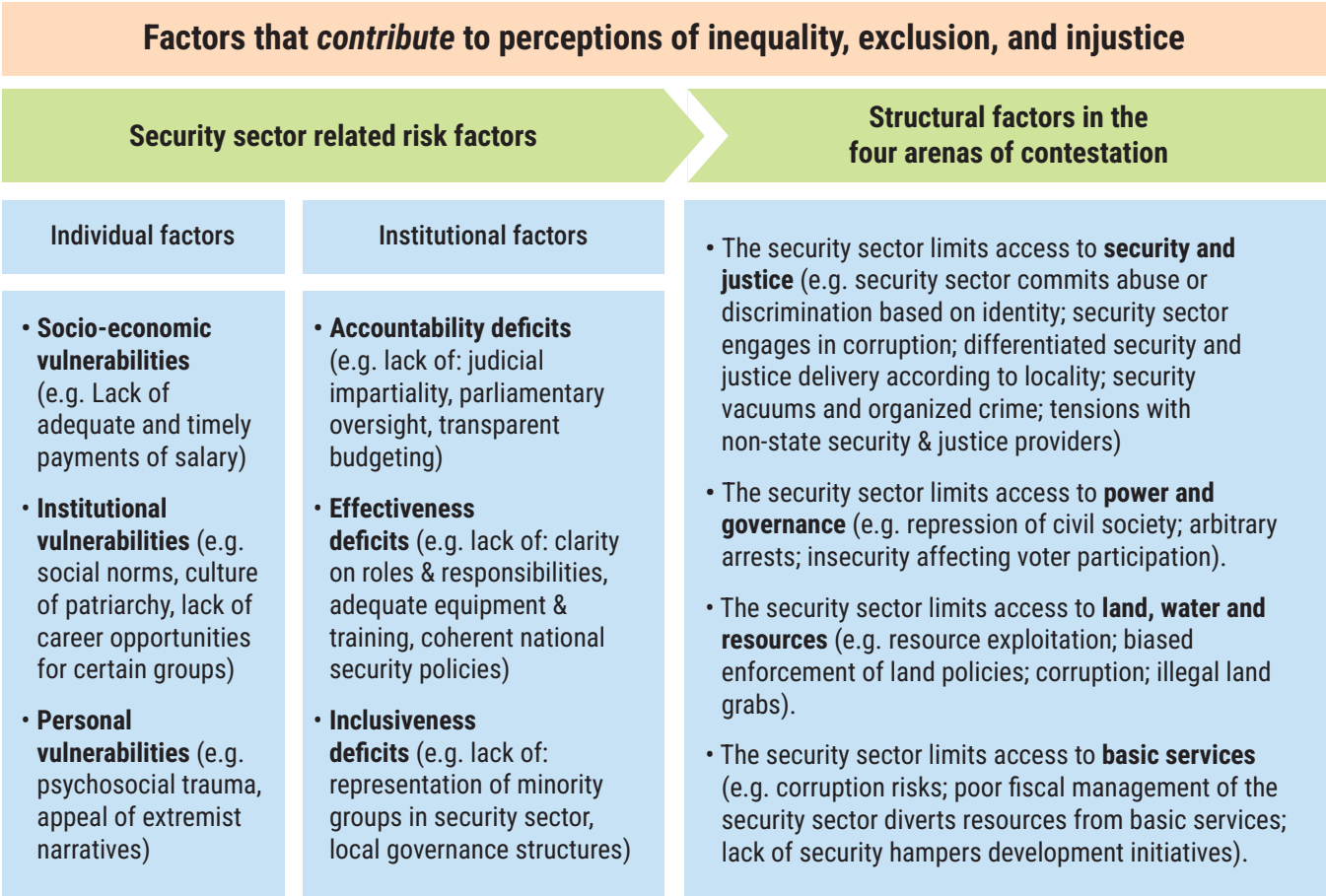
Existing frameworks often focus on national- or sectoral-level risks, while overlooking localized or individual-level dynamics. Yet risks frequently manifest differently in rural vs. urban areas, or in peripheral regions vs. capital cities. For instance, rural areas may grapple with land disputes and state absence, while urban settings face organized crime or youth violence. Grievances and violence tend to be more pronounced in border and peripheral regions, necessitating targeted attention. Effective assessments must therefore disaggregate risk factors by geography and social context.<sup>149</sup>

To apply a prevention lens, security sector assessments should begin by identifying their intersection with broader **structural** drivers of violence—such as inequality, exclusion, and perceptions of injustice. Understanding these systemic risks provides a foundation for assessing how the security sector contributes to or mitigates them.

