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Electoral Management Bodies and Security Forces in West African Elections

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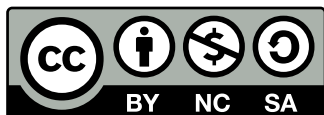## Electoral Management Bodies and Security Forces in West African Elections

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Abbreviations

ACLED   Armed Conflict Location and Event Data

APC   All-People's Congress

CENI   Independent National Electoral Commission (Commission électorale nationale indépendante)

CNAP   National Early Warning and Response Mechanism for Security Risks

CNDH   National Human Rights Commission

CSO   Civil society organization

ECOWAS   Economic Community of West African States

ECSL   Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone

EMB   Electoral management body

EOM   Election Observation Mission

FOSSEL   Force Spéciale de Sécurisation du Processus Électoral

GEWE   Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

GSESP   Gender-sensitive electoral security planning

ICCES   Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security

IESPC   Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee

INEC   International National Electoral Commission

NGO   Non-governmental organization

ONS   Office of National Security

PEA   Public Elections Act

PPA   Political Parties Act

PPRC   Political Parties Registration Commission

SSA   Security sector actor

SLP   Sierra Leone Police

SLPP   Sierra Leone People's Party

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

USIP   United States Institute of Peace

VAWE   Violence against women in elections

VAWP   Violence against women in politics

VDP   Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland

WSRN   Women's Situation Room—Nigeria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Close collaboration between electoral management bodies (EMBs) and security sector actors (SSAs) is crucial for ensuring adequate election security planning, enabling timely and consistent communication, and increasing the chances of preventing election violence. This study reviews the current systems and practices of collaboration between SSAs and EMBs and their relevance for election violence prevention in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

The study is intended to help policymakers and EMBs in Africa, and the broader international community, make elections more secure by enhancing the relationships between EMBs and SSAs. Shifting away from literature that focuses on the causes of violence, this report examines the nature and quality of election security coordination to identify and evaluate existing practices, drawing from the recent experience of five countries in West Africa: Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

EMB−SSA coordination mechanisms have rarely evolved as the result of an intentional institutional arrangement. Coordination mechanisms are infrequently defined in policy documents and seldom in legal texts. Instead, they are fluid arrangements that, when most effective, adapt to changing security contexts and political realities.

Case studies set out in the report illustrate seven key factors that are driving electoral security planning in the ECOWAS region today, and that must be taken into consideration in developing a responsive electoral security plan. The report analyses how each factor impacts the choice or effectiveness of the coordination model and how the model type influences outcomes for each factor.

The cases illustrate possible models for EMB–SSA coordination and give us some insight about when and how to choose among them. They allow us to construct a typology of possible coordination mechanisms and to map how they relate to each other. The typology can be framed in a matrix relationship, with types of cooperation (ad hoc/parallel, institutionalized/formal, extra-governmental) on one axis, and leadership (EMB-led, joint, SSA-led, and extra-governmental) on the other.

Security actors consistently overlook the types of election violence which women most commonly experience, resulting in systematic discrimination and exclusion. Applying gender-sensitive electoral security planning would be a comprehensive response to the problem of violence against women in politics and elections.

Elections represent a valuable opportunity to educate security actors on human rights frameworks and principles. During political transitions, EMBs can help rebuild trust in state security actors through civic education and training.

INTRODUCTION

Election violence is a persistent threat to the integrity of elections and the development of democracies in sub-Saharan Africa. Violence around elections is triggered by a host of factors, ranging from divisive campaigns to online hate speech to statements of a losing candidate mobilizing a support base suspicious of fraud. One of the best predictors of election-related violence is a country's history of political violence, including experiences of civil war, military coups, or violent insurgency.

Electoral management bodies (EMBs) and security sector actors (SSAs) help guarantee the integrity of elections, and they also play a critical role in preventing or limiting election violence. Collaboration between these actors is crucial for ensuring adequate election security planning, enabling timely and consistent communication, and helping to prevent election violence. This report is intended to help policymakers and election officials in Africa and in the international community as a whole to make electoral processes more secure by understanding possible coordination systems and how to choose among them. Shifting away from literature that focuses on the causes of violence, this report examines the nature and quality of election security coordination to identify and evaluate electoral processes, drawing from the recent experience of five countries in West Africa (including Guinea and Niger, prior to coups in 2023).

Based on the case studies, the report presents three main findings. First, it develops a typology of possible coordination mechanisms for EMB and SSA management of electoral security. Second, it identifies factors in the region that shape the choice of the coordination model and identifies key considerations for achieving sustainable

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successful outcomes. Third, it proposes gender-sensitive electoral security planning as a comprehensive response to the problem of violence against women in elections (VAWE).

Chapter 1

ELECTORAL SECURITY, ELECTION VIOLENCE AND THE ECOWAS REGION

Election violence is a subcategory of political violence that can be identified based on timing, targets and perpetrators (Höglund 2009). The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) defines election violence as 'any form of intimidation or physical violence directed against electoral stakeholders, or the disruption of events or damage to materials, intended to affect an electoral process or influence the outcome' (Claes and von Borzyskowski 2018: 5). This report uses this definition, which also recognizes sexual and nonphysical forms of election violence such as intimidation and harassment.

Election violence presents a significant threat to peace and democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, the region recorded the highest rate of deadly electoral violence worldwide from 1989 to 2017, at the level of 1,955 discrete events (Fjelde and Höglund 2022). This includes state-based violence between a government and an armed non-state actor, non-state violence between armed non-state actors (e.g. rebel groups, political parties or ethnic groups), one-sided violence (in which an armed state or non-state actor targets unarmed civilians) and violent political protest.

Election security in sub-Saharan Africa is shaped by the chequered history of SSAs in political life and the lack of a state presence in significant parts of many national territories. Every country in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has experienced multiple military coups d'etat since 1962, with the exception of Cabo Verde (no coups) and Senegal (one failed coup in 1962, shortly after independence). Overall, 96 coups d'etat have occurred in ECOWAS states, including eight since 2020 (Powell and Thyne 2011, with updates). This history shows deep mistrust of military forces' support for peaceful democratic power transfer. Mistrust towards state security actors also frequently spills over to

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civilian security forces (such as the police), casting doubts about the impartiality and professionalism of SSAs tasked with protecting all electoral stakeholders (Adejumobi 2000; Houngnikpo 2013). In several countries, concerns exist that SSAs either turn a blind eye to political violence or themselves become the instruments of intimidation against voters and candidates. The controversial role of SSAs places EMBs in a complex situation, as they must remain impartial while relying on the military and police for the provision of electoral security.

The extremist threat is necessitating EMB–SSA planners to re-evaluate engaging military forces to help keep polls open; to defend against attacks on vote counting and transmission processes; and to protect voters, candidates and EMB personnel.

Rising extremist threats are reshaping military involvement in election security today. National armed forces traditionally played a limited role in election security, given their mandate to protect the nation from *external* (not domestic) threats and due to intrinsic concerns about undue interference, especially in states with a history of military coups. In the ECOWAS region, armed forces are mobilized to protect national borders during elections and, in some cases, to assist with the logistical deployment of electoral materials to remote regions, but they are otherwise not involved in direct security. The extremist threat is necessitating EMB–SSA planners to re-evaluate engaging military forces to help keep polls open; to defend against attacks on vote counting and transmission processes; and to protect voters, candidates and EMB personnel. Although keeping polling stations open at any cost protects suffrage rights and defends state sovereignty against incursions, prolonged military involvement in electoral security should not become normalized.

Beyond these issues, gender-based election violence is a serious concern in the region. Commonly referred to as violence against women in politics/elections (VAWP/VAWE), this refers to any act, or threat, of physical, sexual or psychological gender-based violence against women that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights and a range of other human rights (UN Women 2020). VAWE is specific to the electoral cycle. Examples of VAWE include intimidation as well as sexual and physical violence against women in public life; harassment, aggression and disinformation in various media (including social media); targeting women voters or poll workers with physical and sexual violence or intimidation; and use of sexual violence in repressing political events and gatherings. VAWE is one of the most serious obstacles to the realization of women's political rights today.

Gender-related electoral violence occurs across the region in specific forms (e.g. sexual violence and harassment), with gendered motives (e.g. explicit misogyny) and through different gendered

impacts—such as deterrence of women from running for office, for example (Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo 2020). The absence of responses to address the risk of election violence faced by half of the population constitutes a structural form of discrimination and is a major failure in election security management. As this study will reveal, security provision in West Africa is principally structured to respond to the types of election violence that men experience at the hands of other men, and overlooks the types of violence women most commonly experience. Any form of systematic discrimination in electoral security violates citizens' rights to free and fair participation, and undermines electoral integrity. Securing one group's electoral participation over another's contributes directly to skewed outcomes in political representation; on average for the five countries studied, 80 per cent of legislative seats were held by men (IPU 2025).

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1.1. CONSIDERATIONS FOR ELECTION SECURITY PLANNING

Those seeking to prevent election violence face a challenging task. First, the nature and causes of election violence often vary from one stage to another during the electoral cycle and within different contexts (Fischer 2002). Alihodžić and Matatu (2019) recognize three distinct contexts for democratic transition, each with their own security implications:

- shift from authoritarianism or semi-authoritarianism to electoral democracy;
- transition from deep political crises to political stability; and
- transition from war to peace.

For example, the motivations behind violence during a campaign often differ from those behind violence that occurs on election day or after results are announced. Addressing security issues at each electoral stage requires different strategies on the part of SSAs and EMBs.

Second, because the incumbent government is the most common perpetrator of election-related violence, the state's role as a partner in providing electoral security can be difficult to rely on (Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski 2014). Public mistrust can centre both on civilian SSAs (which can be perceived as state agents of proximate violence)

and on the military (which may be distrusted for its potential interest in seizing power). This situation is particularly relevant for EMBs, which, despite having ostensible autonomy from the government, must nonetheless work with SSAs.

Third, the prevention of election violence cannot be separated from ongoing and often long-standing conflict dynamics. When elections are organized during an ongoing violent conflict, the security situation will complicate the logistics or put poll workers and voters at risk; heated campaigns may stoke communal tensions and endanger candidates; or conditions for a fair campaign may not be in place during a state of emergency. Structural violence such as violence against women in politics (VAWP) adds further complexity. For EMBs and security sector actors working to prevent electoral-related violence, it is necessary to understand how and why violence is being used to affect election outcomes.

International IDEA's Electoral Risk Management Tool maps out key action points that three groups of stakeholders—EMBs, security sector agencies and others—can consider to prevent and mitigate election-related violence across different phases of the electoral cycle.

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EMBs and SSAs face unique security challenges in the pre-election, election day and post-election periods. Table 1.1 summarizes priorities for election security planning within each period. These categories are illustrative, not comprehensive.

This study focuses on the bold items in Table 1.1, where EMB–SSA cooperation is likely to have the most tangible influence.

1.2. **METHODOLOGY**

The case study research was developed to explore the manifestations of EMB–SSA cooperation in the context of diverse electoral security dynamic in the ECOWAS region. Four countries— Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Nigeria—were chosen for the case studies based on a preliminary literature review (a fifth country, Sierra Leone, was subsequently added in phase II). The literature review revealed that there were no consistent model(s) or practices

Table 1.1. Security responses and concerns at different stages of the election cycle

Pre-election	Election day	Post-election	All phases
• Legal framework • **Political party conflict management** • Political finance and conflict • **Crowd control** • Protection of candidates, infrastructure and procurement • **Security forces training** • **Security threat assessment and deployment planning**	• **Rapid response mechanisms** • **Communications**	• Results management • Justice and mediation	• Grassroots peacebuilding • **Conflict monitoring and mapping** • **Preventing violence against women in all areas** • Demobilizing youth • Media monitoring

Source: Based on United States Agency for International Development (USAID), *Best Practices In Electoral Security: A Guide for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Programming* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2013), <https://aceproject.org/best-practices-guide-in-electoral-security/view>.

appearing in the region, but that a number of contextual factors were potentially influencing the nature of EMB–SSA coordination—specifically, the presence of a peacekeeping operation, EMB autonomy, a history of civil conflict, post-coup elections, terrorism risk and the quality of previous elections. The cases were selected to represent a diversity of these factors.

The research was initiated under a grant from the USIP in 2017–2020. Fieldwork was conducted in July and August 2018 in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger and Nigeria following Ethics Review Board approval granted by the University of Ottawa. Six to 10 semi-structured key informant interviews and 1 to 2 focus group discussions were held per country to complement desk research. In each country, EMB leadership and formal security officials at different levels were interviewed. Other interviewees included EMB technical staff, national observers and elected officials, as well as members of local think tanks, civil society organizations (CSOs), watchdog groups, diplomatic and donor organizations, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Interviews were also conducted

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with women involved in prevention efforts or impacted by election violence.

