Warlordism, Insurgency and Public Opinion: Explaining Civil War in Afghanistan

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the DPhil in Politics

Jasmine Bhatia
Department of Politics and International Relations
Nuffield College
University of Oxford

Under the supervision of:
Prof. Stathis Kalyvas
All Souls College, University of Oxford

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Abstract

Current explanations for civil war are divided between grievance and opportunity-based paradigms. This thesis bridges these two theoretical schools by emphasizing *elite fragmentation* as an understudied variable in the onset and spread of insurgent violence. The three articles of this thesis examine these dynamics through the case study of the post-2001 civil war in Afghanistan. First, I compare variations in political violence within two neighboring provinces of northern Afghanistan, demonstrating how fragmentation between armed groups produces heightened grievances amongst civilians, incentivising them to defect to insurgent groups. Second, I show additional evidence challenging the legitimacy of armed commanders through a conjoint experiment demonstrating that Afghan citizens have strong preferences for leaders who are young and highly educated over older leaders with military experience. Third, I examine why attempts to redress public grievances with large injections of foreign aid have largely failed to win over the population in insecure areas with a case study of the National Solidarity Program in Wardak province. Together, the chapters of this thesis contribute to current literature on civil war while suggesting important policy implications for how the international community should engage in civil wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Over two billion people in the world today live in countries affected by chronic political violence (World Bank, 2017). Among the most destructive of these conflicts are civil wars, often concentrated in some of the world's poorest countries. Given the large number of states that are currently suffering from intrastate conflict[1], understanding the dynamics of civil war is a matter of urgency, both for governments facing armed insurgencies and for international actors hoping to prevent their occurrence.

Of the many factors that have been linked to civil war, scholars have noted that countries that have a past legacy of civil war have a higher tendency to experience subsequent outbreaks of violence—otherwise known as the "conflict trap" (Collier et al., 2003; Walter, 2004). Why some countries seem unable to break this cycle, and how these legacies align with current explanations of civil war onset, is still a matter of ongoing debate. Despite a vast accumulation of theoretical literature on civil wars over the past several years, there is still no conclusive consensus among scholars on why civil wars occur. There are four predominant theoretical paradigms that explain civil war: the role of structural factors such as poverty or ethnicity, the proliferation of grievances in the population, the existence of material opportunities that increase the likelihood of conflict, and governing arrangements between the state and its peripheral territories. While each of these paradigms contain some essential truths, in this thesis I argue that long-term exposure to violence unleashes unique political dynamics that exacerbate each of the paradigms above. In environments dominated by armed politics, participants in civil wars adapt their behaviors and strategies accordingly, often in ways that undermine political

[1]According to the Conflict Data Program compiled by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala Universitat, 49 state-based armed conflicts were active in 2017, 10 of which had over 1,000 annual fatalities (UCDP, 2018). Approximately $50 billion of development assistance was allocated to fragile states in 2010 alone (OECD, 2013).

stability. Existing theoretical models fail to adequately account for these unique circumstances, and are therefore inadequate for understanding civil war in chronically weak states. I posit that more sophisticated models that take into account the political realities of armed politics and subnational variation in levels of violence can help improve our understanding of civil war in these contexts.

I begin this paper by reviewing predominant explanations for civil war, assessing their relative strengths and weaknesses. I describe how existing theoretical frameworks fall short of explaining the outbreak of civil war in post-2001 Afghanistan, and propose a modified framework that sheds greater light on the long-term legacies of successive conflicts that have embroiled the country since 1979, particularly the political dominance of armed actors and the fragmentation of governing elites. In addition to explaining how the Taliban, once thought to be thoroughly defeated, was able to re-establish itself as a serious threat to the Afghan state, the theory sheds light on why some areas of Afghanistan proved more capable of fending off the insurgency than others. It also explains why support from international community—including large injections of military and financial resources—failed to stabilize the government, as policies did not adequately address core grievances amongst civilians and often had perverse effects. Finally, I outline the structure and methodology of this thesis, presenting original data from Afghanistan to illustrate my theoretical framework.

What Causes Civil War?

While scholars have sought to understand the origins of civil war for generations, political scientists have recently sought to approach the subject using statistical methods. In the early 2000s, a handful of prevalent models of civil war were established, based on cross-national datasets of civil wars since World War II. These models attempted to identify the most important structural predictors of whether or not countries were likely to experience civil war. Of the posited explanations, the variable with the strongest and most frequently identified correlation with civil war is poverty. In one highly influential study, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) found that poverty — proxied in their model by low rates of GDP growth — is one of the most significant predictors of civil war. Another landmark cross-country study by Fearon and Laitin (2003) also identified a robust negative link between GDP per capita and civil war. In subsequent years,

accumulated statistical evidence has lent support to these findings, showing that countries in the bottom percentile of per capita GDP are several times more likely to experience civil war than those in the top quartile (Blattman and Miguel, 2010).

However, at any given time, even countries with extremely high levels of poverty are more likely to be at peace than at war, and strong correlations between poverty and war tells us little about why some poor countries are more prone to violence than others. Furthermore, the relationship between poverty and civil war can be reversed, with civil wars acting as a *cause*, rather than a consequence, of poor living conditions (Blattman and Miguel, 2010). According to a recent estimate, civil wars cause an average annual loss of 17.5 percent of GDP per capita, with the most ethnically divided countries suffering the worst losses (Costalli et al., 2017). Anecdotal evidence suggests that causality may indeed run in this direction. Consider the case of Burkina Faso and Burundi, two small landlocked African states with similar rates of poverty and economic growth in the early 1990s (Economist, 2011). After civil war broke out in Burundi in 1993, the economic fortunes of the two countries diverged sharply over the next decade. Today, GDP per capita in peaceful Burkina Faso is over twice that of Burundi [2]. The poverty hypothesis does not adequately explain the outbreak of civil war in middle-income countries such as Syria, or explain why, as discussed in this thesis, civil war has broken out in Afghanistan during periods of rapid economic growth. While the association between poverty and internal conflict appears robust, it is on its own an unsatisfying explanation for civil wars.

Another common explanation for civil war is linked to the presence of ethnic cleavages. Indeed, ethnicity seems to be a particularly compelling correlate, since opposing sides coalesce around ethnic lines in a large number of civil wars. Out of 709 minority groups identified by Fearon, at least 100 minority ethnic groups engaged in an ethnically-based conflict against the state between 1945 and 1998, a rate of approximately 14 percent (Fearon, 2006). Extensive case literature provides anecdotal support for the salience of ethnic cleavages as a major explanatory variable for the outbreak, persistence, and intensity of conflict (Horowitz, 1985).

The prevalence of ethnic conflict has led some scholars to advance "primordialist" explanations for civil war. These arguments, in their simplest form, hold that ethnic identity is fundamental to human societies, assigned at birth and passed down to one's descendants (Geertz,

[2]GDP per capita estimates from 2016 are 1800 USD for Burkina Faso and 800 USD for Burundi (CIA, 2017c).

1973; Esteban et al., 2012). Given that ethnicities are fixed, ethnic divisions are both natural and inevitable; ethnic conflicts therefore stem from ancient rivalries between these groups (Esteban et al., 2012). Toft (2005) has demonstrated how ethnic identities are often associated with geographic territories, and inter-group conflict is exacerbated when territorial attachments overlap between competing groups. However, while these arguments may be useful in explaining why ethnic conflicts are fought with such ferocity (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007), they fail to explain the timing of ethnic conflicts (Jackson, 2004), or why some relatively poor, heterogeneous societies are comparatively peaceful, as evidenced by the example of Botswana (Mulinge, 2008). Furthermore, the mere presence of ethnic cleavages do not explain why identities become more or less exclusionary over time, as was the case in Bosnia (Toft, 2005), nor do they explain why, as I shall demonstrate in the case of Afghanistan, some ethnically heterogeneous subnational regions are more prone to conflict than others. Moreover, statistical evidence in support of ethnic salience is weak; Fearon and Laitin (2003) found that, controlling for poverty, ethnically or religiously diverse countries are not significantly more likely to experience civil war than homogeneous ones.

Positive statistical relationships have also been found between civil war and other structural factors, such as a high level of commodity exports that can be exploited by groups to fund insurgencies (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004) and rough terrain where insurgent groups can hide (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). However, while statistical datasets of civil wars have been valuable in identifying important correlates and suggesting potential hypotheses to test, large-n studies suffer from a serious drawback: civil wars are extremely rare events, and at any given time countries are more likely to be at peace than at war [3]. Statistical models also produce different results, depending on how variables are measured and coded. A review of four prevalent civil war datasets by Sambanis (2004) showed that small differences in definitions and coding between the datasets leads to substantial changes in the effect sizes of coefficients, sometimes changing from significant to insignificant depending on the methodology used. Finally, statistical correlations do not persuasively identify causal mechanisms explaining the timing of conflict, nor credibly explain variation between peaceful and non-peaceful countries with similar

[3]This paper adheres to a common definition of civil war, which holds that a country is at civil war when it suffers 1,000 or more battle deaths per year as a result of internal conflict. Admittedly, the frequency of civil wars depends to a large extent on how civil war is defined. As Blattman and Miguel (2010) point out, cases of civil *conflict*, at least 25 deaths per year, tend to be more common, with approximately half of all countries experiencing civil conflict in the past half century.

characteristics.

More sophisticated models of ethnic conflict suggest mechanisms for how ethnic grievances are triggered, and why these grievances are more likely to result in war. According to these models, ethnic or religious diversity alone is not sufficient to trigger civil war, but when certain ethnic groups are systematically excluded from power and/or when ruling elites disproportionately favor certain groups, grievances begin to form along ethnic lines (Denny and Walter, 2014). While politicians may deliberately politicize ethnic relations for political gain, Cederman et al. (2013) argue that these policies can backfire, as individual grievances about inequality may escalate into ethno-nationalist violence. Shared ethnic identities also make it easier for aggrieved groups to agitate and take up arms. Common ethnic identities have been shown to bolster information sharing, group cooperation and economic production (Miguel and Gugerty, 2005; Watkins and Ferrara, 2005; Fearon and Laitin, 1996); Esteban and Ray (2008) have argued that these factors make ethnic groups more effective than other types of cleavages, such as class alliances, in mobilizing for conflict. Along similar lines, since ethnic identities are relatively inelastic, it is often more difficult for competing groups to compromise or strike credible bargains that might prevent the outbreak of conflict (Denny and Walter, 2014).

The body of research on ethnic exclusion and civil war improves on previous studies by positing plausible theories as to how grievances are formulated and why ethnicity, as opposed to other types of identities, consistently appears as a key factor in civil wars. Even so, this explanation still falls short. The logic of ethnic exclusion suggests that civil wars should be more common in countries where minority ethnic groups have a persistent hold on political power; yet, Fearon et al. (2007) failed to find any significant correlation between minority ethnic groups in power and civil war. In Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency has been primarily associated with the majority Pashtun ethnic group; however, Pashtuns have played a historically dominant role in the governance of Afghanistan since long before it became officially independent in 1919, and both of its post-2001 Presidents — Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani — are Pashtuns. Similarly, Jordan has managed to avoid the periodic outbreaks of violence that has affected most of its neighbours, despite being ruled by a minority ethnic group for decades.

Another approach to explaining civil wars focuses on opportunities conducive for insurgencies to occur. It imagines civil war as a *contest* between groups competing for control over

resources. Early formulations of these models included two actors: the government and rebel groups. Importantly, the likelihood of success is linked to access to resources and technology available to each side; Hirshleifer (1989), for example, envisioned the likelihood of success between these actors as a function of the resources committed to rent-seeking competitions. More sophisticated models subsequently emerged, adding the civilian population as a resource that both governments and rebels must compete for (Grossman, 1999). Unlike other resources, winning the allegiance of the civilian population may afford multiple benefits: as a potential source of rents and recruits, cover for covert activities, and evidence of popular legitimacy, which may convince both internal and external actors about the likelihood of insurgent success.

This tradition contains a perhaps obvious but still useful insight: that civil wars are more likely to occur when they are militarily and financially feasible (Collier et al., 2009). According to these models, actors make calculations about the likelihood of success based on information available to them at any given time. The choice to launch or participate in a rebellion depends in large part on how favorably actors interpret their chances. Actors also compare potential benefits of rebellion with the alternative of non-engagement. If the spoils of war are particularly high–when control of particularly lucrative resources are at play, for example–civil war is more likely to occur.

Like grievance-based explanations, opportunity models illuminate another useful dimension of explaining civil war outbreak. They explain, for instance, why the activities of armed groups often converges with criminal activity, owing to the need to raise consistent sources of revenue. As Collier (1999) observed, certain identifiable groups of individuals tend to do well out of war: businessmen, criminals, arms dealers, and drug traffickers, to name a few. While Kalyvas (2015) is careful to distinguish between civil war and large-scale organized crime, he outlines some key areas of overlap, not least in the challenge they pose to the government's monopoly of violence.

Although both opportunistic and grievance-based paradigms contribute useful insights to our understanding of civil war, both suffer from shortcomings, particularly in explaining micro-level patterns of violence. Pure opportunism does not explain the high frequency of group-based violence in civil wars, nor does it support growing evidence emphasizing non-material factors—particularly normative ideologies—in explaining the behavior of armed combatants (Sanín and

Wood, 2014; Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015). However, deeply-held grievances or identities do not account for phenomena such as repeated alliance switching between warring factions (Christia, 2012; Seymour, 2014), or explain why certain groups embed themselves in multiple government institutions and opposition groups—all of which may be ideologically at odds—as De Waal (2009) describes below in reference to Sudan:

> It is hard to separate the "customary' and the ''modern'...the ''native administration' and the ''modern administration' are mutually assimilated. It is common to find that in a single prominent provincial family, one son is the chief of the tribe, and his brothers or first cousins will include an army general, a commissioner, a senior party member, a businessman, and a professor — and also today a senior NGO or UN official. If the family is placed at a particularly strategic political intersection, brothers may hold high ranks in different competing parties, and perhaps one will also be an influential member of an armed opposition movement.

Both contest and grievance-based models of civil war fail to capture these nuances. As Kalyvas (2003) has pointed out, local participation in violence may occur for all sorts of reasons, from the most ideational to the most opportunistic. The sheer complexity of personal motives in civil war has presented a major obstacle to theory development, a challenge compounded by the fact that these dynamics may vary at the subnational level from family to family and settlement to settlement. Developing convincing mechanisms to bridge these competing narratives is an area that merits greater attention from scholars of civil war (Cederman and Vogt, 2017).

This thesis is intended as a contribution towards resolving these contradictions. While I do not present a comprehensive theory of civil war that covers all possible cases, I bring greater attention to the effects of long-lasting violent conflicts on local political dynamics, which in turn help explain how conflicts spread and why we observe subnational variation in levels of insurgent violence. I highlight two mechanisms of particular importance: relationships between state elites and their citizens, and the legacies of violence on the character and composition of local leadership.

A Way Forward: State-Society Relations and Past Legacies of Conflict

A growing research agenda in recent years has focused on the nature of political institutions in conflict-affected countries and how the actions of state elites may contribute to breakdowns in state order. With regards to a wave of civil war outbreaks in Africa in the 1990s, Bates (2015) argues that it is primarily how states behave towards their citizens— specifically, whether states

act primarily as protectors or predators — that determines state failure and the rise of civil conflict. He attributes the outbreak of a large number of African civil wars in the 1990s to a rise in state predation, driven by a collapse in state revenues, a high proportion of lootable natural resources, and a rise in elite insecurity. His conclusions are supported by a growing body of economic scholarship highlighting the importance of state institutions in determining the success or failure of states. North (1991) argues that the existence of institutions constraining the power of the state over its citizens is a key determinant of economic growth, a finding since reinforced by subsequent studies. Similarly, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) find evidence that the prosperity of a state and the risk of state failure are largely determined by how inclusive or extractive its political institutions are.

This line of argument integrates several potential causal variables often associated with violence — including both opportunity (e.g. the presence of lootable resources) and grievances (as a reaction to state predation) — into a single causal mechanism. Combining these two schools is analytically desirable for a number of reasons. Integrated models have more purchase than static models of civil war, as they offer explanations for why the risk of conflict may be higher at particular times. They may also help resolve apparent contradictions in observable phenomena that have different theoretical implications for civil war, and offer more compelling explanations for why some poor countries are more prone to violence than others.

Nonetheless, current research on state institutions and violence has limitations as well. Until recently, most research analyzed civil war at the nation-state level, which has produced methodological issues concerning how state failure is measured. Bates, for example, measures state failure using a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not an armed militia operated in a country during a given year. However, as others have pointed out, this definition does not adequately distinguish between weak states, which are common in Africa, and states in active civil war (Bratton, 2009; Fearon, 2009). Indeed, a major drawback of a vast amount of previous research is that it conceptualizes the state as a single unit. As such, research on state institutions and violence often rests on questionable dichotomies of state behavior: 'inclusive/ exclusive", according to Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) or 'protector/predator", according to Bates (2015). These dichotomies do not reflect the fact that states can act in both ways, simultaneously. Mamdani (1996) suggests as much, describing the African state as bifurcated,

ruling directly over privileged citizens in urban areas and indirectly over 'subjects' in the rural periphery. Furthermore, using nation-states as the unit of analysis fails to capture differences in levels of violence within countries at war. Recent theoretical advances in examining variation in civil war violence at the subnational level (e.g. (Cederman et al., 2013)) suggest promising avenues for future research.

While this thesis draws from existing literature on state institutions and conflict, the field raises another question: why has civil war in contemporary developing countries not improved state capacity? Most foundational literature on state formation concerns the development of modern European nation-states. A key proposition of this literature, most famously articulated by Tilly (1985), holds that constant military engagements in early modern Europe created incentives for monarchs to extract revenues from their populations more efficiently. As a consequence, European states improved their organizational capacities, leading to the development of legal-rational state institutions. By contrast, state formation in the poorest countries has followed a different path (Herbst, 2014). Rather than contributing to the development of state capacity and the expansion of state control, political violence has had dysfunctional effects on contemporary states, disrupting the development process and weakening the quality of state institutions and ability to deliver services. For example, Afghanistan's successive conflicts over the past 40 years have had a catastrophic effect on the state's ability to deliver services — primary school enrollment declined sharply after the anti-Soviet insurgency intensified in 1981 and did not reach the same level again until 2002 (UNESCO, 2018).

There is an ongoing debate as to why state formation in the poorest countries in the global south has diverged from the European experience. Herbst (2014) argues that Africa's relatively low population densities and inhospitable territories led colonizers to limit the reach of the colonial state to a few key areas, leaving the interior relatively free from state rule, a legacy that continues in modern African states today. Others have pointed to changes in the international system, noting that countries modernizing in contemporary times must contend with a highly organized and globalized international system, placing small countries with poorly skilled workforces at a particular disadvantage (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). Yet these explanations do not account for the fact that countries like Afghanistan without a colonial legacy have also struggled in their efforts to create modern state bureaucracies, nor do they

consider that the international system has also expanded economic opportunities for developing states, in the form of larger export markets for example.

I bring greater focus to another mechanism in contemporary fragile states: the tendency for conflict to produce large numbers of specialists in violence. Debos (2016) has described how this process has evolved in Chad, where the threat of low-level violence by men in arms is ubiquitous, even during periods where active war is suspended. As a result, violence is a commonplace aspect of day-to-day life, and the civilians she encountered were often more concerned with the behavior of men in uniform than from attacks by rebel groups. Elsewhere, Reno (1999) has described in detail the rise of warlord politics in Africa and how state authority has been systematically undermined by regional strongmen, who have redirected public resources for private gain. Moore (2004) observes that many small poor states derive most of their revenues from unearned income sources, typically from the extraction of natural resources, strategic rents (mainly foreign aid), or a combination of the two. This arrangement offers many opportunities for local groups in the periphery to siphon resources from the central government, ultimately undermining the consolidation of the state (Bayart, 1993).

This thesis aims to establish links between this literature and predominant explanations for civil war. I argue that the widespread presence and influence of armed elites creates specific political realities that effect the everyday lives of civilians, and that our understanding of the onset and spread of insurgent violence cannot be separated from this context. I further argue that the relationship between local armed actors, central state institutions, and international supporters determines the level of elite fragmentation in peripheral areas, which in turn helps explains variations in insurgent success at the subnational level. Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines these mechanisms in greater detail and illustrates these dynamics through the example of the post-2001 Taliban insurgency in Northern Afghanistan.

By focusing on subnational variations in insurgent violence, this thesis adds additional nuance to state-centric models that use the nation-state as a single unit of analysis. It recognizes that the nature of political authority varies significantly at the subnational level, and that the incentives of different types of elites (urban and rural, formal and informal) are often at odds. Examining elite behavior and governing arrangements at the subnational level may also help explain why conflicts tend to be localized in particular regions, and why outbreaks

of conflict may differ even between neighboring villages (Kalyvas, 2006). At the same time, many national-level variables that are likely to affect political violence can be held constant, particularly those related to experience of past conflicts, long-term historical determinants, international intervention, and the orientation and nature of formal central state institutions.

While this thesis draws from literature on civil war onset, its emphasis on the political legacies of conflict suggests that the findings might be limited to cases of conflict recurrence. Indeed, Afghanistan has undergone decades of successive conflicts, and the mechanisms described in this thesis are perhaps best applied to contexts that have had experienced similarly protracted conflicts. Nonetheless, the insights here may also have some relevance for countries such as Syria, where the civil war has only been active for a comparatively short period of time but where armed political groups have quickly proliferated. Additionally, one advantage of the subnational perspective is that it allows for a rigorous comparison of relatively safe and unsafe areas, which can illuminate how conflict begins at local levels and why some areas prove more resilient in resisting outbreaks of violence than others. Examining variations in violence at the subnational level may therefore yield useful insights for our general theoretical understanding of civil war onset.

Case Study: Afghanistan

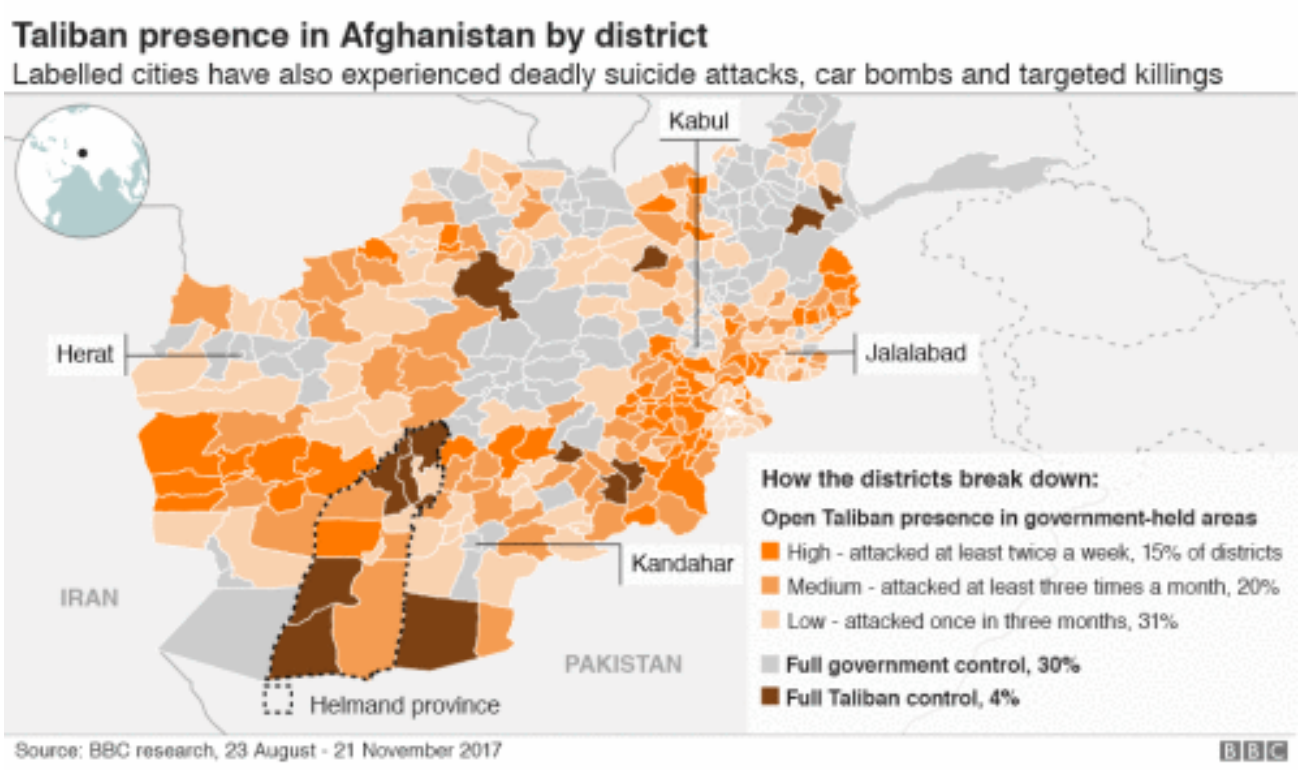
Justification and Background

Afghanistan is an ideal case to explore how the legacies of past conflicts affect the dynamics of insurgency and civil war in the present. Beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghanistan has experienced a near-continuous series of intensive violent conflicts. Since then, well over a million civilians have been killed as a result of war-related violence, and several million more have been displaced (Khan, 2012). Given the country's youthful demographics, most of its citizens have never lived through a period of prolonged peace.[4]

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., U.S.-led coalition forces invaded Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban government in late 2001. Post-invasion, the Taliban were shattered, its forces obliterated by the US-led invasion and its leadership ar-

[4]As of 2018, the median age of Afghans estimated to be 18.8 years, and approximately 63% of Afghans are estimated to be under the age of 25 (IndexMundi, 2018).

Figure 1.1: Taliban Presence in Afghanistan by District, Late 2017



Source: BBC World Service, "Taliban Threaten 70% of Districts in Afghanistan, BBC Finds (31 January, 2018).

rested or forced into hiding. The government that replaced them had the enthusiastic backing of the international community, which pledged to support the fledgling democracy with economic aid and a military coalition of 42 countries. The conflict was widely believed to be over, and the period between 2002 and 2004 was generally peaceful, apart from a few minor attacks. The Bush Administration, preoccupied with Iraq, believed the Taliban was a spent force and allocated a comparatively small amount of attention to dealing with the organization's remnants (Coll, 2018).

However, the Taliban leadership quickly regrouped across the Pakistani border. By 2003 they were capable of launching small-scale attacks into Afghanistan, and since then have steadily improved their lethal capabilities and expanded into new territory across the country (Coll, 2018). By the end of 2017, the government was estimated to fully control only 30% of districts in the country (Sharifi and Adamou, 2018). While the Taliban's natural base is situated in the Pashtun-dominated south, it has since spread across all regions of the country, as seen in Figure 1.1.

Given the scale and breadth of international engagement and support to the post-2001

Afghan government, the resurgence of the Taliban and the onset of widespread civil war in the post-2001 period is empirically puzzling. Given the unpropitious circumstances the movement found itself in after 2001, how were the Taliban able to spread across the country in a relatively short amount of time, even into areas outside of its traditional Pashtun heartlands? Why was the Afghan government, which enjoyed tremendous amounts of foreign aid and military support over the past seventeen years, unable to decisively establish its political authority in these areas? Finally, why have some areas of Afghanistan proved more resilient against insurgent groups than others?

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the political legacy of armed conflict played a significant role in explaining why the Afghan state remained chronically weak and produced fresh grievances amongst the population that the Taliban were able to exploit. While the international community's early efforts at statebuilding in Afghanistan had a tendency to wrongly treat the country as an institutional blank slate (Wright, 2010), several decades of conflict fundamentally altered the nature of political authority in communities across the country. Importantly, this legacy weakened *both* formal and traditional customary institutions, while empowering a new class of armed political elites.

After the fall of the Taliban, the US-led coalition was motivated by the immediate objectives of counter-terrorism, including the need to root out Al-Qaida operatives as quickly as possible. As a result, they made short-term alliances with warlords and other ostensibly pro-government militias, facilitating the entrenchment of warlordism in the country. While these alliances may have delivered short-term gains, they have proved fatal in the long-term. Warlords took the opportunity to refashion themselves into a new class of local elite, co-opting the flow of public resources to enrich themselves and weakening the power of the central state. It was, as one academic described, akin to giving "steroids to a bodybuilder" (Rasmussen, 2017).

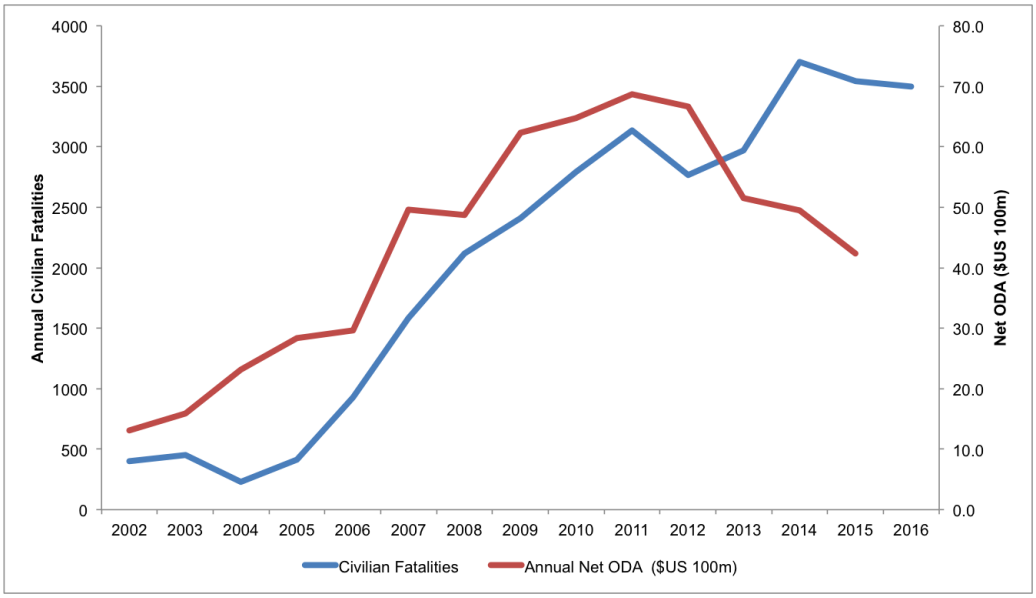
Warlordism has since emerged as a dominant feature in Afghan politics in the years since 2001, and several warlords have fashioned themselves as representatives of Afghanistan's various ethnic and tribal groups, though, as Chapter 3 of this thesis will show, their actual level of public support is likely lower than commonly presumed. While warlordism itself may not always produce anti-government insurgencies, its highly personalized nature and encouragement of excessive rent-seeking behavior makes it prone to instability and competition between elites,

often manifesting in local-level violence that prompts civilians to defect to insurgents. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I compare the experiences of the neighbouring provinces of Balkh and Kunduz in Afghanistan and show how local configurations of power in each province after 2001 made Kunduz vulnerable to insurgent activity. In Kunduz, violent factional disputes between local-level commanders have proved particularly damaging, leading to constant insecurity and exacerbating grievances within the population, eventually culminating in a brief takeover of the entire province by Taliban forces in 2015. Conversely, leadership in Balkh has remained highly consolidated, preventing insurgents from making similar inroads. These conditions explain why certain communities of Afghanistan have proved more vulnerable to Taliban infiltration than others.

Coalition forces were not blind to the deteriorating security situation, and made concerted efforts to stabilize the fledgling Afghan government. As the conflict with Taliban forces intensified, donors dramatically ramped up military and economic support to Afghanistan (Figure 1.2). Seventeen years into the post 9/11 era, Afghanistan remains one of the largest recipients of foreign aid in the world. By 2014, total U.S. aid to Afghanistan during this period exceeded, in real terms, the entire Marshall Plan to reconstruct the European continent after World War II—an enormous investment that has produced high levels of economic growth, but has yet to yield noticeable dividends in terms of stabilization (Groll, 2014). This seems to contradict some of the established literature on aid and political violence. Contrary to expectations that increased state revenues should enable the state to expand control over its territory (Levi, 1989), economic growth and the expansion of state revenues has often been accompanied by a *rise* in anti-government violence. In Afghanistan, civilian fatalities from insurgent violence have risen, not fallen, in tandem with external aid (Figure 1.2). This is also inconsistent with evidence linking external support as a key factor in maintaining stability in fragile states, and observations that sudden drops in foreign aid makes civil war more likely (Bates, 2015; Nielsen et al., 2011).[5] Chapter 4 of this thesis, which examines the legacy of one of Afghanistan's largest aid programs, suggests reasons why this massive amount of support failed to adequately redress local grievances in ways that might have prevented the outbreak of conflict.

[5]Though foreign aid to Afghanistan began to fall in 2013 in accordance with the end of the U.S.-led "surge", Afghanistan still remains the second largest recipient of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the world after Syria according to the most recent figures available. ODA remains at high levels in comparison with the vast majority of fragile states (OECD, 2017).

Figure 1.2: Total Net Official Development Assistance Received and Civilian Fatalities Per Year in Afghanistan, 2002-2016



Note: This plot shows estimated civilian fatalities as a result of insurgent violence per year from 2002 to 2016 (Source: United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan), alongside total net Official Development Assistance (ODA) received per year from 2002 to 2015 (Source: OECD). ODA estimates are in current US dollars.