**Institutional** risks—such as corruption, lack of accountability, and discriminatory practices—should be analyzed in relation to broader structural conditions to better understand how they contribute to grievances and erode public trust. Applying a governance lens can help connect the dots between institutional deficits and structural risks. While accountability and effectiveness are necessary, exclusionary practices or uneven service provision can also fuel violence and mistrust. Inclusive service delivery should therefore be seen as central to prevention. The UN ECOSOC principles of governance offer a useful framework which not only focuses on accountability and effectiveness, but also highlights inclusion as a key principle:

- Accountability (e.g., integrity, transparency, independent oversight)
- Effectiveness (e.g., competence, evidence-based policy, inter-agency collaboration)
- Inclusion (e.g., leaving no one behind, participation, non-discrimination)

Figure 2. Categories of security sector related risk factors



Finally, at the **individual** level, factors such as trauma, cognitive biases, and personal motivations of security personnel also shape the risk landscape. The vulnerabilities faced by security actors—such as poor working conditions—can influence their behavior in ways that either reduce or escalate violence. For example, delayed or unpaid salaries are a recognized push factor, often driving personnel to seek alternative, sometimes violent, means of survival.<sup>150</sup> A comprehensive risk assessment framework must integrate these individual-level factors, recognizing their impact on security sector behavior and governance outcomes.

### 5.3. Integrate the Security Sector into Risk and Resilience Assessments

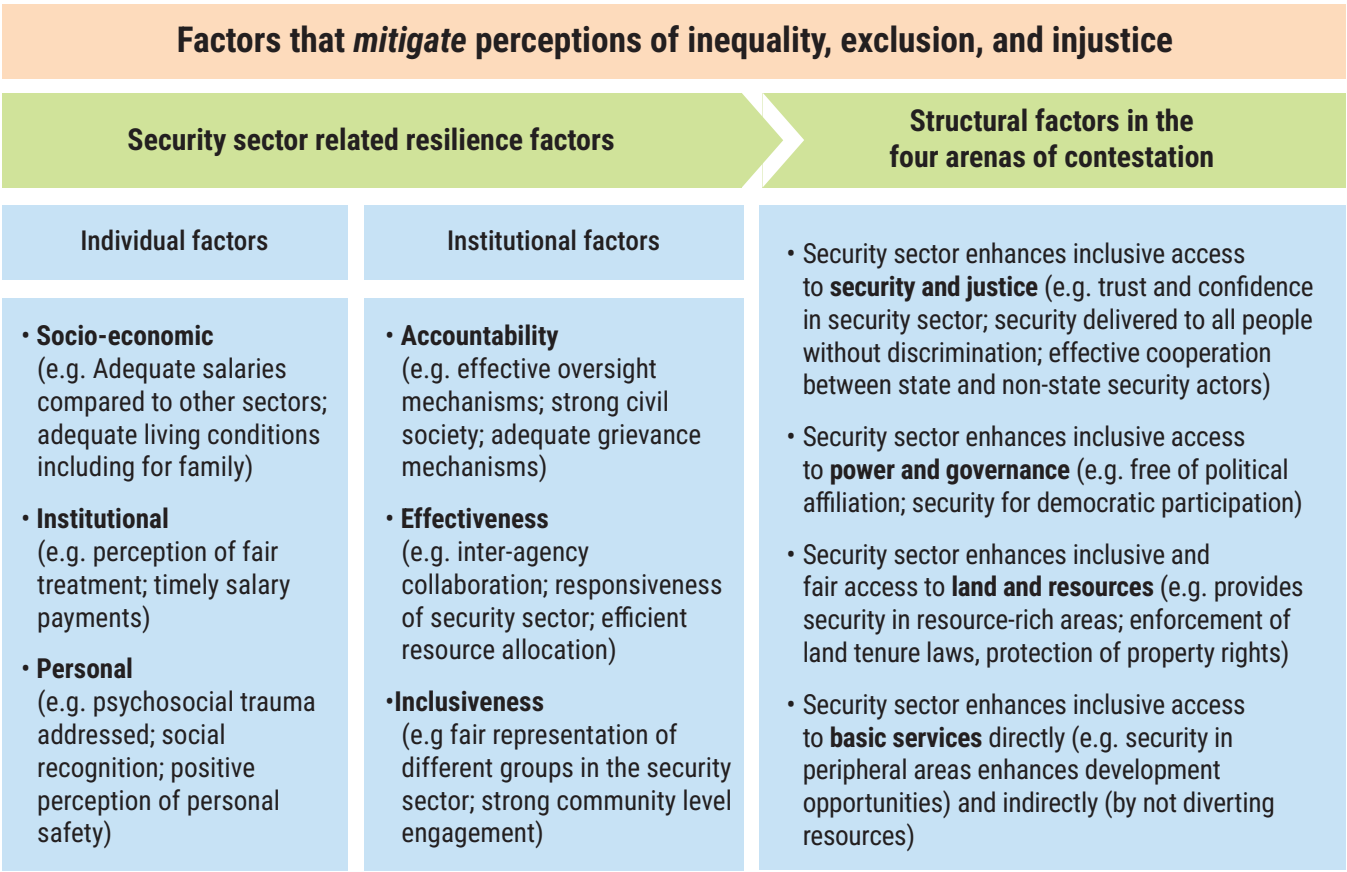
Efforts to prevent violence and instability are undermined when the good governance of the security sector is overlooked in risk and resilience assessments. Yet across institutions such as the United Nations and the World