Interviews with state actors focused on how they prepared for election security and responded to incidents or threats of election violence. Interviews with non-state actors focused on their experiences and perceptions of electoral security management as well as their involvement in supporting electoral security planning or violence prevention processes.

The research was restarted in 2022 in cooperation with International IDEA, following an interruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this second phase, the full body of the research was reviewed and updated. New, remote interviews were conducted for all country studies. A fifth case, Sierra Leone, was added. The research was presented for feedback during the 2022 ECOWAS Network of Electoral Commissions Symposium and General Assembly in December 2022.

1.2.1. Case study: EMB–SSA coordination in Burkina Faso

Since the two coups d'état of 2022 and during the ongoing transitional government, Burkina Faso has experienced significant political instability. The electoral calendar has been suspended and the Independent National Electoral Commission (Commission électorale nationale indépendante, CENI), created in 1998, was dissolved by the transitional assembly in October 2025 (Le Monde 2025). Prior to the upheaval, the CENI was responsible for planning and delivering free and fair elections in partnership with many external actors, including the country's SSAs (Code Electoral VI section 83, VIII section 59). Although the CENI was a permanent body, beyond a limited number of permanent personnel, the actors responsible for securing the delivery of Burkina Faso's elections changed from election to election. This fact, coupled with a significantly deteriorated security situation during the most recent election in 2020, resulted in a difference between formal, planned EMB–SSA coordination processes and the adoption of coordination in practice.

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The precedent for EMB–SSA coordination was set at the time of the 2015 general elections, which were the first democratic elections held since the revolution of 2014. The CENI's internal security commission (Commission de sécurisation du processus électoral) formally acted as the designer and coordinator of security plans for each election. In principle, the structure can be described as follows. The commission was headed by the CENI in cooperation with the head of the

gendarmerie. The vice president of the commission was the director general of the National Police. The commission was responsible for deploying security agents to cover the national territory. It prepared a budget for electoral security and submitted it to the president of CENI for approval. The security budget was included in the overall CENI budget, which was funded by the state. The commission worked with various members of the security sector—police, the gendarmerie, the military and private firms—to implement security plans. In practice, this operated somewhat differently in 2020, as discussed below.

Prior to ad hoc adaptations during the security crisis of 2020, deployment plans were developed by the commission based on the electoral deployment plan established by the CENI. Additional provisions for security could be made in the plan based on data from the minister of security. Non-military security sector personnel (primarily police and gendarmes) were deployed to support polling stations to protect the movement of ballot boxes and to guard CENI officials prior to and after the election was to take place. Reserve security actors were posted at the provincial level for rapid deployment in case the need arose.

In a normal security context, regular consultative meetings were held, first at the national level to discuss how to develop implementation plans. Subsequently, meetings were held at the regional level, where each governor and the SSA developed their own security coverage strategy. The same process was followed at the provincial level with high commissioners and at the municipal level. Chains of command reflected strong coordination. The Ministry of National Defence and Security placed its information channels at the disposition of the CENI for relevant information. Security incidents were reported directly to the CENI president or regional officer, depending on the gravity of the incident. CENI leadership had oversight but the security apparatus led the responses. The comparative speed of the security sector to respond to security problems (as opposed to the CENI) was viewed as a strength of this arrangement. The CENI's influence in guiding responses for maintaining order through civilian (not military) action has also been notable.

EMB–SSA coordination in practice: The experience of Burkina Faso's 2020 elections

The security coordination structure was put to the test in the November 2020 general elections. Burkina Faso enjoyed relative peace prior to 2016, when expanding armed Islamist violence in neighbouring Mali began to encroach upon the country. By the time the CENI was preparing the 2020 elections, regional al-Qaeda

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affiliates (Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims) and a former splinter movement known as the Islamic State-Greater Sahara controlled much of the northern and eastern countryside and had executed several major attacks against military, civilian and diplomatic targets in Ouagadougou (Congressional Research Service 2023). State security forces and state-backed militias and vigilantes reportedly engaged in human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture (Freedom House 2021).

Over a million people were internally displaced due to the violence by the time of the 2020 elections (nearly 5 per cent of the population). The CENI was unable to carry out voter registration in 17 per cent of the country due to the security situation, resulting in at least 166,000 new voters being prevented from registering. Many internally displaced persons who fled without papers were unable to register even where services were available. Over a thousand polling stations could not open (an estimated 10 per cent of the country's 22,000+ polling stations). Out of 127 members of parliament, 52 believed it would be impossible for them to campaign in their constituencies due to a lack of safety (Maïga and Bako 2020).

Two significant legal reforms were passed ahead of the elections in response to the worsening security situation. First, at the start of the year, the government formalized community-based self-defence groups by establishing the Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland (VDP) (law no. 002-2020/AN of 21 January 2020). Built on the backs of existing self-defence groups in Burkina Faso such as the Kogl-wégo and Dozo, the VDP are intended to mobilize the population against attacks by armed jihadist groups, as well as gain more governmental control over increasingly unruly militia groups around the country (Schmauder 2021; Tisseron 2021; Saidou and Betrand 2022). Despite their newly recognized role, the VDP were not part of electoral security plans and their involvement remains a hotly contested topic. Lack of oversight and training contributed to critiques of the VDP's responsibility for human rights abuses (Zongo 2022).

Second, in the absence of support for delaying the election, the National Assembly passed a bill on 24 August 2020 amending the Electoral Code to introduce the so-called 'force majeure' clause. Under the clause, election results would be validated on the basis of those polls that were able to open, even if people could not vote in some parts of the country due to insecurity. Viewed as a politically pragmatic way to avoid adding a political crisis to the existing security crisis, the bill was passed with support from both

the ruling party and key segments of the opposition. However, it also faced sharp criticism from civil society for excluding many voters in insecure parts of the country. At the start of the campaign on 31 October 2020, 'force majeure' was identified in 1,500 villages in 6 of Burkina Faso's 13 regions (approximately 18 per cent of the territory).

During the 2020 elections, electoral security was viewed as an issue of national defence. In consequence, although the CENI remained formally responsible, national SSAs played a more significant role in deployment. The mechanisms described above continued to operate with some important constraints. The commission continued to meet regularly and brief the CENI president, but involved CENI operational teams fairly late in the process for logistics operations. Security deployment plans were led by SSAs, arguably with less coordination and transparency than in 2015. Coloured security sectors were established (green, orange and red), with different plans for each level. However, the CENI did not have a dedicated training unit at the time of deployment, resulting in inadequate training for electoral security agents for election day. Late launches of donor programmes contributed to various delays.

Covid-19 forced the government to suspend biometric registration programmes from 30 March to 25 May 2020 throughout Burkina Faso. Masks and sanitizer equipment were included in the polling station kits—however, no specific procedures or training were provided regarding Covid measures. Observers noted that few poll workers wore masks or enforced social distancing.

The CENI played a crucial role in security-related information-sharing and communication with political parties and other stakeholders. This was vital to navigate sensitive issues like the 'force majeure' clause and the role of security actors in electoral planning. As in the past, the renewal of CENI staff ahead of the 2020 cycle posed a significant challenge for knowledge retention. The need to continually retrain security sector personnel in election security is a costly and potentially precarious drawback to the structure of the coordination mechanism between the EMB and SSAs.

The future is uncertain. Burkina Faso's democracy was interrupted by two coups in 2022. Elections intended to restore a democratic civilian government in July 2024 were deemed 'not a priority' and postponed by the military junta led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré until at least 2029 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024).

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Gender-sensitive electoral security issues in Burkina Faso
Although Burkina Faso opened police force admissions to women in 1975, it was not until 2006 that local police began to regularly recruit women. Today, women represent 10 per cent of police personnel in Burkina Faso (PartnersGlobal 2020). One of four goals of Burkina Faso's first Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (NAP) 2013–2016 is to integrate a gender dimension into security and defence governance.

Within the limited security training that the CENI was able to deploy in 2020, gender was integrated at the most basic level. Women participate in the top levels of cascade-style training, but are rarely part of training at the broader level. This reflects the nature of the security forces, where women are often in administrative roles and less frequently involved in operations. No distinct plans were made to address risks of VAWP. No reports of VAWP were formally registered—however, there was no dedicated mechanism to report to, or any organized group collecting such data.

1.2.2. **Case study: EMB–SSA coordination in Guinea**
Guinea held legislative elections and a constitutional referendum on 22 March 2020 and a presidential election on 18 October 2020. The 2020 elections were troubled early on. President Alpha Condé sought a third term, which required constitutional reform by referendum. Civil society and opposition parties engaged in anti-government protests characterized by clashes between supporters of different parties and between supporters and security forces. The leading opposition parties boycotted the March legislative elections and President Condé won the October presidential election with 59 per cent of the vote. The electoral commission denounced massive fraud and called for a partial repetition of the election.

In September 2021, the civilian government elected in 2020 was overthrown in a coup led by the head of the special forces, Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. The military junta suspended the 2020 Constitution, dissolved the National Assembly, and detained President Condé. The transitional government that was subsequently put into place in July 2022 was dissolved by the military in February 2024. Guineans overwhelmingly voted in favour of a new constitution on 21 September 2025, which paves the way for future elections but also opens the door for the junta to consolidate control by allowing General Mamady Doumbouya to run for president (RFI 2025). More than 220 people have been killed for expressing dissent since 2021 and many opposition leaders are in hiding (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2025).

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Guinea's Independent National Electoral Commission (Commission électorale nationale indépendante, CENI) was established during another period of political anxiety and social unrest in 2007 and oversaw three presidential elections in 2010, 2015 and March 2020, legislative elections in 2013 and 2020, a constitutional referendum in 2020 and a local election in 2018, before being disbanded under a military junta in 2021.

During its tenure, the Guinean CENI had coordinating authority over the country's SSAs during election periods and oversaw the provision of security to Guinean citizens in the periods before, during and following an election. The EMB–SSA coordinating mechanism was characterized by two branches—internal security and external security. Security for CENI actors was provided by an internal security force, while the external branch collaborated with the security sector—led by the gendarmerie and the police, with support from protection agents drawn from civil society—to ensure the safety and free implementation of elections. Under the command of the gendarmerie and police, the command centre operated out of Conakry with decentralized structures in the provinces.

Public confidence in Guinea's security actors reached a low point following the 2009 massacre of civilian protesters (Human Rights Watch 2023). Thus, EMB–SSA coordination emphasized trust building for over a decade. Between 2010 and 2020, one of the distinguishing features of electoral security coordination in Guinea was the creation of a temporary, dedicated electoral SSA. Starting in 2010, the former CENI designated a specific security unit for each election. The Force Spéciale de Sécurisation du Processus Electoral (FOSSEL) was constituted by temporary security bodies under the supervision of the CENI and the operational command of the Ministry of State for Security and Civil Protection (Ministère d'état chargé de la sécurité et de la protection civile) (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2013).

The units were designed to bolster confidence in the electoral process by entrusting security oversight of sensitive electoral processes and materials to an arms-length body and enhancing transparency. The units were disbanded after each election. While some structures were easily revived from one election to the next, such as communication and chain of command structures, other areas, such as training, were more challenging to maintain without continuity.

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Another trust-building initiative of Guinea's EMB–SSA coordination was the state-created civil-military committee to educate security actors about how to engage with protesters and to facilitate dialogue between civilian groups and security actors.

Another trust-building initiative of Guinea's EMB–SSA coordination was the state-created civil-military committee to educate security actors (military and non-military) about how to engage with protesters and to facilitate dialogue between civilian groups and security actors. Additional investment in specialized training of electoral SSAs was undertaken. In 2010, the CENI took the step of delegating responsibility for training state electoral SSAs to a national CSO (Centre du commerce international pour le développement), assisted by international NGOs and UN actors and overseen by the CENI. With support from the Red Cross, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the training programme emphasized human rights standards, the steps of the electoral process, and the appropriate role of security actors in that space. The approach became the model for training curricula when the responsibility for training shifted back to the CENI in 2015 and 2020.

EMB–SSA coordination in practice: The experience of Guinea's 2020 elections
Guinean SSAs have a history of using excessive force against protesters, especially during elections. Likewise, opposition-organized rallies and union-organized strikes have often turned violent (Darboe 2010; Amnesty International 2019). However, the situation worsened dramatically around the 2020 elections. Demonstrations against the constitutional referendum led to 30 deaths and dozens of injuries ahead of the March 2020 polls. Pre- and post-election violence also rocked the October 2020 presidential election, with at least 16 people shot dead. Small mutinies broke out twice in military bases, in the months of the two elections, resulting in 11 dead (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2024). Internet communications were disrupted in the days following the election.

