

## **Security sector reform interventions: row summary**

**Security sector reform – notably the transition to from international to local security forces - show a small effect on violence and perceived security. There is also improved peaceful resolution, though the effect is also small.**

Security sector reform aims to improve how governments provide safety, security, and justice through actors such as police, military forces, customs, and correctional services, as well as oversight bodies.

In the included studies in this row, interventions fell into three main types. First, peace operation and stabilization strategies that sequence security and development tasks, including security only approaches, sequential approaches, and simultaneous approaches. Second, security transition reforms that transfer security provision from international forces to local forces, specifically the handover from the International Security Assistance Force to the Afghan National Security Forces in Afghanistan. Third, community level reforms that seek to replace or prevent a return to rebel governance by improving coordination between state and communal authorities, exemplified by Colombia's ComunPaz program, which worked with police, Police Inspectors, and local community action bodies.

These interventions are expected to work by increasing the capability and legitimacy of state security providers, strengthening oversight and coordination, and reducing the opportunity for armed groups to govern or use violence. Peace operation strategies that prioritize establishing order may reduce conflict recurrence by limiting insurgent capacity and giving state institutions time to consolidate. Transitions from international forces to local forces may improve perceptions of security and legitimacy when communities see local forces present and effective, but they can also fail if local capacity or impartiality is weak. Programs like ComunPaz aim to improve everyday justice and dispute resolution by clarifying roles, building trust through structured interaction, and creating practical coordination routes between state authorities and local community institutions.

The evidence base includes six studies overall, with three impact evaluations contributing effect sizes for violence and atrocity outcomes, one impact evaluation for perceived physical security, and one randomized trial for dispute resolution outcomes.

Reported pooled effects are generally small or very small, and some outcomes show null results. Where interventions were implemented as a package, it is not always possible to attribute impacts to a single reform component.

- Nature and scale of violence or atrocities:  $g = 0.05$  (Small effect); 3 studies, 22 effect sizes. Across peace operation strategy comparisons and two country studies, pooled impacts suggest a small average reduction in violence related outcomes. Security only and sequential strategies were more successful at conflict termination and sustaining peace than simultaneous strategies in the non experimental comparison. In Colombia, ComunPaz reduced unresolved and violent

disputes at the community level, while household level outcomes and resident reports showed little change and some estimates were not statistically significant. In Afghanistan, violence intensity was estimated to decline by around ten percent after Afghan forces assumed responsibility, but this transition occurred alongside other changes, including the broader drawdown of international forces.

- Physical security perceptions:  $g = 0.01$  (Little or no effect); 1 study, 13 effect sizes. In Afghanistan, the transfer of control from international forces to Afghan forces was associated with modest improvements in perceived security and perceived legitimacy of Afghan forces. The average effect is very small, and ongoing risks such as limited local capacity and Taliban influence were interpreted to mean that perceived improvements may not translate into sustained security gains.
- Diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution:  $g = 0.02$  (Little or no effect); 1 study, 5 effect sizes. ComunPaz produced a very small average improvement in consensus around dispute resolution and understanding of local authority, and the evaluation found no clear change in agreement on major disputes between treatment and control groups. Some leader reported indicators suggested improved coordination between state and communal authorities, but these improvements did not consistently translate into broader community wide consensus.
- Qualitative and review evidence (no pooled effect size): Two qualitative studies and one systematic review provide contextual insights. The systematic review of studies on security and policing practices in urban violence reported mixed findings, including that some public security platforms and heavy handed policing approaches were associated with reductions in violence in the included studies, but the underlying studies were described as low quality and results were not consistent across contexts.

Overall confidence is low. Effect estimates come from a small number of studies, often from single country settings, with limited ability to separate the effects of specific reform components from other concurrent changes, such as broader military drawdowns or complementary governance activities. Several studies were rated low confidence due to limitations such as incomplete outcome reporting, missing information on attrition, and non experimental designs. Findings also vary by strategy and level of analysis, for example community level dispute reductions without corresponding household level change, suggesting that impacts may be context dependent and may not generalize across settings or across different reform designs.

**Reported effect sizes (Hedges g)**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Effect size g</b>	<b>Magnitude</b>	<b>Number of studies</b>	<b>Number of effect sizes</b>
Nature and scale of violence or atrocities	0.05	Small effect	3	22
Diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution	0.02	Little or no effect	1	5
Physical security perceptions	0.01	Little or no effect	1	13
Qualitative studies on security sector reform and violence outcomes		Not reported	2	0
Systematic review of security and policing practices and urban violence		Not reported	1	0