Voicing Concern

Surveying People's Priorities in Violent Settings

Introduction

At the initiative of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) will take place in May 2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. A central objective of the process is to 'redefine how the global community delivers for the world's most vulnerable people' living in areas impacted by armed conflict and disasters (WHS, 2015, p. 1).

With a view to giving affected people a greater voice in these discussions, the WHS secretariat contracted the Small Arms Survey to carry out a review of population-based surveys on the needs of people in areas affected by armed conflict (UNDP, 2015). While few surveys have been undertaken in insecure environments to inquire specifically about people's perceptions of their priorities, needs, or concerns, several institutions with various mandates and objectives have carried out relevant studies.

This Issue Brief analyses people's perceived priorities and needs in situations of armed conflict or high levels of insecurity. It is based on 43 recently completed population-based surveys, during which respondents were asked to either identify or rank the general issues about which they felt most concerned. Although not fully representative of all recent conflicts and insecure environments, the data spans three regions: Africa (8 countries), Asia (2 countries), and Latin America and the Caribbean (16 countries). While the focus of the analysis is on countries affected by armed conflict in the traditional sense, it also includes a number of countries—primarily from the latter region—that are experiencing high rates of other types of violence (such as homicides) for comparative purposes.

The study aims to contribute to a better understanding of priorities in situations of armed conflict or high-level insecurity by focusing on the perceptions of the local populations themselves. Specifically, it addresses the following questions:

- What types of primary concerns do people who live in violent settings most commonly identify?
- To what extent do people's priorities vary across settings and population groups?
- To what extent do the concerns identified by respondents overlap with issues that are of relevance to the humanitarian community?

The study is divided in three parts. The first section provides information on the methodology and caveats regarding the surveys under review. The second section reviews general trends based on the analysis of the

A woman shields her children from seeing a victim of a shooting in the street, Guatemala City, Guatemala, February 2012.
Source: Rodrigo Abd/AP Photo

top three priorities identified by the survey respondents. It also examines the extent to which actual security conditions on the ground affect public perceptions of needs. The third section explores differences in perceptions among population groups, disaggregating results based on the sex of the respondent as well as whether the interview took place in an urban or rural area. The following are the report's main findings:

- Security issues stand out as respondents' most pressing concern in areas experiencing ongoing conflict or particularly high rates of violence. The other most frequently cited problems in these settings included unemployment, the economy, and corruption.
- When prospects for security improve, priorities shift. In several African countries that are emerging from conflict, for instance, respondents prioritized issues of relevance to the humanitarian community, including the provision of food, health, and education.
- Men were generally more prone to prioritize security than women. Compared to men, female respondents were more concerned about food, water, and health. This discrepancy suggests that roles, expectations, and impacts differ based on sex in insecure settings.
- Overall, perceptions of priorities differ significantly between urban and rural respondents. Food and healthcare appear to matter more in rural settings, while security concerns seem stronger in urban areas.

Methodology

Surveys involve the use of a questionnaire to measure the experiences, behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of a target population. Through the use of appropriate statistical procedures, surveys can be based on samples of individuals or households that are representative of an area's general population. This, in turn, makes it possible to generate conclusions about that area's entire population. In this sense, surveys constitute a key tool for gathering representative statistics and identifying policy-relevant trends, especially in areas where other sources of data may be scarce or unreliable, as is often the case in countries that are experiencing conflict. Moreover, data can be collected relatively quickly and cost-effectively, since, unlike censuses, surveys require only a fraction of the population to be interviewed. This section describes how surveys were selected as a basis for this report and reviews the key caveats associated with this type of analysis.

Survey selection

The selected surveys have in common that they were carried out in contexts that were affected by conflict, emerging from conflict, or experiencing high levels of armed violence. Given the definitional grey areas that characterize these types of violence, the Issue Brief only retained surveys that were undertaken in countries that experienced an annual rate of violent deaths exceeding 10 per 100,000 population at least once between 2004 and 2012.[1] The ratio of 10 per 100,000 violent deaths per year is a meaningful threshold as only 37 countries are known to have had higher rates in 2012, while the world average for the period 2007–12 was 7.4 per 100,000 (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015, pp. 56–58). This Issue Brief therefore examines surveys undertaken in countries associated with 'traditional' conflicts, as well as in states that are suffering from comparable if not superior rates of other lethal violence, such as extremely high homicide rates, notably in Latin America and the Caribbean.

While these surveys have varying scopes and objectives, they all asked respondents to identify or rank the main needs, priorities, or concerns affecting them or their country; in that sense, they access an untapped source of data for the humanitarian community. The authors established key quality control criteria for inclusion in this study: surveys were selected only if they were administered by reputable organizations and if the methodology and results were published or available. In some cases, the detailed 'microdata' and survey database were also accessible. The survey samples are representative of the general adult population of the country or subnational unit under consideration. Importantly, all surveys adhere to sound methodological standards, including well-defined sampling strategies, weighting procedures, and statistical reliability.[2]

Initially, a literature review identified more than 60 relevant, publicly available surveys that had been undertaken by reputable organizations for potential inclusion in the study. After careful consideration of the criteria listed above, 43 were retained for the analysis. Table 1 presents the key characteristics of the selected surveys, including geographical scope, sample size, and implementing institution.