One important aspect of the Taliban's resurgence that this thesis does not cover is how and why the Taliban were able to reconstitute themselves into a threat after suffering shattering losses in 2001. While I highlight weaknesses in governance that the Taliban were able to exploit, the Taliban resurgence was still not necessarily inevitable. A particularly important factor that enabled the Taliban to regroup in early 2001 was the role of the Pakistani state, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in giving the Taliban space and support to regroup in early 2001. While the Taliban is arguably less dependent on the ISI today—they can draw on resources from territories they control within Afghanistan, including a large part of opium-rich Helmand (Figure 1.1)—it is at least debatable as to whether or not they would have survived as a cohesive political movement had their leadership defected to the state or been arrested or killed immediately after they lost power. It is also evident that the Taliban has evolved in nuanced and interesting ways since they were ejected from power, often displaying a willingness to soften some of their more rigid ideological stances and to appeal beyond their Pashtun base to other minority groups. While this thesis focuses more on how the nature of political order in Afghanistan facilitated the return of the Taliban, future research could shed greater light on strategic decision-making within the movement, as well as the role of external

backers in allowing the Taliban to incubate when it was at its weakest.

Methodology and Data

This thesis is based on original data collected over multiple trips to Afghanistan between 2014 and 2018. While I was predominantly based in Kabul during these trips, I completed three field trips to northern Afghanistan over this period, as well as a trip to Kandahar in the south. The third article is based on data collected from Wardak, a highly insecure province located to the southwest of Kabul. Due to high levels of insecurity in this province and difficulties with traveling by road, the 70 interviews and other raw data were collected by a team of Afghan researchers.

I used a mixed-methods approach in collecting the data. I began by collecting semi-structured interviews for Chapter 2 of the thesis, as well as relevant secondary evidence. Whenever possible, I did these interviews myself. On occasions where a translator was needed, I hired research assistants to accompany me to interviews and assist with translation. Due to issues with security and restrictions on travel, some interviews were conducted by phone or Skype.

Insights from this first stage of data collection helped inform the experimental survey design used in Chapter 3. The survey was designed with input from scholars at the Center for Experimental Social Sciences at Nuffield College. I hired an Afghan survey company to collect the data and provided training to the research assistants and monitored the data collection on an ongoing basis. The survey was pre-tested in Kabul in May 2016, and the data was collected from July-August 2016 in Balkh and Saripul and December 2016-January 2017 in Kunduz. I then explored the implications of the survey results with additional semi-structured interviews. The survey was funded by a grant from the International Growth Centre at the London School of Economics.

Chapter 4 was developed from raw data collected in November and December 2016, originally for a research project funded by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). Two former colleagues involved in the collection of the original raw data are credited as co-authors in the published version of this paper, which will be released in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Asian Survey* later this year.

A brief note on anonymity: the thesis touches on sensitive subject matter that could consti-

tute a security risk for respondents. Many interview respondents asked that their identities be kept anonymous, though in almost all cases permitted general descriptors to be used. Although other respondents gave permission to use their names, I have opted to keep them anonymous in most cases, as security risks have increased considerably since the interviews were conducted. I have made an exception for public figures at high levels of government, who are mentioned by name in the document. In Chapter 4, I have also anonymised the names of the village sampling points, as individuals could conceivably be identified by their positions in each village. Otherwise, details on interview locations and dates are provided in the footnotes.

More information on specific methodological issues pertaining to each chapter are discussed in the text or supplementary information of the articles.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is comprised of three separate articles, each serving to illustrate dynamics of civil war in Afghanistan.

Chapter 2 outlines the main theoretical contribution of this thesis. In the paper, I investigate the onset of civil war in northern Afghanistan, a region with a significant amount of ethnic diversity. I investigate the following question: *Why do we observe different levels of insurgent violence in areas of Afghanistan with similar characteristics?* I start with a overview of the recent history of political violence and the emergence of armed politics in the north. I compare the provinces of Balkh and Kunduz, two ethnically-diverse neighbouring provinces which have experienced different levels of insurgency in recent years. I argue that Balkh has been able to effectively repel insurgents due to the fact that its government has been monopolized by a single warlord with relatively long-term horizons. While the government has by all accounts engaged in widespread corruption, its security forces are relatively unified and patronage networks are relatively inclusive, keeping public grievances at a minimum. In Kunduz, by contrast, no single faction has monopolized control of the territory. As a consequence, local-level violence and civilian abuse is pervasive in many communities, and security forces are too divided to effectively repel insurgent threats or to hold private militias in check. Widespread disillusionment and frustration with local governance has prompted some communities to seek protection from the Taliban, providing the insurgent group with a crucial base of operations. It has since grown

strong enough to pose a security threat to the entire province.

While Chapter 2 argues that armed political actors are the source of many of the grievances observed in Afghanistan in recent years, an alternative possibility is that these leaders remain influential because there is significant public demand for strongmen in insecure contexts. Chapter 3 explores the following question: *In war-torn societies, does the public yearn for strong military leaders to restore order?* Respondents I interviewed during this project were divided on this issue, with some convinced that there was public support for former *mujahadeen* fighters, and others who bitterly criticized them as leaders. I show results from an original conjoint experiment examining public leadership preferences in three provinces in Northern Afghanistan, identifying the attributes of an ideal leader amongst a large cross-section of Afghans. In contrast to the type of leadership described in Chapter 2 that has been on offer from either warlords or insurgents, I show that Afghans living in this region prefer younger, university-educated leaders, while older leaders and those with religious education are penalized. Military experience confers only a small benefit compared to education, challenging the notion that there is widespread public demand for warlords in power. Furthermore, these preferences hold across different age groups, incomes, and ethnicities, and those living in relatively insecure provinces did not show significantly different preferences than those in relatively secure provinces. These findings challenge the notion that strongmen are regarded by the public as a bulwark against insecurity, rather than a source of many of the grievances that have plagued the Afghan population. They also undermine insurgent narratives claiming that there is widespread demand or nostalgia for Taliban rule. Furthermore, while respondents did express strong preferences for leaders of their own ethnicity, preferences were weaker amongst respondents with more education. These findings suggest that civilians who have defected to the Taliban are doing so reluctantly, and would be less likely to do so if provided with more palatable options for local leadership. They also have implications for theories of ethnic conflict, suggesting that more investments in education may have a mitigating effect on ethnic tensions in the region.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores *why large transfers of international aid have failed to bolster the legitimacy of the Afghan government.* I look at the legacy of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), one of the largest development programmes undertaken in Afghanistan's history, in the province of Wardak. This programme is significant because, unlike many other programmes

that have been plagued by inefficiency or corruption, the NSP is generally considered to be highly successful. The NSP is based on community-driven development principles, aiming not only to build local projects quickly but to bring about transformative changes in governance. The paper shows that, while development projects were delivered reasonably effectively through the program, it had limited effects as a mechanism for building state institutions or enhancing public legitimacy. Instead, in highly insecure areas, trust in government appears to be more strongly driven by interactions with government security forces and/or insurgents. The findings challenge common assumptions about "winning hearts and minds" through development assistance, and highlight the limitations of investments in economic development in preventing the recurrence of conflict.

Taken together, the three empirical chapters of this thesis help illuminate the drivers of civil war in Afghanistan. They identify limitations in the donor community's approach to using aid as a statebuilding tool. They identify elite factionalization as a key variable in explaining why insurgents have enjoyed more success in some areas over others. Finally, evidence on public preferences for leadership suggests that defection to the Taliban is not inevitable—popular sentiment is against both warlordism and insurgents and in favor of strengthened local government with educated leadership at the helm, in contrast to what exists today. I conclude by discussing the limitations of this thesis and outlining theoretical and policy implications for civil war in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Today, the insurgency in Afghanistan is stronger than at any point since 2001. Large parts of the country have fallen outside of government hands, and the survival of the government remains highly dependent on the continued presence of international forces. At the time of writing, the security situation continues to deteriorate. Understanding how the country came to this point, in spite of the enormous amount of external aid and counter-insurgency support delivered to the Afghan government over the past seventeen years, is crucial for advancing current theories of civil war and improving how the international community engages with fragile states in the future.

Chapter 2

Warlordism, Elite Fragmentation and Insurgency in Northern Afghanistan

Abstract

In conflict-affected regions with similar structural characteristics, what explains subnational variations in insurgent success? In this paper I compare two neighbouring provinces of Northern Afghanistan with different levels of Taliban insurgent violence in recent years—Balkh and Kunduz— to explain why insurgents have been more successful in their attempts to capture and hold territory in the latter. In contrast to prevailing explanations for civil war onset, I find that *elite fragmentation* is an important but understudied variable explaining insurgent success in this context. I offer a novel theoretical explanation for why elite fragmentation connects with higher levels of insurgent violence by incentivizing predatory behavior amongst elites, which in turn alienated large segments of the population and left it more vulnerable to Taliban incursions. The findings stress the importance of elite fragmentation and local grievances in driving civilian defections to insurgent groups, and illuminate the destabilizing role that competition between local elites can have in undermining the resilience of communities to external threats.

Introduction

Until recently, most influential models of civil war have relied on country-level comparisons to identify drivers of political violence. However, civil war is by definition a subnational phenomenon—in practice, violence is rarely, if ever, uniformly distributed across countries (Cederman and Gleditsch, 2009). Seeking explanatory factors for civil war at the nation-state level, as many foundational models of civil war do, obscures important dynamics that vary from area to area. While recent micro-level studies of civil war have contributed useful insights on the motivations of specific individuals and communities in participating in violent insurgent movements, we continue to lack comprehensive meso-level models for why violence occurs more frequently in certain subnational regions at particular times.

Recent scholarship has sought to shed more light on the subnational dynamics of civil war.

Perhaps most influentially, Cederman et al. (2013) used subnational-level data to argue that ethnonationalist conflict occurs as a result of horizontal inequalities between ethnic groups. According to this theory, the relative economic and political marginalization of ethnic groups explains how group-level grievances develop, thereby increasing the risk of civil war. In other words, the more excluded ethnic groups are from national power, the higher the risk of civil war erupting in areas where marginalized ethnic groups are geographically concentrated. Other scholars have presented further evidence in favor of ethnic exclusion in driving the development of local grievances that precipitate violence between ethnic groups (Denny and Walter, 2014).

While theoretically compelling, certain empirical cases appear to confound the logic of ethnic exclusion. In this paper, I focus on the case of Taliban insurgency in northern Afghanistan. While northern Afghanistan is currently in the midst of an ethnically-charged conflict, ethnic exclusion is an unsatisfactory explanation for its onset. While the Taliban insurgency is largely associated with the Pashtun ethnic group, Pashtuns are the politically dominant ethnicity at the national level. Pashtuns are generally well-integrated into local patronage networks and have benefited from the distribution of a significant amount of development aid in the post-2001 era, though this varies by district. Furthermore, in the north, the Taliban have broadened their base of support to other ethnic groups, suggesting that ethnic grievances do not fully explain why local communities choose to support or oppose Taliban insurgents.

To explore civil war onset in northern Afghanistan, I compare two neighboring provinces in northern Afghanistan that have experienced different levels of insurgent violence in recent years. Drawing from over 100 semi-structured interviews conducted in Afghanistan as well numerous secondary accounts, I find that the *degree of fragmentation between local elites* in the context of armed politics is a more compelling explanation for variation in insurgent success in Afghanistan. Where the provincial government has been monopolized and consolidated by a single faction, as in the case of Balkh, insurgent violence is relatively low; in Kunduz, where no single faction has been able to dominate the territory, local politics is dominated by competitive rent-seeking behavior between local commanders, degrading the local government's capacity to respond to insurgents and alienating large segments of the population. As a result, local communities exposed to political violence are more likely to tacitly or actively support the presence of insurgent groups, creating more opportunities for insurgents to flourish in the

province. I propose an original analytical framework suggesting how local grievances develop under these circumstances, and suggest that future models of insurgent violence consider elite fragmentation as a contributor to civil war.

The first section of this paper briefly discusses extant literature on civil war onset at the subnational level, and I propose a theory for how elite fragmentation combines grievance and opportunity logics into a single mechanism that explains how favorable environments for insurgency fester in particular areas. For the remainder of the paper, I test this theory in the context of northern Afghanistan. First, I provide a brief historical overview of the roots of ethnic cleavages in the north before delving into Afghanistan's recent conflicts, including the insurgency against communist rule in the 1980s, state collapse and warlord rule in the early 1990s, and the rise of the Taliban towards the end of the decade. Finally, I consider the contrasting cases of Balkh and Kunduz in the post-2001 era, explaining why the local government in Balkh has been more successful in repelling insurgent violence, and provide additional supporting evidence for the theory with the shadow case of Kandahar province in the south. I conclude by outlining some theoretical implications for our understanding of civil war and suggest policy implications and areas of future research.

I. Civil War and Insurgent Success at the Subnational Level: A New Theoretical Framework

In understanding the dynamics of civil war, it is useful to begin by defining the phenomenon. This paper adopts a straightforward definition identified by Cederman and Vogt (2017): civil war can be defined as *armed combat within a sovereign state between an incumbent government and a non-state challenger that claims full or partial sovereignty over the territory of a state.* This definition does not imply anything about the underlying motives of individual combatants: as Spruyt (2017) has pointed out, pro- and anti-government combatants may be less concerned with overthrowing or defending the state than with seeking control of territory in order to repurpose public funds to enrich themselves and their followers, a common observance in fragile states. Nonetheless, factions involved in combat typically take at least a nominal stance either for or against the incumbent government, however loosely defined their principles might be.

This definition excludes other types of political violence against civilians, such as mass killing and state oppression, as well as other types of non-state communal violence, though these acts may occur during the course of civil wars (Cederman and Vogt, 2017).

As civil wars are primarily violent contests of political authority taking place *within* the borders of sovereign states, research has increasingly moved beyond country-level models and sought to understand the phenomenon at subnational levels. One influential body of work, emphasizing the role of grievances stemming from local inequalities between groups, builds on theories of relative deprivation first outlined by Gurr (1970): namely, that grievances driven by feelings of marginalization are a major determinant of why individuals take part in violent political action. While Gurr's research focused on the psychological aspects of violence for individuals, subsequent research has applied his insights to explaining group-level violence in civil wars. In particular, feelings of polarization—identification with specific in-groups in opposition to others — and horizontal inequalities in terms of how rents and public services are delivered between groups are particularly salient as mechanisms for explaining how individual-level grievances interact with group-level inequalities (Aas Rustad et al., 2011). Additional contributions by Cederman et al. (2013) argue that the state also plays an important role in fomenting conflict, using ethnic patronage networks to privilege certain groups over others in order to mobilize and maintain political support.

Grievance-based paradigms of civil war have many virtues. They are intuitively compelling, and are supported by a large body of qualitative evidence that suggests many combatants are motivated by a sense of injustice and marginalization. However, attributing the dynamics of civil war to the presence of grievances, tout court, is unsatisfying. One critique of grievance-based paradigms of civil war stems from a competing body of work stressing the importance of *opportunities* for insurgencies to thrive. According to this logic, grievances are ubiquitous in almost every context, yet civil wars are rare occurrences, and violence often limited to highly localized contexts. Therefore, it is more useful to consider structural and political factors that make it more likely that conflict will erupt in particular places and times (Tilly, 1978; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). One related paradigm highlights *greed* as a particularly salient motivation—civil wars are more likely to occur in areas where there are more opportunities for rebel leaders to enrich themselves and their followers (Collier and Hoeffler,

2004; Ross, 2006). Yet, these models are also subject to the critique that they do not adequately take into account the substantial commitment problems rebel groups face in penetrating local communities and encouraging new supporters to defect from the government, nor do they take into account emotions, such as fear and resentment, that are evident in many accounts of civil war (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015). As Cederman and Vogt (2017) argue, grievance and opportunity-based logics both have merits and weaknesses, and theoretical models should take into account how each of these logics interact in local contexts.

This paper will add to the existing theoretical debate by proposing an understudied variable in explaining subnational variations in civil war violence: *elite fragmentation*. It is supported by previous research emphasizing weak state capacity as a major determinant of civil wars (Fearon and Laitin, 2003), but stresses the security and judicial sectors as the most crucial elements of state capacity in these contexts.[1] The model I propose below builds on past work by Staniland (2015), who describes the unique characteristics of armed political orders, where weak state capacity is often compensated for by the use of local militias. In these contexts, governments often face significant principal-agent challenges in their degree of control over local militias in contested areas. I also draw heavily from insights by Christia (2012), who has persuasively documented the phenomenon of opportunistic alliance-switching and fractionalization between armed groups during civil wars. I link these arguments to insights from the grievance literature by demonstrating how high levels of alliance-switching and fragmentation within armed political orders create more insecure and abusive conditions for civilians, making it more likely for them to defect to insurgents.

A Theoretical Model of Elite Fragmentation and Insurgent Success

The basic premise of this model holds that excessive fragmentation between local elites exacerbates competitive predatory rent-seeking behavior in their respective communities. This generates local grievances against the government, which in turn creates opportunities for insurgencies to convince local communities to assist them. Elite competition also impedes cooperation and information-sharing between pro-government forces, degrading the capacity

[1]This stands in contrast to Hendrix (2010), who emphasizes bureaucratic and administrative capacity as the most relevant indicators pertaining to civil conflict. Military personnel per capita has been used as a potential indicator for capacity, representing the state's repressive potential against its citizens (Hendrix, 2010). However, in contexts where the state does not hold a monopoly of violence, the ability of military forces to ensure security may vary from district to district; therefore, military personnel per capita at the national level is a poor indicator of subnational capacity. By contrast, my emphasis is more in line with Sepp (2005), who emphasizes the quality of local law enforcement and the judiciary as key factors in the success of counter-insurgency campaigns.

of local elites to effectively respond to insurgent threats and generating more chances for insurgents to achieve tactical victories in combat.

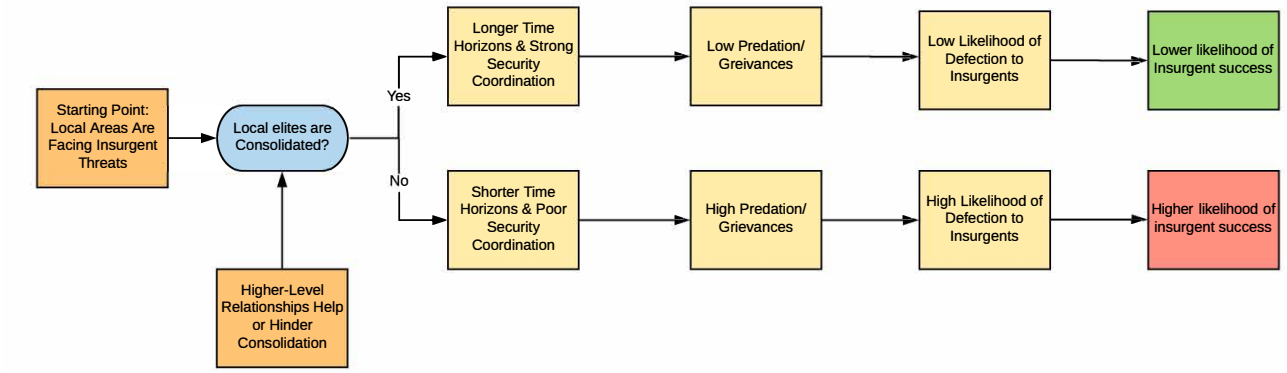
The model I propose involves three primary sets of actors at the subnational level: local pro-government elites, civilians, and insurgents. Other actors of note include central state officials that may provide support and/or exert pressure on local elites, and international actors that may intervene on either side. While I have limited the model to three primary actors for simplicity, the causal chain described below could also apply to multi-party civil wars with multiple pro- and/or anti-government factions. The connection between violent competition by local elites and civilian grievances is still theoretically plausible; indeed, it may be present to an even greater extent.

The mechanisms for this model are as follows. I assume that the primary motivation of most local elites is to maintain and, if possible, expand their zones of influence and power. In the context of armed politics, maintaining authority requires control over local security forces, which entails significant costs in terms of recruitment, salaries, and providing soldiers with food, weapons and other material goods. Local elites must therefore find ways to secure resources on a continuous basis in order to maintain and expand power.

Local elites may adopt a number of strategies to generate revenue. They may agree to nominal oversight of local security forces by the central government in exchange for money for salaries and weapons, as is the case with the semi-formal Afghan Local Police (ALP) discussed later in this paper. They may seek external patrons of their own, bypassing the central government and establishing direct links with potential private or international funders. They may also engage in rent-seeking activities within the territories they control, siphoning resources from informal streams of revenue, extracting taxes from the population, and potentially engaging in the illicit economy or other criminal activities.

In practice, local elites typically engage in some or all of these activities at once. However, from the perspective of civilians, extractive rent-seeking activities are most significant, as those living in territory controlled by armed elites bear the burden of taxation while having limited opportunities to resist. When rent-seeking becomes excessive, civilian grievances against the government are exacerbated, making their defection to insurgent groups more likely. As Wood (2008) has observed, the behavior of local militias towards civilians impacts how civilians

Figure 2.1: A Theoretical Model of Elite Consolidation and Insurgent Success



evaluate whether or not to defect to insurgent groups: Civilians "caught 'between two fires' must choose—on inadequate information and in a context of high uncertainty—which side to support, particularly when combatants force residents to declare such choices."(pg. 548)

However, not all areas have deeply aggrieved populations, and some local elites are more effective at resisting incursions by insurgent groups than others. Drawing from insights from Olson (1993), who intuited that civilians prefer stationary bandits to roving bandits, and Kalyvas (2006), who finds that violence against civilians is worst in contested territories, I argue in this thesis that insurgents are less likely to be successful in areas where elites have highly consolidated leadership. In areas where leadership is consolidated, local elites develop longer-term horizons, keeping predatory behavior controlled enough to keep public grievances in check. A consolidated security apparatus is better placed to mobilize and coordinate local forces against external threats, making them more effective at repelling insurgent attacks. Conversely, in areas with highly fragmented leadership, elites have correspondingly short-term horizons and are more likely to focus on extracting revenues from their respective populations, irrespective of the long-term costs to legitimacy or stability. Under such conditions, elites tend to privilege core groups of supporters, deepening grievances along ethnic or sectarian lines. These elites are also less likely to cooperate with each other in unifying against external threats. The combination of uncoordinated security forces and heightened local grievances makes areas with highly fragmented elites more vulnerable to insurgent violence. I illustrate these dynamics in Figure 2.1.

This theoretical framework advances contemporary models of civil war by presenting a plausible causal chain for how elite fragmentation can weaken local capacity to combat insurgents and generate additional incentives for civilians to seek protection from insurgents. The causal chain explains how grievance and opportunity narratives interact under these conditions. The need to compete for and secure a continuous stream of resources explains why local security forces and militias engage in extractive practices. This in turn explains how anti-government grievances fester in local areas, weakening public support for the government. The combination of poorly coordinated security forces and relatively high levels of local grievances provides fertile opportunities for insurgencies to convince communities to defect and to defeat local security forces in combat.

The causal chain above raises a further question about *how* consolidation happens at the subnational level. In the context of armed politics, I argue that consolidation is mainly a function of how well particular actors manage to attract and maintain the support of higher-level patrons to a greater extent than their rivals. These patrons may be influential officials at the central government level, international backers, or both. In civil wars involving an international military intervention, accessing support from above becomes even more important. This mechanism aligns with evidence presented by Christia (2012), who finds that relative strength between warring groups is a major determinant of alliance formation. It also explains how fractures in the central government and/or between external actors engaged in the conflict often manifest at local levels, but goes further, showing the negative impact of those divisions on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Scope Conditions

While the mechanisms described above linking fragmentation with heightened local grievances might be observable during any civil war, the theory is most relevant to contexts that have suffered from long-lasting cycles of political violence. In these contexts, violent entrepreneurs are likely to be influential relative to other types of actors that might be able to resolve differences between local factions through non-violent means. Indeed, it is prudent to emphasize that it is not simply the presence of divisions between local elites that are problematic, as such divisions can be observed almost anywhere; rather, highly extractive and violent manifestations of these divisions exacerbate grievances amongst civilians. For this reason, the theory is most

applicable to cases of civil war where armed factions dominate the internal political landscape.

Though my emphasis on fragmentation between pro-government elites implies that the theory might only apply to multi-party civil wars, I argue that the binary distinction between pro- and anti-government elites is still meaningful. First, while pro-government groups may be internally competitive, they still operate under the wider umbrella of the state, and are therefore affected by its political composition and policy enactments. Particularly in cases where there is an active international intervention, appearing even nominally pro-government may protect armed groups from being targeted and/or allow them to access counter-insurgency funding or other kinds of support. Furthermore, fragmentation may penetrate the security apparatus of the state, with different political factions co-existing within the national army and police. In these cases, clear delineations between local pro-government factions can be difficult to measure. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, anti-government groups are distinguishable by their stated goal of upending the status quo of central government authority, whereas pro-government groups are theoretically able to co-exist with it, though they may prefer to limit its authority. While these goals may only be nominal in practice, they are still meaningful from the perspective of civilians, where defection to anti-government forces may be accompanied by severe losses in foreign aid and government services which may not apply to situations where territory changes hands between pro-government factions. Maintaining a binary distinction between pro- and anti-government groups is therefore relevant, though I argue that the theory above could apply to both binary and multi-party civil wars.

Falsifiability

There are alternative explanations for subnational variations in violence that could be plausible. The most prominent of these explanations is one that emphasizes the primacy of ethnic cleavages in explaining civil conflict. According to this paradigm, variation in violence can be explained by the relative intensity of ethnic grievances in particular areas. In this case, the apparent consolidation of local elites would be a proxy for the absence of these grievances, either due to high levels of homogeneity in the population or relatively low levels of group-based inequalities.

This is a popular explanation for violence in northern Afghanistan, one that a number of the respondents that I interviewed often articulated. My intention is not to discount the

salience of group identities, particularly the body of work that has documented how these identities facilitate group formation and cohesion, for instance. However, this explanation does not fully explain observable patterns of violence. As demonstrated by Christia (2012), alliance-switching and defections amongst armed groups often occurs across ethnic lines, a phenomenon that appears to contradict the importance of these cleavages in determining the behavior of armed groups. It also does not adequately explain how the Taliban has made inroads outside of its traditionally Pashtun base, as described below. While ethnic issues are clearly salient, the mechanisms described here seek to illuminate processes of grievance formation that occur at the local level that can help explain how and why identity-based conflicts vary in intensity during civil wars.

Other common explanations for variations in subnational levels of violence are related to structural factors that are more likely to exacerbate conflicts. These include geographic factors such as rough or mountainous terrain, providing militant groups with cover from attacks, or the presence of strategic assets, such as control of important roads or economic resources. I do not deny that these considerations can play important roles at a tactical level in determining where militant groups choose to attack or where government forces concentrate their resources. However, structural variables do not adequately explain variation in violence over time, why some communities accommodate insurgent forces and why others fight against them, and why the effectiveness of pro-government forces varies in different areas. Rough terrain might be useful in explaining where insurgents are more likely to be found in the early stages of a conflict, but does not adequately explain dynamics in later stages where insurgents move beyond these safe havens to threaten towns and cities, as in the case of Kunduz, described below. While these factors certainly play a role, I argue that greater attention to patterns of governance can yield more sophisticated insights on subnational variation in civil war.

One of the premises of the theory is that consolidated local elites are more likely to develop longer-term horizons, reducing levels of predation towards their respective populations. An alternative hypothesis is that consolidated elites who have no serious challengers to their rule have more freedom to act without constraints on their behavior, and some of these elites and their followers may choose to abuse their respective populations with impunity. While there is likely to be a considerable degree of heterogeneity in how elites behave owing to a number

of idiosyncratic factors—their degree of attachment to the area, political ideologies, or personal attributes, for example—there are reasons why the population might prefer consolidated rule, particularly when faced with insurgent threats. Under normal circumstances, political competition can result in better, more responsive government, particularly if elites must promote and implement locally attractive policies to win over the population. However, in areas dominated by armed politics, competition often manifests violently. Civilians may therefore consider consolidated leadership as preferable to being subject to unpredictable violence resulting from continuous skirmishes between warring groups. By many accounts, life under the Taliban was highly repressive; yet what they offered was more palatable to most Afghans than the constant infighting between warlords during the early 1990s (Rashid, 2002). Second, elite behavior is determined in part by relationships with higher-level patrons, and local elites may need to constrain predatory behavior in order to safeguard these relationships. While relatively unconsolidated elites may face the same pressures, the immediate need to survive against rivals often trumps demands from these patrons.

Another possible alternative is that consolidation is simply a proxy for state capacity—that insurgencies are most likely to thrive in areas where the state is weakest. Testing this empirically at the subnational level is challenging in a context like Afghanistan, as it is difficult to find appropriate indicators for state capacity. Public service provision may not be a reliable indicator, since many public services are provided by non-governmental organizations. Moreover, certain public services may only be available in secure areas; therefore it is likely that insecurity weakens the state's ability to provide services, not the reverse. Military and police capacity may be a more relevant indicator of the state's ability to engage in counter-insurgency, but in Afghanistan at least, estimates of police and army personnel are notoriously unreliable and often overinflated (Nordland et al., 2018). However, the framework I present is not necessarily at odds with the hypothesis linking state weakness with insurgent success, as it suggests *how* elite fragmentation can erode the state's capacity to fight insurgents. Fragmented elites are less likely to effectively coordinate against insurgent threats, weakening the responsiveness of the state. Besides aggravating the civilian population, continuous infighting between pro-government armed groups also depletes their resources and leave them more vulnerable to insurgent attacks. I shall demonstrate how these mechanisms are present in the case studies

below.

II. Elite Factionalization and Insurgent Success in Northern Afghanistan

I test the theoretical framework outlined above with evidence from Afghanistan, comparing two 'most-alike' provinces on its northern border—Balkh and Kunduz. While not a comprehensive evaluation of the argument, the evidence below demonstrates how the mechanisms described above explain variation in insurgent success in this region, in this case the success of the post-2001 Taliban insurgency.[2] I begin this section with an overview of historical background of the region from the late 19th century to just prior to the U.S.-led intervention in 2001. I then compare the different trajectories of Balkh and Kunduz in the post-2001 period and show how Kunduz's highly factionalized political dynamics have provided fertile ground for Taliban insurgents compared to Balkh's relatively consolidated leadership. I conclude with additional comparative evidence from Kandahar province in southern Afghanistan, where security has improved as local elites have become more consolidated.

Background

'Pashtunization' and the Emergence of Ethnic Cleavages in Northern Afghanistan

Many observers have attributed the roots of ethnic strife in northern Afghanistan to the 19th century policy of *Pashtunization*, implemented by the 'Iron Amir' Abdur Rahman. Prior to 1880, when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan came to power, very few Pashtuns lived in Northern Afghanistan (Bleuer, 2012; Barfield, 2010; Lee, 1996). In order to consolidate his rule, Abdur Rahman began a policy of resettling ethnic Pashtuns in key areas through a program of land confiscation and incentives for migration. To encourage voluntary migration, Pashtun families were provided with generous tax incentives, travel expenses, free land, and livestock (Bleuer, 2012).[3] This led to a rapid increase in the northern Pashtun population: according to one

[2]While there are other insurgent groups which maintain a minor presence in the north, such as the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU) and, more recently, Islamic State affiliates, the Taliban are by far the largest group and constitute the main threat to government authority.

[3]Abdur Rahman also used resettlement to keep political rivals at bay. By exiling them to the north of the country, he prevented them from interfering in court politics while also transplanting them to unfamiliar

estimate, between 1885 to 1888 the number of Pashtun families living in the north increased from 3,500 to approximately 40,000 (Lee, 1996). The process continued throughout the early 20th century, scattering sizable Pashtun communities across northern Afghanistan.

The Pashtunization policies implemented over the 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in many ethnic minorities losing their most fertile lands to incoming Pashtun settlers (Hyman, 2002; Bleuer, 2012). Confiscation and redistribution of lands were also used as punishment during periodic rebellions (Bleuer, 2012). Determined to extend state influence, provincial governments were stacked with Pashtun aristocrats, often relatives of the King (Schetter et al., 2006). These officials often made a point of using Pashtu as the official language of government, thus excluding the vast majority of the population unfamiliar with the language (Patterson, 2004). They also used their positions to distribute the most significant lands and resources to relatives and allies. Elders and clan networks monopolized key positions in the bureaucracies and private enterprises of the period—the mayorship of Kunduz City, for example, became a hereditary position, passed between four elders and their descendants (Wilde and Mielke, 2013).

While these policies heightened tensions and increased socio-economic inequalities between ethnic groups, it is notable that they rarely resulted in large-scale violence in the north. During this period, a number of minor disputes were recorded, particularly between nomadic groups and settlers (Patterson, 2004). Still, these conflicts remained largely localized and failed to escalate into the regional or national arena.[4] On the contrary, the period between independence and the 1970s is regarded with nostalgia by many Afghans as a golden era of peace. Despite widespread poverty, the north benefited from the eradication of malaria (Wilde and Mielke, 2013) and the introduction of primary and secondary education (Rubin, 2002). The Afghan National Bank (*Bank-i mellie Afghan*), formed in 1933, sponsored industries such as cotton and sugar production in northern Afghanistan in the mid-20th century (Wilde and Mielke, 2013). Prior to 1978, cities like Mazar-e-Sharif, the capital of Balkh, and Kunduz city were considered to be some of the wealthiest and most developed in the country (Wörmer, 2012).While the

territory. Friendless and surrounded by hostile ethnic groups, rivals often turned from foes to supporters of the monarchy (Bleuer, 2012).

