

Abstract

Vigilantes countering extremism? The securing the Local Project

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Violence in the name of –or against- religious extremism is presently among the main forms of combat worldwide. While states, armies and police forces have a prominent role in this, non-state armed groups and civil militias are taking prominent positions in securing communities from the threats of such violence. The securing the local project began in autumn 2016 and seeks to come to an understanding of the role of non-state security groups (NSSGs) in countering extremism in Indonesia, Nigeria and Kenya. The project seeks to deliver new evidence-based insights into the broader societal support, effect, critique and understanding of the defense, policing, governance and development activities undertaken by such groups. We ask how these NSSGs relate to the state and its official monopoly on violence on the one hand, on the population they seek to protect on the other, and how they occupy and utilize the space between these two. Where weak or failed states may be unable to act the monopoly on violence, corrupt or outright criminal officials may be a reason for citizens to resist the representatives of the state. NSSGs may thus engage in what formally are illegal activities that are condoned or even supported locally, and that see them taking over tasks of governance, development and security assistance that are officially the territory of the state. In this comparative project we seek to understand the role of NSSGs in dealing with the (threat of) extremist violence. While it is too early to come up with general conclusions this presentation will serve to present a number of findings and tendencies we see emerging from our research, as well as to present the project to a wider audience.