The surveys were undertaken by different organizations, each with their particular focus and objectives, as described below:

- The Afrobarometer has been undertaking periodic surveys since 1999 in a total of 37 African countries (Afrobarometer, n.d.). The questionnaires are designed to assess respondents' attitudes towards democracy, governance, and markets, among other topics. The survey module on government performance includes the following question: 'In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?'
- The AmericasBarometer has been conducting regular surveys of democratic values and behaviour in multiple countries in the Americas since 2004. The latest round of surveys was implemented in 28 countries across the Americas (LAPOP, n.d.). In 2012 the surveys asked, 'In your opinion, what is the most serious problem faced by the country?'
- The Asia Foundation carried out annual surveys in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2014 (Asia Foundation, 2014). These cover a wide range of issues, including security, economic growth and employment, development and service delivery, governance and political participation, the environment, and women's empowerment. The

Table 1 **Reviewed surveys, by source, geographic coverage, and year of implementation**

Survey implementer	Number of surveys	Coverage	Country/area	Sample size	Year
Afrobarometer	5	National	Burundi	1,200	2012
			Côte d'Ivoire	1,200	2013
			Mali	1,200	2013
			Sudan	1,199	2013
			Uganda	2,400	2012
AmericasBarometer	16	National	Belize	1,512	2012
			Brazil	1,500	
			Colombia	1,512	
			Costa Rica	1,498	
			Dominican Republic	1,512	
			Ecuador	1,500	
			El Salvador	1,497	
			Guatemala	1,509	
			Guyana	1,529	
			Honduras	1,728	
			Jamaica	1,500	
			Mexico	1,560	
			Nicaragua	1,686	
			Panama	1,620	
			Paraguay	1,510	
			Peru	1,500	
Asia Foundation	9	National	Peru	64,754 (6,226–9,271 per year)	2006–14
Gallup	1	National	Iraq	3,444	2004
Harvard Humanitarian Initiative	6	Subnational	Côte d'Ivoire: Abidjan	1,000	2013
			Democratic Republic of the Congo: Eastern region	2,620 5,166	2007 2013
			Uganda: Acholi districts	2,585 2,875 2,498	2005 2007 2010
Small Arms Survey	3	National	Burundi	1,487	2008
			Côte d'Ivoire	2,496	2010
			Libya	1,506	2013
	1 (with Danish Demining Group)	Subnational	Somalia: Somaliland	2,846	2008–09
	1	Subnational	Sudan: Eastern Equatoria	2,392	2009
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	1	National	Afghanistan	3,477	2009

Sources: Afrobarometer (n.d.); Asia Foundation (2014); Burkholder (2004); DDG and Small Arms Survey (2010); LAPOP (n.d.); Pham and Vinck (2010; 2014); Pham et al. (2005; 2007); Small Arms Survey (2015); UNODC (2010); Vinck and Pham (2014); Vinck et al. (2008)

questionnaire includes the question, 'In your view, what is the biggest problem facing Afghanistan as a whole? And after that, what is the next biggest problem?'

- Gallup's World Poll surveys perceptions of personal safety, food and shelter, employment, well-being, and confidence in national institutions in more than 160 countries. The poll carried out in Iraq in 2004 asked respondents, 'As an Iraqi, can you please tell me what are your great dreams and hopes about the future of Iraq?' (Burkholder, 2004).

- The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative is an academic centre that conducts research, including surveys, in countries that are experiencing complex emergencies and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.[3] The questionnaires ask respondents to identify their top priorities.

- The Small Arms Survey has carried out a series of armed violence and security assessments, including in several conflict and post-conflict settings. These assessments include surveys that are designed to capture, among other aspects, perceptions of security and firearms. Questionnaires may ask respondents to identify or rank their main concerns, such as by enquiring: 'What are the top three primary concerns you are currently facing?' (Florquin, Kartas, and Pavesi, 2014, p. 2).

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has carried out several surveys to assess crime and corruption in the private and public sectors. While these surveys capture relevant information on people's perceptions, only one was carried out in a conflict-affected setting, namely Afghanistan. It asked, 'What do you think are currently the biggest problems for Afghanistan? (Please choose a maximum of three.)'

Caveats

A number of caveats apply to surveys undertaken in conflict-affected environments. Drawing representative samples is particularly challenging in insecure environments, as the required census data quickly becomes outdated and incomplete due to the displacement of civilians who flee combat.[4] Conflict may also complicate the enumerators' access to certain areas due to insecurity as well as logistical and financial constraints.

Another recognized shortcoming—one that affects the reliability of surveys in general—lies in the possibility that respondents feel pressured to provide answers that they consider to be more socially acceptable (Khalil, 2012; Mneimneh et al., 2014). This so-called 'social desirability bias' may push respondents to provide the 'right' answer to questions rather than their genuine perceptions or opinions. Communities that have been severely affected by violence and fear retaliation for taking part in an interview may be particularly affected by this type of bias. Moreover, there are possible contextual effects, whereby interviewees sense what the survey is mainly after, and tend to comply with that theme in their responses.

As it relies mainly on research carried out by other institutions, this report assumes the surveys were undertaken according to the methodological standards described in the available documentation. Evaluating the extent to which these standards were in fact implemented in the field is beyond the scope of this study, although this factor may have a significant impact on the reliability of a survey.

In this context, interviewers play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of survey results. Critical skills include appropriate knowledge of the local context, an ability to access the communities to be surveyed, and the capacity to interview according to ethical and methodological standards. The recruitment of female interviewers is important to ensure an adequate and gender-balanced implementation of surveys, which may prove challenging in less secure environments (de Tessières, 2012, p. 194; Herbert, 2013). The content and length of training provided to the enumerators and their supervisors can be considered a predictor of the quality of the survey (Alvazzi del Frate and Murray, 2012, p. 16). However, the delivery of such training depends to a great extent on the availability of human and financial resources, which are often more challenging to secure in fragile environments.

Finally, comparing different surveys undertaken in a range of contexts and at various points in time is fraught with challenges. While all selected surveys included a question on needs or priorities, their methodologies and questionnaires were developed to focus on various broader topics, thus posing limitations in terms of comparability.

First and foremost, the central question on respondents' priorities is worded inconsistently; in particular, references to issues that face 'the government' or 'the country' may lead to an under-representation of issues that can be addressed by the humanitarian community. Other surveys asked about individual concerns. Depending on the survey, *needs* can be referred to as *concerns*, *problems*, *issues*, or *priorities*.

Moreover, pre-coded answers differ across the surveys. *Security*, for instance, is referred to as *crime and security*, *insecurity*, *security for humans or household members*, and *security of animals*. Sometimes, several options describe different types of insecurity; the Afrobarometer survey, for example, includes separate response options for *crime and security*, *political instability/political divisions/ethnic tensions*, *political violence*, *civil war*, and *war (international)*. To facilitate comparison, this analysis lumps together these various options.