Guinea's decade-long prioritization of improving civil-military relations in its EMB–SSA coordination correctly targeted a fundamental dilemma. Yet, EMB–SSA coordination is ultimately subject to broader security dynamics which, in the case of Guinea, overwhelmed the best efforts to difuse tensions through electoral initiatives.

Gender-sensitive electoral security issues in Guinea
Use of excessive force against protesters has historically entailed a high risk for VAWE in Guinea. During the violent repression of protests in Conakry on 28 September 2009, at least 109 women and girls were victims of sexual violence on account of their political affiliation. Eleven years later, ahead of the October 2020 elections, UN diplomats warned that 'sexual violence remains, in many contexts, a tool to

intimidate and punish political opponents, their family members and women human rights defenders in the context of political crises' (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2020). The UN called upon all Guinean political actors to send a strong message to end sexual violence once and for all.

Gender concerns were not expressly taken into consideration in any aspect of EMB−SSA coordination planning in 2015 or 2020. Recruitment for FOSSEL did not address gender objectives, and the challenges which women faced in the electoral process were reportedly not the subject of specific planning or training. No data was collected on VAWP. Yet, anecdotal reports from field interviews suggest that women candidates at both the national and local levels regularly faced attacks on their virtue, womanhood, integrity and personal dignity. Some interviewees felt this was a missed opportunity for FOSSEL to prevent or mitigate VAWP.

A parity law was introduced in 2019 and was applied for the first time in the 2020 election. Like in Burkina Faso, failure to respect the gender quota resulted in adverse outcomes, with no women elected at all in 2020.

1.2.3. Case study: EMB−SSA coordination in Niger

Niger achieved its first transfer of power between democratically elected presidents during the 2020−2021 general elections. As elsewhere in the region, two primary electoral security concerns were front and centre—interparty violence and militant attacks. Covid-19 compelled additional public safety planning.

In July 2023, Niger's government was overthrown in a military coup, and President Mohamed Bazoum was taken hostage, triggering a security crisis across West Africa. In 2025, the multiparty system was officially dismantled after all political parties were banned (International IDEA 2025). Prior to the coup, Niger was considered to be on a path towards stability and democracy. This case study examines the EMB−SSA relationship in the period leading up to the 2023 coup.

Prior to the coup, electoral security in Niger was led by an Independent National Electoral Commission (Commission électorale nationale indépendante, CENI) in coordination with representatives of each participating political party in the election, civil society and national defence organizations (the national guard, the gendarmerie, the army, and the police force) in each of Niger's 266 municipalities (interview with former CENI Official B, Niamey 2018). The CENI was

Yet, anecdotal reports from field interviews suggest that women candidates at both the national and local levels regularly faced attacks on their virtue, womanhood, integrity and personal dignity. Some interviewees felt this was a missed opportunity for FOSSEL to prevent or mitigate VAWP.

Prior to the coup, electoral security in Niger was led by CENI in coordination with representatives of each participating political party in the election, civil society and national defence organizations in each of Niger's 266 municipalities.

tasked with ensuring that there was a commission representative of the police, the gendarmerie and the National Guard, as well as other civilian actors such as the civilian protection unit (responsible for firefighting and similar activities) in each municipality (interview with Official A). Within the CENI itself, a handful of security agents were designated to ensure the safety of the EMB leadership during elections (interview with Official A). The defence and security budget was determined by the CENI (interview with Official B).

CENI officials presented their security needs analysis to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence early in the electoral cycle (interview with Official A). Typically, the Ministry of the Interior led on electoral security, with the Ministry of Defence coming to its aid in areas that required an increased security presence. The CENI provided training to those security actors at the leadership level, who in turn trained those who were sent to the municipalities (interview with Official B). The greatest concern expressed by CENI officials prior to the coup was the issue of securing the vast number of polling stations given the administrative divisions of Niger, including areas with nomadic populations.

A National Early Warning and Response Mechanism for Security Risks (CNAP) was created by decree ahead of the 2020–2021 elections (Law No. 2020-184/PRN/PM of 6 March 2020). Under the authority of the prime minister, the CNAP was responsible for security risk data collection, analysis and advising on elections and all security matters.

Niger's CENI engaged in multiple collaborations with other, non-SSA stakeholders for electoral security in 2020–2021, including with the National Ombudsman, the National Electoral Cycle Monitoring Centre (CEMOCEN) of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), the Superior Council of Communication (CSC) and the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP).

Following the elections, Niger's CENI invested in a highly detailed analysis of the causes of and responses to election violence around the 2017–2021 cycle, including recommendations and a 'hotspot' mapping.

Following the elections, Niger's CENI invested in a highly detailed analysis of the causes of and responses to election violence around the 2017–2021 cycle, including recommendations and a 'hotspot' mapping.

EMB–SSA coordination in practice: The experience of Niger's 2020–2021 elections
Failure to achieve political consensus around key aspects of the electoral process until very close to the general election on 27 December 2020 was an ongoing source of instability impacting

EMB–SSA relations around the 2020–2021 electoral cycle. Allegations of fraud prompted post-electoral protests that turned violent in Niamey. At least two people died while 468 were arrested as of 25 February 2021. Internet access was also restricted.

Growing militant violence targeted the electoral process. During the biometric voter registration in December 2019, terrorists attacked the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) who were escorting CENI agents, killing 15 FDS agents. Attacks on electoral material occurred throughout the country and 12 people were abducted. As a result, the registration campaign had to be temporarily suspended in two regions bordering Mali that were heavily affected by insecurity.

Covid-19 forced the government to suspend biometric registration programmes from 20 March to 8 May in Niamey. The CENI also raised the issue of force majeure related to the pandemic to justify the impossibility of enrolling voters from the diaspora.

Gender-sensitive electoral security issues in Niger

The issue of violence against women in elections in Niger became more visible during the 2015 election cycle, with both verbal and physical attacks on women involved in politics and on women voters recorded (Safir and Alam 2017). In response, Niger's CENI took steps in 2020–2021 to address gender issues in electoral security planning.

The CNDH provided capacity support training to national security and defence actors on the topic of VAWE. They supported involvement of men as allies and advocates in preventing VAWE and the inclusion of VAWE prevention issues in voter education training and materials. The CNDH also established a 'Watchdog Brigade' to prevent VAWE. The Brigade initiated a number of actions to address VAWE in the electoral process (PNUD-Niger 2022). These actions included the following:

- integrating VAWE into election observation tools;
- training election observers on gender inclusion and a human rights-based approach;
- ensuring inclusion of VAWE issues in conclusions and recommendations of post-election reports;
- oversight of enforcement of election violence laws and policies, as well as ensuring the application of sanctions against gender-related violations and offences; and

The CNDH provided capacity support training to national security and defence actors on the topic of VAWE.

- awareness raising around key assessed risks, including forcing elected women to resign in favour of a man, and ensuring that elected women receive entitled support.

Both the CNDH Brigade and the CENI's sensitization subcommittee supported civic education around VAWE issues. The CENI subcommittee organized a forum for women and undertook a sensitization caravan and training of elected women deputies and councillors. The Brigade's VAWE education outreach targeted both opinion leaders and the general public.

1.2.4. Case study: EMB–SSA coordination in Sierra Leone

The Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) is an independent EMB which has the mission of conducting all public elections and referendums, registering eligible voters, demarcating constituency boundaries and making regulations for the efficient execution of its functions (ECSL n.d.). EMB functions connected with the registration and regulation of the conduct of political parties are carried out by the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC).

The electoral code defines relevant security relationships and coordination to a greater extent than what similar laws do in other countries in the region.

The electoral code defines relevant security relationships and coordination to a greater extent than what similar laws do in other countries in the region. The law provides that the ECSL liaise with the inspector-general of police on key electoral events such as campaign period demonstrations and processions, and in the interests of general peace and public order. Moreover, it also states that the ECSL shall notify the Paramount Chief and other local councils as the commission may think necessary regarding campaign-related events in the provinces (Public Elections Act 2022, 155(1)). The Sierra Leone Police (SLP) have overall responsibility for providing safety and security for the elections. Electoral security planning begins nearly two years before each election (Albrecht, Horn and Gordon 2011).

An ad-hoc committee, the IESPC has been used for election security for over a decade, including during the most recent elections in June 2023.

This codification is the basis for close EMB–SSA coordination. In 2012, the National Security Council (NSC) established the Integrated Elections Security Planning Committee (IESPC) to serve as a framework for an integrated approach to electoral security for all general and by-elections. An ad-hoc committee, the IESPC has been used for election security for over a decade, including during the most recent elections in June 2023 (Sierra Leone Office of National Security n.d.). The IESPC is activated (and subsequently coordinated) by the National Security Coordinator and the National Security Coordinating Group after the announcement of dates for an upcoming election. The committee is serviced by the Planning and Inter Agency Relations (PIAR) Directorate within the Office of National

Security (ONS), with the director of PIAR chairing its meetings. According to the ONS website, as a multi-sectoral arrangement, the IESPC brings together both state and non-state actors, including a range of security actors (such as the police, armed forces, correctional services and national fire forces) as well as the Human Rights Commission, regional civil society such as the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), international organizations (such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and bilateral aid agencies (such as Irish Aid) (Sierra Leone Office of National Security n.d.). The IESPC mandate includes developing an Integrated Elections Security Strategy as well as a communications plan and election security training manuals, and developing an elections roadmap. It is responsible for mobilizing resources for SSAs and representing SSAs in electoral security meetings and engaging with the EMB to discuss electoral security roadmaps.

The IESPC exists in a context of long-standing and highly targeted international aid for the SLP and for election security management over three decades. Even before the end of the civil war in 2002, assistance targeted strengthening command and control capability, radio communications support, access to transport for rapid response, and strengthening the gathering and analysis of information and intelligence. The SLP has worked to enhance police investigative ability, particularly in the areas of electoral fraud associated with the elections, the gathering of evidence and post-incident investigation (Albrecht, Horn and Gordon 2011).

EMB−SSA coordination in practice: The experience of Sierra Leone's 2023 elections

Sierra Leone has held regular multiparty elections since the end of the civil war in 2002, and most recently in June 2023. The electoral legal framework was revised before the 2023 elections, with the enactments of the Public Elections Act (PEA) and the Political Parties Act (PPA) in 2022, supplementing existing regulations. The PEA expanded the financial autonomy of the ECSL, while the PPA expanded the powers of the PPRC to regulate, supervise and monitor the conduct of political parties. However, the European Union Election Observation Mission (EOM) reported that the PPRC did not use those new powers to their full extent during the 2023 elections, especially when it came to campaign finance (EU EOM-SL 2023a). Several more provisions were also introduced in the context of this election, including the revocation of the criminalization of libel under the controversial 1965 Public Order Act (which remains in force) and the approval of a Cybersecurity and Cyber Crimes Act in 2021 that

introduced significant new restrictions on freedom of expression online (The Carter Center 2023: 3).

The 2023 general election was conducted using both the first-past-the-post system to elect the president and mayors, and the 'District Block Proportional Representation System' to elect parliamentary and council members (African Union 2023). The proportional system, according to which each district is assigned a number of seats based on the population data of the last census results in 2021, was adopted for the first time in the 2023 elections through the 2022 Constitutional Amendment Act (Kamara 2024). In addition, a high threshold was introduced, requiring political parties to obtain 11.9 per cent of the vote to receive a seat in parliament (The Carter Center 2023: 3). Thirteen political parties contested the 2023 presidential election, though the landscape was dominated by the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) (incumbent) and the All People's Congress (ACP) (African Union 2023).

As in other countries in the region, managing public order with graduated non-lethal force during elections has been a persistent problem in Sierra Leone, which has a mixed experience.

As in other countries in the region, managing public order with graduated non-lethal force during elections has been a persistent problem in Sierra Leone, which has a mixed experience. On one hand, for the past decade, human rights organizations have criticized the Government of Sierra Leone's refusal to give permission for peaceful protests organized by opposition parties and critical civil society, as well as the use of criminal sanctions for free assembly and the use of excessive lethal force against spontaneous protests (Amnesty International 2018a). On the other hand, Sierra Leone has different legal regimes for public assemblies and campaign rallies held during the electoral period, with campaign rallies being legislated under the PEA 2022 (Part XIV) and governed by the ECSL and the PPRC.

