WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS?: RE-EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF AID ON ATTITUDES IN AFGHANISTAN

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Declaration

I, Tabitha Poulter confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

In recent years, donors and governments have allocated substantial amounts of aid to conflict-affected communities in the hope that some of it will "win the hearts and minds" of the local population and reduce violence. The logic is that aid can help to foster more positive attitudes toward the government by providing valuable goods and services. The belief is that, in turn, the local population will be less likely to support the insurgency and to instead engage in cooperative behaviours that could reduce violence. For example, communities may no longer be willing to provide food, shelter, and other forms of support to insurgents; members of the community may be less likely to participate in violent insurgency; and communities may be more willing to share information with the government regarding the activities and whereabouts of insurgent groups.

The previous research on aid and "winning hearts and minds" has primarily studied this relationship using violence-related outcomes. Scholars have subsequently attributed any observed reduction in violence to winning hearts and minds without providing compelling evidence for this explanation beyond its compatibility with the data. This research project has therefore sought to overcome this limitation by re-investigating the hearts and minds mechanism using survey data from the conflict in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2013 as a most-likely case. Afghanistan represents a "most-likely" case for examining the winning hearts and minds given the substantial financial resources that were allocated via Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) and the longevity of its programme, spanning 12 years (2004 to 2016). The empirical results from this research demonstrate that, contrary to widespread belief, district–level aid is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. These results are robust to the inclusion of a number of relevant control variables, as well as alternative model specifications and variable measurements.

The findings of this dissertation is aligned with the research of a number of scholars who argue that aid not only fails to secure the "hearts and

minds" of local populations but may, in fact, promote violent insurgency. This body of research point to a limited consensus in the previous literature for the effect that aid has on winning hearts and minds, showcasing the complex relationship between aid and attitudes. I contend that much of the existing research on aid and counterinsurgency has inferred the success or failure of the "hearts and minds" approach primarily through violence-related outcomes, often interpreting reductions in conflict as evidence of improved civilian attitudes. However, such interpretations frequently rest on indirect inference rather than direct empirical validation. In response, this dissertation sought to address these limitations by re-examining the relationship between aid and local attitudes beyond violence-related outcomes alone, using the conflict in Afghanistan as a most-likely case through which to assess the broader validity of the "winning hearts and minds" hypothesis using attitudinal data from the Survey of the Afghan People (SoAP).

These results were obtained using a multilevel logistic regression, testing the effect of reconstruction aid on winning hearts and minds. Utilising three approaches to modelling, namely (1) a bivariate model between aid and attitudes toward government, (2) a model including the individual-level controls, and (3) a model which includes all individual– and district–level control variables, this research concluded that, across all three modelling approaches, the coefficient for aid is both negative and statistically significant. In other words, reconstruction aid is linked with a decrease in attitudes towards the government at the national, provincial and local levels. That is, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also less likely to report that the government is doing a good job. This is a result that is the complete opposite of what we would have expected to observe should the hearts and minds mechanism hold true for the conflict in Afghanistan.

From this research, a clearer picture of the complexity of the case of Afghanistan emerges, one that shows the complex relationships between the presence of international aid and reconstruction projects, and their effect on the perception of government by the Afghan population. My empirical research has found evidence against the notion that aid can help to win over hearts and minds in the context of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. This is a surprising result, as the mechanism itself has been a widely accepted and has informed attitudes across both academic and military fields. This includes the main guidance found in the "Commander's Guide to Money as a Weapons System", which describes how winning hearts and minds should become a military aim in order to facilitate defeating the insurgency.

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Acronyms

ACSOR	Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research
ACSP	Afghan Country Stability Picture
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
CIDNE	Combined Information Data Network Exchange
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
DoD	Department of Defense
ESOC	Empirical Studies of Conflict Project
FMR	Financial Management Regulation
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
MAAWS–A	Money as a Weapons System Afghanistan
MGRS	Military Grid Reference System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NSP	National Solidarity Program
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SoAP	Survey of the Afghan People
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USCENTCOM	Commander of U.S. Central Command

Chapter 1

Introduction

Civil conflict is unfortunately a pervasive phenomenon in today's world and has affected more than half of all nations since the end of the Second World War (Blattman and Miguel, 2010, pp. 3–4). When violent civil conflict breaks out, the local population becomes entangled in the conflict, often resulting in a substantial number of civilian casualties and people displaced, as well as the destruction of large amounts of physical infrastructure that are crucial for supporting this local population (Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

In recent years, donors and governments have allocated substantial amounts of aid to conflict-affected communities in the hope that some of it will "win the hearts and minds" of the local population and reduce violence. The logic is that aid can help to foster more positive attitudes toward the government by providing valuable goods and services (Williamson, 2011; Zürcher, 2017). The belief is that, in turn, the local population will be less likely to support the insurgency and to instead engage in cooperative behaviours that could reduce violence (Zürcher, 2019). For

example, communities may no longer be willing to provide food, shelter, and other forms of support to insurgents; members of the community may be less likely to participate in violent insurgency; and communities may be more willing to share information with the government regarding the activities and whereabouts of insurgent groups (Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013; Zürcher, 2017; Berman et al., 2011b).

The assumptions above are supported by several scholars, who argue that aid successfully increases a population's support for the government and reduces violent insurgency. For example, Berman et al. (2011b) find that small-scale reconstruction spending led to a substantial decline in violence against Coalition and Iraqi security forces in the years 2003 to 2008. Beath et al. (2012) and Sexton (2016) find that aid had a violence-reducing effect in Afghanistan, but only when projects are implemented in relatively secure regions. In regions with higher levels of instability, the authors of these studies actually observe that aid leads to an increase in violent insurgency.

On the other hand, a number of scholars, such as Crost et al. (2014), Child (2019), and Weintraub (2016) argue that aid not only fails to win over the hearts and minds of the local population, but instead promotes violent insurgency. My argument for this somewhat surprising conclusion is that previous research on the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds has predominantly studied this relationship using violence-related outcomes. Subsequently, scholars have attributed any observed reduction in violence to "winning hearts and minds" without providing strong evidence for this explanation beyond its compatibility with the data.

This dissertation therefore seeks to overcome some of the key limitations in the previous research by re-examining the impact of aid on hearts and minds by using the conflict in Afghanistan as a "most-likely" case. In doing so, this study combines individual–level (Level 1) public opinion data from the Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People" (SoAP), with district–level (Level 2) data on reconstruction aid from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). From the SoAP, information is obtained on civilian attitudes toward the Afghan government at the national, provincial and local levels. My argument is that using attitudinal data from the SoAP rather than violence-related outcomes will provide a more accurate test of winning hearts and minds. The dissertation studies six waves of the SoAP, covering 38,805 Afghans nested in 381 districts, sampled between 2008 and 2013. Multilevel modelling techniques are therefore used to accommodate the hierarchical structure of the data. The results show that contrary to expectations, the provision of aid is negatively associated with attitudes toward the Afghan government at all three levels. These results are robust to a series of alternative model specifications and variable measurements, as well as the inclusion of a range of controls.

The remainder of this introduction is used to situate the research in this dissertation. The first section provides a detailed overview of the topic, highlights the gaps in the literature and how this dissertation seeks to address them, and summarises the main findings of this research. The second section explains how this dissertation contributes to existing knowledge about the relationship between aid and winning hearts and

minds. The third and final section outlines the chapters that comprise this dissertation.

1.1 Overview

In order to counter insurgency, donors and governments have targeted a tremendous amount of aid resources to conflict-affected areas in the hope that some of it will help to "win the hearts and minds" of the local population and dampen violence (Crost et al., 2014; Zürcher, 2020; Child, 2023). The logic is that aid can help to foster more positive attitudes toward government by providing valuable goods and services (Williamson, 2011; Zürcher, 2017; Beath et al., 2012; Egnell, 2010; Berman et al., 2018). In turn, the local population will be less likely to support the insurgency and to instead engage in cooperative behaviours that could reduce violence (Zürcher, 2019; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023). For example, communities may no longer be willing to provide food, shelter, and other forms of support to insurgents; members of the community may be less likely to participate in violent insurgency; and communities may be more willing to share information with the government regarding the activities and whereabouts of insurgent groups (Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013; Zürcher, 2017; Berman et al., 2011b). Over time, this will weaken insurgents, and security eventually improves (Zürcher, 2019).

Despite the considerable amount of resources dedicated to securing the support of local populations, the previous literature shows inconsistent and seemingly contradictory evidence for the effect of aid on insurgency. On the

one hand, some studies find that aid has a violence-reducing effect through winning hearts and minds. For example, Berman et al. (2011b) show that small-scale reconstruction spending by the U.S. military in Iraq led to a decline in violence against coalition and Iraqi security forces. Beath et al. (2012) and Sexton (2016) find that aid decreased violence in Afghanistan, but only in regions that were already relatively secure. This conclusion mirrors the findings of Berman et al. (2013, p. 513), who provide evidence that the violence-reducing effect of aid is contingent on the presence of large troop numbers to help better protect projects from "extortion, capture, or destruction". Berman et al. (2013) further emphasises the importance of the availability of professional development expertise in order to ensure that projects are implemented effectively.

In addition, a number of other studies find that not only does aid fail to win over hearts and minds, but it instead promotes violent insurgency. For example, replicating the approach of Berman et al. (2011b) in Afghanistan, two studies by Chou (2012) and Child (2014) could not find a significant positive effect of aid on reducing violence. Karell and Schutte (2018) find that violence increases in the wake of aid projects if those benefit only certain sections but not all of the local population. In an analysis of the impact of aid in different reconstruction sectors, Child (2019) shows that projects in the education sector are linked to an increase in violence in Afghanistan. Sexton (2016), Wood and Sullivan (2015), Weintraub (2016) and Crost et al. (2014) analyse this last scenario, and credit the violence-increasing effect of aid to the attempts of insurgents to sabotage projects. Moreover, a number of other studies instead attribute

the violence–suppressing effect of aid to an increase in the opportunity costs for insurgency. [1] In the context of violence in India, Hoelscher et al. (2012), Dasgupta et al. (2017), Fetzer (2020) and Kaila et al. (2020) all find that a large public works programme is linked to a notable reduction in both the frequency and severity of violence.