Bank, analysis of security sector risks remains fragmented and inconsistent.

For example, while the UN’s Common Country Analysis includes internal security issues, it often neglects how security sector dynamics shape broader risks.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, the World Bank’s Risk and Resilience Assessments rarely examine the security sector’s role in fragility in a systematic way. Even when such risks are flagged, they are often absent from follow-up frameworks such as Country Partnership Frameworks—missing opportunities to align public sector reform with peace and development priorities.

This disconnect has real consequences. **Without integrating SSG/R, these assessments risk reinforcing narrow or misleading narratives**—for example, framing a conflict as ethnic when underlying issues involve corruption, repression, or unaccountable armed actors.<sup>152</sup> A more deliberate integration of SSG/R would not only improve the accuracy and depth of risk analysis, but also strengthen the relevance of development and peacebuilding strategies.

Figure 3. Categories of security sector related resilience factors



To address these blind spots, existing risk assessment tools must be adapted to include core dimensions of security sector governance—such as accountability, effectiveness, and inclusiveness. Doing so would enable the UN, the World Bank, and other actors to better anticipate governance breakdowns and target preventive efforts more effectively.

5.4. Design SSG/R Programmes Around Context-Specific Risks and Opportunities

For SSG/R to meaningfully contribute to prevention, it must be designed around the specific risks that drive violence in a given context. A broad definition of prevention—as addressing all root causes of violence—can blur the line between prevention and wider peacebuilding.<sup>153</sup> This vagueness has led to the rebranding of existing programs without real shifts in design or outcomes, undermining both credibility and impact. Prevention must be more than a label—it requires programming that is tightly aligned with context-specific risk factors.

Understanding these risks requires moving beyond surface-level analysis. Generic reforms, even if governance based, will not reduce violence unless they address the specific sources of exclusion, abuse, or dysfunction. For example, a lack of access to security services may stem from poor infrastructure, political exclusion, mismanagement, or demotivated personnel. Each root cause calls for a different type of intervention—from improving planning, to addressing ethnic discrimination or corrupt deployment practices. Without this level of specificity, SSG/R programming risks missing the mark.

Context also varies across geographies and institutions. Security actors may play stabilizing roles in some areas and exacerbate tensions in others. Governments may work collaboratively with certain armed groups while repressing others.<sup>154</sup> In such complex environments, SSG/R must be adaptable and rooted in evolving local political economy dynamics.

One often overlooked risk is corruption within the security sector, which fuels impunity and erodes trust, especially in post-conflict settings. Despite its clear role

in perpetuating violence, corruption frequently receives insufficient attention in SSG/R efforts.<sup>155</sup> A similar gap is visible when it comes to criminal economies. In the Sahel, SSG/R programs have often focused narrowly on terrorism, ignoring the broader criminal economies that drive insecurity and make youth vulnerable to extremism.<sup>156</sup> **SSG/R programmes must be grounded in evidence-based risk analysis to ensure they target the real drivers of violence, rather than symptoms or politically convenient threats.**

SSG/R is also most impactful when aligned with **critical junctures**, such as elections, constitutional reforms, or DDR processes—moments when security sector risks are elevated due to possible shifts in power and resource distribution. Elections, in particular, are flashpoints where politicization of the security sector can trigger violence. SSG/R can help depoliticize security forces, promote professional crowd management, and ensure public trust in electoral security. Similarly, linking SSG/R to DDR processes can help prevent relapse into violence by providing viable roles and livelihoods for ex-combatants. However, without clear harmonisation criteria, vetting procedures, robust oversight, and meaningful alternatives for those not integrated, such linkages risk reinforcing impunity, corruption and competing allegiances within the security sector—undermining broader peace-building efforts.