[4]In the 1960s, it looked as if the fortunes of minorities in northern Afghanistan was improving. Many optimistically welcomed a royal visit to an Uzbek-Tajik immigrant mosque in Kunduz as evidence of a shift in attitudes (Shalinsky, 1982). Uzbek and Turkmen music was also briefly introduced in national radio programming in 1972, only to be scrapped a few years later (Shalinsky, 1982). These events typified the Afghan government's erratic and often clumsy handling of ethnic politics.

region was eventually subsumed by civil war, it was political cleavages in Kabul, not local conflicts in the north, that led to sustained instability and culminated in the Soviet intervention at the end of the decade.

The Fall of the Monarchy and the Outbreak of War

Over the 1970s, political stability in Afghanistan gradually eroded, then rapidly collapsed at the end of the decade. King Zahir Shah was deposed by his cousin Daoud while receiving medical treatment abroad in 1973, bringing an end to the country's 200 year-old monarchy. Supported by leftist movements, Daoud abolished the monarchy and declared himself President. After marginalizing the leftist factions that helped him gain power, his regime did not last long, falling victim to another coup in 1978 by the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDP). The revolt was spearheaded by Nur Muhammad Taraki and Hafizullah Amin, both Pashtuns from modest rural backgrounds (Newell, 1979). Although Pashtuns were relatively privileged under the monarchy, the PDP included a large number of Pashtuns as well. This was due in part to Amin's effectiveness as a recruiter, but more broadly to the rise of a burgeoning class of ambitious and educated middle-class citizens who struggled to find a satisfying role in Zahir Shah's regime (Newell, 1979; Rubin, 2002).[5] The PDP had two major factions: the Parchams, which was more ideologically moderate, and the more radical Khalqs, led by Amin.

Within months, the coalition between the Khalqs and Parchams broke apart, with the Khalqs briefly gaining the upper hand. Inspired by a hard-line interpretation of Marxism, they quickly implemented major changes in school curriculum, land tenure, and social relations (Newell, 1979). Potential sources of opposition—particularly from those linked with the old regime and Islamist groups—were arrested and murdered on a scale rarely, if ever, experienced before in the country (Rubin, 2002).[6]

Large-scale defections and mutinies in the army began in March 1979 and continued throughout the year. The Soviet Union, increasingly alarmed by the escalating chaos and hoping to install a more stable and moderate government, invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979 and, when Amin refused to step down, reportedly dispatched a KGB unit to assassinate him (Rubin,

[5]Islamist movements also began to appear in Afghanistan during the 1970s. Unlike old regime elites or communists, a high proportion of Islamist leaders had advanced Islamic educations, frequently from Al-Azhar University in Egypt. One of their slogans, "Neither East nor West" reflected their lack of significant ties with either Cold War superpower at the time, though this would change after the Soviet invasion (Rubin, 2002).

[6]About 12,000 political prisoners in Kabul alone were estimated to have been massacred by the regime in 1978 and 1979 (Rubin, 2002).

2002). The Soviets installed Babrak Karmal, leader of the more moderate Parcham wing, as President, and ended some of the more radical programs implemented by the Khalqs. But the damage had been done: state security institutions had disintegrated, a large number of officers had abandoned the regime, and the Soviet invasion prompted a domestic and international outcry (Rubin, 2002). The Afghan state, hitherto a non-aligned country in the Cold War, shifted firmly to the Soviet camp and became a Soviet client state, highly dependent on its external aid and military support. Communist rule also significantly weakened the country's traditional tribal structures, a process that continued during the 1990s civil war and during Taliban rule (Felbab-Brown, 2012).

The Communist Era: 1979-1992

The Soviet invasion led to profound changes in governance. Approximately 3.7 million refugees fled the country during the 1980s, including a sizable proportion of the educated middle class, depriving the country of some of its most skilled professionals (Margesson, 2007). Additionally, Afghanistan's emergence as a major Cold War battleground led to a massive influx of resources and military support from external actors, dwarfing the amount of aid the country had previously received in the decades following independence (Rubin, 2002). Between 1954 and 1980, total Soviet aid to Afghanistan amounted to approximately 1.5 billion roubles (Braithwaite, 2013). Although Soviet records are spotty, it is clear that both economic and military aid massively increased after the Soviet invasion, with Russian military aid to Afghanistan estimated at 7.5 billion roubles between 1984 and 1987 alone (Braithwaite, 2013). The Soviets also provided thousands of technical advisors to assist the executive and civil service in managing the country (Braithwaite, 2013).

At the same time, an anti-Soviet insurgency, led by *mujahadeen* fighters and financed primarily by the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, took root across the Pakistani border. Vast amounts of military aid and technical assistance was provided to the *mujahadeen*, much of it filtered through the CIA (Coll, 2004). The Soviets responded in kind, investing in pro-government militias to help combat the insurgency. While some of the guerrilla commanders were drawn from traditional tribal networks, many represented a new power elite (Giustozzi, 2012). Hyman (2002) described how this upended local power dynamics in many areas: "The traditional hierarchical class system...has been altered and modified by the rise of new political

parties and local guerrilla fronts, frequently led by men from socially insignificant families instead of the old elites."[7] As the war progressed, many landowners and tribal leaders were killed, wounded, or marginalized (Dorronsoro, 2005).

In the north, Abdul Rashid Dostum emerged as the most dominant pro-Soviet commander. An ethnic Uzbek from the northern province of Jawzjan, he came from an impoverished family and received only a rudimentary education, leaving school as a teenager to work in a local gas-refinery in the 1970s. Soon after the outbreak of war, he organized self-defense units to protect natural gas fields in the north. These units formed the basis of Dostum's personal militia, the *Jawzjanis*, which eventually became the largest fighting force in northern Afghanistan, composed of over 40,000 men by the end of the 1980s (Rubin, 2002).[8] While composed primarily of Uzbeks, many of whom nursed grievances against the old pro-Pashtun regime and were sympathetic to the redistributive policies of the PDP, Dostum recruited from all ethnic groups from the area (Rubin, 2002). Dostum was at first enthusiastically supported by the Afghan government, who paid salaries for Dostum's militias and praised them for their effectiveness in defending public interests and repelling *mujahadeen* attacks (Rubin, 2002). By one estimate, the Afghan government provided Dostum with 40 million *Afghanis* per month to maintain his forces and patronage networks, which reportedly extended to officials in the central government (Giustozzi, 2012). While Dostum's growing power alarmed many politicians in the central government, attempts to limit Dostum's power and to counter-balance his forces with military units more loyal to the central government consistently failed (Giustozzi, 2012). Their concerns about Dostum's loyalties proved warranted; Dostum eventually switched sides after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan and the Soviet Union collapsed, leading to the swift downfall of the communist government in Kabul in 1992.

Warlord Rule and the Rise of the Taliban: 1992-2001

Following the collapse of the communist government, Afghanistan was left in the hands of a coalition of warlords. Attempts to form a national government failed, and the coalition split into factions, leading to the outbreak of the country's four year civil war.

The extreme brutality and chaos during this period has been well-documented by many

[7] As Giustozzi (2012) has noted, the usurpation of old landowning elites did not take place uniformly across the country; traditional elites maintained an important role in remote rural areas that were largely untouched by war.

[8] By comparison, the entire national Afghan Army was composed of approximately 150,000 soldiers by the end of the decade, and was consistently wracked by high desertion rates (Braithwaite, 2013).

observers. Kabul, which had emerged from the Soviet War mostly unscathed, was decimated by fighting between rival factions, who reduced most of the city to rubble, prompting what remained of the educated middle classes to flee. The national armed forces dissolved into competing factions, which prevented any chance of a centralized counterweight to offset the power of local military commanders across the country (Giustozzi, 2012). As a result, warlords established zones of influence in the country and governed more or less autonomously.

Dostum remained the dominant military force in the north during this period. His militia, refashioned as a political party called *Junbesh e-Milli*, established an independent capital in Mazar-e-Sharif, where a new Northern Military Council was formed. The council was led by Dostum but contained members from other factions in the north, notably the predominantly Tajik *Jami'at-i Islami*, represented by Atta Mohammad Noor, and *Hizb-e-Wadhat*, led by Mohammad Mohaqiq, an ethnic Hazara from Mazar. A senior *Junbesh* official and former member of the Council recounted how the would-be government in the North asserted its autonomy from the central government, printing its own currency, collecting its own taxes, and forming its own military divisions. [9]

However, this alliance proved unstable. Despite withholding all tax and customs revenues from Kabul, the Council struggled to raise enough funds to pay its bloated Soviet-era militias, let alone provide services to the civilian population. "Mazar was established as a city for 300,000 people, but at the time there were 2 million living there, refugees who had fled from other areas of the country," recalled the *Junbesh* official. "Funding schools and social services for these people was very difficult."[10] Nonetheless, living conditions were still significantly better than the rest of the country. Schools and clinics remained open, and Balkh University was the only one functioning—and still taking female students—during the civil war (Rashid, 2002). While global interest in Afghanistan declined significantly with the end of the Cold War, particularly as the Soviet Union became embroiled in its own internal turmoil and lost much of its Central Asian territory, Dostum proved adept at finding new patrons across the political spectrum (Rashid, 2002).[11]

[9] Interview, 10 December 2015, Mazar. Dostum even launched his own independent airline, *Balkh Airlines*, the main purpose of which was to smuggle goods between the UAE and Mazar (Rashid, 2002).

[10] Interview, 10 December 2015, Mazar

[11] As the Soviet Union broke apart, Dostum established new alliances in Central Asia, particularly within the newly-independent Uzbekistan. At one point, Dostum boasted that he had more diplomatic missions than Kabul (Rubin, 2002).

To a greater extent than other warlord-dominated areas, Dostum found alternative foreign backers and managed to keep a reasonable degree of commerce and trade running. The statelet run by Dostum was secular in nature and a safe haven for many ethnic groups, including many predominantly Pashtun former communists, who initially fled to Mazar when Kabul fell to the Taliban (Rashid, 2002). However, similar to what had occurred at the national level, competing militia groups in the north found it difficult to unify for long under a single leader or mount any meaningful collective action. Not long after the establishment of the council, Atta and Dostum had a falling out over the distribution of revenues[12], and clashes between *Junbesh* and *Jami'at* led to the latter being pushed out of Mazar in 1994, though skirmishes between the two factions continued for years. Dostum and Islamist faction *Hizb-i-Islami* joined forces against Ahmad Shah Massoud, the military commander of *Jami'at*, in the same year, while simultaneously engaging in battles with another warlord, Ishmael Khan, who controlled territory in the West of the country.

The infighting left a power vacuum that was eventually filled by the Taliban, a political movement rooted in the country's Pashtun-dominated south. The Taliban, a group of former fighters and religious students, campaigned ferociously against the abuses of warlords and their militias, quickly winning over broad support.[13] Preoccupied with defeating each other, none of the factions were able to come together to effectively fight the Taliban until it was too late. As Giustozzi (2012) has documented, this infighting resulted in a number of ultimately suicidal behaviors. Atta, for example, remained preoccupied with fighting *Junbesh*, even as the Taliban were advancing on Kabul. Massoud, then Minister of Defense, refused to transfer what remained of his air forces to Mazar under Dostum's control, leaving them to be captured by the Taliban.

Eventually, factionalization between members of the Northern Council and a failure to mobilize collectively against Taliban forces led to its destruction in 1997. Preoccupied with holding territory and resources, elites had few incentives to mobilize for collective action, even in the face of the Taliban threat: "To local military leaders, the loss of their power base to a fellow military leader was as threatening as a takeover by the Taliban" (Giustozzi, 2012). This

[12]Interview, 10 December 2015, Mazar

[13]Perhaps apocryphally, it is said that Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's founder and longtime spiritual leader, was motivated to found the Taliban after the brutal kidnapping and rape of two teenage girls from his home village by local militias (Burns and Levine, 1996).

logic often exacerbated inter-personal feuds, both within and between each faction. Indeed, it was an internal *Junbesh* dispute that ultimately sealed the fate of the Council. Dostum had a falling out with his second in command, General Malik Pahlawan, who suspected Dostum of conspiring to murder his brother. Pahlawan responded by briefly defecting to the Taliban, believing that they would allow him to assume Dostum's autocratic position, retaining more or less the same autonomous privileges and status. Realizing belatedly that the Taliban had no intention of doing so, he quickly switched back, but not before the Taliban sacked Mazar and assumed control of the city.[14]

Civilians suffered tremendously in the wake of the Northern Council's collapse. In Mazar, an armed uprising by non-Pashtun minorities surprised the Taliban and briefly pushed them out of the city, but Mazar was shelled and decimated by rival factions during the fighting. The Taliban, for their part, poisoned wells and destroyed irrigation infrastructure, thus destroying the livelihoods of the vast majority of the civilian population (Rashid, 2002). Between 1992 and 2001, Kunduz city changed hands five times, each time resulting in a fresh round of looting and atrocities by the victorious faction (Wörmer, 2012). Industrialization and development in the north were set back, and women in particular experienced levels of repression not seen in northern Afghanistan for several decades.

As the Taliban solidified control of the north in 1998, the remaining anti-Taliban leaders finally managed to establish a formal anti-Taliban alliance under the leadership of Massoud. Even then, infighting between different factions, notably *Junbesh* and *Jami'at*, continued (Giustozzi, 2012). This infighting alienated many communities in the north, even those vociferously against the Taliban—in UN interviews held immediately after the fall of the Taliban, community elders called for sanctions against both Taliban and *Jami'at* forces (Giustozzi, 2012).

Taken as a whole, the historical overview above suggests a number of key insights about the drivers of civil war onset in Afghanistan, which presaged the post-2001 insurgency. Although most of the militia groups in the north were organized around ethnic lines, horizontal inequalities and ethnic grievances existed long before the outbreak of war and do not suffi-

[14]It is telling that the Taliban were confident enough to allocate a large number of reinforcements to the north, despite the fact that it might leave Kabul vulnerable to a counter-attack by anti-Taliban forces. As one Taliban commander stated at the time: "The northern groups are disunited against each other. The other Uzbek generals cannot rely on Malik. He has already betrayed them once and now he is just trying to save himself. No group has enough forces to fight the Taliban on their own...but they can never unite" (Rashid, 2002).

ciently explain why the Northern Council eventually fell to the Taliban. Rather, the failure of elites to consolidate forces, which resulted in different factions attempting to eliminate rivals at the expense of mounting a coordinated defense against the Taliban, was key in explaining the weakness of the Northern Council and its vulnerability to Taliban forces. Although most civilians suffered greatly under Taliban rule, many expressed gratitude to the Taliban for successfully marginalizing many of the most corrupt and abusive warlords. Even Hamid Karzai, who as Afghanistan's future President would later lead counter-insurgency operations against a resurgent Taliban, initially supported the Taliban and briefly considered taking on a formal position within the movement, based on their promises to restore rule of law (Rashid, 2008). Although the Taliban were swiftly overthrown in 2001 by the U.S.-led invasion, these dynamics would resurface in the wake of the post-2001 political settlement.

IV. Warlordism and Insurgency, Post-2001

U.S. Intervention and the Return of the Warlords

Following the 9/11 attacks on the United States in 2001, the U.S. Government needed to assemble allies on the ground in Afghanistan. They swiftly established links with what remained of the Northern Alliance, including Dostum, Atta, and Ishmael Khan, as well as other lower-level commanders. These actors received massive injections of cash and military aid in the aftermath of 9/11, allowing them to re-arm and replenish their forces (Rashid, 2008). This strategy proved relatively successful in the short-term, ousting the Taliban from power in a matter of weeks. As a result, warlords were rewarded with privileged positions in the post-war settlement. As Rashid (2008) observed: "The irony was not lost on the Afghan people. Although the Americans had liberated them from the evil of the Taliban, they had brought back another evil: the warlords." In spite of concerns raised by contemporary observers, by summer 2002, an estimated 45,000 Afghan mercenaries were being paid by the CIA (Rashid, 2008).

In the north, familiar faces reasserted power. Shortly after the U.S. intervention began, Dostum's forces once again took control of Mazar, aided by his old rival Atta. Both became influential figures in the post-2001 government. Atta was appointed Governor of Balkh province in 2004, where he quickly entrenched himself and remained in power for over a decade. As

for Dostum, while he initially fell out of favor—Karzai removed him as Commander in Chief of the Afghan Army after he allegedly kidnapped and beat a civil servant—he continued to serve as a Member of Parliament for his home province in the north and, like many other of the country's elites, founded his own private businesses and media outlets (Washington Times, 2008). His political fortunes were later resurrected when future President Ashraf Ghani invited him to become his vice presidential candidate in 2014. He now serves as the country's First Vice President.[15]

The influence of warlords in Afghan politics troubled many contemporary observers, particularly those who recalled their appalling human rights records. Indeed, before the Taliban insurgency resurfaced, the problem of warlords and the disarmament and reintegration of armed combatants was one of the Afghan government's main preoccupations. Particularly alarming was the immense amount of wealth and resources accumulated by warlords in a very short amount of time. Ishmael Khan, a warlord in the Western stronghold of Herat, reportedly received three to five million dollar per month in customs revenue from a single crossing point while serving as the province's Governor (Rashid, 2008). Another particularly lucrative source of revenue came through logistics supply chains required by foreign military forces to replenish their fuel, food, and armaments. A 2010 U.S. Congressional investigation discussed in a damning report how a small group of warlords essentially operated as a "protection racket", providing safe passage for U.S. supply routes (on Oversight et al., 2010). The report described the largest of its logistics contracts, Host Nation Trucking (HNT), worth $2.16 billion USD, as follows:

> The principal private security subcontractors on the HNT contract are warlords, strongmen, commanders, and militia leaders who compete with the Afghan central government for power and authority...Although many of these warlords nominally operate under private security companies licensed by the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, they thrive in a vacuum of government authority...HNT contractors and their private security providers report widespread corruption by Afghan officials and frequent government extortion along the road. The largest private security provider for HNT trucks complained that it had to pay $1,000 to $10,000 in monthly bribes to nearly every Afghan governor, police chief, and local military unit whose territory the company passed.

A number of informants with connections to the military confirmed the nature of these security arrangements. "When the Soviets were in Afghanistan, they used their own people

[15]In 2016, Dostum was accused of orchestrating the kidnapping and gang rape of a political rival, and was exiled to Turkey, ostensibly for medical treatment. After a considerable amount of pressure from his supporters, the government allowed Dostum to return to Afghanistan in July 2018 (Nordland, 2018).

to guard supply lines. But guarding those supply lines was dangerous", said one American contractor with military experience.[16] "We wanted as light a footprint as possible. So we outsourced protection of military supplies to local firms, who were responsible for their own security. But of course, the consequence was there was massive corruption going on, and they themselves were paying the Taliban for protection, and so forth. It was self-defeating from a security point of view." As another U.S. military informant put it:

> The international community threw money at the problem [of insecurity], rather than dealt with the problem directly...But people forgot that the *mujahadeen* was overthrown by the Taliban because it was so profoundly corrupt. And their level of corruption was way beyond the public's level of tolerance. We ignored that and allowed them to become part of the government anyway. We did not enforce any standards. We handed out vast amounts of money to the Afghan leadership with no *quid pro quo*.[17]

One of the consequences of these arrangements is that, despite billions of dollars spent on statebuilding and the support of a large contingent of international forces, the Afghan state remained perpetually weak in comparison to local commanders, and its ability to hold them accountable was compromised. At the same time, the potential rewards for rent-seeking became so lucrative that it created incentives for commanders to violently compete with each other for control of territory and supply lanes. As discussed in the following section, this mafia-like environment eventually became a major factor in explaining how the Taliban were able to re-establish a presence in northern Afghanistan, and why they were more successful in some provinces over others.

V. Elite Fragmentation and Insurgent Success: Case Studies of Kunduz and Balkh

In 2003, Taliban insurgents resumed attacks on the Afghan state and international forces, but for the first few years most of their attacks were concentrated in the south of Afghanistan, in close proximity to their safe havens in Pakistan and near the Taliban's traditional Pashtun strongholds. In the north, by contrast, the years between 2002 and 2007 were free from insurgent violence. One interviewee, an Afghan who had been employed for several years by a donor agency, described how easy it was for foreigners to openly travel during those years

[16]Interview, 16 February, 2017, Kabul
[17]Interview, 26 June 2015, Skype

to remote areas across the north, now much more difficult even for Afghans.[18] According to him, most insecurity at the time was due to disputes between local commanders. Due to strict limits on their rules of engagement, the German Armed Forces took a lead role in providing local security in the region, with the presumption that most heavy fighting would be taking place elsewhere.[19]

While the exact circumstances are not known, there are indications that sometime around 2006, the Taliban leadership took the decision to extend operations into the north of Afghanistan. Afterwards, security in the north gradually deteriorated, with a considerable uptick in violence between 2007 and 2009 (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011). However, not all provinces were equally affected. The next section explores the onset of insurgent violence in two neighbouring northern, Balkh and Kunduz (See Figure 2.2). While Balkh has remained relatively secure, security in Kunduz has deteriorated significantly.[20] The two provinces have many similarities: both are multi-ethnic with sizeable Pashtun populations, a legacy of Pashtunization [21]. Both provinces are designated as Level 1: those having particular geographic, political, and economic significance (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012). Both provinces have also been actively targeted for infiltration by insurgent groups (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011). These two cases therefore represent reasonable points of comparison to test the theoretical framework outlined above.

Kunduz: Extreme Fragmentation

While Kunduz was the site of some heavy fighting towards the end of 2001 — it was the final stronghold of Taliban forces in the north, after Mazar and other major cities fell to the U.S. led-invasion — between 2002 and 2007 it was generally free of insurgent violence. However, Taliban attacks gradually became more frequent over the following years. By 2012, it was one of the Taliban's core strongholds in the north, and Taliban troops were recruiting not only from Pashtun strongholds, but Tajiks and Uzbeks as well (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011). By 2015,

[18] Interview, 9 December 2015, Mazar.

[19] As security got worse, Germany loosened their rules of engagement in 2009, though internal German Army assessments found that its soldiers remained ill-trained and equipped for counter-insurgency operations (Thiel, 2011).

[20] See Chapter 3 Supplementary Information for specific details on security conditions in both provinces.

[21] Exact population figures are difficult to come by, since a census has not been conducted since the 1970s. However, the percentage of the population estimated to be of Pashtun ethnicity is estimated to be approximately 33% in Kunduz and 27% in Balkh, with sizable numbers of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen, and a handful of smaller minorities in both provinces

Figure 2.2: Provinces of Afghanistan



shortly after most international forces had withdrawn from the area, the provincial capital briefly collapsed into Taliban hands for the first time since 2001. Although the provincial capital is now back under government control, Kunduz remains extremely insecure. [22]

While Kunduz was largely secure between 2002 and 2007, a stable political settlement never materialized. Prior to 2001, the province was overseen by high-level Taliban functionaries such as Mullah Dadullah, a powerful Pashtun commander from southern Afghanistan, who staffed the administration with Pashtun functionaries (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011). The fall of the Taliban government in 2001 initially created a power vacuum, which was quickly filled by a number of groups affiliated with the Northern Alliance, who tapped their pre-Taliban era networks of support in the province (Wörmer, 2012). One *Jami'at* commander, Mir Alam, who had participated in the defeat of the Taliban in Kunduz in 2001, quickly re-established links with fellow *jihadis* in the district of Khanabad and emerged as the single strongest commander in Kunduz, though he was never able to establish control over the entire province (Münch, 2013). Even in his stronghold of Khanabad, at least eight other factions maintained a presence within the district (Filkins, 2012).

In the immediate aftermath of Taliban rule, a backlash of abuse and intimidation against the province's Pashtun residents took place, carried out by members of the three major non-Pashtun Northern Alliance affiliates: *Junbesh*, *Jami'at*, and *Wahdat*. The backlash was accompanied by land grabbing, forced migration from Pashtun areas, and widespread looting and extortion (Bouckaert and Parekh, 2002). Initially, the distribution of government positions was monopolized by non-Pashtun officials. The Uzbek Ibrahimi brothers took over control of the governorship and border police, while security units were dominated by *Jami'at* affiliates (Münch, 2013). In Pashtun areas where support for the Taliban had been highest, security and intelligence positions were also dominated by *Jami'at*. Only one Pashtun, a prominent Taliban defector, was appointed to a high-level position as provincial chief of police (Münch, 2013).

These abuses, along with continued skirmishes between *Junbesh* and *Jami'at* forces, prompted the international community and the newly formed interim government, headed by Hamid Karzai, to intervene. Noting Pashtun discontent with the status quo, around the mid-2000s government officials allocated significantly more senior district positions to Pashtuns in areas deemed to be potentially sympathetic to Taliban rule (Münch, 2013). After presidential

[22]Interview with a Kunduz-based NGO worker, Dec 17 2017, Phone

elections in 2004, the government also replaced Provincial Governor Ibrahimi with Mohammad Omar, a Pashtun former *mujahadeen* fighter linked to the Islamist faction *Ittehad* and reportedly close to President Karzai. As the international community began large-scale reconstruction projects and international forces set up Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to provide security and reconstruction projects in each province, many local militias adapted to the Karzai era by refashioning themselves as private security and logistics firms, providing services and protection to international NGOs and military forces. Others were absorbed into the police and national army. Additionally, while most of the previous Taliban leadership was was killed or fled, a few who surrendered, such as Haji Omar Khan, the last Taliban provincial governor, found a great deal of financial success in the new regime (Münch, 2013). Reigning in the worst cases of anti-Pashtun abuse and addressing imbalances with political representation seemed to quell insecurity in the province for a few years. Large-scale inter-factional skirmishes settled down, and the German army provided only a small contingent of a few hundred soldiers to support the police and army in the province.

However, outward appearances masked an increasingly frenetic low-level competition for power and resources in the province, often spilling into the criminal economy. Not all commanders formalized their activities to the same extent: Mir Alam, for example, failed to secure a high-level formal position in the government, but earned a sizable income from drug trafficking, control of the money market, and informal taxation in his fiefdom (Münch, 2013; Filkins, 2012). The Ibrahimi brothers collected rents off markets and water distribution (and allegedly, drug smuggling) in the strategically important border district of Imam Sahib (Münch, 2013). Governor Omar was also frequently implicated in large-scale corruption (Calhoun, 2009).

Additionally, attempts to disband militias as part of a nationwide Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) process were largely unsuccessful in Kunduz. Mir Alam's unit in Kunduz, the 54th, was among the first in the country to be targeted for disarmament in 2003. While touted as a success, it failed to substantively defang his militia: while 901 weapons were turned in to much fanfare in the first three days of the program, he reportedly retained four thousand heavy weapons, and the command structure of his militia remained largely intact (Derksen, 2015). A progress report on the disarmament process confirmed that many weapons turned in were old and nonfunctional (Hewad, 2012).

In absolute terms, there is no doubt that public services improved from very low levels during Taliban times (World Bank, 2011). Cross-border trade resurged, and in 2003 Tajikistan resumed supplying electricity to Kunduz (Jones, 2010). However, the continued fragmentation of local politics led to deeply dysfunctional and paralyzed leadership, with ominous implications for the future. One Afghan analyst with long experience in Kunduz described the nature of political cleavages in the government as follows:

> The divides were felt at multiple levels. At local levels you had rivalries. At district levels you had police chiefs and district governors not speaking to or trusting each other. At the provincial level, you had the same problem with governors...The justice system was massively corrupt. And so at least the Taliban could offer something different. You must understand that what people want—many are illiterate—what they want are basic things. Justice and security. Things like women's rights, and a society that has democracy, they aren't thinking about these things. The Taliban were aware of that. They knew that the government was weak and divided. And that opened the door for them.[23]

The Return of the Taliban and the Collapse of Kunduz

To establish a presence in the North, the Taliban employed strategies of infiltration that had worked effectively elsewhere in the country: they invested resources and manpower into the region, established ties with sympathetic local elites, and recruited ideologically aligned mullahs to preach in target areas (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011). In Kunduz, this process appears to have began around 2006, but took a few years to pay off. These incursions were therefore largely ignored at first by intelligence and military forces, allowing the Taliban space and time to deepen their networks. Shrewdly recognizing that their strict moral codes were less popular amongst many communities in the north, the Taliban took a relatively relaxed attitude to previously banned activities like kite flying and listening to music (Münch, 2013). While the Taliban initially focused on establishing links in Pashtun communities, they soon directed recruitment activities towards Tajiks and Uzbeks as well (Giustozzi and Reuter, 2011; Abdul-Ahad, 2009).

The Taliban also pursued a program of targeted assassinations, aimed at unpopular government officials and militia commanders. These assassinations grew increasingly effective, and in 2010 the Taliban assassinated Governor Omar in a mosque while he was visiting a neighboring province, throwing the provincial government into further disarray. They also carried out a series of bold attacks against the predominantly German international forces, who, due

[23]Interview, November 29, 2015, Kabul

to limited rules of engagement, defended themselves but did not respond offensively (Münch, 2013).

By 2009, the Taliban had control of enough territory in Kunduz to levy their own income tax, known as *ushur*. As two tribal elders described it in an interview to the *Guardian*:

> "'They collect 10 percent tax on all income, even from the government fields," said Agha Mansour. "So if you grow 100 Kg of wheat you pay 10 Kg and they give you a receipt and never charge extra or more". Shirjan added: "At least they are honest. They don't take bribes like government officials do." (Abdul-Ahad, 2009).

One analyst described how this contrasted with the experience of civilians who lived in government-controlled areas. "If you're a farmer, and, let's say, you want to take your produce to the market in a Taliban-controlled area, you might have to pay them something along the way, but you know it's going to be the same every time. In government-controlled areas, you might have to pass through six different checkpoints, each run by a different commander. By the time you get to the market you have almost nothing left. It's not that they particularly like the Taliban," he added. "They're just exhausted and fed up with the government."[24]

In response to the rising insurgency in the country, the government took the decision to supplement army and police forces with a new semi-formal security institution, the Afghan Local Police (ALP). The stated purpose of the ALP was to defend local communities with limited police and army support from the Taliban. [25] However, its main effect was to reverse limited progress with disarmament, providing militias an injection of new funds to rearm and recruit new members (Derksen, 2015; Dirkx, 2017). Through Mir Alam's personal connections in the Ministry of Interior, the program provided a significant amount of support to his subcommanders. Alarmed about the growing strength of Mir Alam's revitalized forces, rival groups convinced the provincial government to provide additional support to their own militias (Münch, 2013). Some fighters were pulled out of retirement by the provincial government, like Nabi Gechi, a former anti-Taliban combatant who ran a fish and kebab restaurant in Mazar (Dirkx, 2017). Militias soon ballooned to a point where they dwarfed the provincial government: in the district of Khanabad, for example, there were over 1500 known militia fighters, split into rival factions, but only 170 active police officers, most of whom were tasked with

[24]Interview, 21 July, Kabul

[25]The program, a initiative driven by NATO commander Gen. David Petraeus, appears to have been at least in part inspired by the success of Sunni militias in Iraq during the Anbar Awakening (Felbab-Brown, 2016).

securing key roads (Bleurer and Ali, 2014).

The ALP in Kunduz proved to be wildly unpopular, inspiring fear in the communities they were ostensibly supposed to protect. In spite of being officially under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior, ALP militias were largely unaccountable to anyone. A litany of abuses by the ALP have been documented, ranging from banditry, beatings, rapes, and widespread extortion (Hewad, 2012; Münch, 2013; Derksen, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2015). In the four districts where the project was introduced, violence against civilians actually *increased* by 25 to 30 percent between 2010 and 2014, while it remained relatively unchanged in non-ALP districts (International Crisis Group, 2015). In one national survey undertaken in 2014, 87.5% of respondents in Kunduz reported fearing for their personal safety, one of the highest levels in the country (Warren et al., 2014). As one senior Afghan employee of an international NGO said:

> A lot of these local commanders are the ones causing insecurity. They are the ones extorting money...There was one man whose wife had been kidnapped for a month by a commander, and who begged to have her released. No one in the government was able to help. In these areas, people will prefer the Taliban. I would prefer the Taliban myself if I was living in those areas. If someone steals from you, and then you see the guy walking around the next day with no consequences, that is enough to make you turn away [from the government]. [26]

Not all commanders abused civilians in their territories to the same extent. At first, Gechi appears to have been highly regarded by both international forces and local civilians for repelling Taliban attacks without imposing taxes on the local population. However, in the mid-2010s, as the U.S. military surge in Afghanistan came to an end and external funding began to dry up, he increasingly relied on local taxation to supply his armies, reportedly torturing civilians who refused to pay (Dirkx, 2017).

Besides exacerbating local grievances, there is little evidence that the ALP were particularly effective in combating Taliban forces in Kunduz in the long run. On the contrary, local militias and Taliban fighters sometimes forged informal alliances with each other for mutual gain. According to one account, Mir Alam befriended a former Taliban fighter from the southern province of Helmand, Mawlawi Nasir, who requested asylum from his men in the final days of the Taliban surrender in 2001. Later, when the Taliban returned to Kunduz, Nasir, who had rejoined the Taliban, would sometimes claim responsibility for crimes committed by Mir

[26] Interview, 9 December 2015, Mazar

Alam's men, thus simultaneously raising the Taliban's profile in the province while shielding Mir Alam from government scrutiny (Hewad, 2012). Meanwhile, Mir Alam continued to engage in numerous disputes with rival militias in the province, further destabilizing security in government-controlled areas (Derksen, 2015).