Furthermore, while some surveys asked that respondents rank their top two or three concerns, others only asked them to identify one or several issues but in no particular order.

Recognizing these limitations, the authors of this report highlight important similarities and differences in the perceived priorities of populations affected by armed conflict or high levels of violence.

The fact that some institutions—including the Afrobarometer, the AmericasBarometer, the Asia Foundation, the Harvard Humanitarian

Table 2 The three most-cited priorities in the surveys under review, with an emphasis on security issues

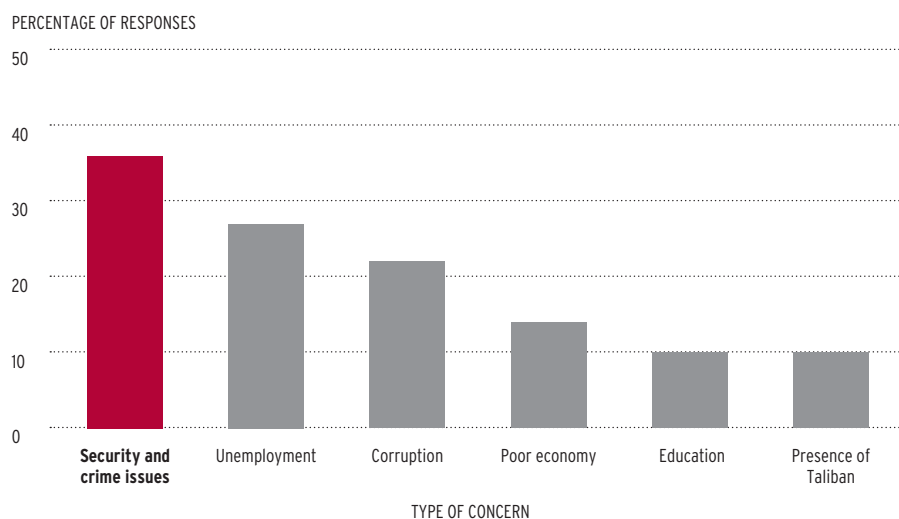| Region	Country/area	Year	Ranking	Survey implementer
Africa	Burundi	2008	poverty (1), **security issues (2)**, food/water (3)	Small Arms Survey
		2012	**security issues (1)**, poverty/destitution (2), food shortage/famine (3)	Afrobarometer*
	Côte d'Ivoire	2010	food/water (1), **security issues (2)**, transportation (3)	Small Arms Survey
		2013	unemployment (1), health (2), **security issues (3)**	Afrobarometer*
	Côte d'Ivoire: Abidjan	2013	work/employment (1), **security issues (2)**, money (3)	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative**
	Democratic Republic of the Congo: Eastern region	2007	**security issues (1)**, money (2), education (3)	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative**
		2013	**security issues (1)**, money (2), job/employment (3)	
	Libya	2013	**security issues (1)**, healthcare (2), education (3)	Small Arms Survey
	Mali	2013	food shortage/famine (1), **security issues (2)**, poverty/destitution (3)	Afrobarometer*
	Somalia: Somaliland	2008–09	health (1), water (2), education (3) . . . **security issues (5)**	Danish Demining Group and Small Arms Survey
	Sudan	2013	management of economy (1), unemployment (2), **security issues (3)**	Afrobarometer*
	Sudan: Eastern Equatoria	2009	food/water (1), healthcare (2), education (3) . . . **security issues (6)**	Small Arms Survey
	Uganda	2012	health (1), poverty/destitution (2), rates and taxes (3) . . . **security issues (13)**	Afrobarometer*
	Uganda: Acholi districts	2005	**security issues (1)**, food (2), other (3)	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative**
		2007	**security issues (1)**, health (2), food (3)	
		2010	food (1), agriculture (2), education (3) . . . **security issues (5)**	
Asia	Afghanistan	2006	unemployment (1), **security issues (2)**, poor economy (3)	Asia Foundation
		2007	**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), poor economy (3)	
		2008	**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), high prices (3)	
		2009	**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), poor economy (3)	
		2009	corruption (1), **security issues (2)**, unemployment (3)	UNODC
		2010	**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), corruption (3)	Asia Foundation
		2011	**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), corruption (3)	
		2012	**security issues (1)**, corruption (2), unemployment (3)	
		2013	**security issues (1)**, corruption (2), unemployment (3)	
		2014	**security issues (1)**, corruption (2), unemployment (3)	
	Iraq	2004	**security issues (1)**, progress to the level of advanced countries (2), to have a democratic government (3)	Gallup
Latin America and the Caribbean	Belize	2012	unemployment (1), **security issues (2)**, economy (3)	AmericasBarometer***
	Brazil		**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), economy (3)	
	Colombia		**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), corruption (3)	
	Costa Rica		**security issues (1)**, economy (2), corruption	
	Dominican Republic		economy (1), **security issues (2)**, unemployment (3)	
	Ecuador		**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), economy (3)	
	El Salvador		**security issues (1)**, economy (2), unemployment (3)	
	Guatemala		**security issues (1)**, economy (2), poverty (3)	
	Guyana		unemployment (1), corruption (2), **security issues (3)**	
	Honduras		corruption (1), **security issues (2)**, poverty (3)	
	Jamaica		**security issues (1)**, unemployment (2), corruption (3)	
	Mexico		**security issues (1)**, economy (2), unemployment (3)	
	Nicaragua		economy (1), unemployment (2), **security issues (3)**	
	Panama		**security issues (1)**, inflation/high prices (2), corruption (3)	
	Paraguay		unemployment (1), **security issues (2)**, economy (3)	
	Peru		**security issues (1)**, economy (2), unemployment (3)	

Notes: Survey implementers that are marked as follows use the corresponding categories of responses to refer to security issues: * crime and security, political instability/political divisions/ethnic tensions, political violence, civil war, and war (international); ** peace and security; *** security, crime and delinquency, violence, and armed conflict.