There is thus only limited consensus in the previous literature for the effect that aid has on winning hearts and minds. Moreover, it shows that the relationship between aid and attitudes is far from straightforward. My argument for this is that the counterinsurgency literature to date has predominantly studied the effect of aid on violence-related outcomes: scholars have focused on the number of security incidents (Beath et al., 2012; Beath et al., 2017; Child, 2014; Child, 2019; Crost et al., 2016; Karell and Schutte, 2018; Sexton, 2016; Hoelscher et al., 2012), attacks on government and international security forces (Wood and Molfino, 2016; Berman et al., 2011b; Berman et al., 2013; Chou, 2012; Adams, 2015), as well as the number of civilians injured, abducted or killed (Crost et al., 2014; Dasgupta et al., 2017; Iyengar et al., 2011; Khanna and Zimmermann, 2014; Weintraub, 2016; Sanchez-Cuevas, 2018; Kaila et al., 2020). Scholars have subsequently assumed that any observed reduction in violence is caused by the positive impact of aid on attitudes. However, scholars have been unable to provide convincing evidence for this argument beyond its compatible with the data. As a result, the violence–suppressing effect of

[1] The opportunity costs explanation is predicated on the assumption that economic factors, such as the absence of well-paid employment, are a root cause of insurgencies (P. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Therefore, aid can provide economic opportunities for young men, making them less likely to join rebel groups and participate in violent insurgency (Zürcher, 2020).

aid may also be accounted for by a number of alternative explanations, including the aforementioned opportunity costs for insurgency.[2]

Though some recent literature has utilised public opinion data to investigate the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds (e.g., Beath et al., 2012; Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023), the generalisability of these studies is likely to be limited given that they typically draw on samples from relatively safe parts of North Afghanistan (Berman and Matanock, 2015). For example, Böhnke and Zürcher (2013) rely on original survey data collected from four districts in northeastern Afghanistan. Their results indicate that development aid helped to improve recipients' perceptions of the government. Similarly, Beath et al. (2012) show that a community driven development programme led to better attitudes toward the Afghan government in the north. In contrast, using survey data collected from across seven northern provinces, Sexton and Zürcher (2023) find that aid failed to improve attitudes toward the government, but that it did help to improve perceptions of insurgent groups. Lyall et al. (2020) find that a cash transfer programme initially increased the local population support for the government, but that this quickly receded, leaving an increase in pro-Taliban support.

This dissertation therefore seeks to overcome some of the key limitations in the previous literature by re-investigating the impact of aid on winning hearts and minds. In doing so, it studies district–level aid from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Commander's Emergency Response Program"

[2]For a more detailed overview of the different ways in which aid can lead to more or less violence see, for example, Zürcher (2017) "What do we (not) know about development aid and violence? A systematic review".

(CERP). The purpose of CERP was to provide U.S. military commanders with the funds to plan and implement projects that "respond[ed] to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their Area of Responsibility" (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 2). Between 2004 and 2014, approximately US$2.3 billion was spent on CERP in Afghanistan on a range of projects, including road construction, cash–for–work, water and sanitation, condolence payments, and agriculture, among others. In comparison to other reconstruction and development initiatives, CERP is unique in that it has a definitive mandate to win the "hearts and minds" of the local population. As the U.S. Army's "Money as a Weapons System–Afghanistan" (MAAWS–A) handbook states, CERP enabled:

> "Warfighters at brigade, battalion, and company level in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment employ [to] money as a weapons system to win the hearts and minds of the indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents" (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 1).

As such, the conflict in Afghanistan is considered a "most-likely" case (Levy, 2008; Eckstein, 1975). In other words, there are strong reasons to believe that we will observe the positive effect of aid on attitudes given the considerable amount of resources dedicated to countering insurgency through winning hearts and minds. If, on the other hand, no evidence for the hearts and minds theory is found, then it would suggest that the theory is flawed or, at the very least, limited to certain cases (Gerring, 2007).

The data on district–level aid from CERP is combined with measurements of individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government from the Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People"

(SoAP). The SoAP is Afghanistan's broadest and longest-running public opinion survey, which is conducted in all 8 regions and 34 provinces. My argument is that using the SoAP data will help to address the limitations of previous research in two different ways. Firstly, using perception–based measures should provide a more accurate test for the effect of aid on hearts and minds compared to the existing literature which predominantly studies violence as an outcome. Secondly, the fact that the SoAP is a nationally representative survey should help to improve the generalisability of results compared to other studies which have used samples from relatively safe parts of north Afghanistan. The dissertation studies six survey waves fielded between 2008 and 2013; covering a sample of 38,805 Afghans (Level 1) nested in 381 districts (Level 2). Therefore, multilevel modelling techniques are used in order to accommodate the hierarchical structure of the data.

Contrary to expectations, the results of this dissertation show that district–level CERP is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. Instead, the results show that aid actually erodes support for the Afghan government. These results are robust to the inclusion of relevant controls, as well as alternative model specifications and variable measurements. What, then, explains these results? My argument is that because CERP projects were planned and executed by the U.S. military, it is they and not the Afghan government who were credited for the provision of goods and services. This in turn undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government by signalling that it was unable to provide for its own citizens. This result

serves to highlight the importance of recipient government ownership of foreign–funded aid projects if they are to have the desired positive effect on hearts and minds.

1.2 Contribution

The dissertation makes a number of important contributions to the literature on aid and insurgency. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the existing literature has predominantly studied the effect of aid on violence as an outcome, which has its limitations. Therefore, my argument is that using the attitudinal data from the SoAP should provide a more accurate test for the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds. This empirical research analyses data from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) to explore the relationship between aid and insurgency in Afghanistan between 2008–2013. In this context, the results obtained will challenge the widespread assumption that international aid successfully increases a population's support for the local government and helps reduce violent insurgency (Berman et al., 2011b; Beath et al., 2012; Sexton, 2016). The research findings from a multilevel logistic regression analysis will support this, contradicting the core argument of the "winning hearts and minds" mechanism; in other words, in the context of Afghanistan, aid has not helped to increase popular support for the government. Instead, this research finds that aid is actually negatively correlated with positive attitudes toward the Afghan government.

Second, the dissertation builds on the important work on Afghanistan

by Beath et al. (2012), Böhnke and Zürcher (2013), Lyall et al. (2020), and Sexton and Zürcher (2023). While these studies have used survey data in order to investigate the effect of aid on hearts and minds, their samples come from relatively safer parts of Northern Afghanistan (Berman and Matanock, 2015). In comparison, the SoAP is fielded across all of Afghanistan's eight regions and 34 provinces. As such, the dissertation provides what is to my knowledge one of the first quantitative studies to investigate this issue using a nationally representative sample.

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured as a monograph, organised in five core chapters and followed by a conclusion. It is organised as follows:

Chapter 2, "Literature Review", provides an overview of the previous literature on aid and winning hearts and minds in order to situate this dissertation within the existing body of research.

Chapter 3, "The Case: Afghanistan", situates the dissertation in existing research and outline the gaps that it will seek to address. This chapter provides contextual information regarding both the conflict and the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). The first section discusses the history and background of the conflict. The second section presents an in-depth overview of the CERP programme, including its origins, standard operating procedures (SOP), and the evolution of CERP activity in Afghanistan. The third and final section explains the rationale for using the conflict in Afghanistan in this dissertation. Drawing on the

existing literature on case selection, it argues that Afghanistan serves as a most-likely case for testing the effect of aid on attitudes.

Chapter 4, "Data and Empirical Strategy", addresses the data used in this research and set out the methodological approach taken. This dissertation combines individual–level (Level 1) public opinion data from the Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People" (SoAP), with district–level (Level 2) data on reconstruction aid from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). This chapter will outline these data sources and the empirical strategy which will be used to test the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds. First, the chapter begins by introducing the survey data and key variables measuring attitudes toward government. Second, it proceeds to describe the main source of aid data, the procedures for data cleaning, and construction of the independent variable. Third, it reviews several individual– and district–level control variables that are likely to affect both the dependent and independent variables, or to explain variation in outcome. Finally, it details the logistic multilevel modelling strategy which is used to accommodate the nested structure of the data.

Chapter 5, "Empirical Results", presents the empirical results and is organised in three principal sections. The first section presents the findings from a series of multilevel logistic regression models exploring the relationship between aid (Level 1) and individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government (Level 2). The second section provides a discussion of these results. In the third and final section, a number of robustness checks are performed in order to address potential

concerns about model specification and other estimation issues.

Chapter 6, "Extended Analysis and Discussion", presents the extended analysis and discussion. It investigates four concerns regarding the empirical results. First, the chapter probes the possibility that the results could have been affected by preference falsification and item non-response. The reason being is that when surveys are conducted in contexts of conflict and fragility, respondents may not answer the survey questions truthfully, or refuse to answer sensitive questions. Second, it tests the effect of aid on attitudes toward two other key actors in the Afghan conflict, namely armed opposition groups and international security forces. Third, it re-runs the full models while testing an alternative source of aid from AidData's "Afghanistan AIMS Geocoded Research Release". Finally, the chapter tests the effect of aid on the opportunity costs for insurgency, which has also been used by scholars to explain the observed reduction in violence.

Lastly, **Chapter 7**, "Conclusion", summarises and contextualises the research findings of this dissertation, outlining the original contribution of this research, acknowledging some of its limitations, and discussing potential areas of future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In recent years there has been considerable debate over the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds. On the one hand, some scholars argue that foreign aid undermines support by signalling that the government is unable or unwilling to provide essential goods and services. On the other hand, a number of other scholars argue that governments can successfully claim credit for the delivery of foreign-funded aid projects. This chapter will therefore review the literature for these two diverging schools of thought. Due to the fact that the existing counterinsurgency literature has predominantly studied the effect of aid on violence-related outcomes, this chapter will also draw on the adjacent literatures on aid and perceptions in contexts of development, natural disasters, and elections, among others. It is reasonable to assume that the effect of aid on attitudes in these contexts will translate into counterinsurgency environments.

2.1 Undermining Government Legitimacy

Scholars have argued that one important factor that solidifies state legitimacy is its ability to provide the population with essential goods and services (Watkins, 2022). Indeed, as Levi et al. (2009) put it:

> "One possible basis for legitimating beliefs is the provision of public goods the population requires to ensure at least a minimal level of social welfare, such as drink- able water, roads, post offices, electricity, piped water, and sanitation... When citizens are confident that government has the competence to produce promised services, they are more likely to give deference to government authority" (Levi et al., 2009, p. 358).

As the above passage shows then, by providing goods and essential services and, more importantly, being seen to be doing so, governments can improve their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Due to this, research has argued that foreign aid may undermine the legitimacy of recipient governments when citizens observe that public goods and services are being provided by external actors (Watkins, 2022).

However, aid may not undermine legitimacy if individuals do not expect their governments to be self-sufficient, and instead expect their governments to receive external assistance (Dolan, 2020). As such, the presence of foreign–funded aid projects can help to improve the perceived competence of local politicians when citizens believe that those politicians played a role in managing to secure the project for the local area (Dietrich et al., 2018; Lyall et al., 2020; Cruz and Schneider, 2017; Guiteras and Mobarak, 2015; Winters et al., 2018). For example, Dietrich et al. (2018) report experimental evidence from Bangladesh showing that the beneficiaries

of a U.S.-funded health project expressed increased confidence in their local government when it was revealed to be foreign in origin. In light of this, Ijaz (2019) argues that voters are more likely to elect politicians with the characteristics that they believe signal an ability to secure foreign aid funding for their constituency.

