

# Security Sector Governance

Applying the principles of good governance to the security sector

### About this series

The SSR Backgrounders provide concise introductions to topics and concepts in good security sector governance (SSG) and security sector reform (SSR). The series summarizes current debates, explains key terms and exposes central tensions based on a broad range of international experiences. The SSR Backgrounders do not promote specific models, policies or proposals for good governance or reform but do provide further resources that will allow readers to extend their knowledge on each topic. The SSR Backgrounders are a resource for security governance and reform stakeholders seeking to understand but also to critically assess current approaches to good SSG and SSR.

### About this SSR Backgrounder

This SSR Backgrounder is about the concept of security sector governance (SSG). The concept of governance provides a way to understand how power and authority over state and human security are exercised within a state. Applying the principles of good governance to the security sector is the goal of security sector reform (SSR).

### This SSR Backgrounder answers the following questions:

- ▶ What is governance and what does it have to do with security? [Page 2](#)
- ▶ What is good SSG? [Page 3](#)
- ▶ What is the difference between SSG and good SSG? [Page 4](#)
- ▶ What are some typical features of good SSG? [Page 5](#)
- ▶ What problems does poor SSG cause? [Page 6](#)
- ▶ Why is oversight essential to good SSG? [Page 7](#)
- ▶ How is good SSG related to SSR? [Page 8](#)



**DCAF**

a centre for security,  
development and  
the rule of law

### What is governance and what does it have to do with security?

Governance is the exercise of power and authority. The term “governance” can be used to describe the rules by which an organization, like a company or a government institution, is run. But “governance” can also mean all the formal and informal processes, actors and values that shape the provision of any kind of public good, and it is in this second, broader meaning that governance is applied to security. **Thinking of security in terms of governance is useful because it emphasizes how a variety of state and non-state actors exercise power and authority over security, both formally and informally and at international, national and local levels.**

**Governance is an umbrella term that can be applied to security generally to explain how international, national and local actors all play a role in shaping decisions about security and their implementation.** Security governance focuses on how security works in general while SSG focuses specifically on decisions about security and their implementation within the security sector of a single state (see Figure 1).

► **Government and governance are not the same thing** Government is the institution that controls the state; governance is a much broader term that describes the rules, structures, norms and processes – both formal and informal – that influence how public goods are provided in any society. **Governance is provided by governments**, in so far as governments make policy decisions, develop strategies, allocate resources and, in a democracy, represent citizens: the exercise of government power and authority directly affects the provision of public goods, including security.

But in any state the government is not the only actor influencing the provision of public goods and therefore governance: **governments provide governance together with non-state actors**, for example through the regulation of commercial activities that affect public goods, such as security.

Moreover, there is also **governance without government**, in so far as non-state actors act independently in ways that also affect the provision of public goods, including security – for example, when communities form self-protection groups or turn to alternative justice systems.

Considering security from the perspective of governance is useful because it includes the roles and responsibilities of government, but it also highlights how different kinds of state and non-state actors influence security provision, management and oversight in both positive and negative ways.

**Figure 1 Governance can describe security in general or within a specific state only**



### What is good SSG?

Good SSG means applying the principles of good governance to a state's security sector. **Good SSG is based on the idea that the security sector should be held to the same high standards of public service delivery as other public sector service providers.**

The principles of good SSG are as follows.

- **Accountability:** there are clear expectations for security provision, and independent authorities oversee whether these expectations are met and impose sanctions if they are not met.
- **Transparency:** information is freely available and accessible to those who will be affected by decisions and their implementation.
- **Rule of law:** all persons and institutions, including the state, are subject to laws that are known publicly, enforced impartially and consistent with international and national human rights norms and standards.
- **Participation:** all men and women of all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and service provision on a free, equitable and inclusive basis, either directly or through legitimate representative institutions.
- **Responsiveness:** institutions are sensitive to the different security needs of all parts of the population and perform their missions in the spirit of a culture of service.
- **Effectiveness:** institutions fulfil their respective roles, responsibilities and missions to a high professional standard.
- **Efficiency:** institutions make the best possible use of public resources in fulfilling their respective roles, responsibilities and missions.

► **The security sector** The security sector is composed of all the structures, institutions and personnel responsible for security provision, management and oversight at national and local levels, including both:

- **security providers**, such as the armed forces, police, border guards, intelligence services, penal and corrections institutions and commercial and non-state security actors, among many others;
- **security management and oversight bodies**, such as government ministries, parliament, special statutory oversight institutions, parts of the justice sector and civil society actors with a stake in high standards of public security provision, including women's organizations and the media, among others.