Initiative, and the Small Arms Survey—undertook several surveys over time or across locations allows for some comparisons. Overall, in the areas under investigation, the importance of the abovementioned caveats diminishes in view of the overwhelming proportion of respondents who identified security issues as their main concern in almost all the studies considered, as described below. While absolute levels of concern may not be directly comparable due to the cited methodological differences, survey results indicate that security was indeed one of the top concerns in the surveyed territories.

People's priorities in insecure environments

This section reviews the general findings of the 43 surveys under consideration, all of which were undertaken in locations that experienced a high rate of violent deaths (10 per 100,000 population per year) at least once between 2004 and 2012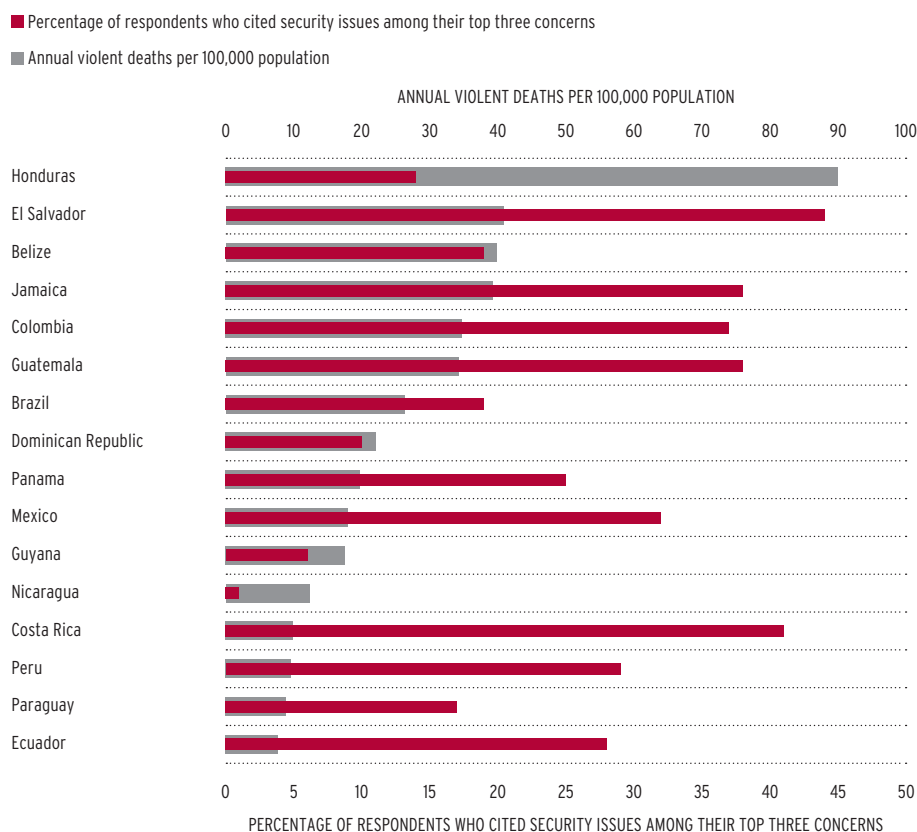. For each survey under review, Table 2 ranks the three top priorities based on the percentage of respondents citing them; it emphasizes the rank of the issue of security, including in the four surveys in which it was not among the top three. As Table 2 shows, security stands out as the most frequently cited concern overall. Following is a discussion of a number of trends that emerge from this data.

Security as the primary concern

Security issues almost always ranked among respondents' top concerns in the 43 surveys under review. They were among the three most cited topics in 39 of the surveys, and topped the list in more than half—26—these studies (see Table 2). Perhaps unsurprisingly, security was the most-cited issue in many of the contexts affected by what are arguably the world's most serious conflicts, including Afghanistan (from 2007–14), Colombia (2012), the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2007 and 2014), Iraq (2004), Libya (2013), and northern Uganda (2005 and 2007). Similarly, in the Americas, respondents in several countries with particularly high rates of armed violence, such as El Salvador and Jamaica, ranked security as their top concern (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015b; see Table 2). This data demonstrates that security is the major concern for people affected by conflict and insecurity in a variety of geographical settings.

There are exceptions to the general rule, however. In environments that are less insecure, security can also be residents' primary concern. Indeed, interviewees in Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru chose security as their top issue although their countries exhibit much lower rates of violent deaths than Honduras or Jamaica (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Moreover, security issues were not among the top three cited

Figure 2 **The six main concerns cited by survey respondents in Afghanistan, 2006–14**

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES

TYPE OF CONCERN

Source: Asia Foundation (2014)

Figure 1 **Comparing security perceptions and violent death rates in Latin American and Caribbean countries, 2012**

■ Percentage of respondents who cited security issues among their top three concerns

■ Annual violent deaths per 100,000 population

ANNUAL VIOLENT DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CITED SECURITY ISSUES AMONG THEIR TOP THREE CONCERNS

Sources: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2015b); LAPOP (n.d.)

A shopkeeper sits in front of his business, which was damaged during a series of car bomb attacks in northern Baghdad, Iraq, August 2013. Source: Thaier al-Sudani/Reuters

concerns in a few surveys undertaken in Somalia (Somaliland), Sudan (Eastern Equatoria), and Uganda (2010 and 2012). In those settings, health, food, water, education, poverty, and the economy were of greater concern.

Other frequently cited problems and needs included unemployment, which featured among the three most-cited concerns in 26 of the 43 surveys under consideration; the economy (15 surveys); and corruption (12 surveys) (see Table 2). These issues seemed to be of particular concern wherever armed conflict was ongoing or levels of violence were high—particularly in Afghanistan and the Latin American and Caribbean countries under review. In Afghanistan, security, corruption, and unemployment dominated respondents' concerns for nearly a decade, from 2006 to 2014 (see Table 2 and Figure 2).[5] In comparison, needs that can be met by humanitarian aid organizations—such as healthcare, food, and education—seem to have been relegated to secondary importance in these settings.