2.2 Undeserved Credit Claiming

Often, donors will brand aid so that communities are able to distinguish between what has been done by external actors, and what has been done by their own government (Watkins, 2022; Guiteras and Mobarak, 2015; Winters et al., 2017). For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) brands its aid as being "from the American people" (R. A. Blair et al., 2022, p. 1359). Similarly, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) brands its aid as being "from the British people" (ibid., p. 1359). A consequence of aid branding is that it helps to demonstrate the generosity of donor countries and their citizens (ibid.). However, it also serves to undermine government legitimacy by signalling a lack of capacity or willingness to provide goods and public services (Carnegie et al., 2022; R. A. Blair et al., 2022; Cruz and Schneider, 2017; Guiteras and Mobarak, 2015). This is important because several scholars suggest that the positive effect of aid stems less from the actual provision of goods and services, and more from an increase perception among the population that the government is capable of responding to their needs (Bodnar and Gwinn, 2010; Lyall et al., 2020; De Juan et al.,

2020).

However, even when aid is donor-branded, governments can sometimes successfully claim credit for it (Carnegie et al., 2022). Indeed, the influx of foreign aid resources will see local politicians attempt to take credit for projects, despite having little or no influence in its allocation (see e.g., Lyall et al., 2020; Dietrich et al., 2018; Dietrich and Winters, 2015; Cruz and Schneider, 2017; Evans et al., 2019; Guiteras and Mobarak, 2015). As such, politicians will engage in what Cruz and Schneider (2017) refer to as "undeserved credit claiming", which occurs when politicians take credit for foreign aid projects in their communities "by advertising that their personal effort and ability to attract resources have led to the receipt of the project" (Cruz and Schneider, 2017, p. 396). For example, politicians will visit project sites, name projects after themselves or family members, and downplay the role of foreign donors (Lyall et al., 2020; Cruz and Schneider, 2017). Cruz and Schneider (2017) show that, in the Philippines, a large community-driven development programme boosted an incumbents chance of re-election because voters incorrectly attributed receipt of the programme to local politicians.

Politicians are able to exploit the general lack of transparency regarding funding sources, particularly in contexts where information is scarce or of low quality, allowing them to manipulate perceptions and outcomes (ibid.). Furthermore, according to the previously discussed study by Dietrich et al. (2018) in Bangladesh, only a minority of respondents were able to identify the United States as funding the health intervention, even *after* having watched a video about the intervention that was branded with the

donor logo. This underscores the fact that even when aid is donor-branded, recipients may still not be able to determine the funding source.

2.3 A Sign of Programme Quality

The foreign funding of aid can send citizens a positive signal about programme quality (Lyall et al., 2020; Winters et al., 2017; Milner et al., 2016; Findley et al., 2017; Dietrich, 2013; Zürcher, 2010). This is due to foreign aid being seen as less corrupt, more effective, and better able to meet the needs of recipient communities (Winters et al., 2017). It is possible therefore that the perceived quality of foreign aid reflects well on those politicians who are associated with service provision (ibid.). Although it must be cautioned that if citizens' expectations of an aid project far exceed what is actually delivered—i.e., that when a project fails to live up to these expectations—it negatively impacts support for incumbent governments (Briggs, 2019; Wang et al., 2022).

Importantly, the fact that foreign funding can be a sign of programme quality helps to explain why existing literature shows that individuals tend to prefer foreign aid projects over those funded by their own governments. Using data from a nationally representative survey in Uganda, Milner et al. (2016) and Findley et al. (2017) report that Ugandan citizens expressed a preference for foreign-funded development projects over those they perceive as government-funded. Similarly, in northeastern Afghanistan, villages that received more foreign-funded infrastructure projects exhibited higher levels of support for the district and provincial governments than those

with government-funded projects (Zürcher, 2010).

2.4 Vote Buying in Elections

A substantial body of literature has investigated vote buying in elections, showing that aid can increase the vote share for incumbent politicians (see e.g., Nupia, 2018; De La O, 2013; Zucco Jr., 2013; Labonne, 2013; Conover et al., 2019; Manacorda et al., 2011; Linos, 2013; Rodríguez-Chamussy, 2015; Galiani et al., 2019; C. Pop-Eleches and G. Pop-Eleches, 2012). As such, the fact that foreign aid can determine the outcome of elections is reflected in the increase in aid funding in the run-up to these elections. For example, Kersting and Kilby (2016) show that the timing of aid project implementation and disbursements is systematically linked to national election cycles rather than occurring at random. In particular, donors engage in "electioneering", whereby they accelerate aid flows to preferred countries in the year preceding national elections. Additionally, Marx (2018), in a cross-national study of World Bank development projects in 23 Sub-Saharan African countries, finds that in the year preceding national elections, incumbent politicians are more likely to prioritise visible projects, and to expedite the completion of ongoing projects as opposed to starting new ones.

In addition, given the importance of voting buying in elections, incumbent politicians will often direct more aid to their supporters, and to those voters most likely to help them win. In doing so, they take advantage of the fact that donors frequently lack accurate information about who is

most in need of aid funds, and therefore delegate responsibility for aid allocation to recipient governments (Jablonski, 2014). For example, Öhler and Nunnenkamp (2014) find that political leaders will channel aid funds toward their home regions, irrespective of regional needs. Dreher et al. (2019) and Habyarimana et al. (2009) argue that aid is often targeted toward the co-ethnics of recipient politicians.

2.5 Adverse Effects of Corruption

A number of scholars have suggested that foreign aid undermines government legitimacy when citizens observe that there is corruption and rent-seeking by powerful or elite groups; particularly high-ranking government officials (see e.g., Fishstein and Wilder, 2012; Felbab-Brown, 2012; E. B. Kapstein, 2017; Fishstein, 2012; Gordon, 2011; Chandrasekaran, 2012; Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2016; Bader and Faust, 2014; Busse and Gröning, 2009; Cha, 2024). For example local firms contracted to deliver goods and services may pay bribes to government officials in order to secure lucrative contracts (Brazys et al., 2017; Watkins, 2022). Furthermore, aid projects may develop or improve local private goods, such as electricity, water, sanitation, hospitals and schools. In turn, this can create opportunities for the extraction of bribes in exchange for access to these service (Brazys et al., 2017). As such, it is often the case that foreign aid has been criticised for propping up despots and corrupt regimes (Findley et al., 2017; Alesina and Weder, 2002). In more autocratic countries, F. Z. Ahmed (2012) finds that foreign aid reduces the probability of government

turnover and regime collapse.

However, the literature shows that donors may take into account the quality of governance in recipient countries when making decisions over the allocation of aid (Winters and Martinez, 2015; Watkins, 2022). For example, donors can mitigate the adverse effects of corruption by limiting the fungibility of aid (Milner et al., 2016; Dietrich, 2013; Bermeo, 2016; Cruz et al., 2024).[1] Additionally, in order to limit the opportunities for rent-seeking behaviour, donors can choose to bypass the government by channelling more aid through non-state actors, such as non-governmental and civil society organisations (Dietrich, 2013; 2016; Winters and Martinez, 2015; Morrison, 2007). Although "bypass aid" may inadvertently undermine citizens' assessments of government performance by signalling that the government is unable to trusted to handle large amounts of aid resources (Baldwin and Winters, 2020; Watkins, 2022). Finally, aid conditionality—the practice of imposing policy conditions on the disbursement of aid—may be used by donors so that aid is less fungible and better able to meet citizens' needs (ibid.; Milner et al., 2016).

2.6 Community Preferences

According to Child and Scoones (2017, p. 36), "the success or failure of reconstruction programming ... [is] contingent on its alignment with

[1]The term "aid fungibility" is used to refer to aid that is given by donors for a specific purpose, but is diverted by recipient governments toward other activities (Findley et al., 2011). Examples of aid that can be easily redirected include agriculture, education and energy projects, whereas aid in the communications and transportation sectors are not as easy to divert (Feyzioglu et al., 1998).

community preferences. Misalignment is the extent to which occupier-led reconstruction initiatives are concentrated in contentious sectors". In other words, local communities will be opposed to aid spending in more ideologically controversial reconstruction sectors (Child and Scoones, 2017). One example is projects in the education sector which can be perceived as contentious when focused on secularisation, girls' schooling and mixed gender classrooms (Child, 2017; Child and Scoones, 2017; Jackson and Giustozzi, 2012). Empirical support for this assertion is provided by Child (2019), who shows that education programming led to an escalation in the incidence of violence in Afghanistan. As the author acknowledges, however, this result may also have been driven by the Taliban's own opposition to education programming. Previous qualitative research has highlighted how the Taliban have often cited strategic concerns in order to justify its attacks on educational institutions, such as; that the curriculum has been used as a mouthpiece of the state, and that schools have been used as polling stations during elections (Child, 2019; HRW, 2006; Giustozzi and Franco, 2011). This further highlights the limitations of using violence-related outcomes in order to study the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds in counterinsurgency environments.

On the other hand, recent empirical evidence suggests that communities react positively to projects which have a direct impact on their daily lives, such as water and sanitation projects, and electrification schemes (Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013; Beath et al., 2012). This should come as no surprise given the fact that, as aforementioned, the ability to provide populations with basic services seems to improve confidence in state institutions (Levi

et al., 2009; De Juan et al., 2020). Böhnke and Zürcher (2013), for example, find the while development aid had no impact on perceived security nor attitudes toward international security forces, it was positively correlated with state legitimacy. They base this conclusion on surveys conducted in 80 communities in North East Afghanistan. The research bolsters a literature that highlights how the provision of basic services can help to improve attitudes toward the government (see e.g., Mcloughlin, 2015; Brinkerhoff et al., 2012; Kooy et al., 2015; De Juan et al., 2020). It also sheds light on how perception-based measures can be used to understand the impact of aid on winning hearts and minds.

In addition, a number of recent studies highlight the efficacy of smaller sized projects (see e.g., Iyengar et al., 2017b; Choi and Park, 2022; Goodhand, 2002; Gordon, 2014; Nagl et al., 2009; E. B. Kapstein, 2017; E. Kapstein and Kathuria, 2023; Egel et al., 2016; Bowen and C. Collier, 2012). For example, in Iraq, Berman et al. (2011b) find that small-scale (projects under US$50k) reconstruction spending from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) is associated with reduced violence against coalition troops and Iraqi security forces. According to the authors' theory, these projects incentivised local communities to share information about insurgent activities with the government and its international allies, which in turn improved the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations. One reason for this is that smaller projects can usually be implemented quickly because they are subject to fewer bureaucratic constraints; thereby providing communities with an immediate and tangible benefit (Jensen, 2019; Berman et al., 2011b). It is likely, therefore, that smaller projects

are valued highly by local populations compared to larger projects which are implemented over a longer period of time (Chou, 2012). As Jensen (2019, p. 68) puts it, "[...] a villager may not immediately see or benefit from a bridge being rebuilt at great expense but will immediately notice less sewage in the streets".