Ahead of the 2023 elections, the ONS, with the technical support of the joint UNDP/UNICEF UN Peace Building Fund, launched two dedicated election secretariats, the National Situation Room and the IESPC.

Ahead of the 2023 elections, the ONS, with the technical support of the joint UNDP/UNICEF UN Peace Building Fund, launched two dedicated election secretariats, the National Situation Room and the IESPC. These bodies were charged with working jointly to provide credible information to the public and consult with relevant authorities to address potential acts of violence. The staff of the two secretariats included senior personnel from the SLP, the armed forces, the Correctional Centre and the national fire force, as well as representatives from civil society (in IESPC), the PPRC, the ECSL, the National Election Watch and other EMBs (UNDP 2023).

International election observation bodies noted that the 2023 election contestants were overall able to exercise fundamental freedoms and conduct their campaigns (The Carter Center 2023). On 25 May,

for the first time in the country's electoral history, most presidential candidates, including the SLPP and APC flagbearers, also publicly signed a peace pledge. However, the impact of the pledge on the campaign environment was limited, with little to no awareness of the pact among party activists and the wider public at the district level (EU EOM-SL 2023b). Serious limitations on and violations of the right of assembly in the run-up to election day and restrictions on campaigning by political parties continued to occur, as did episodes of intimidation and violence in some parts of the country.

In the period ahead of the polls, politically motivated tensions increased, and the campaigning space became more and more restrictive. According to Freedom House, already in July 2022 some opposition parties and leaders faced discrimination and harassment: the Unity Party chair and the National Grand Coalition chair were held for several days for allegedly inciting an unlawful demonstration, before being released without charges (Freedom House 2023). Instances of violence against journalists also occurred before and during the campaign: for instance, two executives of the radio station FOP were brutally assaulted at two different political events in Moyamba. Although they reported the incidents to the police, their cases were closed, purportedly due to lack of sufficient evidence. Another freelance journalist was also harassed and intimidated by party supporters closer to the polls, but the perpetrators were not caught. After the elections, two journalists were trapped inside APC headquarters during a standoff with security agencies, and their cars were damaged. They received no compensation (EU EOM-SL 2023b: 24).

The greatest tensions during the 2023 elections were felt especially by APC representatives closer to voting day, and in at least six southern and eastern districts of the country. According to reports gathered by the EU EOM, at least 17 violent attacks occurred during the campaign. These included one APC office being burned and one vandalized, as well as armed attacks on party officials and some candidates in different districts—most of which occurred in strongholds of the SLPP. Security concerns led to the cancellation of scheduled APC rallies in some locations, and provoked APC officials to leave some districts during the week before the election because of fears for their safety. Some instances where SLPP supporters became victims of violence were also confirmed, including when the house of an SLPP candidate in Freetown was damaged (EU EOM-SL 2023b: 20). During the second week of June 2023, a diaspora blogger also tried to cause upheaval through trying to become a political force outside of established party structures, calling for

protests against the ECSL. As a consequence, on 11, 12 and 21 June, a heavy police and military presence was deployed in several district capitals, including Freetown. Several isolated incidents took place which led to the arrest of at least 150 individuals. In addition, following the inability of the PPRC to broker a compromise between the ACP and the ECSL[1] over their set of demands, the APC called for protest demonstrations. These were met by security forces firing live ammunition and tear gas canisters against ACP headquarters in Freetown, with one person killed (EU EOM-SL 2023a). Overall, the African Union EOM reported that according to the ONS a total of 17,000 security personnel were deployed, drawn from the different security bodies, of whom 80 per cent were from the police force (African Union 2023).

According to the EU EOM interlocutors, the police were generally seen as biased, with a widespread perception that investigations about violent attacks against APC candidates and activists were not sufficiently investigated, particularly in eastern and southern districts—although it was also acknowledged that in several districts the police did attempt to accommodate the concerns of both parties. According to the EU EOM, the PPRC also tended to shy away from using its powers to sanction campaign violators, both due to concerns about further destabilizing the political situation and because the police were not concluding investigations in political violence cases, therefore preventing further actions from the PPRC (EU EOM-SL 2023b: 8). The police cited lack of capacity as a reason for their inability to conclude investigations in a timely manner (EU EOM-SL 2023b: 21).

Gender-sensitive electoral security issues in Sierra Leone

In 2022, the Sierra Leonean Parliament passed the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act. This is the first legislative affirmative action measure aimed at enhancing women's political participation and promoting female candidates that was ever introduced by Sierra Leone. The act foresees a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in public and private bodies, including political parties. The PEA supports the GEWE by granting the PPRC the power to de-register political parties if they fail to comply with existing regulations (The Carter Center 2023).

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1   The mistrust between the APC and the ECSL is due to a legacy of political grievances arising from the removal of APC members of parliaments, following a 2018 High Court ruling that gave the SLPP a majority in parliament, and was further exacerbated by the re-demarcation of constituency boundaries based on the 2021 mid-term population census (Yeboah, Dumenu and Aikins 2023).

To ensure compliance with the GEWE, the ECSL designed software for submission of party lists, with what was assessed by the EU EOM to have a 'fair and mandatory' vertical distribution of female candidates. However, EU EOM interlocutors highlighted that parties tried to circumvent the quota by indicating male candidates as female ones. Nonetheless, women ended up comprising 37 per cent of parliamentary candidates, and 30 per cent of elected members of parliament (41 out of 135) (EU EOM-SL 2023b: 19). This was recorded as the highest level of female representation in parliament in the country's history (Tord 2023), with every district being represented by at least one woman. At the local level, out of 7 mayoral and 15 local council chairperson positions, 2 were won by women (EU EOM-SL 2023b).

Nonetheless, obstacles to gender equality in Sierra Leone's elections still remain, due to what the EU OEM identified as lack of genuine political will. For example, in elections to the extra-parliamentary seats reserved for local leaders (known as Paramount Chiefs) who represent the 14 provincial districts, only one woman was indirectly elected in 2023 (IPU 2023). Even in the placement of women in the lists of parliamentary candidates, it is clear that men are still largely preferred as political leaders, with only one SLPP list (Kambia) being led by a woman, and with the ACP only rarely placing women in the second position. Moreover, in the context of the presidential elections, representation remained low, with only 1 of the 13 political parties running having a female candidate standing for office, while one woman ran as independent and five stood as presidential running mates (EU EOM-SL 2023b).

While some efforts were made to enhance the inclusion of female candidates by organizing public debates in the media reserved for women in the electoral race, they remained under-represented in the media. The EU EOM noted, for instance, that not a single prime-time news item was devoted to the sole female presidential candidate.

Additionally, while the approval of the GEWE is a positive legislative step, enhancement of gender equality in politics is unlikely to occur without addressing persistent socio-cultural, developmental and educational challenges—including fostering political willingness to appoint women to decision-making positions (EU EOM-SL 2023b). As reported by Freedom House, women in fact continue to experience discrimination in employment, education and access to credit.

In August 2022, the Sierra Leonean Parliament passed the Customary Land Rights Act (CLRA), which is meant to improve land rights for

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women. The GEWE also includes provisions mandating equal pay and extending the length of paid maternity leave (Freedom House 2023). Moreover, the new project 'Gender Equality in Politics', funded by Global Affairs Canada and launched in 2023, aims to contribute to fostering the political participation of women and gender mainstreaming in the Sierra Leonen Parliament (IPU 2023).

1.2.5. Case study: EMB–SSA coordination in Nigeria

Nigeria represents a strong case of the legitimate and formalized interconnectedness of the EMB and SSAs in the coordination of elections. The Independent National Election Commission (INEC) is an official government body given power via section 15 of the Nigerian Constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999; Electoral Act 2010). INEC is afforded its own funding and has a wide reach across the country, with an office in each of the 36 states and an office in the Federal Capital Territory, as well as an office in each of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (Electoral Act 2010; interview with staff member of international NGO, Abuja 2018). Through these offices, INEC works with local security agencies to ensure the security of elections at all levels of government.

The coordination is facilitated through the INEC Standing Committee on Security and the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security—a committee of INEC which has, since 2010, been co-chaired by the INEC chair and the Nigerian national security adviser.

The coordination is facilitated through the INEC Standing Committee on Security and the Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES)—a committee of INEC which has, since 2010, been co-chaired by the INEC chair and the Nigerian national security adviser. The ICCES includes representatives from the three branches of security agencies: the intelligence community (national security adviser, Department of State Service, National Intelligence Agency), the armed forces and police (police, army, navy, air force), and paramilitary organizations (Immigration Services, Correctional Services, Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Customs Service, Federal Road Safety Corps, Security and Civil Defence Corps and the Federal Fire Service). Non-security agencies included in the ICCES are INEC, the Police Service Commission, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Police Affairs and the National Youth Service Corps (Situation Room 2016).

The ICCES does not secure elections, but it coordinates with the security sector. It 'makes decision[s] and advises the commission on election security … not hav[ing] the capability or the capacity to secure the election, [it] is [the] security agency that has force' (interview with member of electoral body, Abuja 2018). The ICCES is a permanent body that meets regularly both during and between elections to review risks and develop plans for forthcoming elections. Each security agency provides an operational plan, which is jointly

reviewed by the ICCES and amended as necessary. The ICCES federal structure is replicated at the state and local government levels (interview with member of electoral body, Abuja 2018). Typically, the ICCES coordinates with local security agencies and the Nigerian police, rather than the military, to secure elections, but it can call in military support in rural or conflict-affected areas that require greater security assistance (interview with a member of a CSO, Abuja 2018).

The objectives of the ICCES (Situation Room 2016) are to:

1. coordinate the design of a comprehensive election security management system for INEC;
2. develop locally focused plans for providing security before, during and after elections;
3. harmonize the training, deployment and actions of security personnel on election duties;
4. assess existing security threats across the country that have implications for elections and produce a regularly updated red, amber and green electoral security map for the country;
5. advise INEC on rapid response to security threats around elections, including voter registration;
6. ensure a reduction in transaction costs to INEC of dealing with individual security agencies on issues of elections;
7. evaluate the performance of security agencies on election duties and recommend improvements and sanctions, where necessary; and
8. harmonize the election budgets of security agencies and source funding commonly, if possible.

EMB–SSA coordination in practice: The experience of Nigeria since the 2019 elections

Elections in Nigeria have long been plagued by violence. In 2011, over 1,000 lives were lost, especially following the announcement of results of the presidential elections. During the 2015 election, specific targeting of ethnic groups and the general insecurity in the north-east prompted INEC to briefly postpone the election date. In 2019, elections were again delayed at the last minute, due to cited logistics challenges.

Although the ICCES was created to improve coordination and information sharing, during the 2019 elections international observers reported that, in practice, security agencies did not always share necessary information nor participate regularly in meetings, and at times circumvented INEC's legal authority (IRI/NDI 2019). With the intention to help address cases of misconduct reported

Each security agency provides an operational plan, which is jointly reviewed by the ICCES and amended as necessary. The ICCES federal structure is replicated at the state and local government levels.

With the intention to help address cases of misconduct reported by electoral security agents in 2019, the ICCES developed a Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security Personnel on Electoral Duty to harmonize the codes of conduct of the 19 agencies of which it is composed, and lay out their respective responsibilities.

by electoral security agents in 2019 (Intersociety 2021), the ICCES developed a Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Security Personnel on Electoral Duty (EU 2022) to harmonize the codes of conduct of the 19 agencies of which it is composed, and lay out their respective responsibilities. In late November 2022, ahead of the 2023 polls in February (presidential and parliamentary elections) and March (gubernatorial state elections), the inspector general of police ordered the commissioners of police nationwide to activate ICCES committees (Vanguard 2022a). The objective of the early activation was to engage stakeholders in evolving strategies to mitigate threats to the 2023 general elections.

The 2023 elections were the first to take place after the 2022 Electoral Act was passed—the first electoral reform package in over a decade (IRI/NDI 2023). The act introduced measures aimed at building stakeholders' trust and was viewed positively by international election observers. It includes provisions to enhance the administration and transparency of elections, including significant extensions of electoral timelines; securement of advanced funding for INEC and increases in results accessibility for the public as well as introduction of additional mechanisms for results verification (IRI/NDI 2023). While the passing of the act initially offered hopes for a better electoral environment in 2023 compared to previous elections, these hopes nonetheless remained largely unmet, with the general elections revealing crucial gaps in the ability of the act to guarantee INEC's accountability and transparency. In fact, while INEC enjoyed broad stakeholder trust early in the process, and collaborated with state agencies on various issues including electoral security, public confidence in the institution gradually decreased and was severely damaged during the February elections due to its operational failures and lack of transparency. This exacerbated existing public grievances and tensions in the electoral landscape (EU EOM 2023).