In 2014, Ashraf Ghani was elected president. A western-educated technocrat, he promised to address the problem of armed militias in Kunduz. He quickly appointed Omar Safi, a young UK-educated Pashtun, as governor. While Safi was well-intentioned, many informers I spoke with saw him as being unable to manage political dynamics in his province, which under his tenure quickly spiraled out of control. According to one donor agency staffer familiar with government appointments: "With the selection of Safi, [Ghani] had just heard of someone who had studied Security Studies in the UK, and immediately called him into his office for an interview. Just a few days later he was appointed Governor of Kunduz...But Safi was never accepted by the power-brokers. And so they quickly got rid of him".[27] Another former civil servant in the Karzai government agreed. "[Safi's] background was that he worked for the UN and had a university degree. But Afghanistan is not a country that can be ruled by academics," he said. "Leadership is something different. He was not a bad person, but he was not suited for the role of governing Kunduz." [28]

Safi, for his part, blamed the central government for failing to support him, according to a senior official in the provincial government of Kunduz:

> While [he] was Governor, before the city fell did a risk assessment and presented it to the National Security Council...it highlighted that illegal armed groups were the biggest problem, more than the Taliban. At the meeting, [Chief Executive Officer] Abdullah objected, saying that these people are *mujahadeen* fighters. We said that we should expel 3-4 commanders from the province and filter the rest: the ones who were less abusive and criminal should be absorbed into the police, and others forcibly dismissed. Ghani accepted the recommendations, but Abdullah did not...The problem is that the [central] government itself is divided and fractured, and these fractures reproduce themselves in the provinces, leading to greater instability.[29]

The official denounced connections between militia commanders and senior officials in the government, which protected commanders from having any accountability to provincial authorities: "If we [provincial government officials] want a meeting with Abdullah, it will take at

[27]Interview, 9 December 2015, Mazar
[28]Interview, 8 November 2015, Kabul
[29]Interview, 20 July 2016, Kabul

least three days to make it happen. But if Mir Alam wants one he can get one today." [30]

A few months before the collapse of Kunduz city, it was clear that the provincial capital was increasingly vulnerable. Taliban forces encircled the city from three directions, overrunning the neighbouring district capitals of Chahrdara and Dast-e-Archi in June 2015 (Ali, 2015). Village locals in Khanabad, hitherto a stronghold of Mir Alam, provided shelter to Taliban forces in the hope of finally marginalizing local militias that had terrorized the population. True to form, instead of banding together to defeat the Taliban threat, rival militias held back, waiting for each other to be killed or captured by insurgents (Ali, 2015). One local militia from the Aqtash area of the district was ambushed by a rival militia group while fleeing Taliban forces (Ali, 2015).

The government concentrated on defending the provincial capital, relying on ALP and irregular militia forces for support. However, on 28 September 2015, the Taliban attacked the city and overcame its defenses in a few hours. By mid-morning, to the astonishment of the city's stunned inhabitants, Taliban forces entered the city for the first time since 2001. As one city resident recalled in disbelief: "It was early in the morning and we heard shots. When we woke up, the Taliban were here" (Rahim, 2017).

The fall of Kunduz led to bitter recriminations in the government, including accusations that police and militias responsible for defending the city had simply laid down arms and fled without much of a fight. A few informants grumbled that the takeover was an inside job. A subsequent investigation by the government denounced these conspiracy theories, but attributed the fall of Kunduz in part to a ''mistrustful" environment between local security forces and a lack of a single command structure, which led to warnings about the impending Taliban attack being ignored (Ali, 2016).

After two weeks, the Afghan government, supported by U.S. Special Forces, was able to retake the city. In those two weeks, the Taliban accomplished what the Afghan government failed to do in the fourteen years since it took power: they dealt a significant blow to the power of local militias. In Kunduz City, they ransacked and burned down Mir Alam's mansion, looted many of his weapons caches, and forced Mir Alam's supporters to flee the city. After freeing hundreds of inmates from the city's prison, Taliban fighters led crowds in the city centre chanting for the death of local militia commanders, including Mir Alam (Goldstein

[30]Interview, 20 July 2016, Kabul

and Mashal, 2015). While Mir Alam remains a political force in the province, his power has significantly diminished.[31] While the government undertook a major review of security conditions in the province and allocated more military resources to the province[32], few of its substantive recommendations to improve governance were seriously implemented in the aftermath (Ali, 2016). For the Taliban, the collapse of Kunduz was a major strategic and propaganda victory. They remain a formidable force in the province today [33].

The infiltration of Taliban forces into Kunduz and the collapse of Kunduz City demonstrate the importance of elite fragmentation in explaining Taliban success in this province. Hyper-competitive rent-seeking between different political factions and militias accounted for the weakness of the provincial government and provoked widespread grievances in the population, creating a welcoming environment for the Taliban to gain footholds in the province. Fragmentation between pro-government factions also impeded their ability to mount a coordinated response to Taliban incursions. The end result was disastrous for these factions, weakening them considerably and legitimizing the Taliban as a credible opposition force.

Balkh: Consolidated Leadership

As with Kunduz, Taliban insurgents began laying the groundwork for infiltrating Balkh province during the mid to late-2000s, using similar tactics of investing men and resources and establishing ties with sympathetic mullahs and elites. However, while the Taliban have been able to establish a consistent presence in a few areas, such as the predominantly Pashtun district of Chamtal, to date they have been less successful in threatening provincial stability than they have in Kunduz. Instead, Balkh's relatively consolidated provincial leadership has played a significant role in reducing opportunities for Taliban infiltration.

Like Kunduz, Balkh was coveted by a number of factions relatively soon after the Taliban fell. Just after 2001, Atta and Dostum were the two most powerful power-brokers in the north, and both wanted control of Mazar-e-Sharif, along with other important commanders such as Mohammad Mohaqiq (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). At the time, it was expected that a general council would be formed for an interim period until the Taliban were thoroughly defeated and a new

[31] Interview, 14 July 2016, Kabul
[32] Interview with a Kunduz-based NGO worker, 14 April 2018, Skype
[33] Ibid

government was formed. However, tensions soon resurfaced between the different factions.[34] While both Dostum and Atta were given senior positions in the interim government with the hope of defusing inter-factional tensions, in the summer of 2002 these tensions escalated into violent skirmishes between sub-commanders controlled by Dostum and Atta. At one point, repeated clashes between the two factions grew serious enough to prompt the United States to briefly suspend aid projects to the north (Rhode, 2002).

Eventually, Atta successfully outmaneuvered Dostum for control of Mazar. In part, this was due to Dostum's particularly egregious penchant for brutality, which quickly alienated many in the government and international community. Immediately after the fall of the Taliban, his forces targeted Pashtun communities across the north, including allegations of murder, kidnapping and rape (Gall, 2002). His militias were also implicated in the mass execution of hundreds of Taliban POWs by suffocating them in containers, an atrocity that provoked widespread outrage (Barry, 2002). These abuses led many in the interim government to regard Atta as the lesser of two evils.

Atta also had a number of personal attributes that facilitated the consolidation of power under his rule. He was from Mazar himself, with intimate familiarity of the city, its terrain, and personal connections to power-brokers in the province. He also carefully forged strong connections with international military forces and reportedly received large amounts of material support from the CIA and the U.S. military (Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Najafizada, 2011; Rashid, 2008). Early on, he was able to secure access to lucrative rent-seeking opportunities, particularly revenue from customs and local factories, amounting to hundreds of thousands a month in 2002 and rising considerably thereafter (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Unlike Dostum, he had been consistently on the side of the *mujahadeen* throughout the communist period, giving him a more reliable reputation. Trading in his military fatigues for western business suits, he presented himself as a modernizer, fully on board with the new statebuilding project (Gall, 2010).

Finally, Atta benefited from the appointment of Marshall Fahim, a senior *Jami'at* official, to Minister of Defense under Karzai. Fahim decisively backed Atta over Dostum. Between 2003 and 2004, Atta also took a more conciliatory stance towards Kabul than his rival, whose

[34]In a telling anecdote, after a group of Taliban defected and turned over a fleet of Toyota trucks to the Northern Alliance in late 2001, a violent confrontation immediately broke out between Northern Alliance fighters over possession of the trucks (Filkins and Gall, 2001)

defiance towards central authority was well known (Giustozzi, 2012; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Najafizada, 2011). The Karzai government, for its part, saw an opportunity to marginalize Dostum's power by using Atta against him. Atta's political shrewdness culminated in his appointment as Governor of Balkh in 2004.

Once appointed as Governor, Atta moved quickly to consolidate important positions under *Jami'at*, particularly within the security sector. This resulted in a more unified security apparatus, directly accountable to the governor's office (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). In spite of pressures to disarm, Atta steadily managed to expand the number of men in his private militia from a few thousand in 2002 to reportedly 10,000-20,000 a few years later, along with other militias in neighboring provinces who pledged allegiance to him (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). He also placed loyalists in administrative positions and within the provincial and district police corps, and rewarded loyalists handsomely with jobs, land, and other goods (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Yet he took care to remain an ally of the international community by cooperating on major counter-insurgency and development programs, most notably on poppy eradication (Gall, 2010). [35].

By the end of the decade, Atta had solidified his grip on the province:

> In Balkh, Atta was able to show that he was the strongest: financially, militarily, and politically. He marginalized Dostum and by 2008 or 2009 had basically expunged his influence totally. He had kickbacks from all the construction projects, all the development projects, everything. In doing so, he was able to buy a lot of local commanders from other parties and bring them on to his side.[36]

His reputation as one of the country's strongest and most influential leaders grew steadily. By 2009, Atta was in such a strong position that, after infuriating Karzai by supporting rival candidate Abdullah Abdullah in the 2009 presidential election and publicly criticizing the central government as corrupt and incompetent on numerous occasions, Karzai allowed him to remain in his position as Governor of Balkh (Gall, 2010).

Balkh's relatively stable environment reaped considerable dividends. The city of Mazar flourished as an investment and business hub (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012; Gall, 2010). Atta also oversaw significant improvements in public service delivery and infrastructure, though quality and availability varied throughout the province (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012). One

[35]Despite his relatively strong record on poppy eradication, there are indications that Atta and some of his followers have links to the country's lucrative drug trade (Raghavan, 2015).

[36]Interview, Analyst, Nov 29, 2015, Kabul

comprehensive assessment of public service delivery in Afghanistan attributed Balkh's advances in health and education to the strength of the political settlement under Atta:

> Balkh is most obviously characterised by a strong secondary settlement at the provincial level, as Provincial Governor (PG) Atta has been able to co-opt all former political rivals under his leadership, with the exception of some disaffected Pashtun communities. With full control, Atta has managed to turn his allies into "stationary bandits" who, while they may still extract provincial rents, including from health service delivery, do so in such a way to maximise the long-term benefits and overall stability of the system. (AREU, 2016)

There were downsides to Atta's dominance of local government, not least the massive prevalence of corruption.[37] "You effectively see a dictatorship under Atta", said one former NGO worker with long experience in Mazar. "Anyone with connections to the provincial administration can get things done faster. His loyalists are protected from corruption. And yet, there is good security."[38] Another international local governance expert described his leadership as follows:

> In Balkh, there's kind of a fictional system of vertical accountability in place. In theory, there's a hierarchy between the central government, provinces, and districts. But provincial councils are toothless, and accountability goes up only to the governor's office and nowhere else...You could say that Balkh, as well as Herat and Nangarhar, have performed better on service delivery. But that's not because of the system of local governance. There's tremendous opportunities to siphon money through customs, and many other opportunities for corruption. With a warlord like Atta, he has the ability to use coercion—for example, to force businesses to invest in the province, kind of like what Putin does in Russia. But results are not achieved through formal government policies or institutions.[39]

Even so, Atta's dominance of the province was almost uniformly credited by all interviewees with the relatively stable security situation in the province. Maintaining a strong intelligence network in the province was key. According to a former aide, Atta leveraged his intricate knowledge and connections with local tribes, power-brokers, and civil society groups, using them to cooperate on intelligence (Gall, 2010). One civil society leader described to me how this worked to hinder Taliban activities in practical terms: [40]

> Taking Kunduz City was a major victory for the Taliban, but their real target is Mazar. One week after Kunduz happened, I received reports that dozens of people were coming

[37] One informant, a local factory owner, described several instances of corruption in both the local and central government that he and his fellow businessmen regularly encountered. "If you try and set something up, local officials will come up to you and say, where's my piece of the business? You have to pay to get anything done." (Interview, 10 December 2015, Mazar)

[38] Interview, 22 October, 2015, Skype

[39] Interview, 28 August 2015, Kabul

[40] Interview, 7 December 2015, Mazar

> north to do 'preaching', including 20 people from Pakistan. This was in fact cover for Taliban infiltrators. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs provided a letter of support to the NDS [National Directorate of Security] urging for the 20 entry visas be issued to Pakistanis to come to Mazar. We in civil society went to the Governor with these reports, and the Governor detained the Pakistanis when they arrived and saw to it that they were deported. These kinds of threats must be acted on quickly to stop them from becoming more serious in the future.

Reflecting on why security in Balkh compared favorable to Kunduz, former Governor Safi also credited Atta's leadership. "Atta has his positive points and his negative points. His positive point is that he was able to establish some order over the other commanders and power-brokers in the province. Some nation-building has happened in the province as a result. This has never happened in Kunduz, you have competing illegal armed groups and commanders, and no one is able to establish order over the others." [41]

The Sustainability of Elite Consolidation in Balkh

While respondents acknowledged that Balkh has enjoyed a better security situation than other areas of the country, some expressed concerns that stability would not necessarily last. While Balkh continues to remain more secure, the province is significantly affected by the instability of its neighbours—in one of the single worst terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, over 140 military recruits were killed in the heart of Mazar in April 2017, reportedly in retaliation for the killing of a senior Taliban commander in Kunduz (Salahuddin and Constable, 2017). One Balkh community leader worried that the deterioration of surrounding provinces as inevitably spilling over into Balkh. "It is true that we [Balkh] are more stable...But it is not clear if it will continue. The political game has changed. The Taliban are trying to occupy Kunduz on the one hand and Faryab on the other. If they have these, they can attack Mazar".[42] Another former *mujahadeen* fighter and critic of Atta told me that his support only appeared strong, but could collapse at any time. "Atta purchases loyalty of the local commanders and power brokers. It isn't loyalty based on personality, or ideology, or anything like that. It is just opportunism. And they will turn on him for a better opportunity."[43]

Above all, the case of Balkh demonstrates the importance of higher-level relationships in maintaining an equilibrium of consolidated leadership. In spite of his significant amount of accumulated power, the major threat to Atta's authority comes from his contentious relationship

[41]Interview, 26 July 2016, Kabul
[42]Interview, 6 December 2015, Mazar
[43]Interview, 7 December 2015, Mazar

with the central government. After an escalating feud with President Ghani, in December 2017, Ghani abruptly took the decision to replace Atta with Mohammad Dawood, a former *mujahadeen* fighter who for the past two decades worked as a luggage vendor in London (Mashal, 2018). Atta rejected his ousting and refused to step down for several months. While the crisis between Ghani and Atta was eventually resolved and a new Governor more acceptable to Atta took office, it remains to be seen whether the new political settlement will remain as cohesive as before, and whether insecurity in the province will be affected as a result.

Other Evidence from Shadow Cases

Through the examples of Balkh and Kunduz, I have sought to demonstrate how fragmentation is linked to higher levels of insecurity. Evidence from other cases provides greater support for these claims. Seymour (2014) and De Waal (2014) have described similar dynamics in South Sudan, where political fractures in the central government have manifested in outbreaks of political violence. The case of Shia militias in southern Iraq might appear to be an exception, since these armed groups are highly fragmented but have nonetheless been effective at repelling ISIS attacks. However, there are also indications that Iran has intervened to resolve leadership issues between competing militias and plays a active role in directing and coordinating attacks against ISIS, which have proved to be a decisive factor (Cigar, 2015). Without Iran playing this consolidating role, it is possible these militias would be less effective.

A useful comparative example in Afghanistan is Kandahar province. Once the epicenter of some of the most intense fighting in the country, Kandahar has stabilized in recent years, particularly the areas around the provincial capital, Kandahar City (Bowman, 2015). In large part, this is credited to the consolidation of power under General Abdul Raziq, a former border police officer who rose to become the province's acting police chief in 2011.[44] Despite having amassed a reputation for human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture, Raziq found allies in both the U.S. military and in the Karzai government; he and his men reportedly received military training from American private security firms (Aikins, 2011).

[44]While Karzai officially offered Raziq the job as police chief, Raziq insisted on also keeping his job as head of the important border crossing of Spin Boldak; hence the term "acting".(Aikins, 2011). Raziq was assassinated by the Taliban on 18 October 2018, shortly after the submission of this thesis. He was succeeded by his brother, Tadeen Khan (Constanble and Salahuddin, 2018).

I interviewed a number of respondents in Kandahar to determine whether the improved security situation is indeed attributable to Raziq, or whether there were other factors at play. Almost without exception, they agreed that his leadership was a major factor in the turnaround, particularly his ability to get all levels of government to cooperate. In the words of the head of the Kandahar provincial council, Haji Said Jan Kharzawal: "We are safer than other provinces because we have good cooperation now between security, government, and tribal elders...The biggest reason Kandahar is safer is because of General Raziq, the people have trust in the government and the Chief of Police and that is why they cooperate".[45] Others were more ambivalent, crediting him for getting results but criticizing his methods.[46]

> People give credit [for the improved security situation] to Raziq. I don't know him well enough to say whether or not I support him but we know that he is a human rights abuser and a criminal himself. However, this criminal is fighting other criminals and dealing with them effectively...Raziq is very harsh with justice, that is one reason security is better. If you're caught as a member of the Taliban you won't go to jail, or the courts: you'll disappear. This is well known by everyone.

Could improvements in security be attributed solely to better cooperation between different government bodies, and are grievances in the population therefore irrelevant? While improvements in coordination were clearly important, interviewees emphasized that public support for the security forces was a major factor in the decline of violence. One expert who had conducted research on the ALP described to me the difference between how the police operated in Kandahar as opposed to Kunduz:[47]

> In Kandahar, the creation of the Afghan Local Police had a good impact [on security]. The local police don't abuse the population the way they do in Kunduz, where this happens all the time...local *shuras* (assemblies) give police to the provincial government. They come directly from the villages they protect. Raziq has tight control over all police in the province, be it border police or the ALP. He has the ability to punish them for transgressions...[by contrast] the government has no control over the ALP in Kunduz, it is controlled by local warlords. There the ALP is a mafia.

He went on to describe how this system created more trust between communities and police forces, discouraging local villages from cooperating with the Taliban:

> I will tell you a story from my own district in Kandahar. A tribal leader there told me that they were called for a secret meeting where Taliban fighters were present. At the meeting, the Taliban asked them for help in infiltrating the district and fighting against

[45]Interview, 22 Aug 2016, Kandahar City.
[46]Interview with CEO of a social enterprise, 21 August 2016, Kandahar City.
[47]Interview, 13 July 2016, Kabul.

> the police. The tribes refused, saying that when the Taliban come, they set landmines that put the [local villagers] at risk. The Taliban pleaded with them, saying 'look, we are *mujahadeen*, we are fighting foreigners in this country.' They replied: 'There isn't one single foreigner living in our district. You would just be fighting against our own people, our own sons. If you come to our district, that is what will happen to you.'

Other explanations for the improved security situation in Kandahar do not seem as persuasive. Unlike the north, Kandahar is ethnically homogeneous, overwhelmingly Pashtun, and highly conservative; ethnic exclusion or ideological factors do not appear to be a major factor. The province is strategically important and relatively wealthy; respondents described how the province had benefited from injections of aid, particularly in the form of jobs and infrastructure. In fact, security *improved* as aid to the province was on the decline after NATO forces withdrew in 2014. The consolidation of provincial power under Raziq and the mitigation of local grievances is a more plausible explanation for the improved security situation in Kandahar.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on original interviews and substantial secondary research, this article argues that excessive fragmentation among local elites is a decisive factor in explaining the Taliban's relative success in Kunduz. This evidence presented above suggests a theoretical process which combines grievance and opportunity logics into a single narrative. Highly fragmented elites are more likely to maximize short-term predatory behaviors within their respective zones of influence and to engage in violent clashes with each other to expand their territories. These behaviors exacerbate grievances in local communities, increasing the likelihood that communities will defect to insurgents. Elite fragmentation in the security sector also impedes military cooperation between pro-government forces, creating more opportunities for insurgents to strike bargains with local commanders and achieve tactical victories, gradually expanding their territory. Conversely, consolidated political settlements with a more unified security apparatus are more capable of holding local militias accountable, mounting a coherent and coordinated defense against insurgent forces, and keeping public grievances in check.

The evidence presented here also suggests how elite consolidation occurs. Both Atta and Raziq proved themselves to be shrewd political operators during the post-2001 transition, presenting themselves as reliable allies to the government and international military forces.

They used their positions to gradually amass power, steadily sidelining or co-opting potential rivals. They also took control of lucrative sources of income, particularly from customs, to build sustainable streams of revenue, making them less dependent on extracting rents from the population.

Given their effectiveness in counter-insurgency, one might take away the lesson that the right policy move is to select individual warlords and empower them beyond any potential rivals. However, this is only a short-term solution, one that comes with a high cost. Both Atta and Raziq have grown so powerful that the central government has struggled to assert authority over them; meanwhile the state has lost untold billions in revenue to these and other warlords. While the government was eventually successful at getting Atta to resign his position as governor, Atta remains a dominant political force, and at the time of writing is an expected contender in the next Presidential election. Furthermore, their leadership is largely personality-driven, making political settlements inherently fragile; an early death or unexpected assassination might lead to political fractures down the road. Far from eroding away over time, armed politics is as dominant as ever in Afghanistan, and insurgent forces continue to use this to their advantage.

Even if some short-term bargains with strongmen were necessary, a better strategy would have been to gradually remove the influence of armed politics in the long-term. While the post-2001 political settlements did not emerge in a vacuum and many powerful local elites had already established themselves before the fall of the Taliban, both the Afghan government and the international community wielded tremendous influence in shaping the character of these settlements in the years following 2001. In particular, large injections of military and reconstruction aid amplified the power of armed local elites relative to formal government institutions, often resulting in an environment where local commanders violently competed over territory. Although they presented themselves as reliable bulwarks against the Taliban, in practice their record generally proved to be quite poor, and empowering them often sacrificed a great deal of public goodwill. In retrospect, limiting funds to armed elites, exerting greater financial oversight over lucrative local revenue sources, and maintaining a consistent and realistic disarmament policy would have likely resulted in fewer predatory elites and limited opportunities for insurgents to exploit. While still possible to achieve, this would have been

far easier in the early years of the intervention, while the country was relatively peaceful and before the power of local militias grew and proliferated. In the words of one community elder: "In 2004, the patient could have been treated with an injection. Now the patient needs an operation" [48]

[48]Interview, 6 December 2015, Mazar-e-Sharif.

Chapter 3

Voter Preferences in Violent Contexts: Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan

Abstract

Few studies on electoral dynamics in conflict-ridden countries to date have examined the relative importance of candidates' military prowess in shaping electoral choices. In war-torn societies, does the public yearn for strong military leaders to restore order? This paper challenges conventional expectations about public support for strongmen in insecure contexts. It uses experimental conjoint analysis to estimate leadership preferences in three provinces in northern Afghanistan. Contrary to what is widely assumed, the findings suggest that Afghans living in this region prefer leaders who are young, highly educated, and who share the same ethnicity, while older leaders with religious education are penalized. Military experience confers only a small advantage in comparison. The experiment exploits subnational variation in exposure to insurgent violence, but shows no clear distinctions in preferences for military leaders between secure versus insecure areas. Raising the salience of security concerns with a vignette experiment does not significantly impact results.

Introduction

Existing research on electoral dynamics in conflict-ridden countries tends to emphasize the importance of clientelism and ethnic ties in shaping public leadership preferences. However, few studies to date have examined the relative importance of candidates' military prowess in shaping electoral choices. In war-torn societies, does the public yearn for strong military leaders to restore order? Conventional wisdom — and the electoral success enjoyed by numerous current and former strongmen across the developing world — suggests they do. This paper challenges these assumptions. The evidence presented here suggests that voters place greater value on other leadership attributes, even in communities with long-term exposure to political violence.

This study uses an experimental conjoint methodology to closely approximate the decision-making process for voters in countries beset by active insurgencies: in this case, respondents living in three provinces in northern Afghanistan. The conjoint methodology employed in this experiment assesses the relative importance of different candidate attributes by asking respondents to choose between two profiles of potential leaders. The attributes — age, gender, ethnicity, education, professional experience, and place of birth — were randomized in each profile, and participants repeated the experiment three times. Using this methodology, I was able to test several prevailing hypotheses on leadership preferences in Afghanistan at once, comparing the relative salience of these attributes in determining preferences. Some of the randomized profiles suggested more technocratic, non-traditional leaders, while others evoked a 'strongman' with a military background and a comparatively low level of formal education. The research design therefore tests for preferences regarding different typologies of leadership. I also tested how exposure to vignette treatments highlighting insecurity might affect these preferences.

The findings suggest that, on balance, Afghans living in the region prefer younger, highly educated leaders of the same ethnicity over those with military experience. These preferences hold among different age and income groups, though ethnic preferences are stronger amongst low-income respondents. While there was a moderate preference for male leaders, this preference exists only amongst males in the sample, while female respondents had no significant preference regarding gender. Raising the salience of insecurity with a vignette experiment had trivial effects on leadership preferences, and did not significantly increase support for military leaders. The results challenge prevailing expectations on how violence affects voter preferences in these contexts, and calls into question claims by both pro-government strongmen and insurgent leaders about their popularity within local communities.

Theoretical Framework: Electoral Dynamics in Violent Contexts

Consider the example of Winston Churchill, widely regarded as Britain's greatest wartime leader. Despite leading the country to victory in the Second World War and ending the war

with one of the highest approval ratings ever recorded, he was decisively voted out of office by the British electorate in 1945. This anecdote raises a number of questions: do voters prefer different kinds of leaders in wartime and peacetime? Does the presence of security threats generate public demand for leaders skilled in the art of war? If indeed violence does have an effect on voter preferences, do voters living in relatively secure areas have different preferences to those who are more exposed to violence?

Evidence accumulated over decades suggests that heightened exposure to political violence does have some measurable effect on voter preferences. Most foundational literature in this area comes from studies on the effects of war and terrorism on U.S. elections. In a seminal study investigating the effects of the Korean and Vietnam Wars on electoral preferences in America, Mueller (1973) found evidence of both 'rally' and 'casualty' effects: the former increasing support for the incumbent President in the face of external threats, and the latter decreasing support for the incumbent as casualties mount. Follow up studies have found further evidence of the rally effect (Norpoth, 1985; Ostrom and Simon, 1985; Norpoth and Sidman, 2007; Stapley, 2012) and the casualty effect, though the latter is mitigated to some extent by beliefs about how justified the war is and by voters' expectations that the war will be successful (Karol and Miguel, 2007; Gelpi et al., 2007).

Findings from evolutionary psychology provide further evidence that violence has a significant effect on voter preferences. Experimental studies comparing voter preferences in stimulated wartime versus peacetime scenarios have found that height, masculinity, and attractiveness—interpreted as proxies for health, fitness, and dominance—are particularly valued in wartime, while more feminine, trustworthy faces—suggesting prosocial, cooperative traits—are more valued in peacetime (Little et al., 2007, 2012; Tigue et al., 2012; Re et al., 2013). Preferences for masculinized faces have been found to be particularly pronounced when a threat is perceived to be coming from an out-group (Spisak et al., 2012). Other studies have found evidence linking perceived societal threats to heightened preferences for authoritarianism and aggressive retaliatory action (Feldman and Stenner, 1997; Doty et al., 1991; Huddy et al., 2005).

In light of mounting evidence that political violence does have some effect on leadership preferences, researchers have recently begun to explore these dynamics in countries with prolonged exposure to violence, where its consequences are often acutely felt by a large portion

of the electorate. These studies have generated a number of competing mechanisms connecting political violence to leadership preferences. On the one hand, exposure to violence may reduce support for incumbent governments, who are blamed for failing to adequately protect the population (Berrebi and Klor, 2006, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Ley, 2014). Heightened exposure to violence—or even simply the threat of violence—has also been positively linked to higher support for right-wing, hawkish parties, which are perceived to be stronger on order and security (Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014).[1] A few studies have identified non-linear relationships between exposure to violence and support for hawkish candidates. Gould and Klor (2010) found that low and moderate levels of terrorist attacks in Israel increased support for concessions in peace negotiations, but past a certain threshold hardened public attitudes against further concessions. Elsewhere, Weintraub et al. (2015) found an inverted-U shaped relationship in Columbia, where vote share for a pro-peace candidate was highest in communities with moderate levels of exposure to violence and comparatively low in areas with either very low or very high exposure to violence. While political violence does appear to have a significant effect on electoral preferences in these contexts, understanding the precise direction and underlying mechanisms still requires additional research.

The effect of violence on electoral dynamics are particularly difficult to parse out in fragile states with long-term conflicts between government and insurgent groups. These countries often suffer from weak institutional legacies and a lack of established party systems with well-defined programmatic agendas. Instead, polities are frequently characterized by hybrid forms of governance where armed paramilitary groups and customary patrimonial networks coexist with formal state institutions (Bratton and de Walle, 1997; Boege et al., 2008; Migdal, 1988; Raeymaekers et al., 2008; Meagher et al., 2014; Albrecht and Moe, 2015). When past studies have explored electoral dynamics in these contexts, they have tended to focus on the design and legacies of electoral systems during post-conflict transitions (Kumar, 1998), the extent to which elections function as an alternative or complement to violence (Dunning, 2011), and how participation in violent conflict translates to increased political participation later in life (Blattman, 2009). The relationship between violence and voter preferences between candidates in chronically weak states remains understudied.

[1] One exception to this trend occurred in the aftermath of the 2004 Madrid bombings, which boosted electoral support for the left (Bali, 2007; Montalvo, 2011).

In the absence of coherent party systems and robust electoral data, finding reliable evidence to test this relationship is challenging. Yet, these questions remain important. In the absence of established party systems, political candidates emphasize personal characteristics and patrimonial ties during campaigns; yet, how these factors align with public preferences is unclear. One personal characteristic commonly touted in countries with a long legacy of violence is military experience. As democratization has spread across the developing world, numerous former rebel leaders have succeeded in winning power in national elections over the past 30 years, such as Charles Taylor in Liberia and Jean-Pierre Bemba in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tellingly, candidates often explicitly highlight their war records during electoral campaigns even in cases where these records are marred by war crimes, suggesting that candidates believe that military prowess is particularly valued in the eyes of the public (Themnér, 2017). The implied mechanism is straightforward: leaders with experience in waging war are best suited to translate those skills into maintaining order and security and protecting their constituents. This mechanism closely aligns with evidence described above establishing a connection between heightened exposure to violence and preferences for masculine leaders and/or more hawkish parties.

While evidence suggests that military experience is likely to be valued as a leadership characteristic in violent contexts, it is difficult to measure how strong this preference rates in comparison to other attributes. While electoral data may provide some indication of voter preferences, determining whether voters select strongmen due to their military prowess or because of other considerations, such as a shared ethnicity or regional origin, is challenging. Military strongmen may have more resources to intimidate or crowd out potential alternative competitors, which might further distort estimates of how popular they are in their constituencies.

This study uses a choice-based experimental design to test competing hypotheses about the importance of military experience in insecure contexts. The advantage of this methodology is that it disaggregates military experience from potentially conflated attributes and estimates the importance of military experience *relative to* these attributes. In practice, voters make judgments about candidates based on a simultaneous assessment of a wide range of personal attributes and affiliations. The conjoint experiment employed in this study mimics this process by asking respondents to choose between two composite profiles of leaders.

The literature above suggests a number of hypotheses about what kinds of voter preferences we might expect to see in violent contexts. I put forth the following as preliminary hypotheses:

> *H1: Leaders with military experience are likely to be favored by voters under threat of political violence.*

Given that military leaders are likely to be male, and that previous studies have shown that exposure to violence elicits preferences for masculine attributes in leaders, it is reasonable to expect to find a significant preference for male leaders over female leaders in areas affected by violence:

> *H2: Male leaders are likely to be preferred over female leaders by voters under threat of political violence.*

Finally, the mechanisms above suggest that preferences for military leaders will be higher among populations with more exposure to violence relative to those in more secure areas, as well as in relation to other attributes:

> *H3: As exposure to violence increases, preferences for leaders with military experience are likely to grow relative to other attributes.*

Violence and Voter Preferences in Afghanistan

I chose Afghanistan as a case study to test these hypotheses as it is a *most-likely case* where we would expect to see significant effects of political violence on voter preferences. It has experienced successive waves of political upheaval over an extended period of time, and there is a large supply of potential leaders with experience fighting in one or more of Afghanistan's recent wars over the past 40 years. These wars include a brutal conflict between the Soviet-backed communist government and Islamist *mujahedeen* fighters which lasted until 1992, a period of chaos during the civil war of 1992-1996, a conflict between Northern Alliance fighters and the theocratic Taliban regime between 1996-2001, and finally the ongoing conflict between the resurgent Taliban insurgency and Western-backed Islamic Republic that continues today. Throughout these periods, insecurity has been a lasting problem for Afghanistan's civilian population: at least a million civilians were estimated to have died from war-related violence during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and hundreds of thousands more have been killed in the years since (Khan, 2012). Currently, the Afghan government faces a serious threat

from the Taliban that, as of 2017, controlled or contested at least 45 percent of districts in the country, as well as growing threats from other insurgent groups such as the Islamic State (Roggio and Gutowski, 2017).

Despite rising instability, nascent electoral institutions have emerged in Afghanistan in recent years. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan adopted a democratic constitution with regular Presidential and Parliamentary elections, allowing for some degree of voter choice. Since then, Afghanistan has completed three cycles of presidential elections. Despite widespread allegations of fraud, the country experienced its first-ever peaceful transfer of power between two elected governments after Presidential elections in 2014 (Giustozzi and Mangal, 2014).

