

Effect of Security sector reform on Physical security

Security sector reform interventions had a small effect on improving perceptions of physical security.

Geographical region: South Asia

Effect: Small effect ($g=0.013$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (1 study with 13 effect sizes)

Short summary

The cell studied a quasi-experimental study in Afghanistan examined the security transition during the conclusion of NATO's Operation Enduring Freedom, focusing on the transfer of control from ISAF to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the withdrawal of foreign troops. Over three years, all Afghan districts transitioned to ANSF control. While challenges such as limited local capacity and Taliban influence persisted, the transition improved perceptions of security and ANSF legitimacy.

Long summary

The intervention

The study assessed two main phases of the security transition during the conclusion of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan: (1) the transfer of control from ISAF to ANSF, and (2) the physical withdrawal of ISAF troops. During the occupation, NATO coordinated the training and equipping of Afghan police and military forces. Planning for the transition began in 2010, formally announced in 2011, and executed in five tranches across all districts over three years.

How the intervention is expected to work

Security transitions shift the provision of policing and military operations from well-trained foreign forces to local forces, who may lack experience, legitimacy, or impartiality. Despite these risks, the study found that respondents perceived improvements in security after the ANSF assumed control. Villagers reported more frequent presence of the Afghan National Army (ANA), perceived the Taliban as weakened, and felt that ANSF provided security in their area. These findings suggest that formal transfer of security responsibilities contributes positively to perceived safety.

The evidence base

The cell contains 1 impact evaluation designed as quasi-experimental study design. The IE study was conducted in Afghanistan (1).

Evidence findings

The security sector reform intervention produced a small improvement in perceived security. While positive, the evidence is limited to one study, and the effect size is modest. There is 1 impact evaluation in the cell and evidence summaries of the study are thus provided here:

Included studies

Fetzer (2021) assessed the recent large-scale security transition from international troops to local forces in the ongoing civil conflict in Afghanistan. Characteristic of other foreign military interventions, the occupation of ISAF displaced the incumbent regime and assisted in the installation of an ostensibly democratic government in 2001. During the occupation, foreign forces coordinated under the auspices of NATO helped train and equip local police and military forces. Planning for the transition of security provision from ISAF to Afghan forces began as early as 2010, and was formally announced in 2011. The transition was staggered, and

coordinated around administrative districts. Over three years, and five transition tranches, all of Afghanistan's districts were transferred from ISAF to Afghan control. The study was designed as a quasi-experimental design. The study used digital placemats from ISAF archives to link districts to Regional Commands, and classified districts using a standardized administrative map compiled by the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) research group. All events and survey waves are rectified to match this map. The information was incorporated from Afghan Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which is a military-led scheme for small-scale development projects. The district level shows that the intensity of violence dropped sharply when the ANSF became responsible for security provision. The estimated decline is around 10% for all outcomes. Also, suggests that the shift in security perceptions matches the changes observed in the tactical reports. An increased share of respondents reported security improved in the last 6 months after the ANSF took over security. The study is rated as low confidence due to non-experimental study design and attrition not being reported in the study.

Confidence assessment

Overall Low: Confidence in the evidence is low due to the inclusion of only a single study.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention/ Nature and scale of violence or atrocities