Findings from the EOM of the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute suggest that the lead-up to the 2023 election was even more violent than the equivalent period in 2019, and that the overall 2023 election cycle resulted in more deaths and incidents of election violence compared to the 2019 election cycles, especially in local government areas (IRI/NDI 2023: 8). The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) recorded, in the year preceding the election, 'over 200 violent events involving party members and supporters, resulting in nearly 100 reported fatalities' (Carboni and Serwat 2023). The EU EOM also recorded 101 violent incidents during the campaign and at least 74 fatalities, with the majority of incidents being related to state elections and resulting

from the deployment of politically sponsored gangs intended to eliminate opponents, obstruct oppositions' campaign activities and deter supporters' voter participation (EU EOM 2023). ACLED also identified violence perpetrated by regional security outfits and criminal gangs as one of three main patterns of election violence in 2023, together with violence between party supporters and against candidates, and attacks on INEC's offices and staff. In addition, in a media landscape characterized by disinformation, misinformation and hate speech, violence against journalists was also significant: 'in the wake of the March 2023 gubernatorial elections, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that at least 28 journalists were harassed, attacked, or obstructed from the process while trying to report on the state elections' (IRI/NDI 2023: 26).

Electoral violence in 2023 occurred even as a National Peace Accord had been signed by presidential candidates in September 2022, followed by a second Peace Accord on 23 February—committing candidates and parties to peaceful post-election conduct—and then by state-level peace pacts in almost all 36 states ahead of the gubernatorial elections (EU EOM 2023).

Different stakeholders reported that the reaction and conduct of security agencies regarding tensions and violence during the 2023 electoral cycle were superior to what was seen in the context of previous elections, with security forces generally deploying more on schedule and acting more professionally than in past cycles. In particular, the military tried to avoid playing any role that could be seen as political, and allowed the police to handle the bulk of the election preparation and security. Moreover, in contrast to previous elections, the police were generally not directly involved in election-related offences like election-snatching or threatening of opposition politicians, with only a few exceptions (IRI/NDI 2023: 24). According to a press release by the inspector general of police in March, the police made 781 arrests related to 758 offences during the elections, though it remains unclear how many of these arrests led to effective prosecution and punishment (EU EOM 2023: 27).

Nonetheless, several major shortcomings related to security were identified: the police and security forces often remained passive in the face of blatant electoral violations and political violence, enabled by the fact that the newly approved Electoral Act placed the onus on INEC to identify and stop electoral offences at the polling unit—foreseeing only a supporting role for the security agencies, and also giving INEC (rather than the police) the authority to prosecute electoral offences. While INEC acknowledged security threats to the

Different stakeholders reported that the reaction and conduct of security agencies regarding tensions and violence during the 2023 electoral cycle were superior to what was seen in the context of previous elections, with security forces generally deploying more on schedule and acting more professionally than in past cycles.

elections and conducted several training programmes with security forces beforehand, its actual security enforcement fell short on the days of the election—due to what has been reported as lack of proactiveness and capacity of the institution, as well as failure of the ICCES to act as intended. For example, although the ICCES and security agencies published long lists of various hotlines that citizens could call to report different offences or security incidents, many of the lines were not properly manned on election day (IRI/NDI 2023: 24).

Gender-sensitive electoral security issues in Nigeria

The issue of VAWE and VAWP has been widely taken up by INEC and CSOs. As early as 2014, INEC Chairman Professor Attahiru Jega stated: 'in INEC we believe very strongly that whatever we do, we have to factor the protection and the defence of women' (INEC Nigeria 2014). Women's situation rooms have been deployed since 2015 (Godia 2015). In 2019, the Women's Situation Room—Nigeria (WSRN) documented gender sensitivity in the electoral process as well as incidents of violence (Onochie 2019). In 2019, two political women leaders were killed and some female election officials, as well as security personnel, were raped (Partners West Africa Nigeria 2022).

Ahead of the 2023 elections, the WSRN launched an early warning and response centre (EWAR) for data collection and analysis, early warning, response and reporting (Oketunde 2023). A gender-based 2023 pre-election security threat assessment was also carried out by the Rule of Law and Empowerment Initiative to contribute to planning and prevention (Partners West Africa Nigeria 2022). In December 2022, a coalition of CSOs called for a state of emergency ahead of the elections due to discrimination and violence against female politicians (Abdullahi 2022), following the killing of a female ex-party leader and her daughter in Abia State in March 2022 (Nwakanma 2022) and the murder of the female leader of the Labour Party in Kaduna State after an assailant raided her house in November of the same year (Vanguard 2022b). The EU EOM also reported that at least two female candidates, including one for governor, faced unsuccessful attempts by their parties to exclude them from the race, as well as noting that female candidates faced significant challenges in campaigning due to financial constraints and social resistance—together with very limited media exposure, corresponding to no more than 2 per cent of total prime time on television and radio (EU EOM 2023). The EU EOM also highlighted that economically deprived women voters were vulnerable to targeting by candidates (EU EOM 2023), with the Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room reporting that women in Northern Nigeria especially were forced to

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sell their Permanent Voter's Cards (PVCs) for NGN 2,000 (USD 1.38) by some political parties contesting the elections (Situation Room 2023; Abdullahi 2022). The Code of Conduct for Security Personnel on Electoral Duty produced by the ICCES (2020) does not include specific information on preventing or mitigating acts of VAWE.

In terms of political representation, there were low expectations after the National Assembly rejected most of the anticipated laws for women's inclusion in early 2022. Successive governments have also continued to fail to implement the National Gender Policy target of 35 per cent women to both appointed and elective positions (EU EOM 2023). Women's representation, in decline since 2007, continued to follow this trend in 2023: ahead of the polls, the number of female candidates at all levels of elections was barely 10 per cent, with only one woman contesting the presidential race among 18 candidates and no woman nominated as running mate. Female candidates won 2 seats out of 101 in the Senate, while they won only 13 out of 326 seats in the House of Representatives (IRI/NDI 2023). Also, no governorship was won by a woman. According to International IDEA's Africa Barometer for Women's Political Participation data on Nigeria post-2023 elections, the country ranks as the lowest performing on the continent in terms of gender representation, further underscoring the severity of the gender gap in political leadership (International IDEA 2024).

The Code of Conduct for Security Personnel on Electoral Duty produced by the ICCES (2020) does not include specific information on preventing or mitigating acts of VAWE.

Chapter 2
FINDINGS

The nature of the electoral risks in each country, coupled with internal structures and chains of command within the security sector, were the factors determining the type of coordination mechanism employed.

In the cases examined in Chapter 1, EMB–SSA coordination mechanisms evolved in response to the security context in each country, rather than as the result of an intentional, strategic institutional arrangement. The nature of the electoral risks in each country, coupled with internal structures and chains of command within the security sector, were the factors determining the type of coordination mechanism employed. Coordination mechanisms are rarely defined in policy documents and never in legal texts. Instead, they are fluid and dynamic arrangements that, when most effective, adapt to changing security contexts and political realities.

However, these cases have much to tell us about how to better understand and adopt EMB–SSA coordination mechanisms. First, they illustrate seven key factors influencing the shape of electoral security planning in the ECOWAS region today, and that must be taken into consideration in developing a responsive electoral security plan. Second, the cases illustrate possible models for EMB–SSA coordination and give us some insight about when and how to choose among them. They allow us to construct a typology of possible coordination mechanisms and to map how they relate to each other. Third, they suggest measures against which to judge the effectiveness of different models of coordination. Finally, they point to the need to employ gender-sensitive electoral security planning as a systematic approach to dealing with violence against women in elections and to promote gender sensitivity within the security sector.

2.1. SEVEN DRIVING FACTORS IN ELECTORAL SECURITY PLANNING IN THE ECOWAS REGION

The case studies suggest that there are seven factors that are critical to consider in the design of EMB–SSA coordination. Four of these factors are structural in nature: the dependence of EMBs on SSAs' coercive power, the temporary versus permanent nature of coordination mechanisms, the ability and willingness of the police to protect rather than repress the public, and the impact of bureaucratic procedures and political norms. The other three factors are contextual: inadequate attention to the risks faced by women, the growing impact of violent extremism and the role of vigilante groups. These relationships are summarized in Table 2.1.

2.1.1. EMBs' paradoxical dependence on coercive power

Elections are an exercise of national sovereignty which should in principle be devoid of coercive power. Although the definition of statehood is connected with the monopoly of coercive power, the absence of coercive ability in the exercise of elections defines a democracy. This sets the stage for a curious relationship in the execution of democratic elections. EMBs—whose role is to operationalize democratic principles and implement the electoral laws in the transfer of power—are tasked with organizing autonomous elections free of coercive influence. Yet to do so, they require access to coercive capacity that they do not possess themselves. They must therefore rely on the coercive capacity of actors who may be politicized or associated with human rights abuses to organize a nonpartisan, rights-based public event.

Although in practice security actors occupy roles of varying strength and leadership in electoral security management, it is considered good practice that the ultimate responsibility of electoral security should always fall under an EMB's constitutional and/or statutory mandate for the overall conduct of elections. EMBs wield significant power, including the ability to impose binding rules and regulations on voters, parties and candidates, media, and observers. EMBs delegate their authority to national SSAs to ensure security and enforce some of the relevant electoral laws and regulations. In the five cases considered here (and in many other countries), EMBs have no direct or binding authority over SSAs; cooperation effectively relies on the goodwill of the security sector to uphold delegated duties. The EMB–SSA relationship is a necessary one: elections generally require specialized planning and information exchange, large-scale security and logistical support.

Table 2.1. **Summarizing the relationship between influential factors and trends and EMB–SA cooperation model options**

Influencing factors and trends		How does this factor impact the choice/effectiveness of the model type?	How does the model type influence outcomes for this factor?
EMBs' paradoxical dependence on coercive power	EMBs must have final authority over electoral security but they rely on the goodwill of the SSA. Coordination models must adapt where goodwill and trust are lacking.	SSA political will and public trust in both institutions reduces the imperative for a formalized cooperation model and allows flexibility in model choice, including using ad hoc models. Where one actor lacks public credibility, model choices are constrained and may be based on a combined calculus of public security interests, institutional autonomy and damage control.	The objective is to instil public trust and confidence. Where confidence in the SSA is lacking, models that both create distance between the EMB and SSA and establish the autonomous authority of the EMB can be expected to perform best.
Temporary versus permanent coordination mechanisms	The value of permanent coordination bodies and the scope and mandate is a current debate in the region.	The existence of a permanent mechanism implies a formal/institutional relationship.	Ad hoc or extra-governmental models are more likely to develop temporary approaches to coordination, although they may replicate practices from cycle to cycle.

Table 2.1. **Summarizing the relationship between influential factors and trends and EMB–SA cooperation model options (cont.)**

Influencing factors and trends		How does this factor impact the choice/effectiveness of the model type?	How does the model type influence outcomes for this factor?
The ability and willingness of the SSA to protect rather than repress the public	Managing breaches in public trust and engaging in efforts to build confidence in electoral security are key.	If the SSA lacks credibility or is viewed as unreliable, an EMB-led model is essential for electoral integrity. Where public trust is low but the EMB sufficiently trusts SSA, joint mechanisms can instil trust and build transparency Legacies of co-opted or abusive state security apparatus impact the salience of this factor. Models with strong EMB leadership or clear joint-management arrangements may be better equipped to overcome problematic historic relationships.	Joint models or EMB-led models with formalized coordination can provide the strong communication and planning required to engage in public outreach and confidence-building. Ad hoc models may lack necessary resources or time to develop in-depth outreach, or be less able to provide necessary transparency to promote public trust in contexts with low confidence in public institutions.
The impact of bureaucratic procedures and political norms	Bureaucratic and political procedures as well as norms and sensitivities around aid to SSA can impact interagency competition, timing and international assistance decisions.	Restrictive procedures and norms can inhibit necessary flow of information and coordination between EMBs and SSA s and induce ad hoc arrangements.	Changing norms around bureaucratic procedures is not a function of EMB– SSA coordination mechanisms; however, a clear expression and definition of roles, responsibilities and needs can contribute to effective advocacy for reform. Models that have strong EMB leads may be better able to express the critical nature of the relationship to convince donors of the need to fund electoral security activities more.

Table 2.1. Summarizing the relationship between influential factors and trends and EMB–SA cooperation model options (cont.)