Political leadership in Afghanistan is dominated by a combination of warlords and other former combatants, intermingled with a substantial number of foreign-educated Afghans. Both of its post-Taliban presidents, Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, returned to the country from a long period of exile after 2001. Whereas former President Karzai was well known for his skill in engaging with the country's traditional elites, the current President, Ashraf Ghani, is a former academic and World Bank official and has been described as "the technocratic alternative to the politics of warlordism and corruption" (Packer, 2009). After taking power, Ghani's administration appointed younger, more educated leaders in positions of power throughout the provinces: "Many governors have 'modern' skill-sets and assets, they are younger, and also lacking in one of the main credentials of the past: fighting experience" (Roehrs and Suroush, 2015). Nonetheless, warlords retain a great deal of power in Afghan politics, including the powerful former governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor, and Ghani's Vice President Rashid Dostum, both of whom have taken an active role in leading counter-insurgency operations in northern Afghanistan (Behzan, 2015).

There is not much reliable evidence about how the current composition of leadership aligns with public preferences. The last two presidential elections were marred by accusations of widespread fraud, making them unreliable benchmarks for public opinion (Gall, 2014). Additionally, individual votes may have little to do with personal preferences, particularly in rural areas, where Afghan villages are often mobilized to vote en masse as directed by community elders (Aikins, 2014). Finally, candidates on offer may not align with an individual's ideal

candidate. Qualitative interviews conducted during the study produced mixed results, as respondents were divided about the relative popularity of the nation's warlords. The conjoint methodology employed in this study compensates for deficiencies in observational data.

Northern Afghanistan is a particularly suitable region of the country to explore determinants of leadership preferences. It is more ethnically diverse than other areas of the country, with large numbers of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Pashtuns living with sizable minorities of Turkmens, Hazaras, and other ethnic groups. Additionally, while the entire region is at risk of insecurity, there is considerable subnational variation in the degree to which provinces are exposed to insurgent violence. The region therefore allows for testing of preferences between ethnic groups and between those living in relatively secure versus insecure areas.

Experimental Design

I use a choice-based conjoint design to test leadership preferences amongst respondents. While conjoint analysis has long been used to conduct market research, it has only recently been applied to political science (Hainmueller et al., 2014). However, conjoint analysis offers unique opportunities for enhancing research in developing countries. Respondents are often reluctant to answer sensitive questions truthfully, instead providing answers they believe surveyors want to hear. In insecure or politically oppressive areas, respondents' fear of reprisals for providing unsatisfactory answers may exacerbate this tendency. A choice-based conjoint design mitigates social desirability bias by testing preferences for multiple factors at once, making it difficult for respondents to predict what a satisfactory answer might be (Wallander, 2009). Individual respondents are asked to choose between profiles but not to justify their choice, allowing respondents more scope to express their true preferences. For example, a respondent might feel strongly against being represented by female candidates, but may feel uncomfortable expressing this preference to a surveyor. However, in conjoint experiments, respondents are aware that the surveyor cannot trace which attributes are most important in driving their choices, and may therefore be more candid in their answers. Because leadership choices are a particularly sensitive topic in Afghanistan, a conjoint design is a methodologically sound choice for examining respondent preferences.

The conjoint design for this study is an adaptation of the candidate experiment pioneered by

Hainmueller et al. (2014). In this experiment, enumerators asked respondents to choose between two randomly generated profiles of potential leaders. Before seeing the profiles, respondents were read a short explanatory text:

> *Now I am going to show you a few pairs of profiles of potential leaders and ask you to choose, between the two, the one that you think would be the best advocate for you.*

Respondents were subsequently shown a randomly generated pair of profiles of potential leadership candidates according to the attributes in Table 3.1, and asked: *Given a choice between these two profiles, which person would you prefer as a leader?*.[2] Outcome variables were measured in two ways: first, the forced-choice result was codified as 1 if the candidate profile was selected and 0 if the profile was not selected. Second, after respondents chose between the two profiles, they were subsequently asked to evaluate each profile on a scale of one to five: *On a scale of 1-5, where one indicates that you think the person is absolutely unsuitable to represent you as a leader, and where five indicates that the person would be an ideal leader for you, where would you rate the first profile? (Profile A)/ Using the same scale, how would you rate the second profile (Profile B)?*

The attributes selected for these profiles were selected to reflect particularly salient cleavages in the region that are presumed to be important in determining leadership preferences: age, education, gender, ethnicity, place of birth, and professional experience. I distinguished between foreign and domestic university degrees for two reasons. First, having a foreign degree implies a long period of time spent out of the country, which respondents may see as beneficial in terms of building leadership skills and connections, or conversely may resent as elitist and out of touch. Second, having Western-educated leaders has been positively linked with democratization (Gift and Krcmaric, 2017) implying at least some link between programmatic agendas and foreign education. While other attributes, such as tribal affiliation, may also be important, they were omitted due to complexity and information collected during preliminary fieldwork suggesting that, in the areas of northern Afghanistan where data was collected, ethnic cleavages are most relevant. Additionally, place of birth options were restricted to provincial levels rather than district or village levels.[3] While local identities may also be important pre-

[2]In this experiment, the precise leadership position was deliberately left ambiguous. Specifying a particular leadership position, such as President or Governor, might have caused respondents to imagine the current incumbent while participating in the conjoint experiment, which may have in turn biased the results.

[3]Kunduz is excluded as a provincial option since the province was only added in a later round of data collection and the option to select Kunduz was therefore not available to all respondents.

Table 3.1: Attributes of Candidate Profiles

Attributes	**Values**
Age	28
	37
	49
	57
	68
Education	Madrassa
	Educated to High School
	University Education in Afghanistan
	University Education Abroad
Gender	Male
	Female
Ethnicity	Pashtun
	Tajik
	Uzbek
	Hazara
	Turkmen
Place of Birth	Balkh
	Kabul
	Kandahar
	Saripul
	Kunduz
Professional Experience	Business Owner
	Donor Agency Employee
	Government Employee
	Military
	Private Sector Employee

dictors of leadership preferences, an unreasonably large number of options would be necessary to include all potential areas where the data collection took place.

Certain combinations of attribute levels evoke particular typologies of leadership. For example, a candidate profile of a young university-educated leader with donor agency experience suggests a person who is comfortable working with foreigners, likely to govern with a technocratic mindset, and places less value on traditional institutions. Conversely, an older candidate with a non-formal education and a military background would suggest a candidate closer to the strongman model of leadership. Similarly, a candidate with religious education hailing from Kandahar may stimulate memories of Taliban leadership and is therefore a subtle way of testing for evidence of attitudes towards the Taliban without asking respondents directly. [4]

Respondents had the choice of doing the survey in either Dari or Pashto, the two main languages of Afghanistan. Survey translations in both languages were piloted to ensure that the terminology was clear in layman terms before the data collection took place. Due to high levels of illiteracy in Afghanistan, enumerators were trained to read all questions aloud to respondents and to assist them with examining both profiles. Robustness checks between respondents with no education and respondents with some formal education did not yield major differences, suggesting that respondents without a formal education were able to complete the conjoint exercise with the assistance of an enumerator. More information about these robustness checks is provided in the supplementary information (SI).

The experiment also tested whether exposure to information on insecurity has effects on leadership preferences. Before starting the conjoint experiment, a random selection of participants were exposed to a short vignette describing general insecurity in Afghanistan. A control group received a neutral vignette describing generic facts about Afghanistan. The full text of each vignette is provided in the SI.

Finally, the survey collected demographic information on respondent ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and gender. This information was used to determine how leadership preferences differ between these groups. I also used the demographic information to determine to

[4] I imposed three restrictions on randomization in order to avoid implausible candidate profiles. First, I restricted candidates with military experience to males only. Although there are women currently serving in the Afghan army, it is still considered highly unusual. Second, all candidates from Kandahar were defined as having Pashtun ethnicity only, as Kandahar province is overwhelmingly Pashtun. Third, I restricted 28 year olds to having at least a high-school education, as it would be unlikely that those in leadership positions at such a young age would not have been educated to that level at a minimum.

what extent respondents expressed a preference for leaders with characteristics similar to their own.

This research design has several advantages over previous studies on voter preferences in fragile states. Instead of testing single hypotheses about leadership preferences, the randomization of multiple attributes in conjoint analysis allows for empirical comparisons between many factors by measuring them on the same scale. While it does not test for every conceivable determinant of legitimacy, such as personal charisma or endorsements from key figures, it captures many key candidate attributes that are likely to influence political choice. Additionally, this study more precisely measures the impact of violence on preferences by combining a randomized vignette on insecurity with the conjoint analysis, using the vignette as the independent variable and respondent leadership preferences as measured by the conjoint experiment as the dependent variable. The methodology therefore makes a unique contribution to previous studies on voter preferences in insecure contexts.

Sample

The data presented in this paper come from a household survey of adults conducted in northern Afghanistan between August 2016 and January 2017. The survey was conducted in three provinces: Balkh, Saripul, and Kunduz. These provinces range from relatively secure (Balkh) to moderately insecure (Saripul) to highly insecure (Kunduz)[5]. More information about security conditions in each province is provided in the SI.

In each province we targeted approximately 800 respondents. The final data sample includes 2,485 complete survey responses, each of which includes three rounds of the conjoint experiment, resulting in a total of 7,455 discrete candidate choices. Sampling points were selected by random draw from a list of accessible settlements in each of the three provinces. Sampling points deemed to be inaccessible or too dangerous were removed from a comprehensive list of settlements prior to the draw.[6]

[5]These categories were based on security assessments in mid-2016 at the outset of the project. The data collection took place in Balkh and Saripul between August and September 2016 and between December 2016 and January 2017 in Kunduz. Additionally, 50 pilot surveys were collected in May 2016 in Kabul but were not included in the final sample.

[6]During the data collection, a small number of sampling points in all three provinces needed to be substituted due to unforeseen security issues. In these cases, the substitute points were selected from the same district as the original sampling point with a similar size and ethnicity.

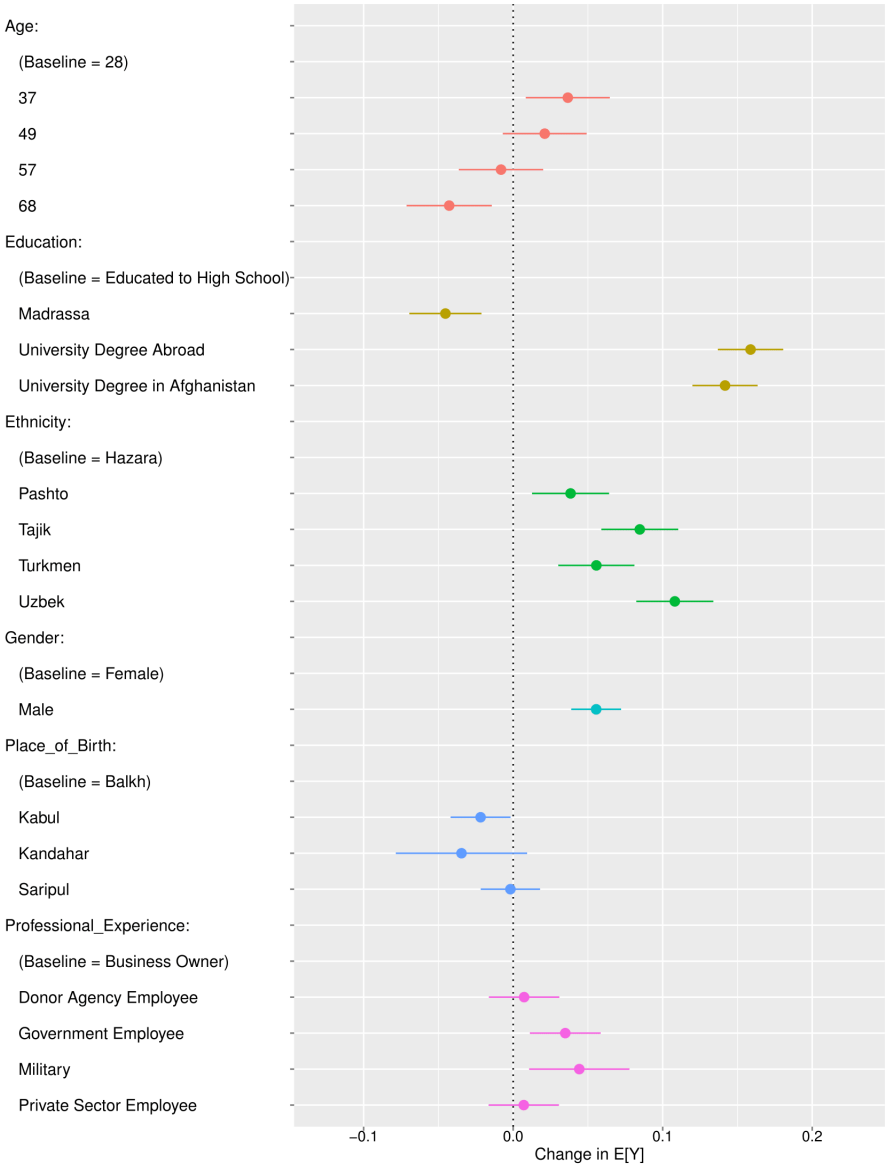
Due to high levels of insecurity throughout Afghanistan, the sample is limited to areas with a sufficient degree of security and does not capture opinions of civilians living in areas outside of government control. The results therefore cannot be considered fully representative of public opinion in the three provinces in the sample. However, the survey collected data from a range of ages, ethnicities, genders, incomes, and education levels in the target population. The sample is not limited to urban areas, but includes a significant number of small rural settlements as well. Although the data presented below cannot be considered purely representative, the sample can be presumed to have greater external validity than a pure convenience sample and is as representative as possible given existing security constraints.

Results and Analysis

Following the methodology set out by Hainmueller et al. (2014), I estimate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCE's) to complete the analysis. The AMCE represents the average difference in the probability of a leadership profile being selected when comparing two different attribute values, where the average is calculated over all possible combinations of the other leadership attributes. This allows for a direct comparison of means between different attributes and attribute levels (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015). More information about the estimation of AMCEs is provided in the SI.

Figure 3.1 displays results for the full sample of respondents. In general, the results challenge prevailing assumptions about the desirability of strongmen in insecure contexts. They provide strong evidence that respondents prefer university-educated leaders and penalize respondents with only a religious education. This was true for both foreign and domestically-educated leaders: having a university degree from abroad increased the probability of being chosen by 0.16 (SE=0.01) compared to a baseline candidate with a high school education, while having a degree from an Afghan university conferred a benefit of 0.14 (SE=0.01) against the baseline. These results do not support the proposition that those who studied abroad are penalized for being out of touch; in fact, studying abroad confers a slight additional benefit to potential candidates. Conversely, leaders who received education in a madrassa received a penalty of 0.05 (SE=0.01) against a baseline candidate, implying that a traditional religious education is not highly valued in candidates.

Figure 3.1: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

The results also showed moderate preferences for younger leaders, though not necessarily too young. The most preferred candidates in their late 30s; respondents gave 37 year olds a 0.037 (SE=0.01) advantage over a baseline candidate of 28. By contrast, older leaders in their late 60s received a penalty of 0.043 (SE=0.01). Other age groups were not significantly different from the baseline.

Respondents did not appear to be particularly attracted to candidates born in their region, nor did they express strong preferences for candidates from elsewhere in the country. Leaders from Kabul were slightly penalized by 0.022 (SE=0.01) against a baseline candidate from Balkh, but other provincial options were not statistically significant. By contrast, ethnic attributes were a much stronger predictor of preferences. In the overall sample, Uzbek candidates received a 0.11 bonus (SE=0.01) against a baseline Hazara candidate. Indeed, Hazara candidates were significantly less likely to be selected than all other ethnic groups. This last finding is not particularly surprising, given that Hazaras have been longstanding targets for discrimination in the country.[7].

With regards to how candidate gender influenced leadership choices, male leaders received a 0.055 bonus over female leaders (SE=0.008), an unsurprising finding in a highly conservative society. However, this preference was only significant amongst males in the sample, who preferred male leaders by 0.095 (SE=0.01), while women had no significant preference for either gender (see Figure 6.7, SI). Furthermore, other attributes, such as education and ethnicity, are still stronger predictors of leadership preferences than gender, even for male respondents. For example, both males and females in the sample expressed similar preferences for university graduates: a 0.16 bonus for foreign-educated (SE=0.02) and a 0.14 bonus for domestically-educated university graduates (SE=0.02) compared to the baseline.

The last attribute concerns the role of candidates' professional experience in determining leadership preferences. Respondents gave moderate bonuses to those with government experience (0.035, SE=0.01) and those with military experience (0.044, SE=0.01) compared to business owners. Candidates with a private sector background or with donor agency experience were not significantly more likely to be preferred over the baseline. These findings suggest that, while business owners and private sector employees have become more prominent in Afghan

[7]For a summary of historical discrimination and the growth of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, see Simonsen (2005)

society in recent years, leadership remains more strongly associated with the government sector in Afghan society. However, while military and government experience are seen as desirable, both are significantly less valued than education.

Effects of Exposure to Violence on Preferences for Military Leaders

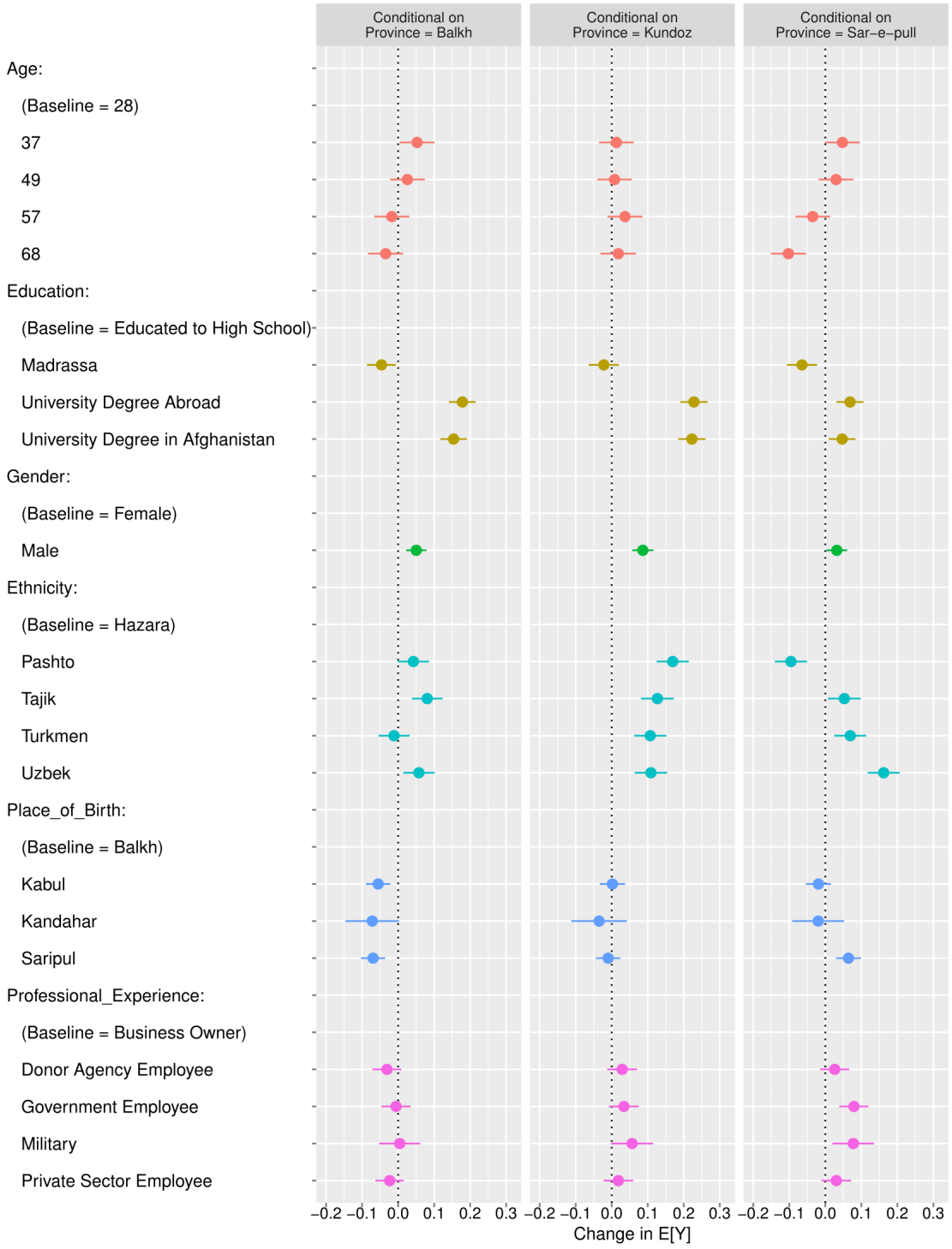
To test hypotheses on whether heightened exposure to violence strengthened voter support for military strongmen, I examined variation in respondent exposure to violence in two ways: by comparing results in relatively secure provinces with relatively insecure provinces, and by comparing respondents exposed to a treatment vignette on insecurity with a control group.

First, I examined whether living in a more insecure province increased preferences for leaders with a military background. I compared conditional AMCEs using an F-test against the null hypothesis that there are no significant differences between AMCEs between provinces. I found no significant difference in preference for military leaders between the three provinces (p=0.412). As shown in Figure 3.2, while respondents in the most secure province (Balkh) showed the lowest overall preference for leaders with military experience (0.004, SE=0.03), respondent preferences for military experience were higher in moderately insecure Saripul (0.078, SE=0.03) than in more insecure Kunduz (0.057, SE=0.03). There is therefore no clear pattern relating insecurity to respondent preferences for military leadership. On the contrary, irrespective of security conditions, people in all three provinces are more likely to prefer university-educated leaders to those with military experience.

Second, using a two-stage experimental design, I raised the salience of security concerns with a vignette describing insecurity in Afghanistan to see whether this would prompt stronger preferences for military leaders. Respondents in the control group were exposed to a vignette describing generic facts about Afghanistan. These vignettes were randomly selected and read out loud to respondents before they engaged in the three rounds of conjoint selection. I then compared conditional AMCEs in treatment and control samples using a t-test with a null hypothesis of no significant differences between them.

I found that exposure to the vignettes had only trivial effects on preferences for military leaders. While those in the treatment group had slightly higher preferences for military leaders (0.046, SE=0.03) than those in the control group (0.031, SE=0.03), the difference was not

Figure 3.2: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Province



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on the respondent's province. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

statistically significant (Figure 3.3). Differences in preferences for male leaders between the two groups was not significantly significant either. I found statistically significant effects for only one attribute: those exposed to a vignette were 0.07 less inclined to select Uzbek leaders compared to those in the control group (p=0.015). This effect could be plausible, as Uzbek fighters have been active in both insurgent and predatory pro-government militias (Roggio and Weiss, 2016; Dirkx, 2017). In any case, the statistical effect is only weakly significant and is not present for other ethnicities. There is therefore little conclusive evidence that exposure to vignettes had much effect on respondent preferences regarding ethnicity or any other leadership attributes, nor does the experiment indicate that military strongmen are more preferred in insecure environments.

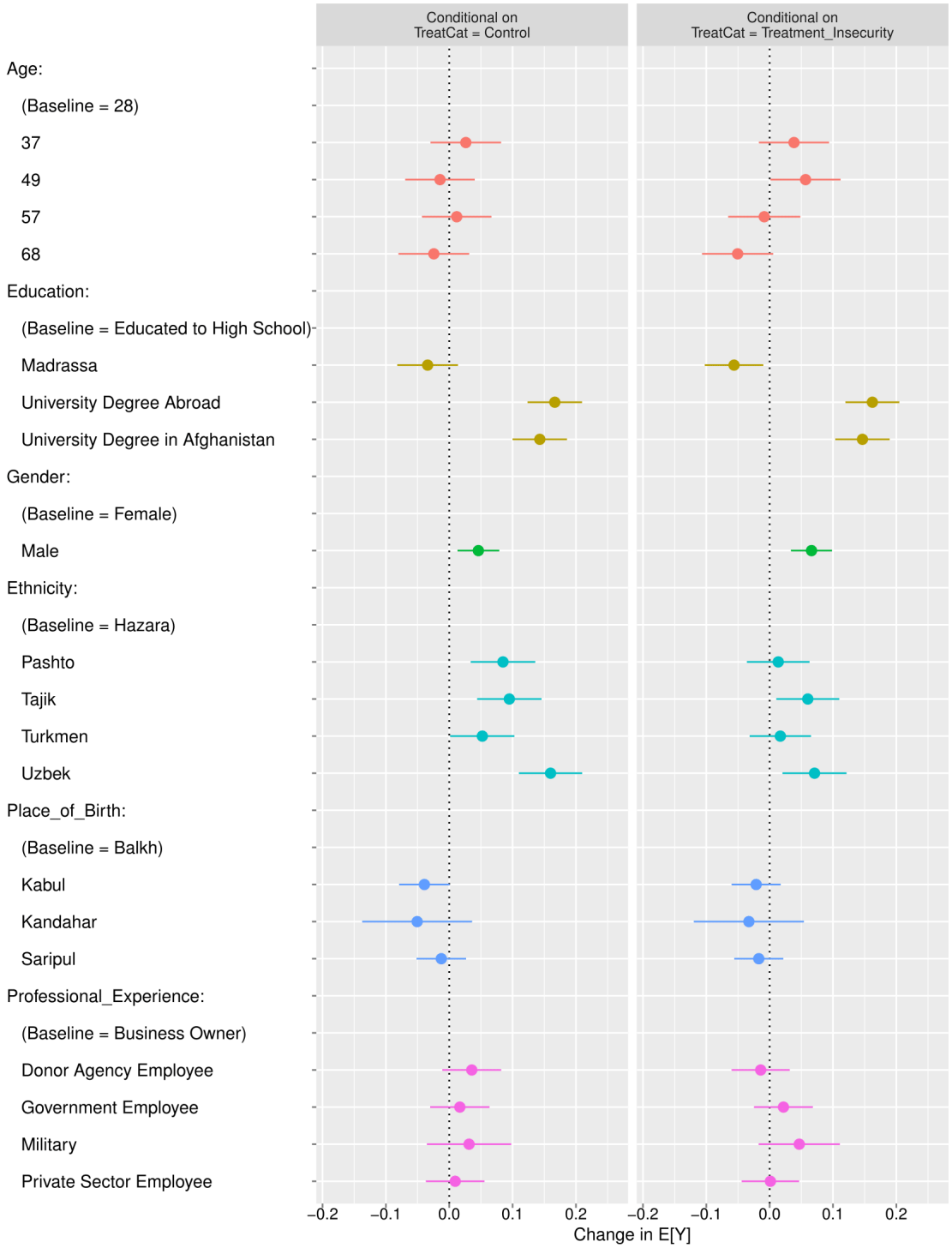
There could be alternative explanations for the fact that the insecurity vignette did not have much impact. First, it is possible that the vignette was not sufficiently understood. To account for this, I included a manipulation check administered immediately after the vignettes were read aloud to assess each respondent's level of understanding. The results of the manipulation check suggest that respondents by and large understood the content of the vignette, indicating that the treatment was effectively administered (see SI). Alternatively, it could be the case that leadership preferences are relatively fixed, and exposure to a vignette may not be sufficient to induce changes in leadership preferences. Future candidate experiments should replicate the effects with alternative vignettes in order to understand to what extent these results are typical.

Interaction Effects for Age, Income, Ethnicity, and Education

Finally, I examined whether these trends held across different demographic subgroups in the sample. Recent generations in Afghanistan have experienced radically different forms of governance over the past 40 years, and it is reasonable to expect that older respondents might be more amenable to traditional forms of leadership. To test this, I examined differences in leadership preferences between different age groups. I divided the sample into the following age quartiles: 18-23, 24-33, 34-49, and 50+.[8] Contrary to prevailing expectations that older generations might be more conservative or traditional in their preferences, I found very little

[8]While there are no precise estimates of Afghanistan's age distribution, over 40 percent of people are estimated to be under the age of 14 (CIA, 2017a). The survey was limited to adult respondents only; the age distribution is younger than most developed countries but is plausible given Afghanistan's population estimates.

Figure 3.3: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Treatment



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on the vignette treatment received. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

evidence for this — on the contrary, preferences between younger and older generations are very similar, as shown in the SI (Figure 6.3).

Conditioning the AMCEs on the respondents' own ethnicity provided strong evidence for the salience of ethnicity in driving leadership preferences, showing that respondents tend to strongly favor leaders from their own ethnic groups (see Figure 6.4, SI). Pashtun respondents were 0.25 (SE=0.02) more likely to select a Pashtun leader against a baseline Hazara candidate, Uzbeks prefer Uzbek leaders by 0.23 (SE=0.02), Tajiks prefer Tajik leaders by 0.15 (SE=0.02), and Turkmens prefer Turkmen leaders by 0.16 (SE=0.07), although Turkmens also prefer Uzbeks by a slightly higher margin (0.19, SE=0.06). These results support findings that ethnic cleavages continue to be strong predictors of leadership preference in the region.

To investigate how preferences might vary between socio-economic groups, I examined differences between high and low-income subgroups. [9] Individuals with low and high incomes could reasonably be expected to have different political preferences owing to divergent economic interests. Low-income individuals in particular may feel alienated from highly educated leaders and therefore express stronger preferences for traditional forms of leadership.

However, respondents' income levels had few significant effects on leadership preferences. As shown in the SI (Figure 6.5), despite the fact that low-income individuals are less likely to have received an education, they preferred university educated leaders at roughly the same proportions as high income and medium income respondents. Low-income respondents gave university educated leaders who studied abroad a 0.15 bonus (SE=0.025) and leaders with a university degree from Afghanistan a 0.13 bonus compared to a baseline high school educated leader (SE=0.025), similar to high income respondents who gave foreign and domestically educated leaders a bonus of 0.16 (SE=0.016) and 0.15 (SE=0.016), respectively. There were also no significant differences between preferences with regards to leaders' age, gender, or professional experience, and the findings do not support the hypothesis that poorer socio-economic groups are more inclined to support those with military experience.

On the other hand, ethnic preferences were more salient amongst low-income respondents

[9] A low income household was defined as one in which respondents' annual household income was 50,000 AFS (approximately 732 USD) or less, medium income was defined as between 50,000-100,000 AFS (approximately 732 and 1,465 USD) and high income was defined as greater than 100,000 AFS (1,465 USD). Average monthly household income in the northern region of Afghanistan was estimated to be between $123 and $135 USD in 2016 (Asia Foundation, 2016). I measured annual rather than monthly income because many Afghan households are dependent on seasonal incomes that fluctuate considerably at different times of the year.

across all ethnic groups compared to medium and high-income respondents (see Figure 6.6, SI). The effect was particularly strong for Pashto and Tajik leaders. For example, low-income respondents gave Pashto and Tajik leaders a bonus of 0.12 (SE=0.03) and 0.15 (SE=0.029) against a baseline Hazara candidate, respectively, whereas high-income respondents were only 0.01 more likely to prefer Pashtuns (SE=0.019) and 0.05 more likely to prefer Tajiks (SE=0.019) against the baseline. Similar patterns were evident among subgroups with different levels of educational achievement (see SI). One possible explanation, consistent with Chandra (2007), is that respondents with low levels of income and education may be more dependent on employment and other economic benefits distributed through ethnically-based patronage networks. Individuals with higher levels of income, by contrast, enjoy a greater level of economic independence and have more opportunities to engage with other ethnic groups, possibly leading to a moderating effect on ethnic voting.

Robustness Checks

In the SI, I report results for a number of robustness checks. First, I compared AMCEs in the conjoint choice model to respondent evaluations of each candidate profile on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates that a candidate is "completely suitable" and 5 indicates that a candidate is "completely unsuitable". I compiled evaluation results in the sample and compared them to results from the conjoint choice model. The results of the two models are broadly similar (Figure 1, SI).

I also ran robustness checks for carryover effects between the three rounds of profiles. As each respondent participated in three rounds of the conjoint experiment, the assumption is that there are no carryover effects between profiles, and respondents would make the same choices regardless of which order they received the profiles. Consistent with that assumption, I found that AMCEs are similar across the three rounds (Figure 2, SI).

The validity of the conjoint experiment is also conditional on assumptions that there are no attribute order effects and that the profiles are indeed randomized. I used *Qualtrics* software on electronic tablets to compile the profiles and assign the vignette treatments. Because the software randomized the order that attributes were displayed in each profile, the composition of the profiles, and the assignment of the vignette, we can assume these assumptions are fulfilled.

Discussion and Conclusion

The conjoint methodology used in this study adds to previous studies of voter preferences in conflict-affected areas by providing an empirical estimate of the relative importance of different candidate attributes amongst populations affected by political violence. The results suggest that, contrary to expectations, higher exposure to violence does not result in significantly stronger preferences for leaders with military experience, a pattern that held across a range of ages and socio-economic groups. Instead, voters generally prefer highly educated younger leaders of the same ethnicity. While male leaders are preferred over female leaders, the effect is smaller than education and ethnicity. Pre-treatment vignettes on insecurity had trivial effects on shifting these preferences in favor of military candidates. However, the results do provide support for the notion that ethnic voting patterns are stronger among respondents with lower incomes and education, and suggests that voter support for strongmen may be driven more by general ethnic preferences rather than a desire for leaders with military experience.