To deliver real prevention outcomes, SSG/R must be rooted in real-time, risk-informed analysis, and responsive to the context-specific political, social, and institutional conditions that shape violence. This requires understanding and addressing the cultural and social norms that influence how security actors exercise authority, make decisions, and relate to communities. Without engaging these underlying dynamics, programmes risk entrenching harmful practices or missing key levers for more accountable and inclusive security provision.

## 5.5. Integrate SSG/R into National Prevention Strategies

The *Pact for the Future*'s call for the development of national prevention strategies presents a critical opportunity to promote a more integrated and effective approach to preventing violence. **An integrated approach is essential because different forms of violence—political, criminal,**

**intercommunal, and gender-based—often intersect and reinforce one another.** These overlapping dynamics can deepen cycles of insecurity and fuel recruitment into armed groups. For example, gender-based violence, especially when committed by security actors, can drive individuals—particularly women and girls—to join armed movements in search of protection. Similarly, links between petty crime, radicalization, and terrorism underscore how marginalization and lack of trust in institutions can push individuals toward violence. Since many risk factors—such as social exclusion or weak governance—are common across different types of violence, siloed interventions are not only ineffective but also inefficient.<sup>157</sup>

However, in practice, SSG/R is often siloed from other prevention initiatives—both at the national and international levels. Different institutional mandates, funding streams, and programming cycles mean that SSG/R, PVE, and broader violence prevention programs are rarely coordinated. This fragmentation undermines effectiveness. For instance, a review of the role of the security sector in the prevention of violent extremism found that security and defense actors are not always included in the formulation of PVE policies,<sup>158</sup> even though heavy-handed or abusive security practices are known to drive violent extremism. Similarly, SSG/R programs often overlook opportunities to connect with youth-led prevention efforts, missing chances to build broader social resilience.

Overcoming this fragmentation requires integrated policy frameworks that embed SSG/R into national prevention architectures. This means ensuring that SSG/R is included in national strategies for violence prevention – whether formalized in an independent document or reflected across individual prevention strategies on issues such as PVE to GBV.<sup>159</sup> This also requires closer coordination between SSG/R actors and those working on governance reform, economic development, and human rights. Without such integration, national prevention strategies risk falling short—treating symptoms of insecurity while neglecting critical enablers of violence within the security sector itself. Embedding SSG/R into prevention frameworks offers a path to more effective, inclusive, and sustainable prevention outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

Not all grievances escalate into violence—but when they do, the security sector often plays a pivotal role in shaping those trajectories. Prevention therefore demands close attention to how institutions, especially the security sector, shape people’s daily experiences of safety, justice, equality, and inclusion. In one context, violence may be triggered by ethnic exclusion; in another, it may be abusive security practices or the persistent absence of security services. **Overlooking the security sector in prevention strategies is not just a blind spot—it is a missed opportunity to build more resilient and peaceful societies.**

From Burkina Faso to Libya and from Colombia to Kyrgyzstan, experience demonstrates that when left unchecked, the security sector can be instrumentalized to entrench power, suppress dissent, or perpetuate impunity. But when governed effectively, it can also become a critical vehicle for inclusion, accountability, and trust-building. More than mitigating harm, SSG/R can help forge a new social contract—broadening access to justice and security and fostering democratic participation. In this way, the security sector can be reshaped from a potential source of grievance into a foundational pillar of national resilience.

A common thread across the diverse cases examined in this paper is the central importance of good governance in the security sector. To enable meaningful transformation, four priority areas must be addressed: balancing accountability and effectiveness to deliver security services that are both capable and trusted; embedding inclusion at all levels of decision-making and service delivery; engaging with hybrid security governance where non-state security actors play a role in people’s daily safety; and addressing regional inequalities and local governance gaps. Taken together, **these priorities point to a revitalized approach to security sector governance—one that, through a prevention lens, values not only effectiveness and accountability, but also inclusiveness.**

Crucially, prevention is not a buzzword. It’s a discipline. It demands intention, analysis, and action. Support programmes cannot be labelled “preventive” unless they are explicitly linked to risk-informed strategies and a clear

theory of change. Effective prevention requires rigorous, context-specific analysis of the structural, institutional, and individual risk factors that contribute to violence. If a risk assessment points to limited access to security in a given region, the next step is to diagnose the underlying cause: is it due to weak infrastructure, resource constraints, systemic exclusion, or institutional failure? Are security actors absent because of insecurity, political or ethnic bias, or lack of operational incentive? Each scenario demands a distinct, evidence-based response—tailored to the underlying dynamics.