Relatively speaking, respondents cited basic needs less frequently among their top concerns. They included food or water (in the top 3 in just 9 of the 43 surveys under review); health (6 surveys); poverty (6 surveys); and education (5 surveys). These types of concerns were raised almost exclusively by respondents in African settings, several of which were emerging from—rather

than in the midst of—conflict at the time the surveys were carried out. As analysts of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative note in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, respondents expressed an interest in recovering from the consequences of conflict, including worsening poverty and an unstable economy (Pham and Vinck, 2014).[6] In the same vein, qualitative research in Somaliland

Figure 3 Dreams and hopes for the future cited by survey respondents in Iraq, 2004

RESPONSE OPTIONS

Source: Burkholder (2004)

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
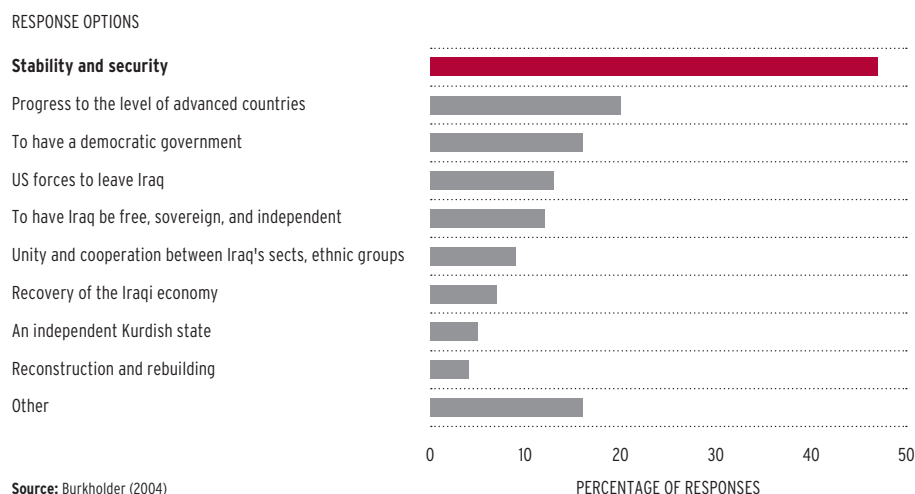
revealed that people talked about safety and security as prerequisites for effective and sustainable development regarding areas such as health, water, and education. It is therefore understandable that survey respondents in this comparatively stable region of Somalia prioritized these issues over security, which ranked fifth (DDG and Small Arms Survey, 2010, pp. 14–17).

Not all of the selected surveys allow for an assessment of the relevance of security issues to health, water and food provision, and education. One example is a Gallup Poll carried out in Iraq in 2004, which asked people about their dreams and hopes for the future of the country. Response options focused on the political and economic situation of the country and excluded many of the needs that humanitarian actors can help address, despite their known importance in part of the country (Burkholder, 2004; see Figure 3).[7]
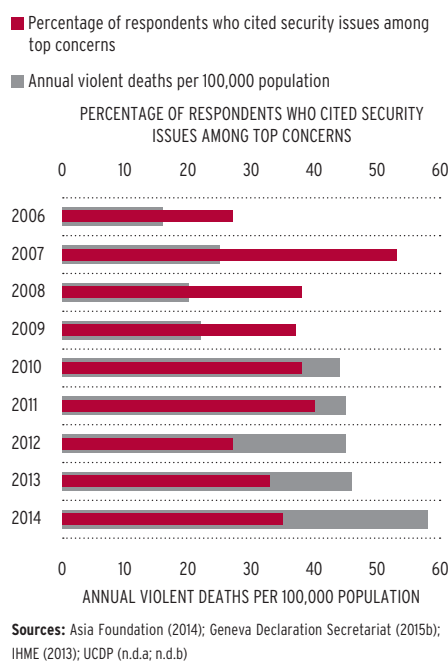
In short, security, the economy, and corruption tend to top people's concerns in the most insecure environments. Where prospects for stability are improving—such as in post-conflict settings after a peace agreement—security gives way to other types of concerns, including needs that can be addressed by humanitarian aid agencies.

Security perceptions and actual levels of violence

Some of the selected surveys make it possible to examine whether the perception of key concerns evolves over time, and the extent to which actual security conditions may affect them. By focusing on contexts where data on both perceptions and actual levels of violence is available over time, this section further explores the linkages between security levels and the prioritization of needs.

The Asia Foundation implemented its surveys in Afghanistan annually from 2006 to 2014, providing a unique set of comparable time-series data on perceptions of top concerns. As shown in Table 2, respondents listed security as the top concern in eight of the nine annual surveys and as second after unemployment in 2006, the year that exhibited the lowest national violent

Figure 4 **Comparing security perceptions and violent death rates in Afghanistan**

■ Percentage of respondents who cited security issues among top concerns

■ Annual violent deaths per 100,000 population

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CITED SECURITY ISSUES AMONG TOP CONCERNS

ANNUAL VIOLENT DEATHS PER 100,000 POPULATION

Sources: Asia Foundation (2014); Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2015b); IHME (2013); UCDP (n.d.a; n.d.b)

death rate per 100,000 population of the entire period under consideration. That rate increased twofold from 2009 to 2010 and reached a peak of almost 60 deaths per 100,000 in 2014 (see Figure 4). Although the surveys show that the issue of security accounted for a slightly smaller proportion of responses after 2011, it nevertheless remained the most-cited priority. In short, respondents kept ranking security as their top concern over a long period of time, as deteriorating security prospects seemed to outweigh possible 'issue fatigue'.

The other top three needs identified by respondents in Afghanistan also began to shift in 2010, the year during which rates of violent deaths doubled in comparison to the previous year. Until 2009, security, unemployment, and the weak economy—and, in one case, high prices—dominated the top three concerns. In 2010, corruption emerged among the top three issues, where it remained alongside security and unemployment through 2014 (see Table 2). Carried out in 2010, the UNODC survey in Afghanistan found that respondents identified corruption as a greater worry than security. Based on the results of a survey conducted in Afghanistan in 2014, the Asia Foundation reports that 'those who perceive corruption to be a major problem [. . .] are most likely to report feelings of fear

for personal safety' (Asia Foundation, 2014, p. 33). The linkages between security and corruption are particularly strong in Afghanistan and deserve further scrutiny.