There are a number of caveats to the findings above. The results are limited to a particular region of Afghanistan, and it is possible that patterns of leadership preferences elsewhere may differ. The candidate experiment tests for leadership characteristics as expressed through hypothetical candidate profiles; however, hypothetical preferences may not align with voter behavior in practice, where other factors such as social pressure may come into play. Furthermore, the findings make no claims about the relative effectiveness or capacity of educated leaders to implement their programs. Still, the results do challenge assumptions about the popularity of strongmen within the population, and suggests that there is public demand for electoral options that provide more opportunities for younger, educated leaders. Similarly, despite the esteemed position of religion in Afghan society, the results suggest that religious education is not as high status as often assumed, and that religious education in fact carries a penalty in terms of providing opportunities for socio-economic advancement. This may explain, at least in part, why madrassas are such a lucrative source of recruits for insurgent groups, given the lack of alternative opportunities provided through religious education (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Future projects should focus on expanding research elsewhere to test whether these findings hold in other similar contexts. Additionally, more complex experiments could explore whether

distinct typologies of candidates are preferred for different leadership roles, or whether public preferences differ at local and national levels of politics. Finally, it would be prudent to explore why technocrats choose not to run against strongmen in these contexts, or if they do, why they are not more successful, given that there appears to be a latent demand for a more technocratic style of leadership.

In terms of policy relevance, the results could inform future political appointments and the selection of electoral candidates, with more support provided to younger, educated leaders. The results also suggest that in-group preferences with regards to ethnicity become weaker as incomes and education grow, implying that improvements in these areas may have future payoffs in weakening voter preferences for co-ethnics. Additionally, public resistance to women in leadership positions could potentially be mitigated by investing in higher education for female leaders and selecting female leaders with strong ethnic ties to their respective communities. Although the experiment only measures public preferences for hypothetical leaders, not their likelihood of success, providing leadership options more in line with these preferences is likely to have positive effects on improving voter satisfaction with electoral politics in the long run.

Chapter 4

Community-Driven Development in Insecure Contexts: A Case Study of the National Solidarity Program in Wardak

Abstract

Governments and donor agencies in developing countries have increasingly viewed community-driven development programs as a means to improve economic welfare and encourage positive institutional transformations in rural communities. This article presents an in-depth review of the legacy of the National Solidarity Program (NSP), a flagship community development program in Afghanistan that established community development councils (CDCs) at the village level. Based on over 70 interviews investigating the performance of the NSP in seven districts in Wardak province, we found evidence that the NSP has generally improved developmental outcomes in target communities and contributed to improving economic well-being. However, we found limited evidence that the program achieved its intended institutional transformations; instead, CDCs are principally understood by the community as a mechanism for delivering development projects, rather than fulfilling a larger governance role. Many CDCs have also stopped functioning due to growing insecurity, raising questions about the sustainability of community-driven development programs in insecure contexts.

Introduction[1]

Governments and donor agencies have increasingly relied on community-based approaches to deliver development assistance in developing countries, including a large number of fragile and conflict-affected states (Dongier et al., 2003; Mansuri and Rao, 2012; Beath et al., 2015; Bennett and D'Onofrio, 2015; Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). As opposed to a development-spending model driven by centralized decision-making, community-driven development (CDD) devolves some control of decision-making and resources to local councils. By giving local

[1] A version of this paper has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed academic journal, *Asian Survey*. It will be released in the forthcoming issue of the journal AS 58:6 (Nov/Dec 2018).

communities a voice in identifying development priorities and providing a mechanism to engage with local government on the provision of public services, advocates believe that CDD programs result in better decisions on development spending, greater legitimacy and accountability of the government towards its citizens, and more opportunities for vulnerable or oppressed groups to participate in local politics (Dongier et al., 2003). In areas under threat from insurgent groups, aid projects have often been touted as a potential counter-insurgency tool, rewarding communities under government control and preventing at-risk communities from defecting to insurgents.

This paper challenges some the core assumptions of this approach. We explore the legacy of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a flagship CDD program in Afghanistan, with an in-depth case study of the program's impact in Wardak, a province under severe threat by insurgents. To date, very few studies have explored how CDD programs function in highly insecure contexts; hence, very little is known about how nascent local institutions developed under CDD adapt to conditions of deteriorating security. Wardak, a relatively dangerous province with a significant degree of insurgent activity, provides opportunities to observe how resilient these institutions are in areas where government control is strongly contested. Additionally, while existing evaluations of CDD have measured short to medium-term impacts, this study provides insights on how the NSP has functioned since its inception in 2003 until the end of 2016.

While we find that the NSP functioned as a relatively effective mechanism for aid delivery, there is little evidence that the NSP delivered transformative institutional changes in the long run or had a significant effect on improving local perceptions of the government. Instead, in most cases local councils set up under the NSP became active only during periods when they received project funding under the NSP, and remained dormant at other times. Generally, they played a role in other governance activities only insofar as local council members overlapped with other customary institutions. Rather than seeing themselves as affiliated with the state, council members in insecure areas were often highly critical of the government and saw themselves as institutionally distinct, in some cases openly collaborating with insurgents instead. Finally, we found that in more conservative areas, institutional guidelines mandating the inclusion of women in decision-making were rarely followed. These findings challenge some of the

theoretical assumptions underpinning CDD in insecure contexts, and suggest methodological improvements for how these programs should be evaluated.

The findings presented here are based on approximately 70 interviews with community members in seven districts in Wardak, additional interviews with government and NGO service delivery providers, and three community mapping exercises illuminating local power dynamics and governance mechanisms. This article proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical mechanisms of CDD and reviews extant literature on the utility of this approach in conflict-affected areas. Section three provides background on the NSP, with a particular focus on the program's activities in Wardak. Section four outlines the study's approach and methodology. Section five presents our results with respect to development and institutional outcomes. Finally, we conclude by discussing theoretical and practical implications for future CDD programs in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Theoretical Framework: Community-Driven Development in Violent Contexts

An ongoing debate in the political violence literature has concerned the relative importance of greed versus grievance factors in explaining the likelihood of civil conflict. One body of research has found a robust statistical link between poor economic conditions—especially widespread poverty and unemployment—and violence (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006). Another school argues that conflict is primarily driven by the existence of local grievances against the government, which are particularly exacerbated by perceived inequalities between groups (Østby, 2008; Cederman et al., 2011)

Though not an approach designed solely for violent contexts, community-driven development (CDD) addresses aspects of both of these theoretical drivers of conflict. CDD is underpinned by two theoretical logics.[2] The first logic concerns how CDD functions as a mechanism to improve local development outcomes. By providing communities with greater control over how public resources are spent, CDD advocates believe that it is a highly efficient method of

[2]Bennett and D'Onofrio (2015) describe these logics slightly differently in a three-logic framework: welfare, governance, and social cohesion. We have opted for the two-logic framework above as closest in spirit to how implementing agencies we interviewed conceptualized it.

reducing poverty in comparison to other modalities. Consistent with literature on the virtues of bottom-up development, it holds that local residents have a better understanding of their environment and needs than state planners, and have higher incentives to reduce corruption and ensure public goods are delivered as intended (Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). Moreover, community members are often actively involved in constructing development projects through the provision of local goods or labour, thus receiving additional economic benefits.

The second logic concerns CDD as a state-building tool to precipitate transformative institutional changes. These transformations are sometimes categorized as having both bonding and bridging effects (White et al., 2018). Bonding effects typically refer to fostering more trust and inclusiveness in local communities. CDD programs work by establishing, training, and empowering elected bodies within rural communities to plan and implement development projects. By strengthening these bodies and providing them with resources to distribute within their communities, proponents believe CDD programs create receptive ground for democratic governance(Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). Programs usually include some participatory mandate for inclusiveness, ensuring representation from women and other marginalized groups, thus reducing the risk of unequal public goods distribution(White et al., 2018). Having achieved a measure of local credibility through public goods delivery, local councils were expected to eventually expand into other areas of governance typically reserved for informal customary institutions, such as dispute resolution (Ghani and Lockhart, 2009).

Bridging effects refer to building trust between the government and local communities, fast-tracking the process of formal institution-building. Extending formal state institutions is often an expensive and laborious process that may take decades, especially for governments with limited capacity. Creating local councils through CDD programs are a alternative means of establishing a presence in local communities and rapidly demonstrating goodwill through the delivery of public goods. Once established, councils are intended to serve as a bridge between the government and local communities, providing information about community needs and serving as an engagement hub for government line ministries.

Though distinct, this logic closely aligns with counter-insurgency literature focused on winning "hearts and minds" in contested areas. This doctrine is rooted in the belief that the support of the population is a critical resource, particularly in discouraging cooperation with

opposition groups and providing the government with vital intelligence about insurgent activities. Advocates for this approach argue that good governance, primarily through public goods provision, is a primary mechanism for building government legitimacy and securing local allegiances (Berman et al., 2011). Community-driven programs that succeed in public goods provision may therefore improve the standing of the government in local communities, potentially dampening insurgent activities.

While these assumptions have underpinned development and counter-insurgency efforts in unstable regions of the world for the past two decades, until recently there was little empirical evidence about their validity. In recent years, a number of studies have tested these underlying theoretical logics, including a series of large-scale evaluations in countries affected by political violence. However, these evaluations have produced mixed results. Panel evidence collected over a four-year period in Iraq suggests that the provision of public goods in local areas did have a positive effect on perceptions of the government and led to significant reductions in violence (Berman et al., 2011). Another study found that local community development projects in Afghanistan were well-regarded by the public, but aid was least effective——and often destabilizing——in areas where large amounts of money were spent quickly, creating resentment between communities and ample opportunities for extensive corruption (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012).

Evaluations that have focused specifically on how CDD programs function in violent contexts have produced no clear consensus to date either. A randomized field experiment testing the performance of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in Afghanistan, an initiative which supports community development councils in local towns and villages, found that the introduction of the NSP led to a significant improvement in villagers' perceptions of their own economic well-being and their attitudes towards the local and central governments (Beath et al., 2011). However, a study summarizing evidence from multiple similar field experiments in post-conflict sub-Saharan Africa found that results were often negligible and that programs supporting participatory councils did not result in lasting positive changes to social cohesion (King et al., 2010). More recently, a review of 25 impact evaluations of CDD programs around the world found that, while CDD programs were generally effective at producing small-scale infrastructure, they had little to no impact on improving governance or social cohesion (White

et al., 2018). Another literature review of nearly 500 participatory programs also found little evidence that interventions led to long-lasting improvements to group cohesion, but noted that they still performed better than top-down government programs at delivering higher quality public goods with less corruption (Mansuri and Rao, 2012).

Case studies at the subnational level have suggested areas where more theoretical sophistication is needed. With regards to the NSP, studies have found that community acceptance of elected councils and their role in local governance varies from village to village, including how council members engage with customary elites (Nixon, 2008; Pain, 2016) The degree to which CDCs function as intended is contingent on a number of factors that are currently neglected in existing theories, particularly the nature of pre-existing communal institutions and practices (Pain, 2016). The longevity of CDD programs is another under-researched variable. An early study on the sustainability of local councils set up under the NSP raised concerns that the councils would likely wither away without sustained project funding, but few studies to date have explored to what extent this has actually happened (Brick, 2008).

Despite the accumulated evidence on CDD in conflict-affected countries, there are significant gaps in the literature. Evaluation methodologies often measure impacts in a short- to medium-term timeframe. For example, a randomized control trial on the NSP covered a four year period from the baseline to the endline (Beath et al., 2015). A recent review found that, of all known evaluations of CDD programs worldwide, the longest available at the time of writing covered a period of seven years (Wong and Guggenheim, 2018). At present, there is very limited data on how CDD programs fare in the long-term.

Additionally, although a number of evaluations have been conducted in conflict-affected countries, data is almost always collected from relatively secure areas within those contexts. The randomized NSP mentioned study above, for example, excluded districts from the most insecure southern provinces of Afghanistan (Beath et al., 2013). The lack of evidence on how CDD programs operate in insecure contexts represents a major lacuna in current theoretical frameworks. While existing theories of change may view insurgencies as an exogenous factor, there is ample evidence that, once violent conflicts begin, local dynamics change in fundamental and often unpredictable ways—in the salience of local identities and opportunities for personal gain, for example—that are likely to have significant effects on how CDD programs operate

and are received in beneficiary communities.[3] It is likely that a modified set of theoretical expectations is appropriate for these contexts.

This study is a first step towards addressing these gaps. We examine the legacy of the NSP program from 2003 to late 2016 in a province that has had an active insurgency since 2006. Many of the villages profiled have received multiple rounds of NSP funding, and local councils have been operating for a decade or longer. The findings provides a rare window into how CDD programs operate in terms of both developmental and institutional logics in such an environment, and how these logics are impacted by the active presence of insurgent groups.

The National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan

History and Structure of the NSP

Comprising almost $2.05 billion USD between 2003 and 2016, the NSP was perhaps the single largest and most far-reaching development aid program in the country's history (World Bank, 2018). The NSP was funded by several international donors and managed by the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), with some technical support from donors and international consultancy firms. While security problems prevented the NSP from being delivered in every community in Afghanistan, it was widely implemented, spanning approximately 35,000 rural communities in all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces. The program commenced in 2003 and closed in early 2017, replaced by a follow-up program called the Citizens' Charter.

The NSP was delivered in three phases. The core elements of project design have remained consistent for all these phases, though minor adjustments to policies and procedures have been made over the years. Phase I of the NSP ran from May 2003 to March 2007, reaching approximately 17,300 communities. Phase II ran from April 2007 to September 2011, targeting an additional 6,000 communities. Phase III began in November 2011 to March 2017, adding a further 13,500 communities. In addition to expanding into new communities, Phase II and Phase III also provided repeat grants to some beneficiaries from earlier phases to be used for new projects.

In each village, the program was rolled out as follows. At the outset, community mo-

[3]For an authoritative account, see Kalyvas (2006).

bilisers employed by facilitating partners — typically local or international non-governmental organizations — approached the village to introduce the program. Next, they facilitated local elections in which each adult individual in a community voted in a secret ballot for candidates to form Community Development Councils (CDCs). Once established, the NSP program provided CDC members with training to assess and manage development projects. The community was allocated $200 per household by the Afghan government, to be disbursed by the CDC on a pre-defined selection of small-scale infrastructure development projects. The CDCs selected either a project with a maximum budget ceiling of the combined household allocation for the village, or $60,000 for villages with more than 300 households. Once approved, the projects were constructed, usually with the help of the NGO facilitating partners. The villages themselves were also required to contribute 10% of the project cost in cash, materials, or labor. Some CDCs received more than one block grant in subsequent rounds of the NSP.

From the beginning, the Afghan government and donor community had more ambitious aspirations for the program. In addition to its role as a mechanism to deliver public goods, the NSP was conceived as a means to transform governance in local communities, providing a formal alternative to customary institutions. Ashraf Ghani, then Minister of Finance and one of the main architects of the NSP, saw the elected CDCs as an antidote to traditional patronage-based politics and the influence of local commanders. Although the CDCs formally existed in parallel with customary structures, Ghani believed that the CDCs could expand their mandate considerably: "Having gathered the necessary institutional and social capital and demonstrated its usefulness in the creation of infrastructure and services... [the NSP] is now ready to become the platform for a more ambitious series of undertakings at the village level. It could, for instance, easily supervise the construction of schools, clinics, and small dams, undertake agricultural extension services, or become a mechanism for the registration and formalization of property rights and dispute resolution at the village level"(Ghani and Lockhart, 2009). Another novel feature of the NSP is that it stipulated that CDC leadership should be comprised of an equal number of men and women, a significant break from traditional customs concerning the role of women in local governance. Beyond managing the NSP block grants, the CDCs were intended to act as a mechanism to help government line ministries and NGOs coordinate on delivering other public services and development projects in the

Figure 4.1: Map of Wardak Province



(Source: Wikimedia Commons).

community.

While the CDCs were tasked with improving community welfare through infrastructure and local development, the long-term goal of institution-building was therefore fundamental to the design and assumptions underpinning the program. For at least a decade, the Afghan government has been considering proposals to give CDCs some type of formal institutional recognition, embedding the CDCs within existing state hierarchies (Nixon, 2008). This paper assesses the extent to which developmental and institutional logics have fared in the province of Wardak, where the NSP program has been implemented since 2003.

Wardak and the National Solidarity Program

Wardak is an exceptionally challenging development context. A predominantly agrarian society, the vast majority of its roughly half a million inhabitants live in rural areas (World Bank, 2016). It ranks below the national average on poverty, literacy, access to health services, and school attendance, particularly for girls (World Bank, 2016). Due to its strategic location just west of Kabul (Figure 4.1), the province has experienced heavy fighting since 2006, and territory is heavily contested by government forces and opposition groups. Wardak is frequently classified as one of the most insecure provinces in Afghanistan, and has one of the highest rates of internally-displaced persons in the country (EASO, 2016a).

Insecurity has gradually escalated in Wardak since the mid-2000s, with the government losing control of territory over time. Wardak is located approximately 35km from Kabul, making it a useful base for attacks on the capital (EASO, 2016a). The province lies along the main highway between Kabul and the southern provinces of Ghazni and Kandahar, a key transportation link connecting the capital and the south. A second important road runs from the provincial capital of Maydan Shah to the central highlands of Bamiyan. The strategic importance of this province has led to intense ongoing conflict between insurgents and government forces (EASO, 2016a).

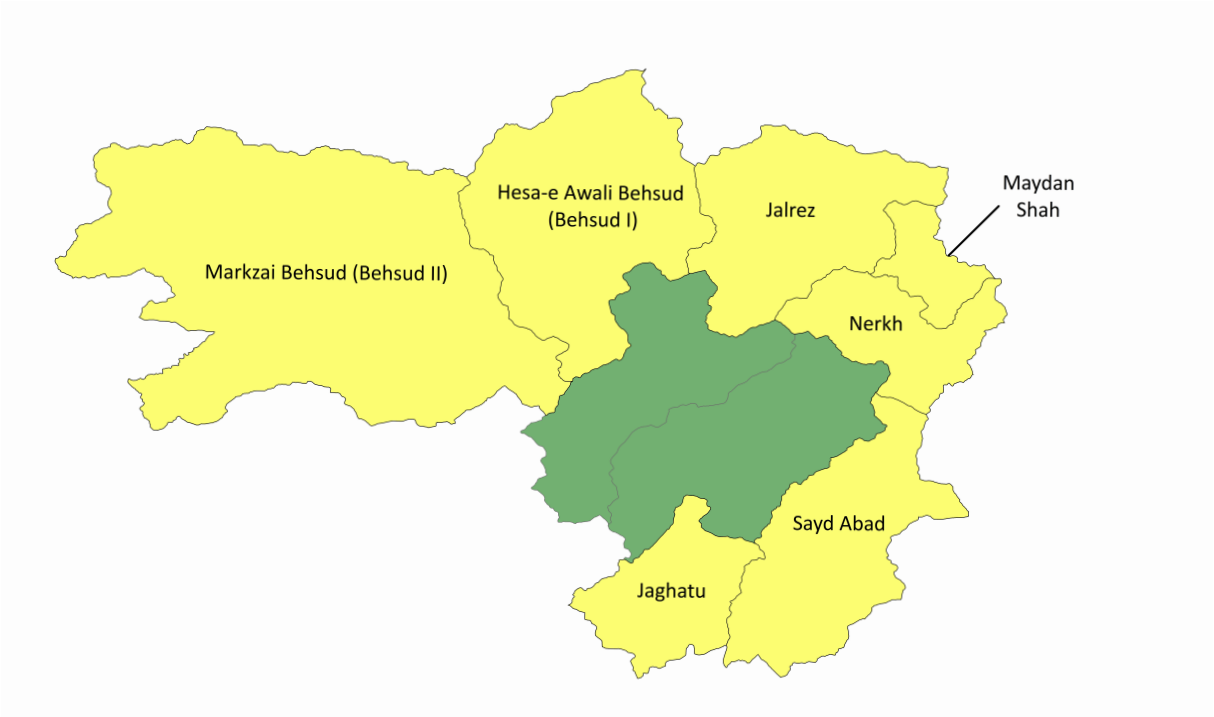
There are nine administrative districts in Wardak. Interviews were conducted in seven of the nine districts: Markazi Behsud (Behsud I), Hesi-e Awali Behsud (Behsud II), Jalrez, Maydan Shah, Nerkh, Sayd Abad, and Jaghatu (Figure 4.2) [4]. At the time that the research was conducted, security conditions varied considerably in the districts of interest. The two northwestern districts of the province, Behsud I and II, were relatively secure. These districts, linking the central highlands to the Kabul-Kandahar corridor, have higher concentrations of ethnic Hazaras, and insurgent activity is relatively low. However, these provinces have experienced an ongoing and ethnically-charged conflict between Pashtun Kuchi nomads and local Hazara residents regarding grazing rights (LandInfo, 2011).

The other districts covered by the study have serious security issues. The Afghan government controls only the main roads running through these districts, while the Taliban have a widespread presence in rural areas. Nerkh, a district in the east of the province, has also experienced fighting between insurgent group Hizb-i-Islami and the Taliban, with both groups also engaged in combat operations against the government. Maydan Shah, the district containing the provincial capital, is controlled by the government within city limits, along the main roads in and out from Kabul, and to the south, but is otherwise strongly contested by insurgents. Multiple local security reports collected during fieldwork suggest that government officials rarely travel outside of Maydan Shah.

In spite of the poor security situation, the NSP was widely implemented in Wardak. In the seven districts selected where the research took place, CDCs implemented a total of 2,563 projects.[5] Irrigation and transport projects accounted for more than 50% of these projects,

[4]The other two districts, Chaki Wardak and Day Mirdad, were inaccessible during the fieldwork period.
[5]Data provided by Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.

Figure 4.2: Target Districts in Wardak



though there was considerable variation across districts. The most frequently selected type of project in Behsud II, Jaghatu and Jalrez were irrigation projects, such as the improvement of irrigation canals and the maintenance of *karez* (traditional irrigation) systems. Electrification projects were more commonly selected by CDCs in Maydan Shah, Nerkh and Sayd Abad. These projects included the purchase of generators and the installation of micro-hydro power systems. Transportation projects, principally road and bridge construction, were most frequently selected in mountainous Behsud I. Because the NSP has remained active in the context of widespread insecurity, Wardak offers a unique opportunity to study how dynamics of community-driven development are affected by insurgent violence.

Approach and Methodology

Before starting key informant interviews with beneficiaries, nine preliminary interviews were completed with government officials and donors who worked on the NSP between 2003 and 2016. The purpose of these interviews was to understand more about the background and institutional context of the NSP, as well as specific challenges in the province of Wardak. These interviews were conducted in November 2016.

Out of a total of 909 possible villages that had received NSP funding, we selected one

in each of the seven target districts in Wardak. Villages in each district were selected at random from the full list of settlements that had received the NSP, with inaccessible villages removed beforehand.[6] We classified remaining settlements according to different categories of development projects undertaken (e.g. irrigation, electrification etc.), and then consulted local security experts in selecting individual sampling points that captured a variety of these categories while ensuring the safety of the research team. In each selected village, trained enumerators conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with adult men, women, and CDC members. Enumerators were instructed to interview community members from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds in the village and to sample from marginalized groups in particular. The socio-economic background of respondents was determined by a subjective judgment by enumerators based on a combination of factors (i.e. education, occupation, quality of home and assets, social status in the village, etc.). Fieldwork was conducted in November and December 2016.

One month after the first round of fieldwork was completed, a series of community mapping exercises were conducted in a second round of qualitative field research in Nerkh, Behsud I and Jaghatu.[7] The exercises were conducted by phone with community members who were initially contacted during the in-person first round of fieldwork. The interviews aimed to validate initial findings and insights from the first round of interviews and collect additional information on the local political situation and community dynamics.

Given that large areas of the province are under insurgent control, we acknowledge that one limitation of this study is that field researchers could only visit villages with a minimum level of accessibility. Providing safe access to target communities was our greatest challenge, especially for female field researchers. Women have very restricted mobility in Wardak, and it is difficult for women to travel from district to district without attracting attention. Because we removed inaccessible villages in each district from the list of potential sampling points before doing the random selection, the remaining villages are generally located in areas with more security, typically closer to the main roads. The findings are therefore not necessarily representative of conditions in the province as a whole. However, it should be noted that

[6]Given the sensitive nature of the questions and that fact that some respondents might be identifiable by their positions, we have kept the specific names of the selected villages in this paper anonymous. In the remainder of the paper we refer to each location by its district name only.

[7]We also planned to conduct the mapping exercise in Behsud II, but a lack of telephone reception in this mountainous region prevented us from doing so.

almost all areas of Wardak are significantly affected by insecurity, and interviewees in almost all districts frequently cited security as a major concern. It is likely that our findings apply even more strongly in the most insecure areas. We therefore hold that, despite limitations on fieldwork, the study provides valuable insights on the dynamics of CDD programs in insecure contexts.

Results

We examined the legacy of the NSP in target communities in terms of both developmental and institutional logics. The developmental logic explores how effective local councils were as a mechanism for delivering public goods and enhancing economic welfare, examining their record on project delivery and contributions to economic well-being across different socio-economic groups. The institutional logic is concerned with the transformational aspects of CDD: the extent to which local councils became involved in responsibilities typically reserved for customary institutions, broadened participation in local decision-making, and built lasting links between communities and the state resilient to challenges from insurgent groups.

Developmental Logic: Delivery of Public Goods

Overall, we found strong evidence that the NSP program had contributed to the development of public goods in the form of local infrastructure, resulting in tangible economic benefits for community members. Respondents confirmed that most of their CDC's selected projects had been constructed, and there were few indications that planned infrastructure projects had been abandoned. Community members in the target areas generally had a positive perception of the infrastructure produced under the NSP and a strong appreciation for the program in general.

In Jaghatu, for example, the local CDC allocated most of its resources to a single infrastructure project: the construction and extension of an irrigation canal, completed eight years ago. Community members reported that this canal is still widely used for irrigation. They generally judged the canal to be of good quality, though two respondents mentioned that it needed further funds for maintenance. They also reported that the installation of the canal has allowed villagers to create new farmland in previously unused areas, as the supply of water to

these areas has expanded. Some respondents claimed that the project has principally benefited those who own the extended farmland, though they noted that others use the canal as a source of drinking water.

In Jalrez, by contrast, the CDC opted to construct a number of smaller projects, including deep wells, a road, a water supply network and access to solar electricity. Locals complained that the first project, a well, was a poorly constructed failure, but reported that other projects are still frequently used. Interviewees confirmed that the road made it easier for community members to travel, allowing for access to health clinics and neighboring communities. One community member praised the NSP for improving the water supply network: "The NSP brought positive changes...people now take water from the water supply system. They are happy. They used to use a donkey to fetch water but now they have it inside their homes."[8]

NSP infrastructure projects were positively associated with economic benefits by most respondents. When asked to identify specific economic benefits created by the NSP, respondents in most villages identified two major impacts. First, landowners who benefited from improved water systems reported that they had become wealthier as a direct result of the program. Furthermore, respondents living in areas where roads were constructed reported an improvement in access to markets, clinics, and other public services in the district centers.

Another widely reported economic benefit was opportunities for temporary paid work during the construction period. Though these opportunities were not long-lasting, it is notable that many respondents emphasized the positive economic impact of these short-term jobs to their households over other economic benefits, particularly poorer respondents. "The project benefited us economically because when we were constructing the water reservoir, the people who were unemployed received an income for the construction work", said one housewife from Behsud I.[9] Two farmers from Behsud II also related that they personally received wages while working on NSP construction projects.[10]

Respondents identified a few problems with the distribution of funds through the NSP. While respondents in most communities felt that economic benefits were distributed relatively equally, a small minority of respondents felt that projects benefited certain community members more than others. Generally, this feeling was more concentrated amongst lower income

[8]Interview, Driver from Jalrez district, 8 December 2016.
[9]Interview, Housewife from Behsud I district, 4 December 2016
[10]Interviews, Farmers from Behsud II, 5 December 2016

respondents, particularly those living further away from infrastructure projects. As one laborer in Behsud II put it:

> All the people have had economic benefits [from the projects], but not me. I am in a very bad economic situation. Our economic situation was not good before, and it is still not good. My land does not have any crops. We are still poor people.[11]

Another problem associated with some public goods delivered through the NSP was a lack of sustainability. In Sayd Abad and Maydan Shah, respondents complained about electrical generators installed through the NSP, no longer operational due to a lack of money for fuel and maintenance, a common criticism amongst most interviewees from these areas. As one community member in Sayd Abad recalled:

> The first [NSP] project was an electricity program. Every house was responsible for putting in money to operate the generator, and it worked for five years. After that, people couldn't afford to buy fuel for the generator or to repair the machine due to our economic conditions. So now the generator is not functioning. People are only benefiting from the bridge and the culvert, not the electricity project.[12]

Similarly, in Behsud II community members unanimously complained about a school project that was started in Phase I of the NSP but never finished, leaving the community with no usable educational facility. Indeed, respondents seemed to dwell on cases where projects had been started and failed or fallen into disrepair, indicating that raising public expectations on service delivery and subsequently failing to deliver may produce strong negative reactions terms of public goodwill.

Nonetheless, these failures were relatively rare; most public goods undertaken in the seven villages were completed as planned and still operational. The findings from these seven villages suggest that the NSP program in Wardak was indeed successful in achieving positive development outcomes, most of which appear to be durable in the medium-term. While four of the seven villages reported that the NSP had delivered a piece of infrastructure either incomplete no longer in use, all villages were using at least some infrastructure delivered through the NSP. It is also evident that the public goods built through the CDCs are considered useful and needed by community members, and that they have at least in some cases delivered tangible economic benefits. Notably, all respondents interviewed were aware of the NSP and could accurately identify something it had delivered, suggesting that the NSP was a relatively effective

[11]Interview, Laborer from Behsud II district, 5 December 2016.
[12]Interview, Farmer from Sayd Abad district, 4 December 2016

and successful mechanism for delivering public goods in the target communities.

Institutional Logic: Transforming Local Governance

The findings above suggest that the NSP has performed relatively well at delivering developmental objectives, and that villagers are aware of the role of the NSP in bringing public goods into their communities. However, we found much weaker evidence that these successes have produced the expected institutional transformations, both in terms of bridging and bonding effects. Instead, we found few indications that the establishment of the CDCs has substantively altered local dynamics of authority. Furthermore, insecurity has become a significant obstacle, in some cases leading to a complete break between community leaders and state institutions.

Roles and Responsibilities of CDCs in Local Communities

In the communities visited, the CDCs are seen primarily as a mechanism for the delivery of the NSP's infrastructure projects. When asked whether they had contacted the CDCs to ask for assistance, community members almost exclusively mentioned that they had done so in order to request new development projects. There was little sense from the interviews that communities expected the CDCs to play larger governance roles or provide any other kinds of services.

Interviews with community members and CDC leaders provided few examples of the CDCs resolving low level disputes in the community, which are instead addressed by customary authorities. In Behsud II, for example, one respondent stated that "the CDC doesn't resolve conflicts. The local *shura* (assembly) works on this issue" [13]. While some CDC members told field researchers that they had taken part in resolving disputes, it was not a result of their position as CDC members per se, but because of their parallel roles in community *shuras* or other customary structures. Where the CDC members are local elders, as was the case in most of the communities visited for this study, the CDCs and customary forms of governance are essentially interchangeable. According to one farmer in Jalrez: "the tribal elders and the CDC intervene [in conflicts] because the CDC members are also the tribal elders". [14] Another CDC member in Jaghatu agreed: "In fact, it is the responsibility of our *Malik* (chief) to resolve local disputes, though I also take part...just a short time ago a Pashtun girl escaped with a Hazara

[13]Interview, Community member from Behsud II district, 5 December 2016
[14]Interview, driver from Jalrez district, 8 December 2016

boy, and then the *Malik* went and freed that girl and brought her back from Kabul to her family." [15]

NSP experts interviewed for this project also confirmed this finding. While dispute resolution was not envisaged as the initial function of the CDCs, it was expected that, as trust with the community grew, they would gradually take on additional local governance roles, including dispute resolution. Instead, it appears that, at least in Wardak, customary institutions have continued to be the principal *fora* through which local disputes are resolved. In contested areas with a strong Taliban presence, the Taliban itself is a far more common provider of justice and dispute resolution than the CDCs. Respondents in four of the seven districts told enumerators that the Taliban and other opposition groups such as Hizb-e-Islami were primarily responsible for resolving disputes in their communities.

Bridging Communities and the State

We found limited evidence that the CDCs serve a bridging function between villages and higher state institutions. In theory, the establishment of CDCs would have provided government line ministries and NGOs with a community-level body through which service provision could be administered and organized. The evidence collected here suggests that this has only taken place to a limited extent.

In Jalrez, Behsud II, Maydan Shah and Syad Abad, CDC members interviewed reported that they have not worked with any government department to deliver services. In Nerkh and Jaghatu, CDC members reported that they had worked with government line ministries in the past, but this has now stopped due to the worsening security situation. Only in one of the villages, Behsud I, did CDC members report that the government was engaged with them on education and agriculture services a periodic basis.[16] In general, it appears that the government is currently providing no services in these communities through the CDCs, aside from Behsud I.[17]

On the contrary, in many of these communities, both NGOs and government officials are largely absent. Rather than viewing the CDCs as aligned with the government, CDC officials

[15]Interview, CDC member from Jaghatu district, 3 December 2016

[16]Interview, CDC member from Behsud I, 4 December 2016.