Moreover, risk factors evolve. Prevention strategies must therefore be dynamic, not static, updated regularly through monitoring and grounded in participatory analysis. The call for national prevention strategies in the *Pact for the Future* presents a crucial opportunity to more meaningfully integrate SSG/R into prevention efforts. These strategies must not treat the security sector as peripheral or siloed. Instead, they should recognize its relevance across a range of prevention goals—linking SSG/R with related agendas such as preventing violent extremism, addressing gender-based violence, and strengthening social cohesion.

In sum, meaningful and lasting violence prevention requires a shift from short-term, fragmented interventions toward cohesive strategies that place security sector governance and reform at the core of resilience-building. Delivering on this potential, however, demands more than good intentions. It requires predictable, long-term financing, as well as the expertise, tools and systems needed to prioritize, implement, and monitor reforms. Above all, it demands sustained political will and a willingness to invest political capital for long-term gains. Without these enabling conditions, even the best-designed SSG/R efforts are unlikely to shift the dial on prevention.

# Endnotes

- 1 The OECD *States of Fragility 2025* report notes that “violence of all types is rising as support for prevention diminishes,” and further highlights that “deaths from violence continue to rise,” alongside persistently high levels of gender-based violence worldwide. OECD (2025) “States of Fragility 2025”, OECD Publishing, Paris, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/81982370-en>. Violence related to organized crime is also increasing in many contexts; see for example: Europol (2025), European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment - The changing DNA of serious and organised crime, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Violent extremism is similarly recognized as rising, as detailed in: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The Dynamics of Violent Extremism in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2023, Available at: <https://www.undp.org/blog/dynamics-violent-extremism-sub-saharan-africa>
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- 3 The New Agenda for Peace calls for “a more deliberate and explicitly universal approach to the prevention of conflict and violence [...]”. See, United Nations (2023) “New Agenda for Peace”, p. 10, Available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/08/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-peace-en.pdf>. Similarly, the Pact for the Future recognizes that “Member States bear the primary responsibility for preventing conflict and building peace in their countries [...]”. See United Nations (2024), “The Pact for the Future”, p. 14, Available at: [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_adopted.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf)
- 4 Target 16.1 seeks to ‘significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere’ and includes an Indicator (16.1.2) on ‘conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause’. For information, see: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>
- 5 “States of Fragility 2025”.
- 6 In this paper, upstream prevention refers to efforts that address the root causes of violence—such as inequality, exclusion, and weak governance—before tensions escalate into crises or conflict.
- 7 While this paper seeks to disaggregate the roles of different security sector components where possible, such as police or armed forces, the term ‘security sector’ is used more broadly when making the general point that it must be included as a key actor in prevention efforts. For the purposes of this paper, the security sector includes “defence, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services and institutions responsible for border management, customs and civil emergencies”. It also includes elements of the criminal justice sector, as well as relevant oversight actors and non-state security actors. See UN Secretary-General’s Report on “Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform”, 23 January 2008.
- 8 The goal of security sector reform is to apply the principles of good governance to the security sector. Some actors now use the term ‘security sector governance and reform’. UN Security Council Resolution 2553, for instance, refers to support for ‘security sector governance and reform activities’. See: [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/s\\_res\\_2553\\_2020-en.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/s_res_2553_2020-en.pdf)
- 9 UN Security Council Resolution 2151 notes that ‘an effective, professional and accountable security sector without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law is the cornerstone of peace and sustainable development and is important for conflict prevention’. See: [https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2151\(2014\)](https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2151(2014))
- 10 The DCAF research project drew on a literature review, national expert questionnaires covering 12 countries, five in-depth case studies, and interviews with UN staff. The countries examined in the questionnaires include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, Guinea-Bissau, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Nepal, and the Philippines. Additionally, the literature review was expanded to include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Nigeria.

- 11 Debates continue over whether greed or grievance is the predominant driver of conflict. Some actors may exploit legitimate grievances to justify actions driven primarily by greed.
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- 25 This figure summarises the key tenets of each arena of contestation, and relevant tensions in each arena, as per the UN-WB Pathways for Peace report. See: UN & WB "Pathways for Peace", Chapter 5.
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