2.7 Favouritism in the Distribution of Aid

Aid frequently does not benefit all members of a population equally. In order to achieve development goals, donors often target aid at those who they consider most at need, and in particular marginalised or vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, women, and the poor (O'Brien-Udry, 2021). However, a consequence of targeting aid at specific groups is that this can cause resentment between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Evans et al., 2019; Adato and Roopnaraine, 2004; MacAuslan and Riemenschneider, 2011; Ellis, 2012). This in turn erodes trust in government by signalling that. Moreover, citizens may perceive that For example, in Kosovo, O'Brien-Udry (2021) shows that aid targeted at minorities erodes trust in local and national governments because it sends a signal to constituents about their politician's lack and misplaced priorities.

In addition, local politicians will often direct more aid toward their political supporters, further exacerbating the unequal distribution of aid (Jablonski, 2014; Seim et al., 2020; Briggs, 2021). This highlights what has been previously discussed in Section 2.4, in which incumbent politicians will target aid to their home regions and coethnic groups in order to

increase their reelection chances (Öhler and Nunnenkamp, 2014; Dreher et al., 2019; Habyarimana et al., 2009).

2.8 Armed Actors Claiming the Reputational Benefits of Aid

Existing research has argued that insurgents might seek to violently sabotage aid projects which help to win over the hearts and minds of the local population (Zürcher, 2017; 2019). This is evidenced by the increase in attacks on aid workers, government officials, and members of the community in the areas in which aid is concentrated (see e.g., Zürcher, 2020; Stoddard et al., 2009; Stoddard et al., 2017; Fast, 2010; Murdie and Stapley, 2014; Ghorpade, 2020; Boutton and Pascoe, 2018; Hoelscher et al., 2017; Weintraub, 2016; Premand and Rohner, 2023). Moreover, these attempts at sabotage may occur even *before* the programme has begun as insurgents seek to "use violence preemptively to counter anticipated shifts in support" (Weintraub, 2016, p. 992). Crost et al. (2014) finds empirical support for this assertion in the Philippines, showing that a large community-driven (CDD) development programme led to an increase in violence before the funds had been disbursed.[2] This result is consistent with the idea that insurgents attempted to sabotage the programme because they feared if successful it would weaken their support within the population.

[2]As Weintraub (2016) correctly points out, however, this argument relies on insurgents knowing in advance where and when aid will be disbursed, which seems unlikely in most conflict settings.

However, more recently, a number of scholars suggest that instead of preventing the government from, insurgents can claim the reputational benefits of aid for themselves by taking credit for the implementation of projects (Breslawski, 2023). Armed groups will frequently depend on the support of civilians in order to obtain essential resources such as food, shelter, recruits, funding, as well as information (Z. C. Mampilly, 2011). While both coercion and violence is often employed to secure compliance from local populations and extract these resources, such methods tend to be unsustainable and counterproductive over a long period of time (Arjona, 2017). As such, foreign aid is used by armed actors as a means to boost their perceived legitimacy within the population (Asal et al., 2020; Arjona, 2017). As Z. C. Mampilly (2011, p. 54) puts it, "since civilians in rebel-controlled areas can and do enjoy these goods without directly participating in the insurgency, the provision of public goods can be viewed as part of a broader program to generate legitimacy and support for the rebel regime". An example of this in practice can be seen in Syria, for example, where the Salafi Islamist rebel groups Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham took credit for public services provided by U.S.–funded local councils, thereby claiming the reputational benefits (Carnegie et al., 2022).

One of the most common ways in which armed groups can claim the reputational benefits of aid for themselves is by facilitating humanitarian access (Breslawski, 2023). Often, it is necessary for humanitarian organisations to negotiate access with armed groups in order to ensure the safe passage of aid convoys and the distribution of aid resources (Z. C. Mampilly, 2011; Jackson and Giustozzi, 2012). However, this risks legitimising claims

made by insurgents to represent specific populations (Z. C. Mampilly, 2011, p. 87). Indeed, one of the main reasons that armed groups permit the movement of humanitarian supplies into the areas under their control is the belief that it legitimises them in the eyes of communities receiving this aid (Haddad and Svoboda, 2017, p. 17). For example, Breslawski (2023) presents evidence from a survey experiment in Afghanistan showing that when participants are told the Taliban allowed a project to occur in their village, they were more than three times as likely to identify the Taliban as a facilitator of development projects. This was in spite of the fact that individuals had their own experiences with development projects in their village. Importantly then, this result underscores the ease in which armed actors are able to take credit for foreign–funded development projects.

In addition, by facilitating humanitarian access, armed groups can benefit from what some scholars have referred to as the "substitution effect" (de Waal, 1997; Anderson, 1999; Breslawski, 2022; Z. Mampilly, 2009; 2011). As Anderson (2001) summarises:

> "To the extent that international aid agencies assume responsibility for civilian survival in war zones, the aid they provide can serve to free up whatever internal resources exist for the pursuit of warfare. Furthermore, this can also permit local authorities to define their own roles in terms of military control and, thus, to abdicate their own responsibility and accountability for civilian responsiveness" (Anderson, 2001, p. 4).

Furthermore, it can often be observed that armed groups suffer consequences imposed by civilians when they attempt to restrict or deny humanitarian access. Disobedience by civilians is a common form of con-

sequence, where the local population quietly evade or sometimes openly defy the rules imposed by the armed groups. Civilians may as well deny important resources for the operation of such armed groups, such as shelter, food, and information (Breslawski, 2022; Kaplan, 2017; Masullo, 2021).

2.9 Summary

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on how foreign aid influences public perceptions of government legitimacy and support in conflict and development contexts. One school of thought argues that aid undermines legitimacy by showcasing state incapacity, particularly when donor branding helps highlight that the provision comes from a foreign actors rather than their own government. On the other hand, a number of scholars argue that governments and politicians can claim, or even appropriate, credit for aid projects, sometimes undeservedly, increasing the populations' perceptions of their competence, and potentially leading to an increase in electoral support. Aid can also act as an indicator of the quality of programmes, leading to improved attitudes towards politicians associated with their deliveries. However, excessive expectations from the local population or perceptions of political corruption may reverse these effects, especially where elites divert aid resources or engage in rent-seeking behaviour.

The chapter also discusses how aid becomes entangled in electoral politics, with evidence showing that disbursements often coincide with election cycles and may be used to favour the incumbents' supporters or their co-ethnic groups. Moreover, community preferences often shape

the success of aid projects, with essential services such as water and electricity leading to an improvement in the perception of the state's legitimacy, while contentious projects such as those in the education sector can provoke opposition. Finally, the literature highlights that armed actors may seek to sabotage or take control of aid projects, claiming benefits to their reputation by facilitating humanitarian access or exploiting the aid's legitimising effects. In doing so, these armed groups create complications for the relationship between aid, legitimacy, and conflict dynamics.

These sources from literature form the academic background upon which this dissertation lies. The next chapter will delve in the specific history of the conflict in Afghanistan, followed by an empirical analysis of the data. The results of this analysis will draw on the literature discussed in this chapter to develop a thesis on the "hearts and minds" theory and its effectiveness—or lack of—in the context of Afghanistan.

Chapter 3

Background: The Case of Afghanistan

This dissertation uses the case of Afghanistan in order to re-investigate the impact of aid on winning hearts and minds. This chapter is used to provide contextual information regarding both the conflict and the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). The first section discusses the history and background of the conflict. The second section presents an in-depth overview of the CERP programme, including its origins, standard operating procedures (SOP), and the evolution of CERP activity in Afghanistan. The third and final section explains the rationale for using the conflict in Afghanistan in this dissertation. Drawing on the existing literature on case selection, it argues that Afghanistan serves as a most-likely case for testing the effect of aid on attitudes.

3.1 A Brief History of the Conflict

3.1.1 Invasion and Regime Change (October 2001–Early 2002)

On 7th October 2001, the United States initiated military operations in Afghanistan in direct response to the September 11th terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Al-Qaeda network (Giustozzi, 2008; Bird and Marshall, 2011). The military intervention, officially designated as Operation Enduring Freedom, marked the beginning of what would become the longest military engagement in U.S. history. Beyond its immediate counterterrorism goals, the intervention quickly evolved into a complex and multifaceted mission encompassing state-building, counterinsurgency, and humanitarian assistance.

The decision to launch the campaign was framed as part of the broader "Global War on Terror", with the primary objective of dismantling Al-Qaeda's operational infrastructure and removing the Taliban regime, which had provided sanctuary to its leadership. According to the former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (2011, p. 683), "the goal was to rid Afghanistan of Al-Qaeda and replace their Taliban hosts with a government that would not harbor terrorists". The U.S. government had formally demanded that the Taliban surrender Osama bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda and the purported mastermind behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks in American soil. American officials framed this demand as a non-negotiable condition for avoiding military confrontation, emphasising that the Tal-

iban's continued harbouring of Al-Qaeda operatives constituted a direct threat to international security. The Taliban leadership, however, refused to comply, citing both a lack of concrete evidence directly linking bin Laden to the attacks and a religious obligation to protect a guest who had sought refuge under their authority (Cristol, 2019, pp. 95–96). Indeed, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar (2001) had stated that "Islam's prestige is at stake [...] If we [give up bin Laden], it means we are not Muslims [...] That Islam is finished". This refusal was not merely a legal or diplomatic disagreement but reflected the deep ideological and political entanglement between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda at the time. The Taliban's insistence on religious justification underscored the movement's commitment to its interpretation of Islamic principle of "Melmastyā",[1], even in the face of overwhelming international pressure. It was this refusal by the Taliban to hand over bin Laden that was used as the justification for the U.S.–led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (Byers, 2002).

The invasion began with air strikes targeting Taliban infrastructure, including airfields, early warning radar, and command–and control–facilities (Perry and Kassing, 2016;Lambeth, 2006, p. xvi). Soon after, Special Operations Forces (SOF) were sent into Afghanistan to coordinate with anti-Taliban factions, including the Northern Alliance (Perry and Kassing, 2016, p. 48).They were later joined by the Marines and Army Infantry, as well as coalition forces from key allies, including Australia, Canada,

[1] "Melmastyā" is a Pashtu word that translates to "hospitality". It is a fundamental principle of the Pashtunwali code of honour of the Pashtun people of Afghanistan, concerning both hospitality and loyalty.