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative surveys carried out in northern Uganda in 2005, 2007, and 2010 provide similar insight. Over these years, the security situation improved, as evidenced by a lower incidence of violence and stronger perceptions of safety among survey respondents in 2010 (Pham and Vinck, 2010, p. 23). Data on violent deaths in the whole country also points to improvements in the security situation from 2010 (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2015b). As security conditions grew more stable, the surveys detected shifts in responses: whereas survey respondents had identified peace and security as the top concerns in 2005 and 2007, they cited food, agriculture, education, and health in 2010, such that security issues dropped to the fifth place (Pham and Vinck, 2010, pp. 19–20; see Table 2).

As the cases of Afghanistan and Uganda illustrate, levels of insecurity seem to condition people's priorities. Security and governance issues such as corruption are particularly relevant when insecurity shows no signs of abating. When the security situation is improving, issues associated with development and basic services take on greater prominence.

National vs. local concerns

Some of the surveys under review contained separate questions asking respondents about the main issues facing them in general or their country as a whole, as well as questions on the priorities that are most pressing in their immediate surroundings. The data suggests that perceptions at the local level differ from those at the national or general level, illustrating that violent events occurring elsewhere in the country can affect people's overall perceptions of security in different ways.

The Asia Foundation surveys in Afghanistan show that concerns cited as local-level priorities differed from those listed as key issues for the country as a whole. Indeed, while security

Figure 5 **The six main local-level concerns cited by survey respondents in Afghanistan, 2006–14**

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES

TYPE OF CONCERN
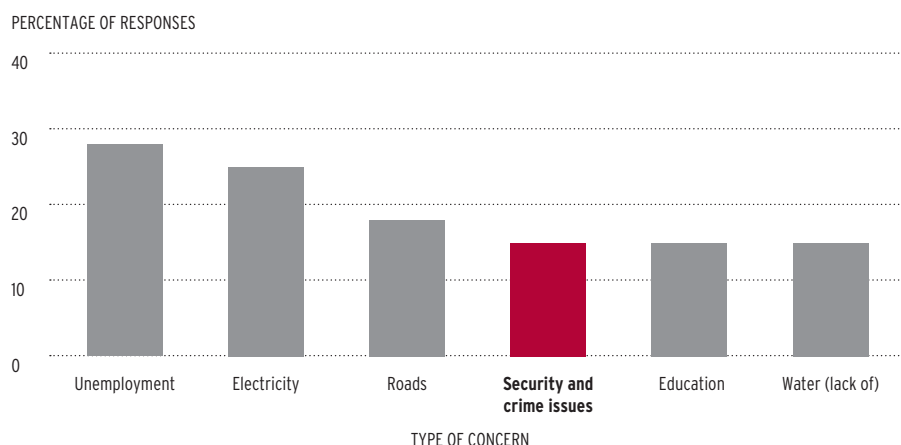
Source: Asia Foundation (2014)

and crime topped the list of country-level issues, they only came in fourth among concerns at the local level, after unemployment, electricity, and roads (see Figure 5). As security conditions deteriorated, however, respondents increasingly cited security and crime as concerns, such that they featured among the top three local-level issues in 2013 and 2014 (Asia Foundation, 2014).

Similarly, other surveys reveal that reported security concerns regarding the country as a whole differ from those relating to respondents' own neighbourhoods or villages. In Libya in 2013, for instance, security may have topped respondents' lists of main concerns (see Table 2), yet a majority (64 per cent) of Libyans indicated that they considered the areas where they lived to be safe or very safe (Florquin, Kartas, and Pavesi, 2014, p. 2). While seemingly contradictory, these findings suggest that in at least some contexts, general perceptions of insecurity may not reflect immediate threats or experiences of violence. In Libya, the research underscored how political instability and regular, mediatized incidents of violence (even if they were isolated geographically) can play a greater role in generating feelings of insecurity than the situation at the local level (Florquin, Kartas, and Pavesi, 2014, p. 2).

The data on local-level priorities reveals that the linkages between perceptions of local and national levels of violence can be weak. In both Afghanistan and Libya, respondents cited needs for their neighbourhoods and villages that did not necessarily

match what they identified as their general priorities for the entire country. This may be especially relevant if violence is concentrated in a particular location while other areas are more or less peaceful. Indeed, an armed conflict that directly affects only a small segment of a country's territory and population can shape the perceptions of priorities for the whole nation.

Differences in perceptions among population groups

Several of the surveys under review made it possible to disaggregate results by sex of the respondent, and according to whether the interviews were undertaken in urban or rural settings. This section disaggregates results based on these two criteria to identify differ-

ences in perceptions among these population groups, with the aim of providing a more nuanced analysis of the above general findings.

Gendered perceptions

The consultations held in preparation for the WHS highlighted the important role humanitarian actors can play in addressing the 'specific needs of women and girls of different ages and backgrounds' (WHS, 2015, p. 2). This section examines whether survey responses varied on the basis of the sex of the respondent.

The Afrobarometer surveys undertaken in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Sudan, and Uganda show that men and women often cited similar issues among their top three concerns, although sometimes in different order. As Figure 6 illustrates, men tend to express stronger levels of concern about security issues than women, a trend that was particularly strong in Mali. In addition, more men than women reported being worried by the management of the economy and corruption. In contrast, more female respondents identified poverty and destitution, food shortages, and famine as critical issues. Both groups expressed similar levels of concern for unemployment and health (Afrobarometer, n.d.).