Influencing factors and trends		How does this factor impact the choice/effectiveness of the model type?	How does the model type influence outcomes for this factor?
Inadequate attention to the risks faced by women	The absence of responses to address the risk of election violence faced by women constitutes a structural form of discrimination and is a major failure in election security management.	Political and social pressure to promote gender equality can place new imperatives to take this factor into consideration in decisions around institutional security arrangements. As smaller, potentially more agile institutions than security actors, EMBs may be viewed as more responsive and better able to identify election-specific security issues, thus models with EMB leadership or joint implementation may be more impactful.	Where EMB leadership of electoral security is well-entrenched, EMB information and awareness in this area, coupled with relationships with civil society and other stakeholders, position them to engage effectively on this and sensitize security actors.
The growing impact of violent extremism	Holding elections in areas contested by violent extremists is of symbolic importance as an indicator of state control; where EMB and state SSA s mismanage or fail to hold elections, the legitimacy and territorial integrity of the organized state is diminished.	The growing influence of extremist groups is creating new pressures for formalized cooperation models, given the complexity of the risk, the increased number of actors involved in mitigating it, and the long-term horizon involved.	These contexts are more likely to result in institutionalized coordination and may see a greater role for SSA leadership. As a result, EMBs may temporarily cede some authorities that would not be otherwise recommended in more stable contexts and should remain vigilant to protect autonomy.

Table 2.1. **Summarizing the relationship between influential factors and trends and EMB–SA cooperation model options (cont.)**

Influencing factors and trends		How does this factor impact the choice/effectiveness of the model type?	How does the model type influence outcomes for this factor?
The controversial role of vigilante and self-defence groups	In regions where community defence organizations are active, a key dimension of EMB–SSA coordination is to find ways to legitimately involve, integrate or otherwise engage these groups to leverage their contributions to local security for electoral processes while mitigating multiple risks.	Self-defence groups tend to arise in regions where state security is otherwise unable to operate; however, these groups lack formal status and are, presumably, temporary stop gaps. As such, any contribution to electoral security cooperation would require a model that can accommodate ad hoc arrangements.	SSA-led coordination models may have greater cultural resistance and institutional rigidity to adapting to work with groups such as these. EMB-led models may be better able to act as intermediaries to negotiate short-term, ad hoc relationships around electoral events.

EMBs' dominant perspectives on the use of force tend to differ from those of most police forces and other civilian protection agencies in several ways. Police forces in West Africa, as in many parts of the world, are institutionally oriented towards public order. Policing assemblies within a human rights framework is an ongoing challenge, as our cases have illustrated. Public order legislation in several countries in the region, including Burkina Faso and Niger, tends to view public gatherings (including the assemblies for the expression of political opinion) as threatening public order and peace, leading to riots and ultimately to insurrection (Alexis 2018). As a result, public order management 'is not about protecting interests nor people but first of all about preventing trouble and disorder in public spaces' (Alexis 2018: 5). International and domestic cooperation and the ratification of international covenants and the African Charter are slowly generating change in these respects.

EMBs do not naturally have a culture of security management. Thus, there is a paradox: during elections, the actor with less capacity and technical background in public safety and violence prevention and mitigation (the EMB) is responsible for overseeing agencies specialized in these areas (the SSAs). When EMB–SSA coordination

is successful, the inherent tension of this relationship could be resolved through regular interaction and the design of joint objectives and planning based on some level of equality between EMB authority and SSA operational autonomy.

In terms of how this factor relates to the coordination models of the typology (Table 2.1), the relative strength or weakness of an EMB's security capacity should not influence the overarching importance of EMB leadership of electoral security. However, it can be expected to influence the ways in which that leadership is exercised. The most definitive factor is cultural: where goodwill and trust exist between the EMB and SSA, pressure to codify or formalize the institutional relationship decreases.

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2.1.2. Temporary versus permanent coordination mechanisms

Most EMBs in the ECOWAS region have some form of permanent security in place to protect the headquarters offices, the storage areas for electoral materials between cycles and the security of key staff. They do not, however, have an elaborate, permanent and institutionalized mechanism for coordinating with SSAs. Whether they should strive to implement such a mechanism is open for discussion.

The establishment of permanent EMB structures would allow for a permanent electoral security office or coordination mechanism, especially in the period between elections. The breadth and scope of this mechanism can vary, from minimalist top-level periodic coordination to decentralized administration, and from leadership only to the introduction of a permanent special SSA that receives ongoing guidance and training.

The possible benefits of permanent security coordination structures include increased professionalization, reduced training costs, and efficient planning or better foresight around sensitive electoral periods.

The possible benefits of permanent security coordination structures include increased professionalization, reduced training costs, and efficient planning or better foresight around sensitive electoral periods. Drawbacks include high costs, exacerbated tensions, the exacerbation of pre-existing rivalries between domestic security actors, and the increased influence of security actors on the electoral process. The existence of a permanent security coordination structure implies the existence of a formal/institutionalized approach to EMB−SSA coordination, and thus has broader cost, logistical and possibly legal implications.

2.1.3. **The capacity and willingness of the SSA to protect rather than repress the public**

EMBs in transitional states have the challenge of normalizing the role of SSAs and institutionalizing democratic procedures after long periods of disruption. Often, the SSAs remain heavily politicized; policing practices may be characterized by discrimination, corruption, abuse of power and the use of excessive force. Capacity is frequently very low, and SSAs in remote locations may have experienced abandonment by the central state. Under these conditions, the involvement of SSAs during elections can spark apprehension and mistrust among the population, who may fear physical violence, coercion, political pressure or influence, and impunity for assailants' actions. Transforming security forces into trusted and accountable protectors of public order and safety is a tremendous challenge, but it is vital to electoral security.

The issue of public trust and confidence in electoral SSAs is one of the areas where EMBs can have broad influence. Elections require specific policing skills that are often weak or absent in many of the countries surveyed. This lack of skill may have several expressions and sources, from problematic public order legislation in Burkina Faso and Niger to a legacy of violence in Guinea and ongoing allegations of excessive force in Sierra Leone (Civicus 2023; Jefferson et al. 2020; Amnesty International 2018b), as well as police failure to protect voters and electoral integrity in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch 2007). Likewise, where electoral laws and procedures are evolving (notably as security procedures adapt to increased extremist violence), training in crowd control or electoral reforms becomes even more important. SSAs have several major hurdles to overcome in policing elections: demonstrating political neutrality, defending human rights and free speech, and protecting the process without using excessive force or resorting to intimidation or repression.

EMB training of SSAs provides an opportunity for formal, large-scale coordination and direct cooperation. EMB staff in Nigeria described the importance of electoral security training as follows: '[Security personnel on] election duty do not really understand the electoral process or their duties and the responsibilities. [EMB training of SSAs is important], so that at the end of the day they can better understand that their role is not to actually interfere but to secure life and properties and not to be overtly assertive when they are doing their duties' (interview with staff member of international NGO, Abuja 2018).

In contexts where resource allocation for security sector training is particularly weak, elections (with their accompanying budget influx and high visibility) represent a valuable occasion for educating SSAs on human rights frameworks and principles more broadly.

In contexts where resource allocation for security sector training is particularly weak, elections (with their accompanying budget influx and high visibility) represent a valuable occasion for educating SSAs on human rights frameworks and principles more broadly. In Guinea, this task was delegated to assigned CSOs, sometimes in cooperation with international human rights and elections organizations, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UNDP and IFES. As with any post-conflict police training content, technical content (procedures, practical tools and skills, instructional guides) are as important as knowledge of human rights (O'Neil 2005). In all cases, EMB training staff reported that training empowers police in their role as protectors of the electoral process, including the people, materials and places involved. As expressed by one trainer: 'As we move through the electoral process, we began to train [SSAs] on human rights, law enforcement, and election security and above all that they are not there to intimidate, neither to frighten nor to rape people but to ensure their safety' (interview with former electoral official, Conakry 2018).

New channels of citizen accountability are contributing to mutual trust building—and contention—around policing. EMB and security actors in several countries mentioned that observers and regular citizens (especially youth) are using digital means (especially photographs and videos) to hold police to account. As expressed in one interview, 'there is a lot of awareness and activism by young people using social media   so even the military, the militants, the security agents are careful for this day and how they carry out their duties because they know people are watching' (interview with staff member of a CSO, Abuja 2018). However, citizen videos or photographs of even minor incidents can fuel outrage via the Internet and spark demonstrations that rapidly escalate into violence. Imagery and video of police violence can spread quickly on the Internet and rapidly undermine confidence in police forces. EMBs and SSAs actors need to be prepared to check information quickly (perhaps in collaboration with civil society watchdogs) and react quickly with the goal of reducing risks. SSAs also need to ensure that their personnel are trained to professionally handle violence that is being fuelled by social media.

Electoral security actors inspire confidence when they engage in public consultations and other transparency measures, including public communiqués and meetings with political party leadership on codes of conduct for behaviour during campaigns. Public trust-building measures help quell fears of terrorism in elections as well. In regions where police have been mistrusted, the threat of extremist

violence has motivated populations to turn back to state SSAs. The reverse is also true: police that may have had troubled relations with local populations are incentivized to rebuild trust and communication channels to protect and repel extremist influencers. Any measure that is likely to increase the responsibility of SSAs is positive for confidence building—for example, making the security personnel in charge of securing the electoral process recognizable, via uniforms, clearly marked cars, and so forth (Hounkpe 2019). Likewise, measures to build awareness of the roles and responsibilities of police in the electoral process through civic education and the establishment of a clear communication plan or code of conduct can help (Hounkpe 2019).

2.1.4. The impact of bureaucratic procedures and political norms

Bureaucratic and political procedures, norms and sensitivities can affect EMB–SSA coordination in a variety of ways. Electoral security requires the engagement of multiple security agencies (police, gendarmerie, national guard, etc.) in a process that involves significant profiling, prestige and funding as well as political sensitivities. As a result, interagency competition can influence the shape and structure of EMB–SSA coordination. EMB relations with the police constitute a first arena of coordination, and beyond this, sub-level dynamics come into play between police and other security and election authorities. EMB approaches to managing this dynamic vary widely. In Nigeria, INEC brings together a large coordination body of 18 different security agencies. In contrast, in Burkina Faso, coordination may be described as a form of managed autonomy under which the EMB sets parameters and leaves the interagency coordination and management to actors within the security sector.

Bureaucratic considerations also impact coordination in terms of timing. In states where election planning can begin only with a presidential decree, there may be reduced or inadequate time to plan security coordination. In extreme cases such as Guinea, the delayed timing of such decrees has resulted in an electoral training turnaround time of just a few days or even hours. Countries with fixed electoral calendars are better able to construct long-term, strategic relationships between electoral management and electoral security agencies.

Normative issues further influence electoral management and security coordination systems. Of all the areas of electoral administration that may receive outside support from international or regional bodies, electoral security is among the least frequent

Any measure that is likely to increase the responsibility of SSAs is positive for confidence building—for example, making the security personnel in charge of securing the electoral process recognizable, via uniforms, clearly marked cars, and so forth.

Normative issues further influence electoral management and security coordination systems. Of all the areas of electoral administration that may receive outside support from international or regional bodies, electoral security is among the least frequent beneficiaries.

beneficiaries. Electoral security actions involving state SSAs are widely perceived to be more sensitive than other areas of electoral administration. Although foreign technical assistance to administrative areas of electoral management was generally welcomed by respondents, in each country surveyed, state security management of electoral security was often viewed as a highly sensitive area of national sovereignty, falling outside the sphere of international technical assistance. Although this aversion to foreign support for state security reflects traditional norms around civil-military domains, this attitude could be viewed as perverse in the case of elections. EMBs control decisions about administrative processes that ultimately reflect the will of the people and the distribution of power in the state (the core of state sovereignty), whereas state SSAs are responsible for defending (not deciding) these processes. This segregation of electoral security from technical electoral assistance is reinforced by normative and bureaucratic standards of international organizations and donors, many of which place restrictions on working directly with SSAs outside of direct defence sector cooperation projects (e.g. electoral support programmes may be explicitly barred from working with police and other security actors).

Anecdotal reports from the respondents suggest that disaffected local security actors were less committed to performing electoral security duties when they felt excluded from decision making in the chain of command for electoral security (and, perhaps, excluded from the associated patronage benefits).