France, Germany, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom (Camporini et al., 2014, p. 47). By mid-November, rapid gains by the coalition and Northern Alliance led to a series of strategic victories. The first major victory occurred on 10th November when Mazar-e Sharif, a major city of strategic importance in the north of the country, was captured by coalition and Northern Alliance forces. This was swiftly followed by the fall of Kabul on 13th November when Taliban forces were driven from the capital. Finally, the last Taliban stronghold of Kandahar fell on 7th December, thus marking the effective collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (Folse, 2002, pp. 88–89). retreated to the mountainous region in eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistan border (ibid., p. 45). Following the Battle of Tora Bora, hundreds of Taliban fighters and Al-Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden, managed to escape across the border into Pakistan (Perry and Kassing, 2016).

After the fall of the Taliban in December 2001, the Bonn Agreement laid out a political roadmap for Afghanistan's post-Taliban transition (Barnett and Hamidzada, 2007). This agreement established an Interim Authority, led by Hamid Karzai, until a *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council) could be convened to create a Transitional Administration, as well as outlined a timeline for the drafting of a new constitution and national elections (Lister and Wilder, 2005, p. 40).[2]

It also called for the creation of a United Nations mandated international security force to maintain stability and order during the transitional

[2]A *Loya Jirga* (Pashtun for Grand Council) is a traditional meeting of representatives.

period following the fall of the Taliban regime (Fields and R. Ahmed, 2011).[3] This proposal reflected the widespread recognition among the international community that Afghanistan's political environment was fragile, requiring external support to prevent it from relapsing into factional conflict. At the *Loya Jirga*, held in July 2002, Karzai was appointed to serve as President of the Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA) and to govern the country until a "fully representative government could be elected through free and fair elections" (Morgan, 2007, p. 15; Lister and Wilder, 2005).[4]

3.1.2 Stabilisation and Nation-Building (Late 2002 – 2005)

Between 2002 and 2005, Afghanistan entered a phase of stabilisation and nation-building following the collapse of the Taliban regime. An essential element to this was the implementation of the Bonn Agreement, formally known as the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions, which was signed in December 2001 and constitutes the legal framework for an interim authority in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. After a Constitutional *Loya Jirga* was convened to debate and amend the draft, the

[3]Annex I, Section III of the Bonn Agreement stated that "Conscious that some time may be required for the new Afghan security and armed forces to be fully constituted and functioning, the participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan request the United Nations Security Council to consider authorizing the early deployment to Afghanistan of a United Nations mandated force".

[4]These elections were to be held no more than two years after the *Loya Jirga* (Morgan, 2007; Lister and Wilder, 2005).

constitution was officially ratified on 4th January 2004. Among its key features, the constitution established a presidential system in which an elected president was to serve as the head of state; created a bicameral legislature consisting of a lower house (House of the People or *Wolesi Jirga*) and an upper house (House of Elders or *Meshrano Jirga*); formed an independent judiciary system comprising of a Supreme Court (*Stera Mahkama*), Courts of Appeal as well as Primary Courts; and enshrined the rights of women and minorities in law. On 9th October 2004, Afghanistan held its first ever democratic presidential election, with a 70 percent turnout (Goodson, 2005, p. 30). Of the 10.5 million registered voters, around 8.1 million cast their ballots (CRS, 2005, p. 62; United Nations, 2004b). Despite threats made by the Taliban to disrupt the democratic process, reporting indicates that there "had been no major security incidents and no Afghan voter had been killed during the polling" (United Nations, 2004a).

At the election, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) played a critical role in providing security (Saikal, 2006). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) had, on 20th December 2001, established ISAF through UNSC Resolution 1386, in accordance with the Bonn Agreement (Kfir, 2012). The first ISAF troops were deployed to Afghanistan in June 2002 and operated under the rotating leadership of coalition member states (Haysom and Jackson, 2013). However, control of ISAF was eventually assumed by NATO in August 2003 (ibid.). Initially, ISAF was mandated to support the post-Taliban transition by assisting the Interim Authority and maintaining security in Kabul (Saikal, 2006).[5] From late

[5]UNSC Resolution 1386 (2001) stated that ISAF was "to assist the Afghan Interim

2003, however, this mandate was expanded and ISAF was authorised to operate outside of Kabul for the first time.[6] By 2005, the ISAF presence in Afghanistan had grown to 9,000 personnel from 36 contributing countries (HOC Defence Committee, 2006, p. 11).

In order to extend its reach beyond Kabul, ISAF had adopted the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) into its strategy in December 2003 (NATO, 2006, p. 156). PRTs had first been developed by the U.S. in late 2002 and were conceived as small teams of military and civillian personnel whose main goal was to "assist The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts" (ISAF, 2009, pp. 250–251; Bebber, 2008). As such, PRTs were often tasked with implementing quick impact projects (QIPs) designed to win hearts and minds (Haysom and Jackson, 2013). By the end of 2004, ISAF had taken command of five PRTs in the north of Afghanistan (Baghlan, Faizabad, Kunduz, Maymaneh and Mazar-e Sharif), followed by a further four PRTs in the west of the country by mid-2005 (Herat, Farah, Chagcharan and Qal'eh-Now) (NATO, 2006, pp. 156–157). Each of these PRTs was led by an ISAF troop contributing nation (TCN) (e.g., Norway in Maymaneh, Sweden in Mazar-e Sharif, Italy in Herat, and Spain in Qal'eh-Now).

Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas so that the Afghan Interim Authority as well as the personnel of the United Nations can operate in a secure environment" (UNSC, 2001, para. 3).

[6]UNSC Resolution 1510 (2003) stated that "[The Security Council] authorizes the expansion of the mandate of ISAF to allow it [...] to support the Afghan Transitional Authority and its successors in the maintenance of security in areas of Afghanistan outside of Kabul".

3.1.3 Taliban Insurgency and NATO Expansion (2006 – 2008)

Beginning in 2006, the Karzai government and its NATO allies faced growing armed opposition from a resurgent Taliban (Sexton, 2016).[7] This resurgence was driven by a number of factors. One primary factor was the perceived weakness and corruption of the Afghan government (Jones, 2008). At the same time, the 2003 invasion of Iraq had diverted significant resources away from the conflict in Afghanistan. In addition, in 2006, there was substantial growth in the cultivation of opium poppy, which funded the Taliban through taxation on the cultivation, processing, and smuggling of drugs (Felbab-Brown, 2020).[8]

As a result, during this period, the number of suicide attacks increased more than fivefold (from 27 to 139), armed attacks almost tripled (from 1,558 to 4,542), and roadside bombings more than doubled (from 783 to 1,677) (Constable, 2007, pp. 88–89). In a direct response to the increased threat posed by the Taliban, ISAF continued to expand across Afghanistan. ISAF first expanded its operations to the south of Afghanistan by assuming command of four existing OEF U.S.–led PRTs (Qalat, Lashkar Gah, Kandahar and Tarin Kowt) (ISAF, 2009, p. 95). For the first time since ISAF's expansion began, there were more PRTs under the command of

[7]It should be noted that in addition to the Taliban, the Karzai government faced armed opposition from a number of different insurgent groups, including Hizb-i-Islami (HIG), the Haqqani Network, Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Law or TNSM), and the Tehrik-e-Taliban, among others (Gohel, 2009; Sexton, 2016; Dorronsoro, 2009; Giustozzi, 2008).

[8]The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that in 2006 there was a 59% increase in the hectares of land being used for opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan (UNODC, 2006, p. iii).

ISAF than there were under OEF (ISAF, 2009). At the end of 2004, there had been a total of 19 PRTs across Afghanistan, and by the end of 2008 this number had risen to 26 PRTs, led by 13 contributing countries (Haysom and Jackson, 2013; GOA, 2008b).

In contrast to the 2004 presidential election, the 2006 parliamentary elections were marked by significant violence at polling stations, which prevented voting in an estimated 30 to 40 districts (Giustozzi, 2019, p. 44).

3.1.4 U.S. Troop Surge and Counterinsurgency (2009 – 2011)

By 2008, the security situation in Afghanistan had deteriorated significantly. The Taliban had re-emerged and began gaining control in the south and east of the country. As a result, civilian casualties were rising, and public confidence in both the Afghan government and international forces was in decline. In response to this situation, the incoming Obama administration made Afghanistan a top foreign policy priority.

As such, in December of 2009 President Barack Obama announced plans to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, bringing the total number of U.S. forces in the country to more than 100,000 (Obama, 2009). The overarching goal of the surge was to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat the Taliban insurgency, secure key population centres, and accelerate the training of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) so that responsibility for security could be transferred over to the Afghans. The goal was to "reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow

the government" at the same time as to "strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future" (Obama, 2009).

The surge in troops was accompanied by a clear timeline, and the U.S. vouched to begin withdrawing its troops from Afghan soil by July 2011, signalling that the commitment was not indefinite and that the goal was to strengthen the local administration (ibid.).

3.1.5 Transition and Drawdown (2011 – 2014)

From 2011 to 2014, Afghanistan entered a period of transition referred to as "Inteqāl", in which responsibility for security throughout the country was gradually transferred from ISAF to the ANSF (NATO, 2022a).[9] It was at the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon that this transition was outlined in five stages (also known as tranches). In order to facilitate the transition, NATO worked on building the ANSF's capacity by improving training, leadership, and literacy.[10] For example, the size of the Afghan security forces grew sharply from approximately 162,690 personnel in 2009 to approximately 331,295 personnel in 2014 (Livingston and O'Hanlon, 2017, p. 6).[11] This rapid growth was done so as to enable Afghan forces to take the lead for security as ISAF forces were withdrawn (NATO, 2022b). The transition took up to 18 months for each tranche, depending on local conditions on the ground (NATO, 2022a). By mid-2014, the Afghan security forces were

[9] "Inteqāl" is the Dari and Pashtu word for transition.

[10] Estimates from 2010 suggest that around 70 percent of new recruits to the ANSF were functionally illiterate (Cordesman et al., 2010, p. 109).

[11] The figures for the Afghan security forces include the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan Air Force (AAF), and the Afghan National Police (ANP).

leading 99% of all security operations, with ISAF providing support in an advisory role (MoD, 2014, p. 4).

As the ANSF began taking control of security, the phased withdrawal of U.S. and NATO–led ISAF troops occurred. This withdrawal was made possible by the killing of Osama bin Laden on 2nd May 2011 by U.S. Navy SEALs in Pakistan, which was seen by some policymakers as. As such, on 22nd June, President Obama announced that 10,000 surge troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of the year, and an additional 23,000 by the end of summer 2012 (Obama, 2011).[12] The withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan coincided with the gradual closure of PRTs across the country. By the time that responsibility for security had been transferred to the ANSF, all PRTs had been phased out with their functions handed over to the Afghan government, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector (NATO, 2022a). After 13 years, on 28th December 2014, President Obama announced the End of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (Obama, 2014).