Small Arms Survey studies undertaken in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, and Sudan (Eastern Equatoria) confirm

Figure 6 **Percentage of survey respondents in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Sudan, and Uganda who cited security issues among their top three concerns, by sex (2012–13)**
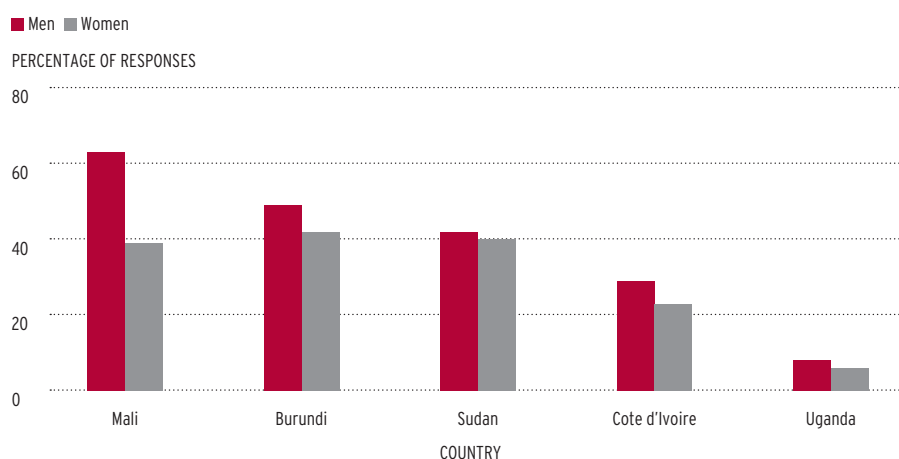
■ Men ■ Women

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES

COUNTRY

Note: The term 'security issues' combines responses for crime and security, political instability/political divisions/ethnic tensions, political violence, civil war, and war (international).

Source: Afrobarometer (n.d.)

Figure 7 **The six main concerns cited by respondents in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, and Sudan (Eastern Equatoria), by sex**

■ Women ■ Men

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES
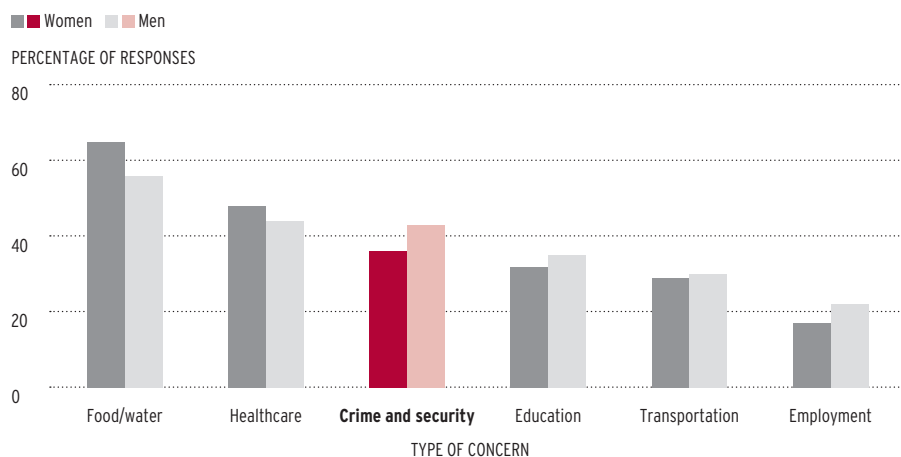
Source: Small Arms Survey (2015)

these trends. Overall, both men and women identified food and water, healthcare, crime and security, education, and transportation as the five most important needs in life. Women, however, expressed more concern than men about food and healthcare, while men generally reported being more worried about crime and security than did women (see Figure 7). Moreover, the surveys revealed that housewives expressed less concern for security than did students, the retired, or disabled people (Small Arms Survey, 2015).

Similarly, in Afghanistan, slightly more men than women cited concerns about crime, security, and corruption, while the reverse was true with respect to unemployment and poverty (Asia Foundation, 2014). The 2009 UNODC survey in Afghanistan revealed comparable trends, although reported levels of concern about security issues were about the same among men and women. More men than women reported concern about corruption, poor governance, and a lack of the rule of law, while more women than men expressed unease with reference to unemployment and poverty (UNODC, 2010). In Latin American countries faced with high levels of violence, more women than men cited security issues among their main concerns (LAPOP, n.d.).

Overall, men and women seem to share common perceptions of the main issues facing them. Yet reviewed data shows that in some areas, more women

than men single out issues that are relevant to humanitarian aid agencies, such as access to food and healthcare. Men, on the other hand, tend to identify insecurity and corruption as their main concerns, possibly because the group is most directly affected by violence in conflict.[8]

Urban and rural settings

Comparing responses of people who live in urban areas with those of respondents who reside in rural settings is also instructive. An examination of the combined Afrobarometer data for the five countries under review shows that people who live in urban areas identified unemployment, security issues, and poverty or destitution as their top

Figure 8 **The six main concerns cited by survey respondents in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Sudan, and Uganda, by urban and rural setting (2012–13)**
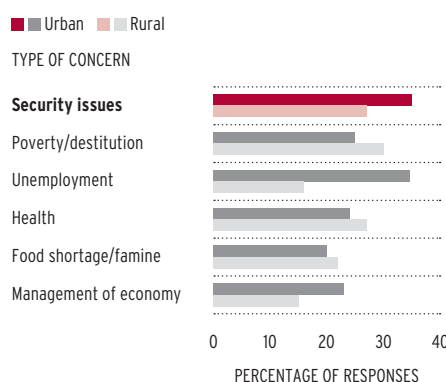
■ Urban ■ Rural

TYPE OF CONCERN

Note: The term 'security issues' combines responses for crime and security, political instability/political divisions/ethnic tensions, political violence, civil war, and war (international).

Source: Afrobarometer (n.d.)

three concerns; meanwhile, rural residents selected poverty or destitution, security issues, and health as their top concerns (see Figure 8). These findings illustrate different perceptions of needs across the urban–rural divide in surveyed countries.

The studies undertaken by the Small Arms Survey found that security was emerging as a much greater concern among urban than among rural respondents. In fact, 'crime and security' was the most-cited need among respondents who lived in urban areas, followed by healthcare and education. These findings stand in sharp contrast to those reported by rural respondents, who identified food and water, healthcare, and transportation as more urgent needs than security (see Figure 9). The study conducted by the Danish Demining Group and the Small Arms Survey in Somaliland similarly found that respondents in urban areas expressed more concern about employment and security while those in rural areas underscored their worries about healthcare, water, and education (DDG and Small Arms Survey, 2010).

