

The effect of policing and public security on political security

Increased police presence at polling centers had a small effect on fear of attacks but corresponded with a decline in voter turnout.

Geographical region: Middle East and North Africa

Effect size: Small effect ($g=0.034$)

Confidence in study findings: Medium (1 study with 2 effect sizes)

Short summary

Enhanced policing and public security measures, such as increased police presence, do not appear to substantially improve perceptions of political security. In Afghanistan, increased police deployments at polling centers had a small and insignificant effect on fear of attacks. Moreover, the heightened security presence corresponded with a 30% reduction in voter turnout.

Long summary

The intervention

Policing and public security measures, such as increased police presence, were deployed during Afghanistan's 2010 parliamentary elections to safeguard voting processes and deter insurgent violence. The intervention aimed to protect civilians and polling stations, ensuring higher electoral participation. However, widespread public perception of the Afghan National Police as corrupt and abusive diminished trust in these forces, indirectly discouraging citizens from voting.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Heightened policing and public security measures aim to improve political security by addressing insecurity and reducing fear of attacks. The presence of law enforcement at polling centers is expected to deter violence, creating a safer environment that encourages voter turnout and participation in political processes. However, the intervention assumes that the public perceives security forces as legitimate and trustworthy. In contexts like Afghanistan's 2010 elections, public mistrust of law enforcement—due to perceptions of corruption and abuse—can undermine these efforts.

The evidence base

The cell includes 1 impact evaluation study. The setting of the study is Afghanistan.

Evidence findings

Increased police presence at polling centers had a small, insignificant effect on perceived insecurity or fear of attacks. However, it is linked to approximately 30% decline in voter turnout compared to polling centers with lower levels of security. This decrease appears to be driven more by citizens' desire to avoid interactions with corrupt police officers than by concerns that heightened security signaled greater violence.

Included studies

Condra et al. (2019) examine the effect of security provisions in Afghanistan where the government deployed varying levels of Afghan National Police to polling centers to safeguard against insurgent violence. This intervention aimed to secure the election process and enhance public trust in the government amidst a backdrop of significant pre-election violence and concerns about insurgent attacks. The study utilized a quasi-experimental design, leveraging the unintentional variation in police deployment across polling centers with similar histories of violence. This allowed the researchers to isolate the effects of police presence on voter turnout. Data sources included internal government records, event-level violence data, certified voter turnout numbers, and pre- and post-election survey data from potential voters. Findings revealed that increased police presence at polling centers led to a significant decrease in voter turnout, averaging a 30% reduction compared to centers with fewer police. This decrease was not attributed to voter anticipation of election-day violence but rather to negative perceptions of the police as corrupt and predatory, which discouraged voter interaction with security forces. The study is rated as medium confidence as it is non-experimental.

Confidence assessment

Overall low: This cell is rated overall low as it only contains 1 study.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention / nature and scale of violence and atrocities

Community and state governance / government performance

Policing and public security / presence and quality of social safety nets