[17]This finding was contested by interviewees at the central and district level who had worked on the NSP in Wardak. They reported that in the more secure areas, the CDCs regularly lobby the government and NGOs to attract funding for further projects, and that more than 10% of CDCs in Hesa-e Awal Behsud, Markaz Behsud and Jalrez have succeeded in finding this funding. However, community members and CDC officials interviewed in these areas did not substantiate this claim.

and community members generally view CDCs as a separate body entirely. Interviewees in the more insecure districts had few positive things to say about their interactions with government bodies. In Sayd Abad, the CDC head himself spoke contemptuously of the government: "In fact, government officials cannot get out of Kabul, so how could they come here? They have made towers for themselves in Kabul to hide behind. Security here is bad, and no one can come here."[18] The CDC head in Maydan Shah claimed to have contact with NSP officials but no others and expressed similar frustrations with the government: "We don't want to keep relations with the military—we are tired of them. To provide projects and serve the people is good, but they put innocent people in prison...[which] increases the distance between the government and the people."[19] The head of the CDC in Jaghatu went further, claiming that they were no longer registered with the government and had no contact with NGOs either: "We are only CDCs in name."[20]

The overall evidence suggests that in the areas where they are able to operate, CDCs have not become the preeminent source of local governance in Wardak. There are few indications that the government is using them as a conduit for the work of central line ministries, nor do they provide a link to the central government for the majority of communities interviewed, with the exception of Behsud I. CDC members interviewed did not appear to see themselves as affiliated with or accountable to government institutions; on the contrary, they saw themselves strictly as local representatives, often highly critical of the government.

Participatory Governance through CDCs

One of the broader objectives of the NSP was to improve representation and inclusiveness in local governance by making CDCs fully participatory, with quotas for traditionally marginalized groups. CDC members were elected through local democratic elections facilitated by NGOs, in which every member of the community has one vote. NSP guidelines stipulate that women should be equally represented on the local councils.

Respondents confirmed that CDC elections had indeed occurred in their communities, and generally felt themselves to be adequately represented."The CDC is accountable to the people and they do everything for the people...[the benefiting of some groups over others] has not taken

[18]Interview, CDC Head from Sayd Abad, 4 December 2016.
[19]Interview, CDC Head in Maydan Shah, 6 December 2016.
[20]Interview, CDC Head from Sayd Abad, 4 December 2016

place in this area", stated one laborer from Behsud II. [21] Another community member from Jalrez agreed, stating: "I want to say, as an individual in the community, that the CDC does its work very transparently."[22] Respondents were unanimously content with the electoral system used to select CDC members and we uncovered no complaints that the process perceived as rigged or unfair.

However, the communities profiled in Wardak generally performed poorly in ensuring equal female participation. Of the seven CDCs profiled, respondents in five—Jaghatu, Jalrez, Maydan Shah, Nerkh, and Sayd Abad—unanimously reported that no women had ever served on their CDC. Both male and female respondents in these areas expressed beliefs that women in their communities were not educated enough to participate as CDC members and that it was inappropriate for them to do so. The findings suggest that, particularly in the Pashtun majority areas of Wardak, the NSP has not been successful in securing female participation in local governance. In these areas, the establishment of female participation in CDCs is extremely challenging, given the mixture of conservative cultural attitudes, low levels of female education, and high insecurity, exacerbated by the presence of Taliban forces.

Conversely, in Behsud I and II, the two Hazara majority districts in the northwest, CDCs included female members. However, attitudes to female participation differed between men and women. Female respondents interviewed in these areas commended the NSP for mandating female participation in the CDCs. They felt that female participation was meaningful, and that female CDC members had some influence on determining local priorities. However, the perception of male community members was somewhat different. In Behsud I and II, male community members described the significance of female participation in the CDC as very limited. Despite efforts by the NSP program to promote the benefits of gender equality, the perceptions of male interviewees regarding female CDC members remains highly influenced by traditional beliefs about the appropriate roles of women, specifically with regards to performing the tasks of a CDC member. "There are women in our CDC", said one male CDC member in Behsud I, "but as the women don't have enough education they can't do anything."[23] A community member from the same village agreed: "The women are not educated, they are like

[21] Interview, Laborer from Behsud II, 5 December 2016.
[22] Interview, Driver from Jalrez, 8 December 2016.
[23] Interview, CDC member from Behsud I, 5 December 2016

blind people. The men do everything [in the CDCs]."[24]

Insecurity and the Sustainability of the CDCs

While we could not reach communities in the most insecure areas of the province, NSP officials estimated that a substantial number of CDCs in remote areas of Jaghatu, Nerkh, Sayd Abad and Maydan Shah have ceased to meaningfully function in Taliban-controlled areas. Generally, these were CDCs located in villages furthest from the district centers.

In the communities we could reach, we found that council members coped with mounting insecurity in a number of ways. First, although all communities nominally had CDCs, five of the seven councils, all located in relatively insecure areas, had become functionally inactive. Interviewees commonly mentioned two main reasons for this. In Sayd Abad, respondents said that CDCs were specifically targeted by insurgent groups. CDC members reported that they were warned to stop their work by the Taliban, and that they were afraid of being associated with the CDC. This fear was also shared by community members, impeding the ability of CDCs to play a leadership role: "We don't approach [CDC members] because it is a security threat for us", said one housewife in Sayd Abad.[25] A more commonly mentioned reason in other communities was that, as insecurity rose, government agencies and NGOs withdrew from the area, and there were no projects to implement and therefore no reason for CDCs to continue with meetings. Respondents in the more insecure districts blamed the lack of projects on poor security conditions and repeatedly stated that the government should be focused on improving security over all other priorities. "The NSP should start first with security because without security nothing can be done in our area," said one respondent from Nerkh.[26]. Another CDC member from Sayd Abad agreed: "We need security more than financial support; if there is security in our area there will be a lot of work opportunities...In the past, our projects were interrupted by because of fighting in the area."[27]

When asked how CDCs had continued to operate in the presence of insurgent forces when the NSP was active, interviewees in four of the seven villages explained that their councils actively collaborated with insurgent forces and continue to do so. For example, community members in Nerkh explained that the Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami dominate village politics, with

[24]Interview, Farmer from Behsud I, 5 December 2016
[25]Interview, Housewife from Sayd Abad District, 4 December 2016.
[26]Interview, Driver from Nerkh District, 7 December 2016.
[27]Interview, CDC Member from Sayd Abad, 4 December 2016.

the latter operating checkpoints in the immediate area of the village and the Taliban operating checkpoints in an adjacent area. According to respondents, these two groups are the most important local political actors and can influence how resources are spent, including NGO funds. Similarly, multiple respondents in Jaghatu openly stated that their CDC members (also the traditional village elders) were cooperating with Taliban forces, and that Taliban insurgents took an active role in village politics. By contrast, the government had little to no presence or influence. While CDCs may continue playing a development role under these circumstances, they are clearly not functioning as a mechanism for furthering government legitimacy or transforming local politics in the manner intended. Instead, these dynamics demonstrate the weakness of institutional logics in the context of armed politics and the resilience of customary sources of authority at the village level. Under these conditions, CDC members see themselves and behave not as agents of the state but primarily as representatives of their local communities, with few upward ties or accountabilities.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study assesses the extent to which the NSP has achieved its developmental and institutional goals in Wardak province. From a developmental point of view, the findings show that the NSP has succeeded in providing access to infrastructure and services to people in the targeted communities, which have resulted in tangible economic benefits in the villages profiled. Although we find that these benefits are not necessarily enjoyed equally by every member of the community, there are more people who have access to infrastructure and services than prior to the NSP. Though our conclusions are limited to the villages included in the study, they are consistent with other evaluations in Afghanistan and elsewhere that have documented improvements in basic infrastructure and public welfare as a result of CDD programs. However, we did not find much evidence in support of the NSPs broader institutional goals, neither in terms of expanding their mandate beyond developmental activities nor in bridging local communities with state institutions. Participation in CDCs generally reflected local norms, with more conservative areas refusing to comply with mandates for female representation.

The findings offer a number of important theoretical and practical insights. First, the findings challenge theoretical assumptions linking CDD programs to transformational models of

statebuilding. While local councils established under the NSP performed reasonably well at their primary mandate of delivering development projects, there is scant evidence that their remits ever expanded, or that communities ever saw them as anything more than an institution to oversee the dispersion of aid. Furthermore, we observed that CDC members did not necessarily see themselves as affiliated with the state, and community members often differentiated between government institutions and CDCs. These findings cast doubt on whether CDD programs alone can work as an effective device to further government legitimacy and thus function as an effective counter-insurgency tool. It is notable that CDC members who were highly critical of the government and expressed a desire to cut ties with them still praised the NSP and signaled a willingness to continue accepting aid funds, indicating that active participation in the NSP is a poor proxy for popular sentiment about the government as a whole.

Another insight of this study is that many of the gains of the NSP appear to be fleeting. While much of the infrastructure created under the NSP is still intact, there is a distinct lack of clarity about the sustainability and long-term maintenance of this infrastructure. A few projects required maintenance or have fallen into disrepair. This is particularly the case in more insecure districts, where development projects have mostly ceased and government activities are almost completely absent. This finding has methodological implications for how CDD programs are evaluated. Most evaluations are completed shortly after the completion of the program and rarely set aside funds to evaluate medium to long-term effects. But the results raise questions about the durability of both developmental outcomes and institutional achievements in the long term. Furthermore, setting expectations for the provision of public goods without a sustainable plan to maintain them may have the ultimate effect of creating negative goodwill against the government if those goods ultimately fail. Future evaluations should seek to measure impact over a longer-term period, particularly in violent contexts where government control is constantly in flux.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this study concurs with other evidence that CDDs can serve as a relatively effective mechanism for development spending, even in areas beset by insurgency. However, it is increasingly questionable whether a CDD program, highly dependent on the distribution of aid, can genuinely function as a mechanism for expanding state authority in highly insecure areas. The evidence presented here suggests that the underlying institutional

assumptions are perhaps too ambitious, at least within a limited timeframe. While public goods delivery may weakly translate into temporary boosts of higher trust in government institutions, we found that opinions about the government were more strongly determined by other issues, chiefly local interactions with security forces and the perceived ability of the government to keep communities safe. Theoretical frameworks in violent contexts should therefore take into account that there appears to be a hierarchy of public goods in terms of fostering state-society relations, with security and well-functioning mechanisms for dispute resolution a higher priority than infrastructure and other public services. We suggest theoretical frameworks include more specific outcomes on governance, with more clarity on how success in this domain can be measured. Practically speaking, implementers should seek to integrate CDD programs within sustainable frameworks for public service delivery, while downgrading expectations about their potential for institutional transformation in highly insecure contexts.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this thesis I have sought to illuminate how the legacy of armed politics in Afghanistan set the stage for the resurgence of the Taliban post-2001. The findings contribute to our understanding of the subnational dynamics of political violence, and add nuance to current research on civil war, counter-terrorism, and aid effectiveness.

Since 2001, hundreds of thousands of foreign soldiers have been deployed to help stabilize the Afghan government, along with billions of dollars of foreign aid. At the outset of this project, I sought to understand how the Taliban insurgency was able to expand into regions outside of its southern Pashtun base against a significantly better funded and equipped government, and why some government-controlled areas were better able to cope with insurgent threats than others. I also explored why the distribution of aid by the government and its international backers proved so ineffective as a counter-insurgency strategy.

The three chapters of this thesis provide insights on these questions. In the sections below, I summarize the findings and major contributions of each chapter, discuss the limitations of this body of research, and consider its major implications, both from theoretical and policy perspectives.

Summary of Findings

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is provided in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I examine the variation in insurgent violence since 2001 between two provinces in northern Afghanistan: Balkh and Kunduz. I begin by outlining the pre-civil war history of the region, covering the rise of armed factions during and after the Soviet invasion. I argue that this context is crucial for understanding how the Taliban were able to re-enter the region post-2001. In

Kunduz, extreme fragmentation amongst various armed factions led to frequent outbreaks of low-level violence and abuses against civilians. As a result, grievances proliferated within the population against local commanders and government security forces. When the Taliban began re-infiltrating the region around 2006, they deftly exploited these grievances and presented themselves as an alternative source of authority that could offer more protection to civilians than the government. Once they gained a few safe havens in the province, they steadily expanded their territory until they became strong enough to threated the entire province. Fragmentation amongst armed elites prevented the local government from coordinating effectively against the Taliban, ultimately undermining counter-insurgency efforts.

In neighbouring Balkh, by contrast, elite fragmentation is relatively low, and armed factions are dominated by a single faction headed by the province's longtime former governor. The relative unity of security forces and the ability of the governor to hold local security units accountable helped keep local grievances relatively low. This provided fewer opportunities for Taliban forces to infiltrate the province, and enabled the provincial government to respond more effectively to insurgent attacks. Similar patterns can be observed in Kandahar, where security improved as the provincial leadership became more consolidated.

The theoretical framework presented in this thesis provide a more convincing explanation for variations in insurgent violence than models that emphasize ethnic grievances or opportunistic alliance-switching alone. It helps explain conditions under which alliance-switching becomes more likely, while incorporating grievance-based explanations for why individuals and communities may opt to support Taliban forces. This model offers a more sophisticated view of what, at first blush, appears to be simply an ethnically-driven conflict. While ethnic cleavages are salient in this region, I argue that fragmentation within security forces is an important and understudied variable that should be incorporated into civil war logics.

The chapter also offers insights into how fragmentation amongst elites occurs and sustains itself. I argue that elite fragmentation is largely driven by relationships between armed factions and higher-level patrons, be it individuals or factions within the central government, international supporters, or both. The case of Kunduz demonstrates how cleavages within the central government replicate themselves in local areas, with competing factions in the centre maintaining particular networks and jockeying to install their own agents in positions of influence. The

presence of international forces creates additional dependencies between armed factions and military forces, typically resulting in strengthening local armed factions. In Balkh, Governor Atta was able to convince a large number of powerful patrons of his reliability, thus allowing him to consolidate his power within the province. This created positive path dependencies within the province, where the relatively stable security situation produced additional confidence and higher levels of support. However, this equilibrium has proved difficult to maintain. Tensions between Atta and the central government have been ongoing for years, and while Ghani's administration successfully convinced Atta to resign as governor, it precipitated a serious political crisis that veered dangerously close to violence (Mashal, 2018).

The theory presented above rests on the assumption that the influence of armed factions is unwanted in local communities. An alternative hypothesis is that this influence exists because there is a demand for these factions in insecure contexts, based on previous studies indicating that exposure to violence produces stronger preferences for leaders with masculine and/or authoritarian characteristics (Doty et al., 1991; Feldman and Stenner, 1997; Re et al., 2013). In Chapter 3, I showed evidence from a conjoint experiment from three provinces in Northern Afghanistan testing what kind of leadership characteristics are most valued amongst the public. I find that, contrary to widespread beliefs, Afghans living in this region prefer younger, university-educated leaders over leaders with military experience or religious education. These preferences remained robust between insecure and secure provinces, and raising the salience of insecurity with a vignette did not substantively alter the findings. The results challenge prevailing literature about the effects of violence on voting behavior, and provides additional support to the findings in Chapter 2, which suggest that armed groups are deeply unpopular in local communities and contribute to the proliferation of grievances within the civilian population.

Finally, Chapter 4 explores why efforts to address these grievances through the distribution of aid have been ineffective. Since 2001, the Afghan government and international donors have funneled large amounts of money into community-driven development programs such as the long-running National Solidarity Program (NSP) in order to rapidly deliver development projects to rural communities and strengthen ties between the government and villages. This paper tested the theoretical assumptions underpinning these programs by exploring the legacy

of how the NSP fared in the highly insecure province of Wardak. The results revealed that, while the program was reasonably successful at delivering small-scale infrastructure, it had negligible effects on transforming local governance or improving relationships between the government and local communities. Instead, evidence collected from Wardak suggests that public opinion about the government is predominantly determined by the nature of their interactions with security forces, and furthermore that local councils established under the NSP were more likely to collaborate with Taliban forces than with the government in highly insecure areas. The results challenge counter-insurgency assumptions about the likelihood of winning hearts and minds through aid, and support evidence that the positive effects of aid on contributing to trust diminish as violence increases (Beath et al., 2015).

Limitations

The conclusions above are subject to a number of limitations. First and foremost, the security context of Afghanistan posed significant challenges to fieldwork and data collection. Access to contested areas was extremely difficult, and in many cases I was unable to personally travel to data collection sites as much as I would have liked. This was particularly the case for research in Kunduz, where I conducted many of the interviews with residents by Skype or met with them in person in Kabul or Mazar-e-Sharif. Similarly, the data from Wardak was collected exclusively by Afghan research assistants from the area, as travel to the area for non-locals has become exceedingly dangerous in recent years. While the Afghan research assistants who contributed to this project did a superb job, my ability to validate the data in person was unfortunately limited by restrictions on travel. Additionally, the opinions of civilians living in inaccessible areas are represented in this thesis to a very limited extent, as are the perspectives of insurgents currently engaged in fighting. Throughout the project, I relied on the knowledge and guidance of local researchers and security experts to make judgments on travel and sampling point selection. These factors have undoubtedly biased the results towards those living in safer and more accessible areas. Below, I discuss major limitations specific to each chapter.

Chapter 2

The model presented in this chapter was developed inductively, using Afghanistan as a

case study. This methodology has many advantages, most notably in generating theoretical innovations that can subsequently be tested using a more deductive approach (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). However, there are pitfalls to this approach as well, most notably in the falsifiability and generalizability of the proposed theory.

I briefly discussed these issues in Chapter 2. I considered alternative explanations for the outbreak of civil war in northern Afghanistan, particularly the existence of ethnic grievances, a predominant explanation for persistent political violence in the region. While ethnic grievances are certainly present, I argued that this explanation insufficiently accounted for subnational variation in violence and the opportunistic behavior of armed groups. I believe the theory presented here is superior to alternative theories in combining these two paradigms to explain dynamics of civil war in Afghanistan.

With regards to generalizability, I acknowledge that the evidence presented in the paper is mainly applicable to the Afghan context. However, I briefly cited evidence that showed similar patterns of violence elsewhere. While more theory-testing and refinement is undoubtedly needed, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the causal logics described in the chapter are likely to appear in other contexts. One potential caveat is that the theory is most applicable to countries that have a long legacy of armed conflict. Under these conditions, specialists in violence are more likely to become predominant political actors. However, it is also evident that armed politics has quickly spread after the outbreak of war in previously stable Syria, to cite one example; therefore it may not take very long for similar conditions to emerge soon after political order breaks down.

Finally, the semi-structured interviews completed for this chapter were conducted mainly through snowball sampling, the starting point being my own personal contacts. As a result, there is a considerable risk of respondents being excessively comprised of Afghans comfortable speaking with foreigners (particularly foreign women) and having some contacts within government bodies, international organizations and/or elite, highly-educated Afghans. However, the accounts I collected generally corresponded with findings from other sources in Afghanistan, including journalistic accounts, grey literature, and the opinions of experts and analysts with long experience in the country. I am therefore reasonably confident that, while there are undoubtedly omissions and errors in the data, the general conclusions remain compelling.

Chapter 3

As discussed in Chapter 3, issues with poor security and a lack of reliable census data in Afghanistan constrained my ability to conduct rigorous probability sampling for the quantitative survey. While I tried to collect samples that captured as representative a sample as possible in areas that were accessible, the sample should not be considered as representative of the population living within the three provinces where the survey was administered. Additionally, I was only able to find systematic data on security conditions at the provincial level. While I did collect qualitative reports that described security conditions at sub-provincial levels, I was unable to obtain reliable quantitative data about violence at a more granular level that was comparable between the three provinces. While data on violent clashes between insurgents and government forces may not capture everyday incidences of violence against civilians as described by Debos (2016), such data may have provided an additional level of analysis to apply to the sample. However, given the relative consistency of the results across different subgroups, it is unlikely that sub-provincial data on violence would have substantively affected the main findings.

Due to the relatively high cost of conducting research in Afghanistan, I could only afford to collect quantitative research in a single region in the north. It would have been illuminating to conduct comparative research elsewhere in the country, particularly in southern Pashtun-dominated areas. While similar preferences exist in the south, there are also significant cultural differences between the region and the rest of Afghanistan. Replicating the conjoint experiment at a nationwide level—and potentially other similar contexts where armed politics is dominant—would produce more confidence in the results. I am currently seeking funds to replicate and expand the survey to other parts of Afghanistan.

Finally, future research could add further nuance to the conjoint methodology by testing for leadership preferences in different roles and at different levels of government. Respondents may prefer particular characteristics in a president than they would in a district governor, for example. I made a deliberate choice not to specify the type of leadership role because I feared that it would lead respondents to imagine the current incumbent, and therefore bias respondent choices. However, alternative experimental designs could incorporate modified designs to test the extent to which specific information about positions impacts respondent preferences.

Chapter 4

High levels of insecurity in Wardak meant that many potential sampling points in the province had to be removed, limiting the generalizability of the findings in Chapter 4. It would have been preferable to visit a larger number of sampling points and to select the points more systematically, but as there was only a small amount of funding to conduct the research and the data collection had to be done by a team of local research assistants, it was not possible to do more. Security restrictions limited the amount of time research assistants could spend in each location, which hampered the ability of researchers to build trust with respondents and elicit more forthright responses. For this reason, research assistants called back a selection of interviewees a month later to reconfirm the findings and hold a follow-up discussion about the same issues. At times, these callbacks yielded interesting findings: for example, one interviewee spoke frankly over the phone about links between local council members and the Taliban in his village, which he was reluctant to do in person.[1]

One limitation I anticipated would be more significant was the potential for recall bias with respect to past projects. The interviews concerned the long-term legacy of the NSP over a period of 13 years; as such, respondents may not have accurately recalled projects being constructed in their villages many years ago. However, this did not turn out to be as much an issue as I anticipated, as there was a high degree of consistency in responses between different interviewees in the same location. In all cases, it seemed as though NSP projects were quite high profile and were remembered with a fair degree of accuracy. However, it was more difficult to measure the effect of the NSP on transformative governance after the fact, particularly their impact on trust in government. Current theoretical frameworks on community-driven development lack common and well-defined indicators to measure desired outcomes on governance that can be compared across contexts. As pointed out in the conclusion of the chapter, these frameworks are in need of further refinement.

Additionally, the results of past evaluations suggest that positive effects on aid are likely to be fleeting unless aid is delivered on a regular basis. Because block grants for infrastructure projects delivered under the NSP are delivered on an ad-hoc basis every few years, I am cognizant of the dangers of using this case to draw firm conclusions as to the relationship between service delivery and positive effects on state-society relations. It is possible that aid programs

[1]Community member from Jaghatu, Jan 2017, Phone Interview [Note: Precise date unrecorded]

integrated into normal government service programs, delivered on a regular basis, would show more consistent positive effects. As evaluations in this vein have only been undertaken in the last decade, it is clear that much more data is required to test these frameworks, including rigorous panel data on large scale community-driven development programs to complement qualitative case studies, particularly in insecure areas.

Finally, while the findings from this chapter cannot be generalized beyond specific areas of Wardak province, they do compliment a growing body of evidence casting doubt on the transformational promise of community-driven development, both in other provinces of Afghanistan and in other countries. In particular, the evidence suggests that positive effects of aid wane as insecurity increases, a finding that challenges fundamental assumptions in the counter-insurgency literature. It is worth noting that very few studies to date have been conducted in highly insecure contexts, and that the study makes a unique contribution to understanding how local councils formed under CDD adapt as security deteriorates. However, we need more evidence from a multitude of contexts in order to validate these conclusions.

Implications

Finally, I wish to reflect on some of the wider implications of this thesis, both in terms of theory and policy. At the time of writing, the war in Afghanistan—now the longest foreign war in America's history—continues with no end in sight (Astore, 2017). As of August 2018, coalition military forces in Afghanistan have suffered over 3,500 fatalities since 2001,[2] and casualties on the Afghan side were estimated to be as high as 111,000 between 2001 and 2016, including soldiers, civilians, and militants.[3] This findings in this thesis contribute to our understanding of why civil war in Afghanistan continues to persist, and suggest how this tremendous loss of life might have been avoided.

Theoretical Implications

The theory presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis contributes to contemporary theories of civil war by combining grievance and opportunistic paradigms into a single causal mechanism. It builds on insights from work by scholars such as Christia (2012), who have persuasively

[2]icasualties.org, http://icasualties.org/oef/, accessed 4 September 2018.

[3]This estimate is only accurate up to August 2016 (Crawford, 2016). Civilian casualties in the two years since have remained close to record-high levels (Janjua, 2018).

documented the phenomena of alliance switching and elite fragmentation in Afghanistan and elsewhere. I link these observations to the grievance literature by demonstrating how excessive fragmentation contributes to higher levels of civilian abuse, making communities more likely to seek protection from insurgents. I argue that bridging these two theoretical schools offers a more persuasive explanation for subnational variations in violence during civil wars. While the theory requires additional testing, it is a step forward in understanding dynamics of civil war in contexts where armed political actors play a dominant role.

Most previous work on civil war onset, particularly large-n studies, tends to group all cases together to look for commonalities. However, the evidence presented here highlights the important role that armed political actors played in the resurgence of conflict, themselves a legacy of previous wars. In the case of Afghanistan, variables that are normally associated with greater stability—economic growth and external aid, to name two examples—were ineffective at stemming civil war and may have even fueled it, insofar as it led to greater competition and fragmentation between elites. One implication of this work is that civil war onset in countries like Afghanistan with a history of long-drawn conflict may have distinct causal mechanisms compared to countries that had been previously peaceful and where states enjoyed a relatively strong monopoly of violence. Indeed, the case of Afghanistan suggests that civil war outbreak in the latter may be more driven by ideology or social change—as evident in the Soviet-Afghan war—whereas later breakdowns in authority appear to be more opportunistically driven. One possibility that the influence of opportunistic actors grows as war drags on, as those without strong ideological convictions are better able to survive and thrive under different political regimes. Future research could explore these propositions in greater depth.

The conjoint experiment in Chapter 3 also holds implications for existing literature on how violence affects voter behavior. Generally, the prevailing view in the literature is that exposure to violence increases voter preferences for more militaristic/masculine and authoritarian leaders. The findings here indicate that other factors, particularly higher education, are a higher priority for voters. One explanation might also be the case that where voters are exposed to the everyday violence of armed commanders, their preferences for more technocratic models of leadership increases. Few conjoint experiments have been conducted in civil war contexts to date; this chapter points to the wealth of compelling findings that can be unearthed in these

contexts through this methodology, and how experimental methods can be used to understand voter behavior in countries where electoral data is rare and/or highly fraudulent.

Finally, both Chapters 2 and 4 have implications for literature on statebuilding and aid effectiveness in conflict-affected settings. The major implication of the findings in these chapters is that, while foreign aid has may have positively contributed to economic growth, it has not produced expected gains in stabilization or legitimacy. The results suggest that the predominance of armed actors in Afghan politics is one explanatory factor for why these gains have not materialized. Because these actors control security and access to particular regions, they are able to redirect funds for private gain, thus undermining the ability of the state to control them. It is also clear that assumptions in the counter-insurgency literature about how aid can be used for the purposes of winning hearts and minds are far too simplistic. More sophisticated research on how violence mitigates positive effects of aid, both in terms of theory building and evaluation, is clearly necessary.

Policy Implications

This thesis drew substantially from the knowledge and experience of a wide variety of professionals who have been engaged in Afghanistan for years, including aid workers, researchers, journalists, civil servants, diplomats, political activists, and soldiers. Over the course of many conversations with these individuals, a number of policy insights were frequently repeated. While many of these insights are still up for debate, these lessons are relevant for the current conflict in Afghanistan and future engagements in similar contexts.

Seventeen years into the war, it is obvious that the original international mission to root out terrorism and facilitate a stable post-conflict transition to democracy in Afghanistan has been a catastrophic failure. The reasons for this are still being debated. One explanation, popular with President Obama and many in his administration, was that the U.S. had "taken its eye off the ball in Afghanistan" when it invaded Iraq in 2003, and consequently had provided an insufficient amount of support to stabilize the country (Hastings, 2009). Many respondents I spoke with suggested that there is some truth to this, particularly in the degree to which coalition forces underestimated the ability of the Taliban and Al Qaida to reconstitute themselves into a serious threat from its safe havens in Pakistan. And yet, the Afghan surge that took place after Obama took office—including massive increases in foreign aid and military support—only seemed to

make things worse. As shown in Chapter 2, security in Kunduz deteriorated significantly during the surge, as it did in many other parts of the country.

The evidence presented in this thesis suggest that the failure of the international mission was not due to insufficient support, but was more a question of fundamental flaws in the way support was provided. The international community had a very poor understanding of micro political dynamics when it entered Afghanistan in 2001, particularly concerning the agendas of armed political actors and their relationship with local communities. Coalition forces often made poorly-considered alliances with violent entrepreneurs for counter-terrorism purposes without realizing the degree to which these entrepreneurs would use their positions to capture massive amounts of wealth and power, thus undermining the authority of the central government they were ostensibly trying to support. This contributed to factionalization between groups, as local commanders violently competed against each other for influence and territory, exacerbating grievances in the population. Importantly, these dynamics penetrated the formal government at all levels, as many of them also held official positions or had links with those who did.

In this environment, it is unlikely that simply pumping higher levels of aid into the country would have addressed these fundamental problems. Regular audits by the congressionally appointed U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) contain mind-boggling accounts of corruption in the aid sector; in a recent letter to congress, SIGAR estimated that at least $15.5 billion of U.S. aid to Afghanistan has been wasted between 2008 and 2017 (Sopko, 2018). Even relatively successful programs like the NSP, while successful at delivering small-scale infrastructure, failed to address core priorities for local governance: safeguarding security and predictability in the daily lives of citizens. After coming out of one meeting in which the interviewee described a number of ways security forces in his area were skimming funds off local aid projects, I turned to my research assistant and shook my head. "Too much aid, too fast", I said. "And to the wrong people," he replied. "And now, you can't get them out."

A lesson for policymakers engaging in contexts dominated by armed politics is to exercise a much higher degree of caution and skepticism when engaging with local actors on counter-terrorism, particularly when providing them material support. While it may at times be prudent to provide funding or training to local allies to improve their capacity to keep the peace,

there is a moral hazard inherent to that arrangement: if would-be proxies understand that aid is contingent on the presence of insurgent threats, eliminating these threats becomes contrary to their self-interest. As Chapter 3 suggests, the presumed legitimacy of these individuals may be overstated. Additionally, policymakers should place greater controls over the distribution of aid in these contexts, and recognize that aid is less likely to be effective in areas experiencing extreme levels of violence. Attempting to 'win hearts and minds' of those living in contested areas with quick injections of aid is unlikely to work; efforts would be better concentrated on facilitating the development of sustainable and well-functioning public services in areas under government control, while addressing fundamental concerns about local security and injustice—above all prioritizing the protection of civilians from pro- and anti-government groups alike—in highly contested areas.

Given the long legacy of war in Afghanistan and the predominance of armed politics, was the resurgence of the Taliban inevitable? Was the intervention in Afghanistan doomed to fail from the moment the first coalition forces landed in 2001? While it is impossible to know for certain, the brief moment of relative peace and optimism that spread throughout the country in the early 2000s suggests that other outcomes might have been possible. Engaging with and co-opting local warlords was perhaps a reasonable short-term calculation: it is likely that government officials and the international community believed it would buy enough time and stability for a new generation of leaders to emerge. But these bargains carried long-term costs. Nearly two decades after the establishment of the post-Taliban government, the arbitrary rule of armed politics continues to dominate most areas of the country, and the government is more preoccupied than ever with the question of how to manage powerful strongmen and their sub-commanders. Decisions to accommodate them might have seemed logical, even necessary, in the years immediately following 2001. From this vantage point, ensnared in an endless war, with many regions on the brink of collapse, it is difficult to imagine how things could have turned out worse.


MARGULIES
VIETNAM
IRAQ
AFGHANISTAN
The definition of insanity is...
...doing the same thing over and over...
...and expecting a different result.

Chapter 6

Supplementary Information: Voter Preferences in Violent Contexts: Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan

Appendix A: Survey Details

I. Security Assessment

Survey data was collected in three provinces in Northern Afghanistan: Balkh, Saripul and Kunduz. For this survey, I classified Balkh province as relatively secure, Saripul as moderately insecure, and Kunduz as highly insecure based on assessments of security conditions in mid-2016. I relied primarily on an European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Security Assessment from January 2016 (EASO, 2016a) and its November 2016 update (EASO, 2016b), along with qualitative interviews and discussions with data collection managers living in each province. These objective assessments were complemented with perception data from an annual *Asia Foundation State of the Afghan People* survey, which includes the following question: *How often do you fear for your own personal safety or security or for that of your family these days?* Security conditions in each province are detailed below.

Balkh: Relatively Secure

According to the January 2016 EASO report, Balkh experienced 226 security incidents in the first 8 months of 2015, of which 81 were armed confrontations and 26 were explosions.[1] The

[1]The report also tracks other types of security incidents, such as individually-targeted attacks, security enforcement, and non-conflict related incidents. I considered armed confrontations and explosions in the assessment as the most relevant indicators for insurgent-related insecurity.

assessment quoted a report referring to Balkh as "northern Afghanistan's most secure province" and described the capital, Mazar-e-Sharif, as "one of the safest cities of Afghanistan, much more so than Kabul" (EASO, 2016a, pg. 145). While the November 2016 update noted an uptick in security incidents between September 2015 and May 2016, security forces in the province were capable of mounting an effective response in some areas (EASO, 2016b). Responses from the Asia Foundation Survey confirmed Balkh's relative security; 41.23% of respondents said that they never or rarely worried about their own or their family's safety or security (Asia Foundation, 2017).