There are different definitions of the security sector, but SSR is based on a broad understanding of the sector which incorporates all security provision, management and oversight bodies, including both military and non-military security institutions and state and non-state actors.

For more information on the security sector, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on "The Security Sector".

**What is the difference between SSG and good SSG?**

**SSG is a concept used to describe the reality of how a state’s security sector works. Good SSG is a normative standard for how a state should provide state and human security in a democracy.**

**Good SSG is about values:** it focuses specifically on applying the principles of good governance to security provision, management and oversight in a national setting. The concept of good SSG shows how to make a state’s security sector more effective and accountable within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights.

**SSG is an analytical concept:** it does not assess whether or not the security sector works according to the principles of good governance or democracy, and it is not based on a commitment to any particular norms or values; SSG simply describes the exercise of power and authority in the context of one particular national security sector.

**Security governance is a more general version of SSG** that also describes the exercise of power and authority, but in the broader context of international security: Figure 2 summarizes the differences between these three concepts.

**Figure 2 Differences between security governance, SSG and good SSG**

Security governance	Security sector governance	Good security sector governance
More general		More specific
<b>Type of concept</b>		
Analytical concept: Describes who uses force, how, and for what purpose at local, national or international levels.	Analytical concept: Describes rules, structures and processes of state security provision, management and oversight in a national setting.	Normative concept: Prescribes the principles and good practices of a well-governed security sector within a national setting.
<b>Focus of analysis</b>		
How and why force is used and controlled by any actor, whether formal or informal, state or non-state, public, private or commercial.	How and why a country’s security sector uses and controls force within a national context, including public, private and commercial actors.	Degree of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for the human rights of individuals and communities by state and non-state security sector actors within a national setting.
<b>Type of security</b>		
May focus on any type of security at international, national or local levels.	Focuses on state and human security in a national context.	Focuses on improving human and state security by strengthening democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights for all individuals and communities.

### What are some typical features of good SSG?

When the principles of good governance are applied to the security sector, the state provides security for the population effectively and accountably within a framework of democratic, civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights. **Good SSG is a collection of principles, not an institutional model, and therefore the same core**

**principles of good governance apply differently in each security sector.** Establishing good SSG is a matter of constant ongoing adjustment as security threats and needs change: **No security sector is beyond the need for improvement.** Although each security sector will face distinct threats and needs, there are some typical institutional features of good SSG (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3** Typical institutional features of good SSG

#### The use of force is defined by a legal framework

Publicly known laws, policies and strategies set out when the use of force on behalf of the state is legitimate; and the roles and responsibilities of state and non-state security actors are clearly defined, including mechanisms for democratic, civilian control, oversight and sanction.

#### Control and management of the security sector are institutionalized (not personalized)

Processes for direction, management and oversight are set out by elected or duly appointed civilian authorities within legitimate democratic institutions that practise accountable and transparent financial management and promote respect for human rights. The personal interest of the office holder is not a factor in control, management or decision-making.

#### Security sector institutions have sufficient capacity to fulfil their missions effectively and sustainably

The security sector has the structures, personnel, equipment and resources necessary to fulfil the legitimate security needs of both the state and the individuals and communities that make up the population.

#### The mandates and missions of different private and public security actors are clear and distinct

Unambiguous and transparent arrangements for interaction, coordination and cooperation between security sector actors are defined according to their legal roles and responsibilities.

#### The security sector functions according to a culture of public service

In every aspect of their duty, security sector actors promote unity, integrity, discipline, impartiality, equality and respect for the human rights of all individuals and their communities.

### What problems does poor SSG cause?

**Poor security sector governance is the result of a failure to apply the principles of good governance to the provision, management and oversight of security within a state.** Poor SSG causes a wide range of problems for individuals and communities, the security sector itself and broader political and socio-economic stability.

