

# Avoiding political entanglement or embedding justice in politics? Are we asking the right questions?

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Questions concerning the political economy of justice in fragile contexts and the development community's engagement with it are as pertinent as ever. It is, however, quite often the wrong questions that are being asked. At its Annual Conference on 24 June 2015, the [Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law](#) observed that

'Interventions often seek to steer clear of politics, as this often raises difficult questions regarding legitimacy and elite involvement',

and that 'Security and Rule of Law programming is, therefore, often presented and undertaken as a purely technical endeavor.' It consecutively asks whether such neutral interventions are in fact 'realistically possible.'

The answer to this inquiry, as analysts and practitioners will widely underwrite, is a straightforward 'no.' All development interventions, and those related to justice, security and rule of law arguably even more so, are per definition political and hence entangled or embedded in existing political economies. Nor is this unequivocally a bad thing. A research project investigating local [security arrangements in Beirut](#), Lebanon, that was recently piloted under the Platform, for instance, found that the political parties often blamed for inciting instability and insecurity on a national level simultaneously gave substance and durability to neighborhood-level security and justice assemblages.

The really significant question, then, is not whether purely technical or 'neutral' interventions are possible but whether they are desirable. Having a theory of change, the single most indispensable asset of any organization seeking to intervene in fragile settings these days, in fact implies the exact opposite of political neutrality. To aspire for change is inherently normative and political. Dealing with non-state, undemocratic or (semi-)criminal elites is often feared to grant them undue legitimacy. Yet, not engaging with the political economy at hand in reality mostly boils down to