Respondents to the Asia Foundation surveys in Afghanistan cited security and crime, unemployment, and corruption as the top concerns for their country, regardless of whether they lived in rural or urban settings. However, unemployment and the weak economy were more often cited in urban areas, whereas corruption was more frequently mentioned in rural settings. Security issues were similarly cited in both areas (Asia Foundation, 2014). In the Latin American countries under review, more urban residents than rural respondents reported being concerned with security, although this dynamic did not apply in all the countries under review (LAPOP, n.d.).

Overall, perceptions of priorities among rural respondents differed significantly from those of urban respondents. Food and healthcare seem to matter more in rural settings, while security concerns seem more widespread in urban areas. These findings suggest that municipal authorities may be overlooked as potential resources,

Figure 9 **The six main concerns cited by respondents in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, and Sudan (Eastern Equatoria), by urban and rural setting**

■ Urban   ■ Rural

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES

TYPE OF CONCERN
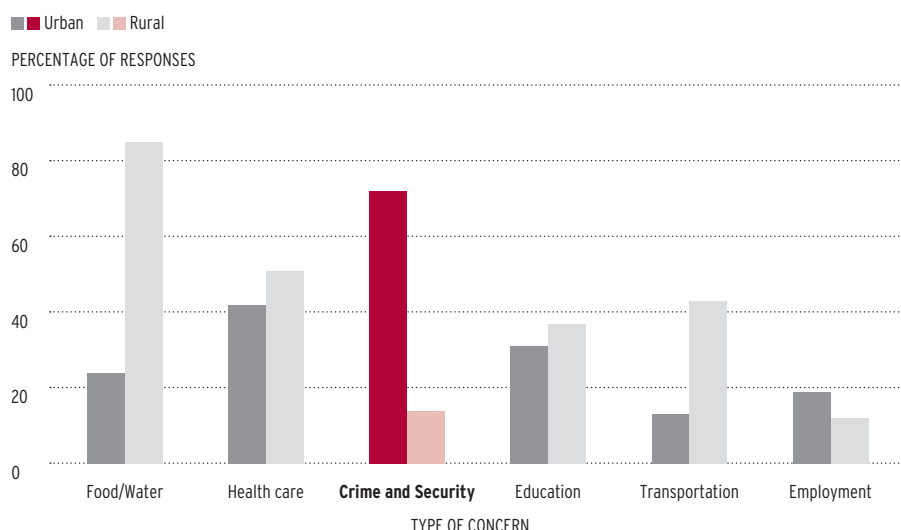
Source: Small Arms Survey (2015)

or that humanitarian aid organizations deliver more provisions in cities and do not venture into the countryside, or a combination of both. The results also highlight the importance of evidence-based needs assessments, as people's priorities in complex environments are context-specific.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed in this Issue Brief draws from a body of knowledge previously untapped by the humanitarian community. It reviews the findings of 43 household surveys conducted by different institutions in a variety of locations that have experienced high levels of violence, focusing on answers to questions about the respondents' main priorities and concerns. These studies provide valuable information on how individuals view their needs and priorities, which, in turn, may offer clues as to where humanitarian assistance fits within this picture.

Security issues stand out as the most pressing concern for people in a variety of settings affected by recent or ongoing conflict and armed violence. At the height of a conflict, when prospects for peace are low, people are understandably primarily concerned with security-related issues. While intuitive, this key trend justifies the calls made during the WHS consultation process to 'keep people safe from harm by putting protection at the centre

of humanitarian action'—in terms of protecting both vulnerable groups and humanitarian aid workers (WHS, 2015, p. 3). It also implies that security should be consistently considered in humanitarian programming, as it is likely to feature among beneficiaries' primary concerns, if not as a prerequisite for addressing their other needs.

The study also shows that priorities shift over different stages of a crisis. The reviewed surveys suggest that access to food, healthcare, and education become most relevant only after people sense that they can expect an improvement in the security conditions around them. Although more research is required, these issues do appear to resonate particularly strongly among women as well as in rural areas. Such variations of perceptions among population groups demonstrate the importance of collecting sex-disaggregated data, since it can provide critical insight that the humanitarian community can use to improve its operations and efficiency. The variations noted between perceptions of security and actual levels of threat also deserve further scrutiny, as unfounded perceptions may lead to displacement that could potentially be prevented. While survey research comes with its own caveats and challenges, it also holds great potential for assisting the humanitarian community in meeting some of the important goals set out by the WHS process. ■

Notes

1   Violent death rates in this Issue Brief are drawn from the 2015 *Global Burden of Armed Violence* report and database (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, n.d.).

2   For an overview of indicators of the quality of a survey's methodology, see Alvazzi del Frate and Murray (2012).

3   Pham and Vinck (2010; 2014); Pham et al. (2005; 2007); Vinck and Pham (2014); Vinck et al. (2008).

4   See, for instance, Asia Foundation (2014, p. 148).

5   Some of the surveys under review did not feature 'corruption' as a pre-coded answer; these include surveys carried out by the Small Arms Survey in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, and Somaliland. As a result, the importance of corruption to the surveyed populations may be greater than suggested in this review.

6   In 2011, Côte d'Ivoire's gross domestic product shrank by 5 per cent (Pham and Vinck, 2014, p. 19).

7   As an earlier poll carried out in 2003 revealed, humanitarian assistance was particularly relevant in Baghdad. Indeed, 27 per cent of respondents in the capital 'did not have enough money to pay for needed clothing, food, and healthcare either "always" or "most of the time"' (Ludwig, 2003).

8   See, for instance, Ormhaug (2009, pp. 10–13).

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About the Small Arms Survey

The Small Arms Survey is a global centre of excellence whose mandate is to generate impartial, evidence-based, and policy-relevant knowledge on all aspects of small arms and armed violence. It is the principal international source of expertise, information, and analysis on small arms and armed violence issues, and acts as a resource for governments, policy-makers, researchers, and civil society. It is located in Geneva, Switzerland, at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

The Survey has an international staff with expertise in security studies, political science, law, economics, development studies, sociology, and criminology, and collaborates with a network of researchers, partner institutions, non-governmental organizations, and governments in more than 50 countries.

For more information, please visit: www.smallarmssurvey.org.