Finally, the structure of security sector chains of command can facilitate or inhibit effective coordination. The integration of regional and local-level SSAs varied widely across the countries studied. Where security decision making is concentrated at the central level without sufficient vertical coordination within the SSAs, representatives of subnational security authorities reported feeling resentment, a violation of their authority, and concern about quality of security provision. Anecdotal reports from the respondents suggest that disaffected local security actors were less committed to performing electoral security duties when they felt excluded from decision making in the chain of command for electoral security (and, perhaps, excluded from the associated patronage benefits). The vertical, hierarchal structure of security actors also presented a challenge for integrating horizonal coordination with a third party (i.e. an EMB) at the subnational level. Most EMB–SSA coordination meetings, train-the-trainers activities or joint planning sessions occur at the top levels in the capital cities. Regional and local rollout of these coordination efforts generally appeared to be siloed within the respective agencies. Yet local-level coordination mechanisms are vital, particularly in highly decentralized police structures and in rural areas where the formal, central state may have little or no presence.

2.1.5. **Inadequate attention to the risks faced by women**

It is the responsibility of the EMB and the designated electoral security providers to ensure the safe participation of women and men in elections. The risks of VAWE pose distinct challenges for electoral security providers. The most basic issue is a general recognition and acknowledgement of the existence of gender differences in election violence and risk. EMBs and SSAs cannot be expected to assume responsibilities to proactively address violence against women in elections without recognizing it as a problem. In addition, a textured understanding of the nature of this risk must underlie any strategic planning. This understanding includes comprehending the distinct security risks and protection needs of different groups of women in given contexts. Political will and resources to act on this risk are also necessary.

Interviews across the region reflect deeply conservative perspectives regarding women's political participation and its implications for security. No senior-level security actors interviewed (in EMBs or SSAs) were women, despite requests for diversity in the meetings. When interviewees were asked about security management and gender, their responses were limited to offering queue accommodations for pregnant women/women with small children and early morning voting to allow women to return home in time to prepare meals. Recognition of gender differences in election risk was absent; women's low participation was attributed to a lack of interest or competence. Some respondents actively opposed the idea of associating targeted security planning using temporary measures such as quotas, stating that women need to merit participation rather than receive special attention.

Increased international pressure and awareness raising around the issue has led to initial dialogues. These have involved primarily EMBs (not SSAs) and have yet to result in tangible output. Gender is a low institutional priority in both sectors. The application of gender quotas for political candidates, as well as for personnel at all levels of electoral administration, from executives to polling station staff, is increasing the pressure to address this issue. Women's high levels of participation in civil society (including domestic observation) in the region is also creating more awareness of the issue and more pressure to respond.

2.1.6. **Violent extremism is reshaping EMB−SSA coordination**

Radical groups pose an existential threat to state sovereignty during elections. Legitimacy is conferred by elections in democratic states. When violent extremist groups impede the organization of elections,

Recognition of gender differences in election risk was absent; women's low participation was attributed to a lack of interest or competence.

they violate the foundation of the state itself. Holding elections in areas contested by violent extremists is of symbolic importance as an indicator of state control; where the EMB and state SSAs mismanage or fail to hold elections, the legitimacy and territorial integrity of the organized state is diminished. The threats which extremist groups pose to citizen security and national sovereignty are compelling EMBs to shift away from informal and ad hoc coordination strategies, and towards more formal structures and deeper planning processes that are better able to respond to complex risks.

Violent extremist groups in the region view state elections as an opportunity to enhance control and influence while disrupting the democratic process and undermining state sovereignty (interviews with police official and with CSO representative, Ouagadougou 2018). As such, they pose a threat to human and material security during elections. Boko Haram has regularly targeted voters during Nigerian elections over the past decade (Ploch Blanchard 2015; Human Rights Watch 2019). In Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger, the shadow of Mali's 2018 elections weighs heavily, after as many as 4,500 of Mali's 23,000 polling stations were attacked by groups with ties to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State; between 600 and 800 Malian polling stations were closed during the first round of voting in July 2018 (Ahmed 2018).

States with previously low-level electoral security risks tended towards ad hoc and temporary arrangements during the electoral period; the risks posed by extremist groups are motivating midcycle consultations and reopening conversations around permanent collaborative electoral security mechanisms.

This emerging dynamic has a twofold effect on EMB–SSA coordination. It compels EMBs and state SSAs to revisit existing cooperation mechanisms and shift towards more formal structures and processes, including advanced planning and deployment strategies. States with previously low-level electoral security risks tended towards ad hoc and temporary arrangements during the electoral period; the risks posed by extremist groups are motivating midcycle consultations and reopening conversations around permanent collaborative electoral security mechanisms. Larger and longer security deployments to affected regions require more resources. The varying nature of the extremist threat shapes the types of response required. To counteract extremists' claims of legitimacy and bolster local confidence, state electoral and security bodies must enhance security deployments well in advance of elections, and emphasize public messaging around orderly and secure electoral processes.

2.1.7. **The controversial role of vigilante and self-defence groups**

Although the presence of organized, armed non-state groups poses practical and existential concerns for national security management, not all such groups are inherently threatening to electoral processes. In Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, community defence organizations (such as local self-defence and vigilante groups) have emerged to respond to community-level insecurity by augmenting or substituting for inadequate state policing (de Bruijne 2022; Samassy 2024).

Frequently characterized by a strong sense of patriotism and national pride, the region's community defence organizations broadly support electoral processes. Indeed, vigilante groups may be viewed as essential to electoral security in areas with limited policing and governance structures. In some cases, vigilante groups and the police informally coordinate electoral security, especially in the sphere of information sharing and intelligence. In Nigeria, this information sharing is highly regularized and formal. Community defence organizations reportedly contribute directly to police operations in some areas, such as assisting in criminal arrests. In some countries where there are not enough police to cover all polling stations in remote regions, community defence groups have informally self-organized to provide security at polling stations on election day. This election security function is performed without coordination with the EMBs or state SSAs.

These groups are often well organized. For example, the Kogl-wégo in Burkina Faso originated as groups of local farmers and herders involved in forest firefighting and the prevention of illegal logging as well as theft of crops and livestock. Today, an estimated 4,500 Kogl-wégo groups around the country engage in a broad variety of security actions. They are organized into brigades and other units, and have uniforms and an executive structure. Groups composed of community elders, called Wibsé, engage in mediation between the Kogl-wégo and the community and perform intelligence gathering. The Kogl-wégo occasionally contend for influence with the Dozo, another group with similar origins in rural self-defence that tends to be active in different parts of the country. The role of women in these groups is reportedly prominent, with strong involvement at the leadership level and in specialized functions such as intelligence gathering on local crimes.

Vigilante groups operate primarily in vast rural territories where state police presence is weakest and where their operatives may outnumber those of state SSAs by 10 to 1. They are generally viewed

positively by their local communities because they are members of these communities. Recruited locally and intimately connected to traditional governance structures, self-defence groups may benefit from higher levels of trust than state SSAs that come from other regions and appear only during election periods. These self-defence groups are generally perceived as nonpolitical and are not affiliated with religious organizations, radical or otherwise. In contrast to radicalized, armed religious groups, community defence organizations are generally not recognized for using their coercive capacity to impose an ideology.

Despite the reportedly benign or constructive role of self-defence groups, they present a puzzle and a potential risk for election security management.

Despite the reportedly benign or constructive role of self-defence groups, they present a puzzle and a potential risk for election security management. Apart from some examples in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, where local self-defence groups have defined relationships with state SSAs, vigilante groups are often not registered and thus not accountable to the state. It is often challenging to integrate these groups into formal election security coordination mechanisms. EMBs and SSAs implicitly recognize the contribution of local self-defence groups but are unable to formally engage with them due to structural relationships and legal constraints. The groups pose inherent risks: without explicit apolitical mandates or accountability mechanisms, vigilante groups can be exposed to ideological manipulation and evolve into personal militias for local elites.

Although state or parastate actors, such as the police and EMBs, cannot formally engage community vigilante groups to manage electoral security, this gap is tentatively bridged in Nigeria and Burkina Faso by civil society groups working to facilitate coordination and information sharing on electoral security between formal and informal security actors.

In regions where community defence organizations are active, a key dimension of EMB–SSA coordination is to find ways to legitimately involve, integrate or otherwise engage these groups to leverage their contributions to local security for electoral processes while mitigating multiple risks. One path may be to channel cooperation through affiliated, registered CSOs that are active in various aspects of securing the electoral process, such as violence monitoring and electoral situation rooms.

Chapter 3

DIMENSIONS AND VARIETIES OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY COORDINATION

The case studies teach us about identifiable models of EMB–SSA coordination. No two countries are entirely alike in their mechanisms and approaches to EMB–SSA coordination. However, identifying some of the characteristics that differentiate the ways in which election security coordination is organized may help to identify those coordination types that may be best suited for countries in the ECOWAS region and for countries around the world that face similar security challenges. This section introduces a typology to map the possible configurations of coordination models and how they relate to each other.

3.1. A TYPOLOGY OF COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The possible configurations of EMB–SSA coordination mechanisms can be charted according to the leadership of electoral security management and the type of coordination. Leadership specifies the entity with the primary responsibility for managing electoral security (preparation and response). Sometimes, the EMB is responsible for election security planning and personnel, provides leadership of joint structures, and sets the security agenda. In other cases, the military, the police or another state security agency is the primary party responsible for leading and coordinating election security planning and personnel and setting the security agenda. Additional options include joint EMB–SSA management, extra-governmental leadership (such as peacekeeping-led electoral operations), and cases where leadership is absent.

Coordination mechanisms also differ in the structural arrangements for collaboration between the security sector and the EMB during the

The possible configurations of EMB–SSA coordination mechanisms can be charted according to the leadership of electoral security management and the type of coordination.

electoral cycle. Coordination mechanisms may operate ad hoc, where the lead agency calls upon a secondary actor periodically or when needed for involvement in security planning and implementation. In other cases, institutionalized/formalized arrangements may exist between security and electoral agencies regarding electoral security management (e.g. their roles may be defined in a legal document or a memorandum of understanding, or a formal coordination mechanism may exist). Additional options include extra-governmental cooperation (e.g. coordination by a third party such as the United Nations) or the absence of coordination. A typology of collaboration formats is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. **Typology of collaboration between election and security officials**

Leadership	Ad hoc/parallel	Institutionalized/formal	Extra-governmental
EMB leadership	EMB is responsible for election security (personnel and planning); SSA is on call	Institutionalized committee/meetings/ agencies; EMB issues directives to SSA through institutional structures	EMB is responsible for election security (personnel and planning); peace operation is on call. Uncommon cooperation type
Joint leadership	Parallel and separate systems of electoral security management	Joint operational centres; instances where SSA and EMB are headed within same ministry	Joint operational centres; instances where peace operation is responsible for election management
Security sector leadership	EMB plays little security role beyond ad hoc information provision requested by SSA s	EMB has institutional responsibilities for providing information; SF sets the security agenda	EMB plays little security role beyond information provision requested by peace operation
Extra-governmental leadership	Electoral security leadership is primarily managed by a third-party international actor with ad hoc coordination/ consultation with local actors	Electoral security leadership is primarily managed by a third-party international actor; formal coordination mechanism with national actors exists	Electoral security is entirely managed and implemented by a non-state actor

3.2. **KEY DIMENSIONS OF EMB–SSA COORDINATION**

Research by International IDEA and other actors supports the findings that greater cooperation reduces the risk of election violence (Opitz, Fjelde and Höglund 2013; Hounkpe and Gueye 2010; Alihodžić and Asplund 2018). In order to analyse the effectiveness of any of the typology options presented above, the following questions—which are drawn from the existing literature—can be used to analyse the relationship between SSAs and EMBs and the quality of their cooperation:

- Is the role of the SSA and the EMB–SSA cooperative relationship codified in legal frameworks?

- Considering the election cycle, when does election security coordination begin? Does this timing allow for timely planning?

- Has a gender analysis identified distinct risks for women and men and ensured representation in security bodies and consultative mechanisms?

- Is there a clear division of tasks or chain of command? To whom should security threats be reported? Who gives orders and who is responsible for information gathering?

- What role do the armed forces play in security functions, as compared to the police?

- How is the budget determined for security functions? Is this done from within the EMB budget? Is there a specific budget allocation?

- How is coordination structured at lower administrative levels (e.g. provincial, district)?

Just as the distinct models of cooperation vary among the options in the typology, there is a large degree of variation in how individual countries respond to these questions. There is no consensus on the best model or approach for cooperation. However, models in which security actors have authority above that of the EMB are not considered good practice. To maintain the neutrality and integrity of an electoral process, the EMB is recommended to have final authority on the administration of elections, including leadership over security coordination. The only exceptions to this are atypical situations where a third party (such as the United Nations) temporarily assumes responsibility, usually in a crisis or post-conflict situation. Domestic

There is no consensus on the best model or approach for cooperation. However, models in which security actors have authority above that of the EMB are not considered good practice.

authorities (and, in rare cases, third-party actors leading election management) have several options in designing cooperation mechanisms adapted to national context and needs, including high-security threats (such as in Nigeria and Mali) which dictate that EMBs follow guidance from SSAs more than in lower-risk environments. The mechanisms coordinating election security are often created either through codification in the legal framework or through informal interactions.