**Poor SSG causes systematic institutional problems for the security sector.** A lack of effective oversight, transparency and accountability in the security sector causes corruption that is difficult to eradicate because of personal benefits derived by members of the security forces and civilians in political institutions. Ineffective oversight and accountability also make the security sector vulnerable to political interference from civilian powerbrokers and to arbitrary policy-making. Vested interests in the security sector and wider government can cause security forces to grow too large, making them a financial burden to the country. A lack of transparency and accountability in security planning and decision-making is also likely to lead to substandard national security and defence capabilities, as well as poor internal security. These weaknesses endanger the state by leaving the security forces incapable of providing either national or human security. For those within the security services, poor SSG generally means limited career opportunities due to a lack of professional development, poor conditions of service and politicized, corrupt or personalized promotion policies. As a result of discrimination – for example, against women, religious or ethnic minorities – security sectors fail to select the best candidates or to make best use of human resources. As the security forces themselves lack public legitimacy, so the security professional loses respect and social standing.

**Poor SSG threatens political, economic and social stability.** An effective, efficient security sector that lacks democratic civilian control can become the support mechanism for an authoritarian regime. It may take on economic or political roles that compromise democracy, leading to arbitrary policy-making, abuse of power and a malfunctioning legislative system. A security sector that functions in an atmosphere of impunity, without respect for principles of democratic oversight, rule of law and human rights, cannot provide credible protection for individuals and communities. Under such circumstances, security institutions become prone to corruption and

► **Good SSG and the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force** Good SSG is based on the idea of the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force. This means that the state is the only institution in a society that has the right to use force (or the threat of force) to uphold rules about how people should behave.

The state monopoly on the legitimate use of force does not mean that the state is the only actor that uses force, or is the only legitimate authority in a society. Instead, it means that the state is the only institution with the political authority to decide when and how force is to be used legitimately in the public interest.

**From the point of view of good SSG, the legitimacy of the state's monopoly on the use of force depends on democratic, civilian control of the security sector, within a framework of rule of law and respect for human rights.** The state monopoly on the legitimate use of force is an important part of good SSG because it shows that the actions of state and non-state security providers are only legitimate when they meet these standards.

human rights abuses that endanger the population and national development. Through discrimination, abuse or benign neglect, security institutions fail to provide basic security for some parts of the population – women, for example – or certain ethnic or religious groups, among others. In such cases, standards of public law and order corrode and become an increasing drain on economic performance. **Together the dysfunctions caused by poor SSG can breed political instability, economic weakness, unchecked harassment or abuse against specific groups or communities, a lack of basic security at the individual and community level, high levels of crime and even violent conflict.**

### Why is oversight essential to good SSG?

Good SSG depends on a legal framework as well as government security policies and strategies that clearly allocate responsibility for security provision, management and oversight according to the principles of democratic civilian control of the security sector, rule of law and respect for human rights. Oversight within a system of civilian democratic control ensures security institutions are meeting their responsibilities effectively and efficiently, according to the principles of good governance. **Oversight can protect the security forces from political interference while also preventing them from interfering in political affairs.**

While every security sector is different, and no single model of good SSG exists, institutional systems of security sector oversight typically share certain features (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** Typical features of security sector oversight

The **executive** authority determines security policy and exercises direct political control over the security services. It is accountable to citizens, chiefly through parliament and regular elections but also through judicial oversight, media scrutiny and public consultation and debate.

The **security services** execute government policy and carry out their mandates as prescribed by law: internal disciplinary mechanisms and oversight procedures contribute to efficient and effective mission performance.

**Parliament**, or the **legislature**, drafts or approves security legislation and budgets, oversees the security services and provides a public forum for political parties to deliberate on security policy and activities.

A **constitutional judicial authority** ensures that security initiatives conform to established constitutional order – for example, constitutional courts, high courts or supreme courts with constitutional jurisdiction.

The **justice system** tries security sector personnel and political decision-makers who violate the law; monitors the use of special powers, for example through warrants; and in some cases makes recommendations to improve security policy.

Various **special statutory institutions** oversee particular aspects of security provision and management – for example, human rights commissions, independent complaints authorities, ombuds institutions, financial audit bodies and anti-corruption commissions, among others.

**Individuals, the media and civil society organizations** engage in research, debate, advocacy and other activities that might be critical or supportive of the security services and the government's security policy. Their public scrutiny provides an essential form of oversight because it represents a variety of views and needs.

### How is good SSG related to SSR?

Good SSG constitutes a set of idealized principles and good practices, which no country in the world matches entirely. The principles of good governance provide standards of security provision, management and oversight against which actual practices can be measured. **Establishing good SSG is the goal of SSR.** SSR is the political and technical process of improving state and human security by making security provision, management and oversight more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and respect for human rights.