Saripul: Moderately Insecure

According to the January EASO report, Saripul experienced 129 security incidents in the first 8 months of 2015, including 90 armed confrontations and 11 explosions. Despite the fact that Saripul had fewer overall security incidents compared to Balkh, it has a much smaller population (just over half a million, compared to approximately 1.3 million in Balkh) and therefore its per-capita incident rate is higher. Furthermore, security conditions in the province were described as having "deteriorated over the past two years" with a growing number of villages controlled by Taliban forces (EASO, 2016a, pg. 154). The November 2016 report confirmed that conditions have continued to worsen throughout the province in the first months of 2016, with security forces appearing "helpless" in the face of the growing insurgency (EASO, 2016b, pg. 157). In the Asia Foundation survey, 33.2% of Saripul residents reported that they never or rarely worried about their own or their family's safety or security over a 5-year period (Asia Foundation, 2017).

Kunduz: Highly Insecure

According to the January 2016 EASO report, Kunduz experienced 462 separate security incidents in the first 8 months of 2015, including 291 armed confrontations and 69 explosions. The report described the security situation in Kunduz as "very unstable" and outlined in detail the worsening security situation, including the collapse of the provincial capital for a brief period in September 2015 (EASO, 2016a, pg. 122). The November 2016 update described continued fighting on the outskirts of Kunduz City over the spring and summer of 2016. Many districts continue to be close to collapse, and the provincial capital remains under significant threat from insurgents (EASO, 2016b). In the Asia Foundation survey, only 10.6% of Kunduz respondents

reported that they never or rarely worried for their personal or their family's security over a 5-year period (Asia Foundation, 2017).

II. Full Text of Vignettes

The vignettes are based on genuine reports/news stories about conditions in Afghanistan, but no attributions were included to avoid influencing the results. Vignettes were read aloud to all respondents by enumerators.

Treatment Vignette: Insecurity

> *Now I'm going to read you a short piece of information about Afghanistan. The past year (2015-1394) is believed to have been the most difficult year for Afghanistan in terms of insecurity since 2001. Last year, the level of civilian casualties rose to unprecedented levels. Officials recently implored 'those inflicting this pain on the people of Afghanistan to take concrete actions to protect civilians and to put a stop to the killing and maiming of civilians in 1395.'*

Control Vignette

> *Now I'm going to read you a short piece of information about Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a population of about 33 million people, making it the 41st largest country in the world. There are 34 provinces and nearly 400 districts in Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares a border with six different countries in Central and South Asia, including a 76km border with China. There are four major rivers in Afghanistan: the Amu Darya, the Hari River, the Kabul River, and the Helmand River.*

In addition to the two vignettes above, two other randomly-administered treatments were included in the study: one describing predatory corruption and one describing instances of nepotism. Neither yielded significant differences compared to the control group.

III. Sample: Additional Information

The sample was comprised of 2,485 respondents from the three provinces of Balkh, Saripul and Kunduz located in the Northern region of Afghanistan. Each respondent completed three rounds of the conjoint experiment, resulting in a total of 7,455 discrete candidate choices.

In each province we targeted approximately 800 respondents. A total of 80 sampling points were selected per province, and enumerators were given an approximate quota of 10 surveys per sampling point: half female and half male.[2] Sampling points were selected by random draw

[2]Male and female quotas were not always possible to fulfill, due to a shortage of respondents in some

from a list of accessible settlements in each of the three provinces.

Enumerators made contact with village elders and local officials to gain consent for the research before beginning data collection in each sampling point. Enumerators were instructed to begin at a central landmark in the town and sample every third house, using a random walk method. To account for local norms, enumerators worked in teams of male and female relatives, with males interviewing male respondents and females interviewing female respondents. In each household, adult participants were randomly selected using a Kish selection grid method. The cooperation rate for the survey was high (94.8%) and the non-contact rate low (4.1%), reducing the risk of potential sources of bias. I have not applied any post-stratification weights to the results presented below due to the fact that a formal census has not been conducted in Afghanistan since 1979 and there is consequently a lack of reliable auxiliary data with which to compare the sample.

IV. Average Marginal Component Effects

I used the *cjoint* package for R developed by Hainmueller et al. (2014) to calculate Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) and to evaluate interaction effects. Respondents participated in the conjoint experiment three times, evaluating a total of six profiles. Following the procedure described in Hainmueller et al. (2014), each of the independent variables — the candidate attributes, in this case — are included in a regression equation as dummy variables against a baseline attribute level.

The AMCE as estimated by the *cjoint* package represents the marginal effect of a single attribute level averaged over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes (Hainmueller et al., 2014). The resulting coefficient for each attribute level can be interpreted as the percentage point change between the baseline level and the attribute level of interest.

sampling points and the difficulty of finding people at home during daytime hours. Data collection was not possible during evening hours in many areas due to heightened security risks of traveling at night.

Appendix B: Robustness Checks

I. Comfort with Conjoint Question by Respondent Education

Given high illiteracy rates in Afghanistan[3], enumerators were trained to take extra care with illiterate respondents in explaining the conjoint experiment and assisting respondents in understanding the two profiles.

I also included an additional robustness check in the survey to assess the degree of difficulty respondents had with completing the conjoint experiment. Immediately after each survey was completed, asked survey enumerators to evaluate the level of difficulty respondents had with the conjoint experiment and the rest of the survey questions. The robustness check was phrased as follows:

Comfort with Conjoint Question

> *In your opinion, how comfortable was the interviewee in answering the conjoint question (comparing the leadership profiles)?*

Comfort with Overall Survey

> *In your opinion, how comfortable was the interviewee in answering the other questions?*

Enumerators were asked to rank respondents' level of comfort on a scale of 1 (Extremely Comfortable) to 5 (Extremely Uncomfortable).

I compared responses between respondents with no education (n=1245) with those who had completed primary school or higher (n=1240) to assess whether there were any major differences. As expected, respondents with no education reported slightly more difficulty with both the conjoint experiment and the overall survey than those with at least some education. However, even respondents with no education were able to complete the survey without much difficulty, and respondents with no education reportedly found the conjoint experiment only slightly harder than the rest of the survey.

Given the small magnitudes of difference between respondents with no education and some education and between completing the conjoint experiment and the rest of the survey, it is reasonable to conclude that most respondents were able to complete the conjoint experiment with the assistance of an enumerator and that results for non-educated respondents should be included in the sample.

[3]In 2015, only 38.2 percent of the Afghan population over 15 was estimated to be literate (CIA, 2017b). Literacy is particularly low amongst women (24.2 percent).

Table 6.1: Mean Respondent Comfort Levels As Reported by Enumerator

Education Level	Mean Rating Overall	Mean Rating Conjoint	n
No Education	1.75	1.81	1245
Some Education	1.50	1.59	1240

II. Candidate Evaluation Robustness Check

At the end of each round of the choice-based conjoint experiment, participants were asked to evaluate each of the two profiles on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates that a candidate is completely suitable and 5 indicates that a candidate is completely unsuitable.

I compared AMCEs between the choice-based and evaluation-based models. As shown in Figure 6.1 below, the overall results between the two models are very similar. As in the choice-based model, respondents express a preference for younger, university-educated leaders, and candidate ethnicity was also salient, while candidate place of birth was insignificant and private sector backgrounds were still undervalued compared to public sector (although donor agency employees were given a slight boost in the evaluation-based model). Interestingly, gender preference becomes statistically insignificant in the evaluation-based method compared to a preference for men in the choice-based model, suggesting that the insignificance of gender in the evaluation model may be to some extent driven by social desirability bias.

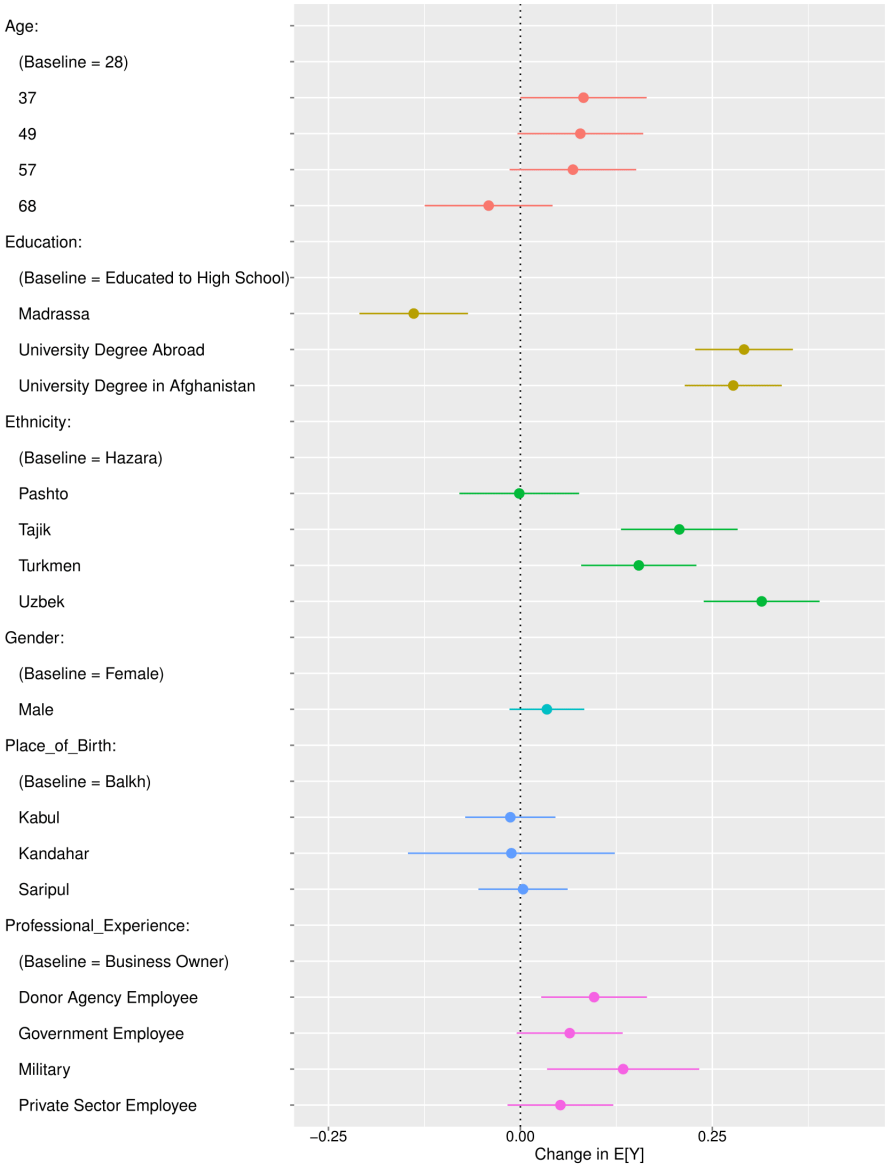
III. Comparison of Results Between Rounds

The results assume that there are no carryover effects between rounds. To verify this assumption hods, I compared results for Rounds 1, 2 and 3. As shown in Figure 6.2, results between rounds are quite similar, suggesting that there were few significant carryover effects between rounds.

IV. Manipulation Check for Treatment Vignette

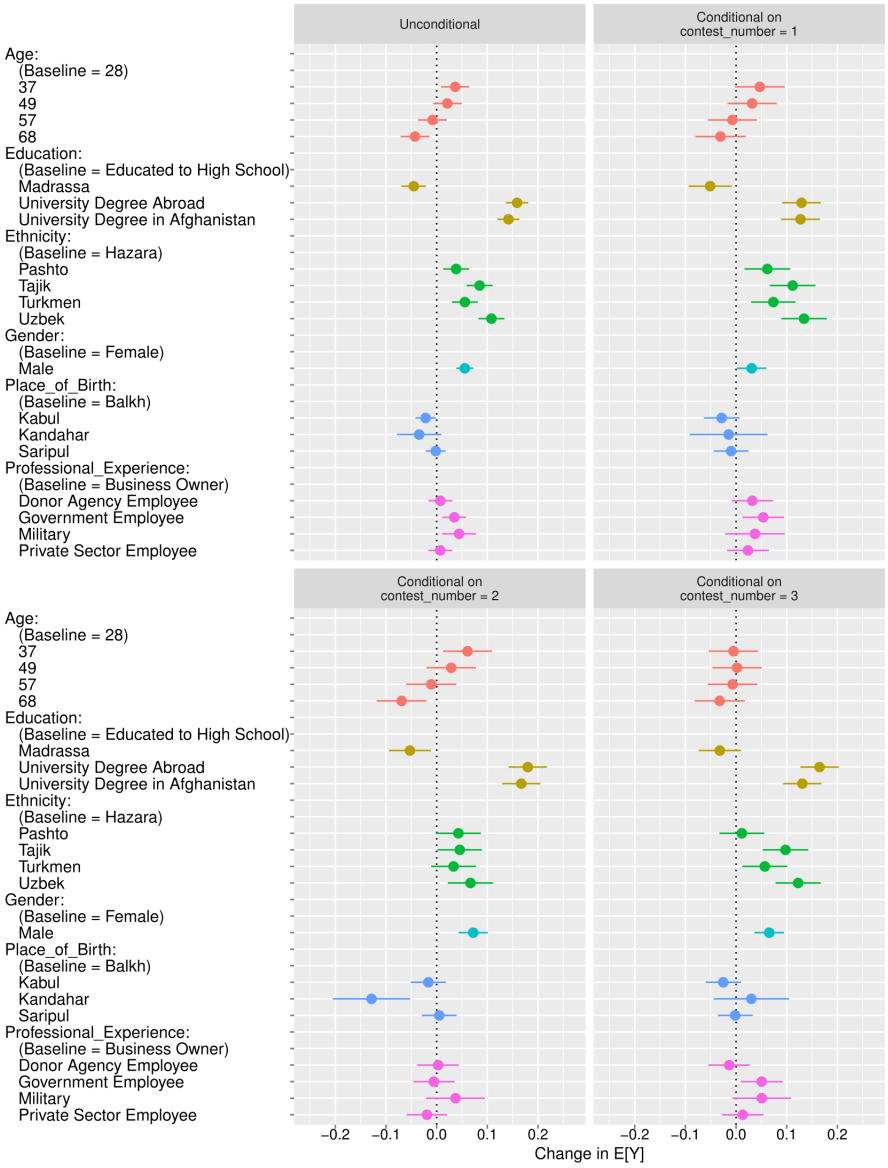
Immediately following the vignette experiment, the survey asked respondents one question about the information in the vignette to verify whether they understood its content. The vast majority of respondents who received the insecurity treatment (87 percent) answered correctly, indicating that the treatment vignette was understood by most respondents and can therefore

Figure 6.1: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Evaluated as a Suitable Leader



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being positively evaluated as a suitable leader on a scale of 1 to 5. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.2: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as a Preferred Leader by Conjoint Round

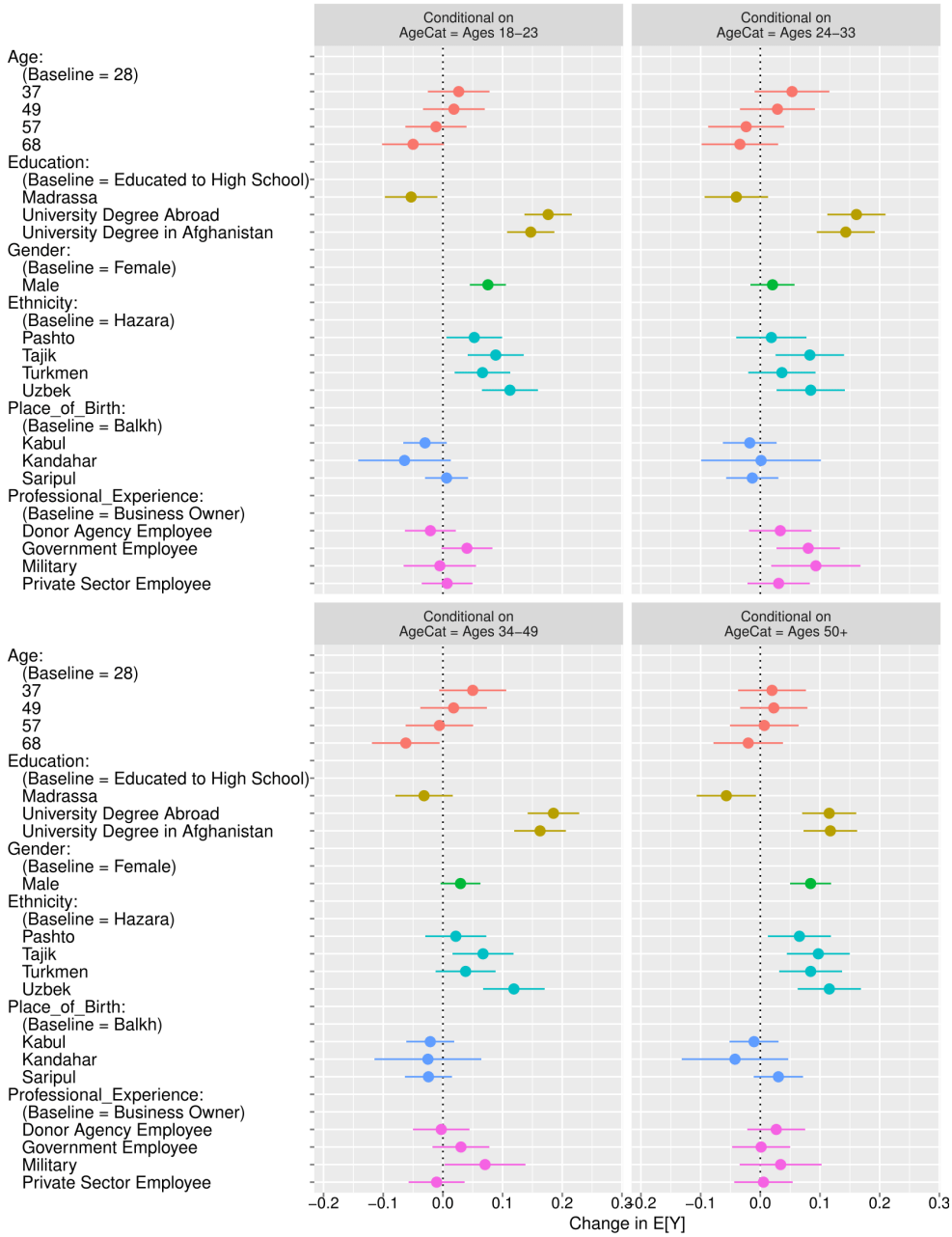


Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on vignette treatment received. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

be considered effective. Balance tests between treatment and control groups did not reveal significant differences for major variables of interest.

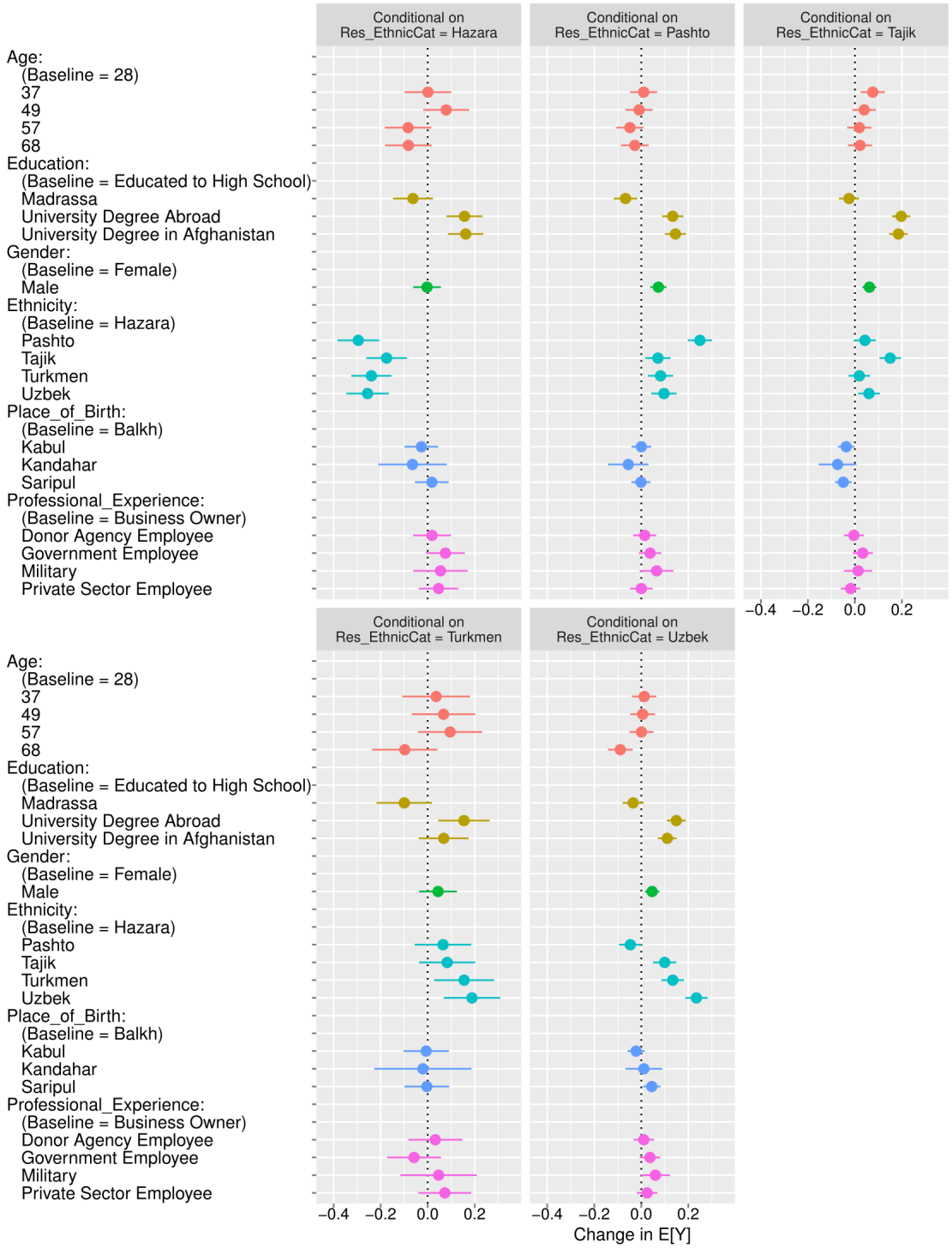
Appendix C: Subgroup Interaction Charts

Figure 6.3: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Age Group



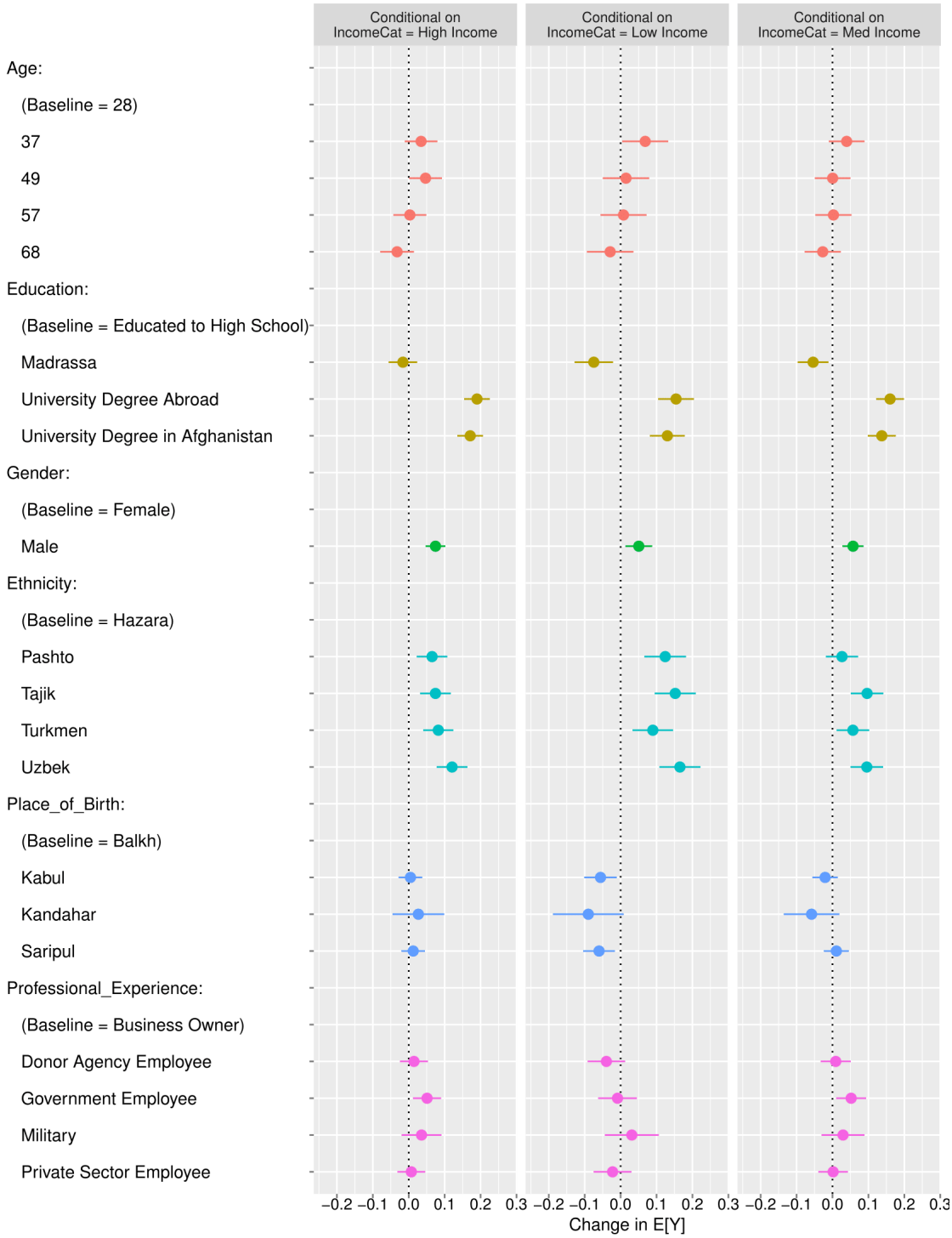
Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on age of the respondent. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.4: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Ethnicity



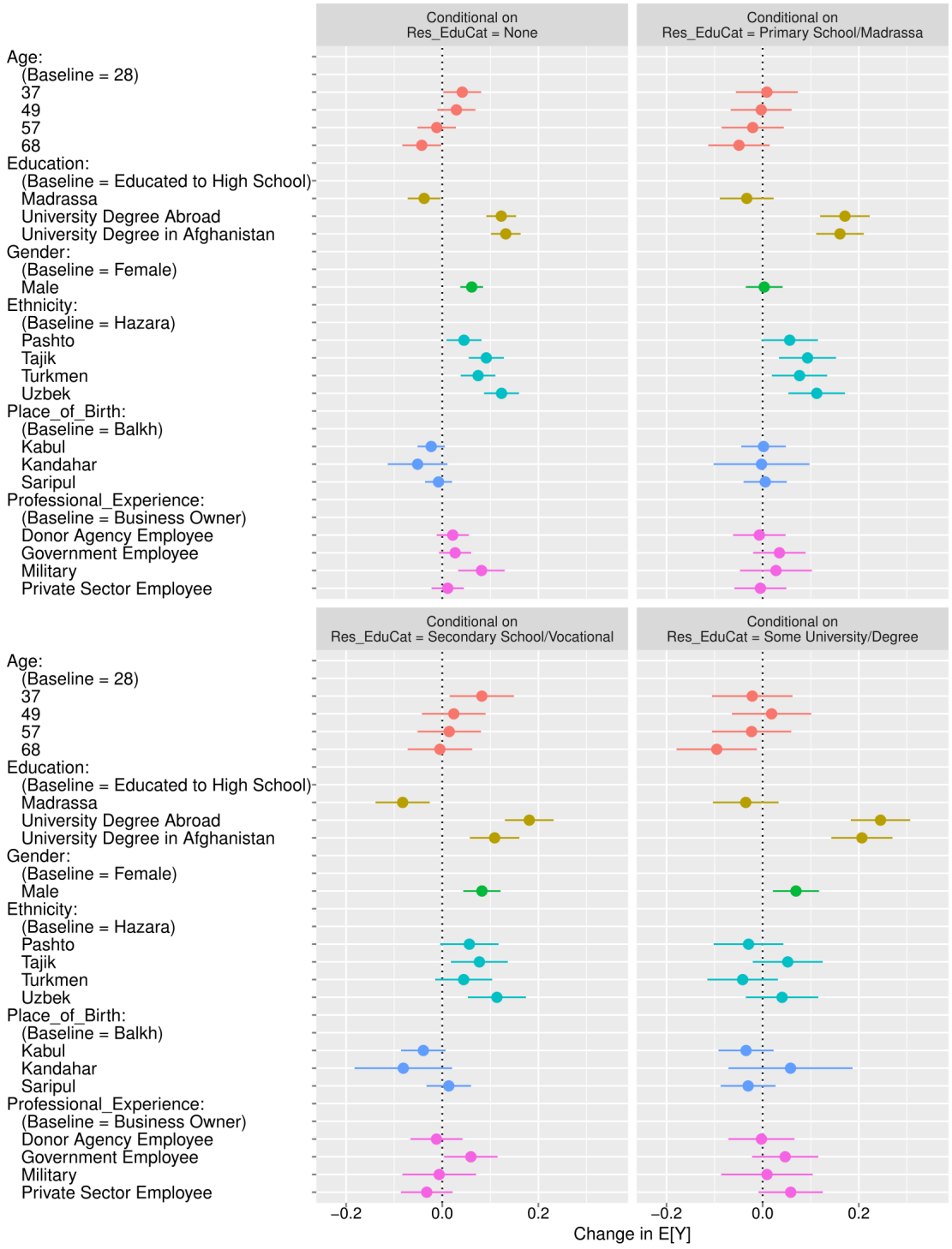
Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on respondent ethnicity. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.5: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Income Group



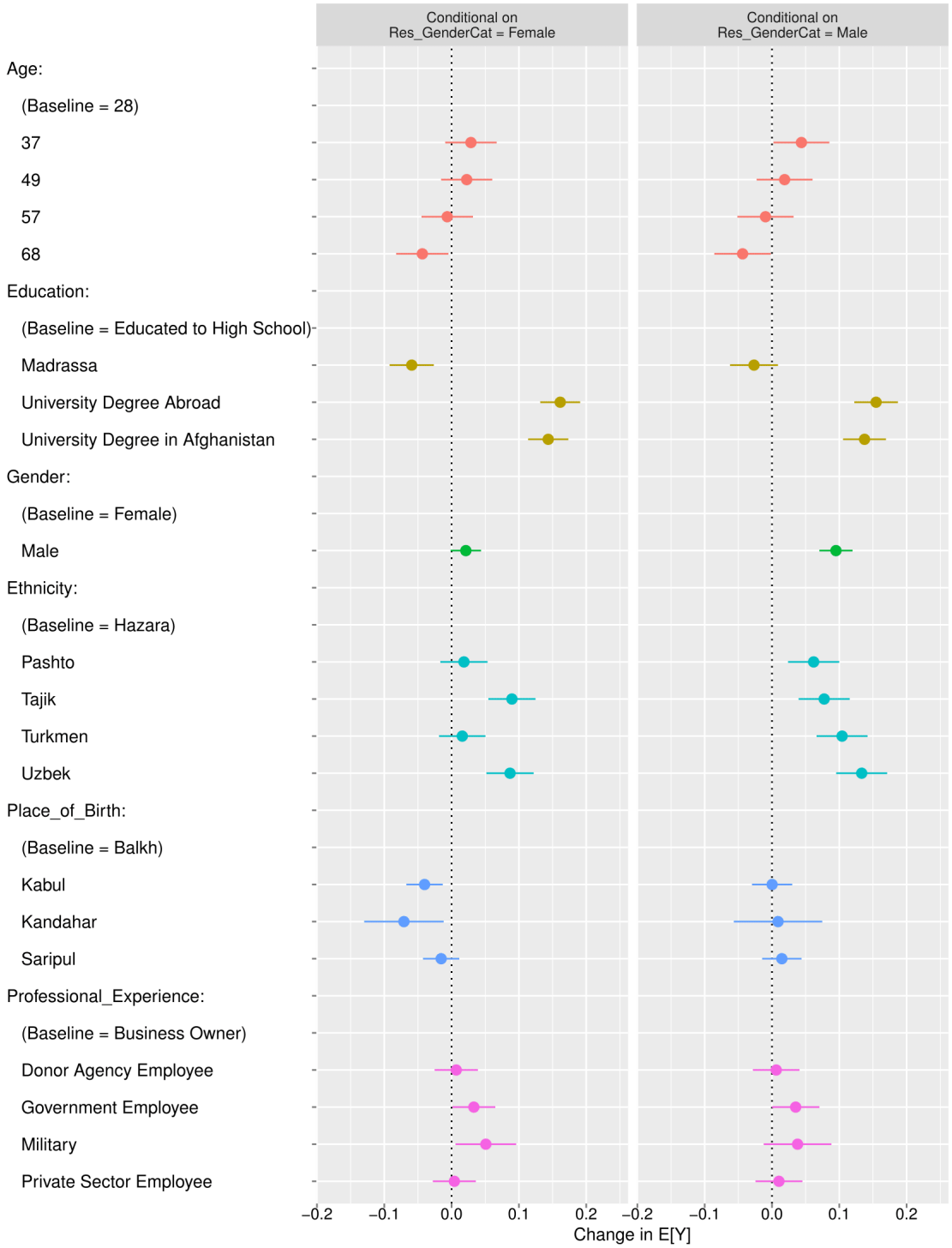
Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on income group of the respondent. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.6: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Education



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on respondent education levels. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 6.7: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Gender



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on the respondent's gender. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

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