3.2 The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Commander's Emergency Response Program" (CERP) provided local commanders with the funds to address "[...] urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within

[12] At the beginning of 2013, there were approximately 105,000 ISAF personnel and 184 bases or facilities across Afghanistan. By the end of the year, this had been reduced to 75,000 personnel and 88 bases and facilities (NATO, 2014).

their Area of Responsibility (AOR) by carrying out programs that will immediately assist the indigenous population" (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 2). While CERP projects were typically small in scale, low in cost, short in duration, and focused on restoring basic services or creating employment; in some cases, CERP did provide funding for large-scale infrastructure projects, such as road and bridge construction (Egel et al., 2016; Jensen, 2019). In contrast to other aid programmes, CERP is unique in that it was specifically designed to support U.S. military objectives by "winning the hearts and minds" of the local population, which in turn improves security (Bodnar and Gwinn, 2010; Egel et al., 2016; Zürcher, 2017). The remainder of this section provides a detailed background on how and why CERP was used during the conflict in Afghanistan.

3.2.1 Origins of CERP

In order to understand the role of CERP in Afghanistan, it is necessary to briefly discuss the conflict in Iraq, which is where the programme first originated. It was in March 2003, during the early stages of the U.S. combat operations, that U.S. soldiers began finding secret caches of U.S. currency hidden around the country (Martins, 2004). The first find was in an exclusive residential neighbourhood in Baghdad, where soldiers of the 3rd Infantry Division discovered more than US$600 million hidden in cottages belonging to regime officials (Zucchino, 2003b; Martins, 2004; Egel et al., 2016). Just days later, soldiers found another US$112 million hidden inside a nearby animal kennel (Zucchino, 2003a; Martins, 2004). In

April, President George W. Bush issued a memorandum authorising the Department of Defense (DoD) to use the cash, along with other assets seized from the regime in the weeks and months that followed, to fund projects that would assist the Iraqi people and to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq (Egel et al., 2016; Martins, 2004). This authority was given the name "Commander's Emergency Response Program"—commonly known by the acronym CERP—in June 2003 (Egel et al., 2016).

Between early June and mid-October 2003, more than 11,000 CERP projects were completed, which resulted in the purchasing of US$78.6 million in goods and services (Martins, 2004, p. 8). Indeed, by September and October of the same year, the average cost per CERP project increased from approximately US$4,000 to over US$17,000 per project, a rise of more than fourfold within just a few months. (ibid., p. 9).

As it became clear that funding from seized assets would not last beyond the end of 2003 as the rate of spending accelerated, President Bush submitted a request to the U.S. Congress for supplemental funding (ibid.). In response to repeated calls from field commanders for the funds to conduct CERP-like projects in Afghanistan, this request to Congress was to authorise commanders to use appropriated CERP funds in both countries (ibid.). Following weeks of scrutiny and intense debate, the bill was passed by both the House and Senate, and signed into law by the President on 6th November 2003 (Paschal, 2011). Importantly, this marked the first time that federal appropriations of the U.S. government could be lawfully used to fund CERP in Iraq and Afghanistan (Martins, 2004). In all, Congress authorised spending of more than US$7.8 billion for the

fiscal years (FY) 2004 to 2015 (Egel et al., 2016). Of this amount, more than US$4.1 billion was allocated to the conflict in Iraq, US$3.7 billion to Afghanistan, and US$2 billion to the Philippines (ibid.).[13]

3.2.2 Evolution of CERP Activity in Afghanistan

Between FY 2004 and FY 2014, approximately US$2.3 billion in CERP was disbursed across Afghanistan. Figure 3.1 visually depicts an overview of annual province–level CERP activity.[14] As the figure shows, during the early stages of the conflict (2004–2009), most CERP activity was concentrated in the eastern and southeastern provinces that share a border with Pakistan. This is where U.S. counterinsurgency operations were focused at the time. Following the resurgence of the Taliban in 2009, CERP activity shifted toward the south. As such, almost 60 percent of CERP obligations between 2010 and 2011 were for projects in the Taliban heartland in Kandahar and Helmand (SIGAR, 2018b; Egel et al., 2016). Spending was concentrated in areas that were most populous, and had higher levels of economic and agricultural development (SIGAR, 2018b).

[13]Just weeks after the U.S. began its military operations in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (OEF-P) was launched on 15th January 2002. Its mission was to counter the threat posed by Al-Qaeda affiliates in the south of the country. Besides Iraq and Afghanistan, the Philippines was the only other country to have received CERP funds (Egel et al., 2016, pp. 40–41).

[14]The figure is based on CERP activity as reported by the DoD Quarterly Reports and compiled by Egel et al. (2016, pp. 217–220). It should be noted, however, that there are two main sources of data on CERP projects; the DoD Quarterly Reports and the CIDNE database. While the reports provide a more comprehensive list of CERP projects, they only provide information on the province in which projects are implemented, rendering the data unsuitable for more fine-grained analysis (ibid.). Therefore, the empirical chapters in this dissertation instead rely on CIDNE, which provides precise geographical information on the location of CERP projects via Military Grid Reference System (MGRS) coordinates. For more information on the CIDNE database, see Chapter 4 Section 4.2.

However, CERP funds were also used to implement projects in other more remote areas of the country (Egel et al., 2016).

Additionally, during the U.S. Troop Surge period, there was a shift in the focus of CERP spending. More spending was allocated toward agriculture projects and projects designed to improve local economic conditions (SIGAR, 2018b). According to the MAAWS–A handbook, approximately 70% of working Afghans were employed in agriculture at the time (USFOR-A, 2012, p. 129), which is one of the reasons behind this shift in focus of CERP. For example, the funding of private business had initially been prohibited by the programme, but an exception was made in 2009 for micro grants, which are grants of up to US$2,500 (SIGAR, 2018a).

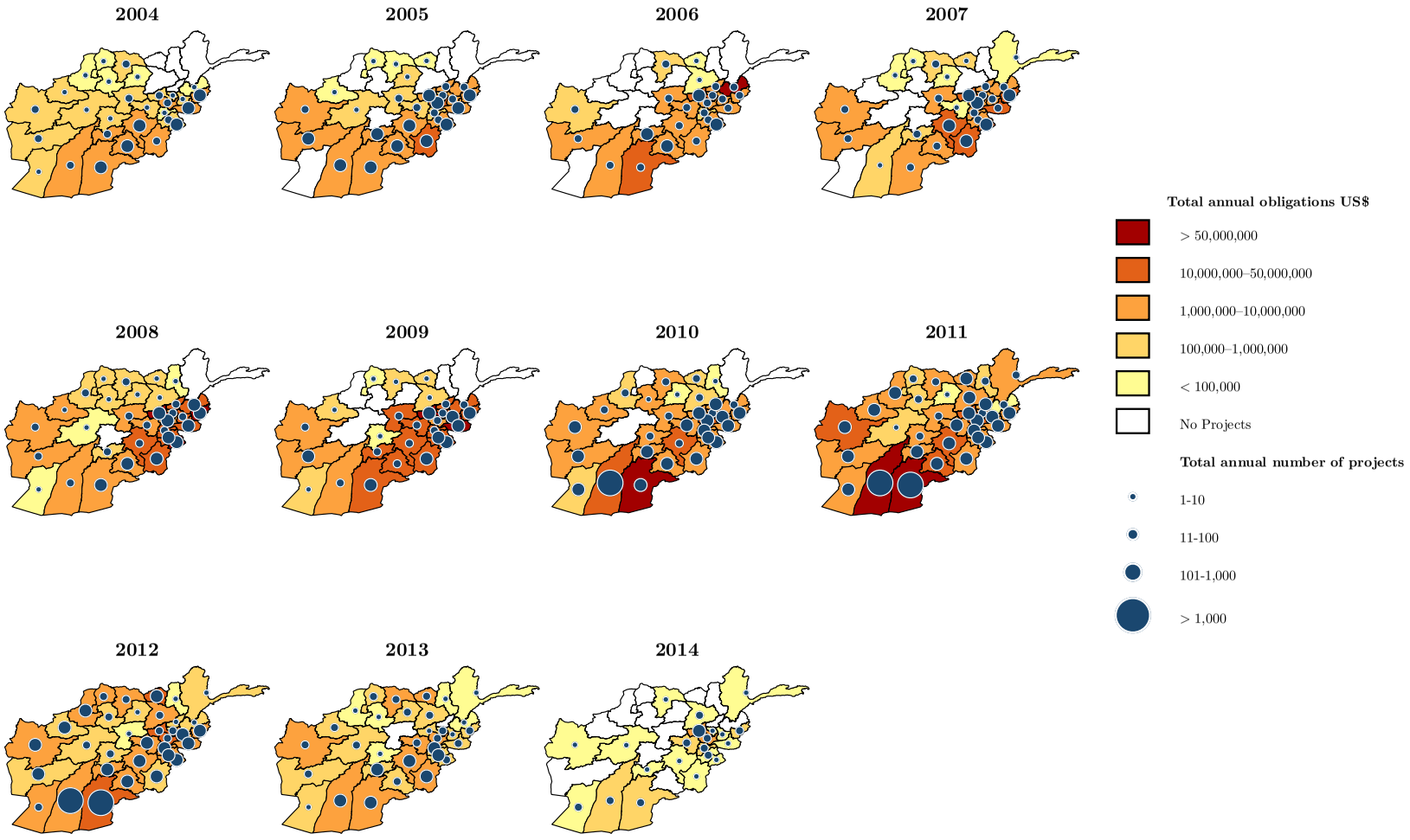


Figure 3.1: The figure shows the total CERP obligations US$ and number of projects by province and year. The figure replicates Figure 4.1 in Egel et al. (2016) and is based on the author's estimates of CERP activity from the DoD Quarterly reports.

The use of micro grants followed a more general trend in the increase in the number of small-scale CERP projects (SIGAR, 2018a). The shift toward smaller sized projects can be attributed in part to the introduction of new restrictions for CERP projects costing over US$500,000 (SIGAR, 2018b). In addition, there was growing scepticism among some members of Congress that large–scale infrastructure projects led to "waste, fraud, and abuse" and that they "in many instances cannot be sustained" (McCaskill, 2011). At the height of the surge in 2011, small-scale and short-term projects costing US$5,000 or less accounted for approximately 95% of all CERP projects (Egel et al., 2016). Therefore, while overall CERP disbursements declined, there was an increase in the number of projects initiated (SIGAR, 2021a). As such, the majority of CERP projects that were initiated over the course of the conflict in Afghanistan were initiated between FY 2010 and FY 2012 (SIGAR, 2018b).