In some cases, the EMB and security sector address issues of election violence informally, through separate and parallel systems with little or no collaboration (see column 1 of Table 3.1). Cooperation, if it takes place, occurs through ad hoc meetings and informal information exchange, as in Benin (Alihodžić 2016). Research shows that ad hoc arrangements exist throughout West Africa because legal frameworks related to EMB–SSA cooperation are often vague or absent (Hounkpe and Gueye 2010).

More interesting for the present analysis are the cases with formalized mechanisms of communication, information sharing and, in some cases, decision making between EMBs and their security sector counterparts (see column 2 of Table 3.1). Some of these mechanisms involve regular meetings among key stakeholders, while others employ functional roles. Examples include Sierra Leone's Inter-agency Consultative Committee on Election Security, the multiparty liaison committees in Malawi (Opitz, Fjelde and Höglund 2013: 719), the Joint Election Operation Centres in Nepal (Alihodžić 2016: 57) and South Sudan (Kammerud 2011: 160), and the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Elections Security in Nigeria's 2011 elections (Catt et al. 2014: 133). All these bodies brought together EMB and security sector representatives—and, in some cases, political party officials and CSOs—in institutionalized forums or specialized agencies.

All too frequently, EMB–SSA relations can be less harmonious. For example, during the 1996 Sierra Leone elections, EMB registration teams were blocked by the military from accessing refugees in Guinea and much of the countryside (Elklit and Reynolds 2002: 111). Under such circumstances, the possibility of cooperation is severely weakened and EMB involvement in security functions will often be subordinated to the SSAs.

There is no standard role for the EMB in electoral security. In some cases, the EMB takes over all security functions (see row 1 of Table 3.1). For example, during election periods, the police forces

in Uruguay and India come under the direction of the EMB, which has substantial authority over force deployment (López-Pintor 2000: 162; Alihodžić 2016: 46). In other contexts, the civilian EMB has little input on security issues, with the SSAs relying on the EMB only for intelligence purposes (see row 3 of Table 3.1). During Pakistan's elections in the early 1990s, for example, the army took an independent approach to assessing security threats and carrying out deployments on election day, with some concerns that it was assuming some of the authority of the electoral commission (López-Pintor 2000: 203). Similarly, the EMB can be relegated to supporting the functions of an international mission in post-conflict settings (see column 3/row 4 of Table 3.1; see also Catt et al. 2014: 352; Murray 2007).

Regardless of the specific roles they play, EMBs are almost always well positioned to perform one key function: information gathering (Alihodžić 2016). In all contexts, a core responsibility of the EMB is to monitor the quality of the election, which includes assessing the extent to which violence, insecurity and intimidation may influence voters' involvement in the electoral process (Hounkpe and Gueye 2010). For this reason, most EMBs have systems in place to identify security threats or sources of political conflict. For example, India's electoral commission has developed a number of tools, including vulnerability mapping and the identification of at-risk polling stations (Electoral Commission of India 2016). In other cases, intelligence is gathered through CSOs and then transmitted to electoral administrators. The recent popularity of 'election situation rooms' exemplifies this model.[2]

Whether an EMB takes on a leadership role in the planning of election security or not, its information-gathering role makes its involvement in the planning process essential. The regular SSAs often require a specialized knowledge of electoral risk management and political conflict that is invaluable to predicting and preventing election violence.

In all contexts, a core responsibility of the EMB is to monitor the quality of the election, which includes assessing the extent to which violence, insecurity and intimidation may influence voters' involvement in the electoral process.

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2   An election situation room is a coordinated mechanism for receiving and sharing election information to ensure that civil society efforts contribute to free and fair elections, coordinated as effectively as possible. 'Women's situation rooms' empower women to be a leading force for democratic and peaceful elections (see International IDEA 2016).

Chapter 4
GENDER-SENSITIVE ELECTORAL SECURITY PLANNING

Women and men have distinct electoral security experiences, pertaining to (among other things) widespread VAWE and VAWP. Gender impacts security-related needs, priorities and roles in electoral security provision. Electoral security planning should systematically adopt the principles of gender-sensitive security sector reform in order to ensure equitable access to and engagement in democratic processes.

Gender-sensitive electoral security planning means transforming election security to be both responsive and representative of women *and* men, as well as people of diverse gender identities.

Large-scale security sector reform has established norms for gender-sensitive transformations of security sectors/systems since the concept was introduced in the 1990s. However, electoral security management generally continues to approach the issue in a piecemeal or ad hoc manner. Gender-sensitive electoral security planning (GSESP) means transforming election security to be both responsive and representative of women *and* men, as well as people of diverse gender identities. If well-constructed and implemented, GSESP should be a comprehensive response to the problem of VAWP and VAWE.

GSESP involves acknowledging and responding to the different electoral security and justice needs of women and men. These are increasingly well-documented in the growing literature on VAWP and VAWE (UN Women 2017). Mainstreaming gender analysis in electoral security plans can identify the risk implications for women and men of any planned action, including election-related legislation, security policies or electoral management decisions.

GSESP also involves ensuring the full and equal participation of women and men in electoral security decision making as well as within security institutions. To achieve this, recruitment, retention and advancement strategies should target equitable representation.

Electoral security plans must ensure that SSAs have the necessary policies, protocols, structures, personnel, training and resources to meet the different needs assessed.

Finally, security leadership also involves inclusive consultation and participation of women's organizations in civil society oversight, early warning and/or rapid response mechanisms. GSESP will ensure that both men and women are consulted and, where appropriate, involved in security provision, management and oversight.

GSESP relies on close cooperation between EMBs and SSAs around electoral cycles. EMBs are often best placed to understand and identify gender-specific election risks. Cooperative planning will better enable SSAs to implement inclusive security strategies.

Table 4.1 presents an illustrative model of a gender-sensitive electoral security plan.

GSESP relies on close cooperation between EMBs and SSAs around electoral cycles. EMBs are often best placed to understand and identify gender-specific election risks.

Table 4.1. **Illustrative GSESP model**

EMB	SSAs	Joint
Review and revise existing election security-related legislation, policies, codes of conduct and protocols to ensure that they are not discriminatory and take into account the specific needs of women and men	Establish targets and dedicated initiatives to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of women and other under-represented groups in security system institutions and oversight bodies	Establish women's situation rooms and observatories
Conduct gender-sensitive electoral security assessments, including sex-disaggregated data and surveying the different security and justice needs of women & men	Implement specific policies, mechanisms and programming to prevent, address and punish VAWE including by security system personnel	Include VAWE education as part of the core training curriculum of security system personnel at all levels
Establish a national team of gender-sensitive electoral security experts to support SSAs in an advisory capacity	Ensure that security system oversight bodies address the different VAWE security and justice scenarios	Collaborate with women's CSOs to integrate intelligence, responses and policymaking in gender-sensitive electoral security
Design and implement communication strategies on GSES programmes with tailored messaging for different groups of people	Address discriminatory attitudes and culture of security system institutions	Designate a national focal point for gender-sensitive electoral security who will coordinate with the EMB and SSAs
Ensure that election debrief and analysis reports include full analysis of the effectiveness of gender-sensitive electoral security and recommendations for improvement	Develop communications materials that highlight women's involvement in and protection by national security actors during elections	Dedicate adequate resources to implement national gender-sensitive electoral security programmes and a resource mobilization strategy to secure internal and external funding

Chapter 5
RECOMMENDATIONS

The following guidelines for EMB–SSA collaboration, and practical steps to take to improve that collaboration, can enhance the prospects for the peaceful conduct of elections.

TO EMBS

1. Where gaps exist, assume leadership of coordination and the responsibility for securing dedicated funding.
2. Standardize procedures, training practices and cyclically constituted special units to enhance security responsiveness to unanticipated threats.
3. Where EMB leadership is established by law, embrace leading the coordination relationship and responsibility for securing dedicated funding. Advocate policy reform where leadership is not codified.
4. Initiate EMB–SSA coordination early in the electoral process, and draw on risk analysis resources as well as standing models and practices developed before the start of the electoral process.

TO EMB NETWORKS

1. Integrate reflection on electoral security coordination (including GSESP) into thematic meetings.
2. Recognize and share best practices in EMB–SSA coordination across regional groups.
3. Periodically invite security actors to EMB network events to share perspectives and good practices.

TO ECOWAS

1. Ensure that any ECOWAS contributions to prepare, organize or supervise elections in member states under article 42 of the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (1999) include a component related to effective EMB–SSA coordination.
2. Integrate assessment of EMB–SSA security planning (including GSESP) into ECOWAS election observation missions under article 31 of the Protocol.

TO NATIONAL SECURITY BODIES

1. Continuously seek to enhance information-sharing channels and protocols with the EMB for both prevention and response to security incidents.
2. Review electoral planning and response strategies for gender-sensitive electoral security criteria, including equitable staffing and training.
3. Where significant new security threats are emerging, revisit standing arrangements and consider more structured approaches to coordination, such as inter-election period reviews, joint operational centres and situation rooms.

TO REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

1. Focus on providing technical expertise in designing coordination mechanisms.
2. Fund research and the development and implementation of training programmes on GSESP, including covering all forms of VAWE (physical, psychological and sexual, online and offline).
3. Include EMB–SSA coordination as a topic for international observation. This should include reporting on the structure, mandate, and activities of coordination mechanisms and recommending changes where called for.

Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

Electoral security management in West Africa has developed over time as a natural response to contextual security risks. Little attention has been given to identifying and classifying mechanisms of security management, in this region or elsewhere. Although ad hoc responses may be effective in low-risk environments, complex and evolving security environments, including the weaponization of social media and the growing participation of women in politics, require EMBs and SSAs to revisit their methods of planning and coordination. The single most influential trend reshaping EMB–SSA coordination mechanisms in the ECOWAS region today is the growing presence of violent extremism. The threats which extremist groups pose to citizen security and national sovereignty are compelling EMBs to shift away from informal and ad hoc coordination strategies and towards more formal structures and deeper planning processes that are better able to respond to complex risks.

Overall, there is no standard role for EMBs in electoral security. In some cases, the EMB takes over all security functions. In other contexts, the civilian EMB has little input, with the SSAs relying on the EMB only for intelligence purposes. Regardless of their specific role, EMBs are almost always well positioned to gather information to inform election security approaches (Alihodžić 2016). Regular SSAs often lack the specialized knowledge of electoral risk management and political conflict that is invaluable for predicting and preventing election violence. If the SSAs are viewed as politicized or adversarial rather than supportive of the EMB's activities, then the EMB can only try to mitigate the risks and distance itself from the SSAs.

Accountability mechanisms for EMBs are especially weak in the area of electoral security management, in part because blame can be shared with SSAs. Accountability issues are even more important

Regardless of their specific role, EMBs are almost always well positioned to gather information to inform election security approaches.

Beyond that caveat, no single best coordination mechanism exists. However, one can examine various factors contributing to EMB–SSA coordination so as to identify structural and contextual issues and trends that affect the ability of EMB–SSA mechanisms to effectively respond to, prevent and mitigate violence.

for the security sector because it is often impossible to hold SSAs to account for failing to properly secure electoral processes, especially in states that struggle with holding SSAs accountable to civilian authorities in general.

EMBs must have the ultimate authority in all areas of electoral administration; they risk diminishing their autonomy if coordination mechanisms become too formalized. Beyond that caveat, no single best coordination mechanism exists. However, one can examine various factors contributing to EMB–SSA coordination so as to identify structural and contextual issues and trends that affect the ability of EMB–SSA mechanisms to effectively respond to, prevent and mitigate violence. Ad hoc arrangements result in more reactive or crisis management approaches and can avoid excessive bureaucratic problems that can delay or muddle more formal mechanisms. However, formalized structures can (ideally) allow for more preventive approaches. As electoral security risks grow and become more complex in the region, formalizing certain aspects of the EMB–SSA relationship may help address the threats. For instance, how self-defence forces can be incorporated into such mechanisms remains an important subject for future research.

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This report reviews the quality of collaboration between security services and electoral management bodies and its relevance to election violence prevention in the Economic Community of West African States region. Drawing on ethics board-approved field research and remote interviews in five West African countries, the report presents a typology of coordination mechanisms and assesses the factors that influence their effectiveness. The findings aim to inform election administrators, security providers, development partners and scholars concerned with improving electoral security coordination and mitigating violence in West Africa and beyond.