SSR concerns all state and non-state actors involved in security provision, management and oversight, and emphasizes the links between their roles, responsibilities and actions. SSR also involves aspects of justice provision, management and oversight, because security and justice are closely related.

SSR can include a wide range of different reform activities covering all political and technical aspects of security, including among others legislative initiatives; policy-making; awareness-raising and public information campaigns; management and administrative capacity building; infrastructure development; and improved training and equipment. **But efforts to reform the security sector only constitute SSR if they enhance both accountability and effectiveness within a framework of civilian, democratic control, rule of law and respect for the human rights of all individuals.**

For more information on SSR, please refer to the SSR Backgrounder on "Security Sector Reform".

► **International norms and standards on good SSG** Since the 1990s a number of multilateral and regional organizations have been involved in setting accepted norms and standards of good SSG, including the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**, the **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** Development Assistance Committee, the **European Union (EU)**, the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, the **African Union (AU)**, the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)** and agencies of the UN system. **The UN Secretary-General's** reports on security sector reform of 2008 and 2013 endorsed the principles of good SSG, and both the AU and ECOWAS have developed regionally applicable norms and standards of good SSG.

## Further resources

For a fuller introduction to the concept of security sector governance:

- Heiner Hänggi  
**Making Sense of Security Sector Governance**  
 in Heiner Hänggi and Theodor H. Winkler (eds),  
 Challenges of Security Sector Governance  
 (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2003).
- Nicole Ball  
**Reforming Security Sector Governance**  
 Conflict, Security & Development, 4(3), 2004.
- Funmi 'Olonisakin  
**Reforming Security Sector Governance:  
 Comment on Nicole Ball's Paper**  
 Conflict, Security & Development, 4(3), 2004.
- United Nations Development Programme  
**Democratizing Security to Prevent Conflict and  
 Build Peace**  
 in Human Development Report 2002. Deepening  
 Democracy in a Fragmented World (New York and  
 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 85–100).
- Gavin Cawthra and Robin Luckham  
**Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of  
 Military and Security Establishments in  
 Transitional Democracies**  
 (London: Zed Books, 2003).

For more on applying the principles of good governance to the security sector:

- UN SSR Taskforce  
**Democratic Governance of the Security Sector**  
 in Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical  
 Guidance Notes (United Nations, 2012, pp. 91-116).
- OECD Development Assistance Committee  
**Section 7.1: Democratic Oversight and  
 Accountability**  
 in OECD DAC Handbook on Security System Reform:  
 Supporting Security and Justice (Paris: Organisation  
 for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007,  
 pp. 112-123).
- Nicole Ball, Tsjeard Bouta and Luc van de Goor  
**Enhancing Democratic Governance of the Security  
 Sector: An Institutional Assessment Framework**  
 The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of  
 the Netherlands, 2003.

## More DCAF SSR resources

- DCAF publishes a wide variety of tools, handbooks and guidance on all aspects of SSR and good SSG, available free-for-download at [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch). Many resources are also available in languages other than English.
- The DCAF-ISSAT Community of Practice website makes available a range of online learning resources for SSR practitioners at <http://issat.dcaf.ch>

The **Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)** is an international foundation whose mission is to assist the international community in pursuing good governance and reform of the security sector. DCAF develops and promotes norms and standards, conducts tailored policy research, identifies good practices and recommendations to promote democratic security sector governance, and provides in-country advisory support and practical assistance programmes.

**DCAF wishes to thank**

Petra Gurtner for production and design;  
Cherry Ekins for copy editing in English;  
Lynda Chenaf for copy editing in French;  
Linda Machata for translation into French; and  
Fernando Colaço for app development.

**Series editor**

Fairlie Chappuis

**To cite this publication**

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, "Security Sector Governance", SSR Backgrounder Series (Geneva: DCAF, 2015).

© DCAF. SSR Backgrounders are available free of charge from [www.dcaf.ch](http://www.dcaf.ch). Users may copy and distribute this material provided that DCAF is credited. Not for commercial use.





**DCAF**

a centre for security,  
development and  
the rule of law

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control  
of Armed Forces (DCAF)  
P. O. Box 1360  
CH-1211 Geneva 1  
Switzerland

Read the SSR Backgrounders online or  
download the free SSR Backgrounders app  
for smartphones and tablets at  
**[www.ssrbackgrounders.org](http://www.ssrbackgrounders.org)**