As the U.S. military began transferring responsibility for security to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in 2012, there was a decline in the number of new CERP projects. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces from southern and eastern Afghanistan between 2012 and 2014, the programme shifted its focus toward Kabul and the neighbouring provinces of Wardak, Parwan, and Logar; which by 2014 accounted for nearly 95% of CERP spending (Egel et al., 2016; SIGAR, 2018b). By December 2014, after over a decade of conflict, President Barack Obama announced the end of Operation Enduring Freedom. Nonetheless, CERP continued to provide funding for reconstruction and development projects in Afghanistan. Between FY 2015 and FY 2020, the U.S. Congress had

appropriated US$37.5 million, and of this amount the DoD had disbursed approximately US$18 million (SIGAR, 2021a).

3.2.3 Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for CERP

Guidance on the use of appropriated CERP funds was first provided on 25th November 2003 through a memorandum issued by the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) (USD(C)) Dov S. Zakheim (Martins, 2004; Egel et al., 2016). This guidance recognised that CERP was a "a very powerful tool for the military commanders in carrying out their current security and stabilization mission" and that appropriated CERP funding should "preserve [...] the same flexibility and responsiveness [...] maintained with the original CERP that was funded with seized Iraqi assets" (quoted in Martins, 2004, p. 12).

This guidance was codified in April 2005 with the release of the Department of Defense's (DoD) Financial Management Regulation (FMR), which rescinded the USD(C) memorandum (Egel et al., 2016). The FMR identified which types of projects were permissible under CERP, and which types of projects were prohibited.[15]. Additionally, the FMR assigned responsibilities for administering CERP to several entities within the DoD (SIGAR, 2021a). The USD(C) was responsible for establishing and supervising the principals and procedures of CERP, and "[to] ensure that congressional oversight committees are timely informed of CERP activities through the quarterly reports". The Secretary of the Army was responsible

[15]Permissible projects included those in the agriculture, education, electricity and transportation sectors, while prohibited projects included entertainment and reward schemes (DoD, 2005, pp. 3–5).

for promulgating the "procedures as necessary to ensure that unit commanders carry out the CERP in a manner consistent with applicable laws, regulations, and this [FMR] guidance". Finally, the Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) was responsible for determining how CERP funds would be allocated across commands and advocating "for appropriate resources and authorities in support of the theater's military global war on terrorism mission" (DoD, 2005, p. 4).

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for CERP were further refined as funding for the programme grew (SIGAR, 2021a). In May 2009, the U.S. Forces - Afghanistan (USFOR-A) released the first of several iterations of the "Money as a Weapons System - Afghanistan" (MAAWS–A) handbook, which provided guidance "for proposing projects, awarding contracts, and managing CERP-related activities" and was intended to act as "a user-friendly guide designed to help commanders get from point A to point Z in the CERP implementation and management process" (Paschal, 2011, p. 26). The first iteration of this document made performance metrics a requirement for CERP projects costing over US$50,000 (SIGAR, 2021a). It also introduced higher approval thresholds for larger sized projects (Berman et al., 2011b; SIGAR, 2021a; Jensen, 2019). For example, projects of US$200,000 or less could be implemented with the approval of brigade commanders, while projects of more than US$2 million needed approval from the commander of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2021a).

In December 2009, the first update to the MAAWS–A handbook made measures of effectiveness a requirement for all CERP projects, regardless of

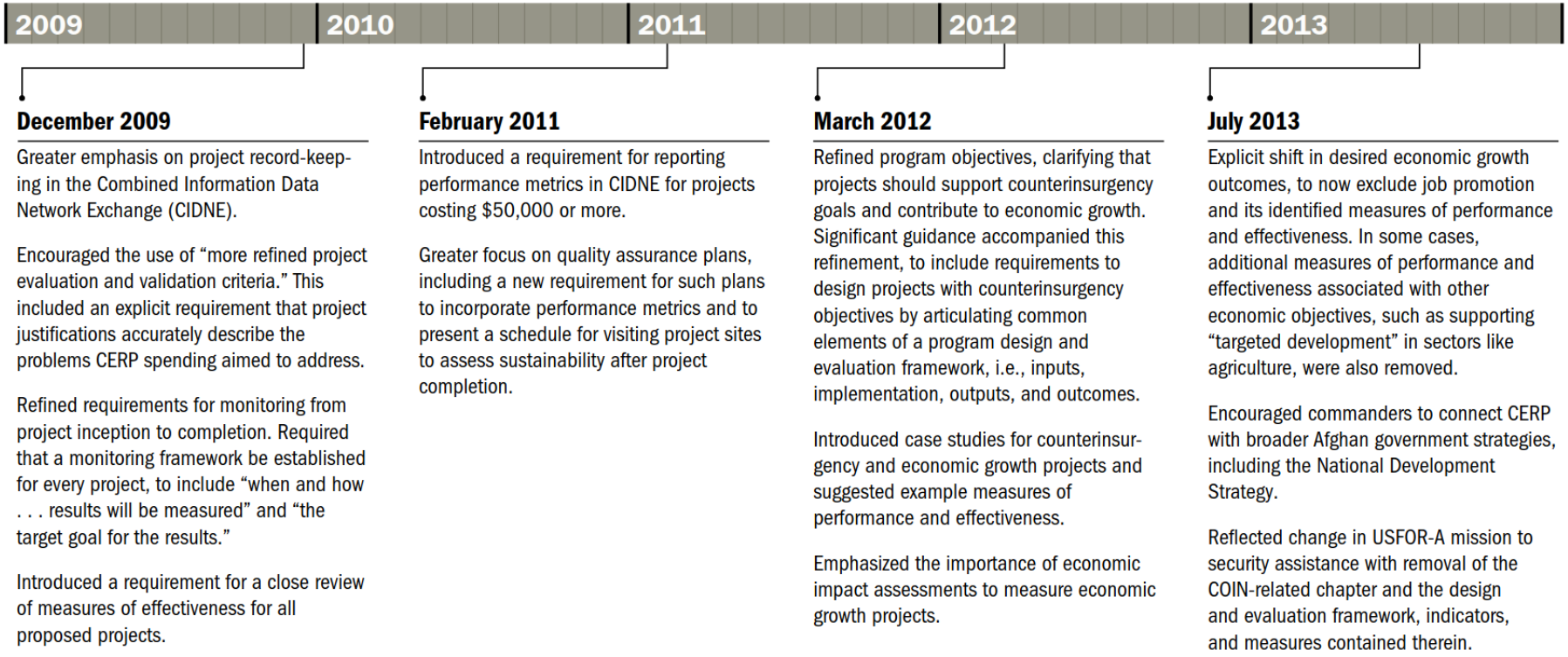
dollar value (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 92). However, there was little guidance on how to actually measure the impact of projects after completion (SIGAR, 2021a, p. 128). Instead, the handbook provided commanders with five keys to project selection, these being: "(1) quick executability; (2) local national employment; (3) benefit to the Afghan population; (4) high visibility to the local populace; and (5) sustainability by the GIRoA" (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 5). In addition, the December 2009 update contained of annexes which provided CERP implementation, including a detailed description of the project execution and management procedures (Annex A); category descriptions and examples of projects permissible under CERP (Annexes B and C); guides for project managers (PM), purchasing officers (PO), and paying agents (PA) (Annexes E, F and K); and a guide for properly entering CERP projects into the CIDNE database (Annex G) (Egel et al., 2016; USFOR-A, 2009b).[16]

The subsequent updates to the MAAWS–A handbook focused on improving the monitoring and evaluation of CERP projects. These updates were made in response to a November 2010 report by the U.S. Army Audit Agency which had concluded that "[U.S. Forces – Afghanistan] and its predecessors hadn't established a correlation to prove whether CERP funding affected [counterinsurgency] operations. Although CERP had many humanitarian and developmental benefits, we questioned the effectiveness of CERP as a [counterinsurgency] tool due to the absence of a program baseline and performance measures" (quoted in SIGAR, 2021a,

[16]The Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE) is the internal management system used by the U.S. military to record tactical information from troops, including the implementation of CERP (Sexton, 2016).

p. 130). Figure 3.2 shows a timeline of the key changes made to MAAWS-A after the initial release of the standard operating procedures in May 2009.

EVOLUTION OF MONEY AS A WEAPON SYSTEM – AFGHANISTAN: KEY CHANGES TO CERP M&E REQUIREMENTS AFTER MAY 2009*



* The initial standard operating procedures for CERP were released in May 2009. This table presents key, M&E-related changes to the standard operating procedures over time.

Source: U.S. Department of the Army, "Money as a Weapon System – Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)," U.S. Forces – Afghanistan Publication 1-06, December 2009, pp. 2, 18, 92–94, 114; U.S. Department of the Army, "Money as a Weapon System – Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)," U.S. Forces – Afghanistan Publication 1-06, February 2011, pp. 94, 96; U.S. Department of the Army, "Money as a Weapon System – Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)," U.S. Forces – Afghanistan Publication 1-06, March 2012, pp. 119–121, 123–124, 132–135; U.S. Department of the Army, "Money as a Weapon System – Afghanistan (MAAWS-A)," U.S. Forces – Afghanistan Publication 1-06, July 2013, pp. 3, 12, 124, 128–129.

Figure 3.2: The figure shows a timeline of the key changes made to the Money as a Weapons System Afghanistan (MAAWS-A) handbook following the initial release of the standard operation procedures (SOP) in May 2009. The figure is reproduced from SIGAR (2021a, p. 130)

3.2.4 Project Selection, Execution, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

The majority of CERP funds in Afghanistan were channelled through U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) (Jensen, 2019). Each PRT typically consisted of between 50 to 100 military personnel and 3 to 5 civilian specialists (Johnson et al., 2012; Katzman, 2008). These civilians were supposed to include representatives from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of Agriculture (Tarnoff, 2009). However, the reality is that in many PRTs these positions were not filled (Haysom and Jackson, 2013). Indeed, a January 2009 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) showed that across the 12 U.S.–led PRTs in Afghanistan, there were 1,021 military personnel and only 35 civilian specialists (SIGAR, 2009).[17] As such, it was the case that "infantrymen, artillerymen, and cooks were often asked to manage millions of dollars worth of project portfolios with little or no experience in project management, construction, or finance" (anonymous soldier quoted in Egel et al., 2016, p. 130).[18]

According to the "Money as a Weapons System–Afghanistan" (MAAWS–

[17] At their peak, there were a total of 26 PRTs across Afghanistan, with the U.S. serving as the lead nation for 12 of them. The rest were led by NATO and coalition allies, including the United Kingdom, Germany and Canada (SIGAR, 2009). Each of these PRTs varied significantly in terms of structure, funding, leadership, and strategic focus depending on the lead nation (Cafarella, 2009). It should thus be noted that any discussion of PRTs in this dissertation pertains only to those led by the U.S.

