

Beyond the Tarmac Road: Local Forms of Policing in Sierra Leone & Rwanda

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Civil war deeply disrupted policing in Sierra Leone and Rwanda, leaving their state police forces inadequate in numbers, skills and resources to serve all citizens. In this security vacuum local forms of policing play an important role. The article argues that the country-specific pattern of local forms of policing depends on three factors: the nature of the conflict and peace settlement; the regime ideology; and the level of regime insecurity and fear of conflict recurring. The empirical data concerning the local policing groups is presented under three headings: crime prevention and intervention; investigation and resolution; and punishment. The article concludes with an assessment of the hazards and potential for states and donors supporting such groups. They are certainly flawed agencies in the eyes of both users and government, but in a context of less than fair and accountable state policing, their widespread provision and support is not to be dismissed lightly.