[18] This section has summarised the key steps in the CERP implementation process. For a more detailed overview, see the "Money as a Weapons System - Afghanistan" handbook (e.g., USFOR-A, 2009b, pp. 26–38).

A) handbook, the first stage in CERP implementation was project identification and selection (USFOR-A, 2012, p. 22). Potential CERP projects could be identified and brought to the attention of commanders by his or her PRT team through a number of demand signals, including village elders, representatives of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA), officials at the local and national level, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and U.S. or coalition forces (USFOR-A, 2011, p. 36). In addition, one common way in which potential CERP projects could be identified was through meetings held between PRTs and village *shuras*.[19] It is advised that whatever the demand signal used to identify projects, commanders should "execute CERP projects in support of their COIN objectives" (USFOR-A, 2012, p. 22). In principal, the SOP restricts CERP spending to twenty project sectors, including agriculture, transportation, education, water and sanitation. However, in reality commanders were given the flexibility to identify and select projects based on the local conditions in their respective areas of operation (SIGAR, 2021a). Table 3.1 shows the CERP project sectors, and examples of projects under each sector classification.

After a potential CERP project has been identified, a project manager (PM) is assigned to develop a project proposal. As such, the PM is responsible for completing the documentation required to obtain U.S.

[19] *Shuras*, known as *jirgas* among ethnically Pashtun communities, can be found in almost every village across Afghanistan (Brick Murtazashvili, 2023). A type of informal village council, *shuras* generally consist of some combination of local elders, tribal leaders, clerical elites, militia commanders, and strongmen (Shurkin, 2011, p. 12). The *shuras* would convene on an ad hoc basis when specific issues arise (Brick Murtazashvili, 2023; Terpstra, 2020).

Table 3.1: Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) Sectors and Project Examples

CERP Sectors	Project Examples
Agriculture	Irrigation wells; pesticide control for crops; seeds for planting
Battle Damage Repair	Repair of property damage resulting from U.S. and coalition military operations
Civic Cleanup Activities	Projects to cleanup public areas; area beautification
Civic Support Vehicles	Purchase or lease vehicles (e.g., Construction vehicles, water and trash trucks)
Condolence Payments	Payments to civilians for the death/physical injury of relatives resulting from U.S. and coalition military operations
Economic, Financial, and Management Improvements	Micro-grants to individuals or small businesses; refurbishment of Bazaars
Education	Build, repair, and refurbish schools; school supplies; textbooks
Electricity	Electrical production (solar, hydro, wind, and fossil); generators
Food Production & Distribution	Food handling technology, including refrigeration, storage, warehousing, etc.
Former Detainee Payments	Payments made to individuals on release from coalition internment detention facilities
Healthcare	Construction/repair of hospitals and clinics; medical supplies; training
Hero Payments	Payments made to surviving spouses or next of kin of Afghan defense/police personnel killed because of U.S. and coalition military operations
Irrigation	Purchase of farm equipment or implements; canal cleanup
Other	
Protective Measures	Fencing; guard towers; lights
Rule of Law & Governance	Projects to repair government buildings such as administrative offices, or court houses
Telecommunications	TV/Radio stations (including equipment purchase, repair, and maintenance)
Temporary Contract Guards	Guards for critical infrastructure (e.g., oil pipelines, electric power lines)
Transportation	Transportation infrastructure, including roads, railway tracks, airports, ports, etc.
Water and Sanitation	Water treatment facilities; wells; flood prevention; waste disposal

Note: The table shows the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) sectors and project examples from the Money as a Weapons System Afghanistan (MAAWS-A) Handbook (USFOR-A, 2009a, pp. 67–72).

Commander approval. This includes a Letter of Justification (LoJ) that describes how the project will benefit the Afghan population, an Independent Government Cost Estimate (IGCE) that clearly identifies the expected costs of the project, and a Statement of Work (SOW) that outlines what needs to be done and the standards that must be adhered to by the local contractor (USFOR-A, 2012, pp. 23–29). For projects equal to or greater than US$50,000, a "Sustainment Memorandum of Agreement" must be signed with the Afghan organisation or Ministry that will sustain the project once completed (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 29). It is recommended that if the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) is unwilling to finance operating costs or maintain the investment, then the project should not be funded (USFOR-A, 2012, pp. 27–28). After the PM has finished project development, the proposal is sent up the chain of command to the appropriate level Commander for approval.

Subsequently, when a CERP project has been approved, the PM works with a purchasing officer (PO) to solicit bids from local contractors to execute the project (USFOR-A, 2011, pp. 49–50). As was noted earlier (see Section 3.2.3), one of the five keys to project selection was "local national employment". The PO is therefore advised to select the contractor that not only provides the best value for money, but also maximises local Afghan employment. streamlined planning process for CERP enabled commanders to approve projects and release funds quickly without from the Afghan government. This meant that CERP was much more efficient than USAID, for example, which long process requiring central planning and the contracting of major international firms (Lepeska, 2008). Throughout

the project's execution cycle, the PM would make regular site visits to conduct a quality assurance (QA) assessment to inspect the progress and quality of work done by the contractor, and to ensure that the goods and services being delivered is line with the SOW. The PM was also tasked with ensuring that the project files were kept up-to-date in the CIDNE database (USFOR-A, 2012, pp. 32–33).

Upon completion of a CERP project, the paying agent (PA) is responsible for settling any outstanding bills for goods and services received. The MAAWS–A handbook states that the preferred method of payment was electronic funds transfer (ETF), although cash payments in Afghani were authorised (USFOR-A, 2011, p. 51). To mark the end of construction of large-scale infrastructure projects, it was common for PRTs to hold Afghan-led ribbon cutting ceremonies. The purpose of these ceremonies was to confer ownership of CERP projects to the Afghan government in order to enhance its legitimacy in the eyes of the population. As such, they were attended by Afghan officials including district and provincial governors, police chiefs, and government ministers, among others (see e.g., Weis, 2007; Campbell, 2006; Mercurio, 2011; Skillman, 2010; Young, 2010; Hart, 2009; Shafran, 2009). The PRTs were meanwhile authorised to spend up to US$500 on light refreshments at these ribbon cutting ceremonies (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 15).

3.2.5 CERP as a Tool for Winning Hearts and Minds?

As was earlier pointed out, CERP is unique in that it had a definitive mandate to "win the hearts and minds" of the local Afghan population. The MAAWS—A handbook states that:

> "Warfighters at brigade, battalion, and company level in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment employ money as a weapons system to win the hearts and minds of the indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents. Money is one of the primary weapons used by warfighters to achieve successful mission results in COIN and humanitarian operations" (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 1).

This exemplifies how money itself was used a weapon for counterinsurgency warfare. CERP allowed U.S. military commanders at various levels to quickly respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction needs in their areas of operations, hoping to achieve tangible benefits for local populations. Examples of projects included the construction or repairs of roads and bridges, development of irrigation canals, constructing or refurbishing of schools, clinics, and wells, as well as support to local education and farming programmes, and others. The aim was for each project to be locally identified, with quick approval and implementation, often realised in conjunction with local labour (ibid., pp. 15–17). Importantly, commanders could not use CERP for projects that directly or indirectly benefited U.S. or coalition personnel, nor for paying for goods, services, or funds to national armies, among other limitations (ibid., p. 17).

Thus far, it remains uncertain the extent to which CERP was successful in helping to win over the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population.

This is for two main reasons. Crucially, the effectiveness of CERP was often measured as outputs rather than outcomes, including the number of schools and clinics built or repaired; miles of roads constructed; dollars obligated; and the number of projects completed. Moreover, there are even reports that some PRTs counted "the number of smiling Afghan children" as a measure of success (McNerney, 2005).

Secondly, there were significant problems in the collection of accurate data on CERP activity (Egel et al., 2016). While the MAAWS–A handbook states that the PM is responsible for keeping project files in the CIDNE database up-to-date, in reality the PM was focused "on the project's execution, while the documentation and CIDNE status are often neglected" (USFOR-A representative quoted in DoD, 2011, p. 17). Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter 4 Section 4.2.1, the problem of incomplete and missing CERP data posed a significant challenge while undertaking the research in this dissertation and required at times some innovative data cleaning.

3.3 Why Afghanistan?

This dissertation uses the conflict in Afghanistan as a "most-likely" case (Levy, 2008; Eckstein, 1975) for studying the relationship between international aid and the attitudes of the local population. If, on the other hand, the "hypothesized relationship between X and Y does not hold even though background factors (Z) predict that it should" (Gerring and Cojocaru, 2016, p. 405), then it would suggest that the theory is flawed or, at the

very least, limited to certain cases (Schmoll and Swenson, 2024).

This work thus argues that the conflict in Afghanistan constitutes a most-likely case for examining the "winning hearts and minds" theory within the broader literature on counterinsurgency and foreign aid. Several factors make Afghanistan particularly suitable for such analysis. First, the substantial financial resources allocated via CERP created one of the most extensive and sustained experiments in the use of aid as a tool of stabilisation in modern warfare. Second, the longevity of the program, spanning multiple phases of the international intervention, provides a rare opportunity to assess the long-term implications of aid distribution under conditions of protracted conflict. Third, the availability of data, encompassing both administrative records of CERP projects and survey evidence on Afghan public attitudes, enables an empirical assessment of the relationship between aid provision and local perceptions.

Given these conditions, the theoretical mechanism underlying the "hearts and minds" theory would predict a positive effect of localised aid interventions on community attitudes toward coalition forces and the Afghan government. However, the findings presented in this study suggest that empirical support for this relationship is limited or inconsistent, therefore calling into question the mechanism itself. This, in turn, highlights the need to re-evaluate the assumptions of the "hearts and minds" theory itself.

3.4 Summary

This chapter provides the context needed for examining the relationship between foreign aid and local attitudes in Afghanistan. It situates the dissertation within the broader historical, political, and operational landscape of the Afghan conflict, while offering a detailed exploration of the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), the primary aid programme under analysis. The chapter also outlines the rationale for selecting Afghanistan as a most-likely case for testing the "winning hearts and minds" theory.

The first section traces the history of the Afghan conflict from the U.S.-led invasion in October 2001 through successive phases of regime change, stabilisation, insurgency, counterinsurgency, and the eventual withdrawal of the U.S. forces. It highlights how the dynamics of warfare, governance, and reconstruction shaped the environment in which aid programmes operated, creating both opportunities and constraints for efforts to influence local legitimacy and security outcomes.

The second section offers an in-depth account of CERP, including its origins, evolution, and implementation. Initially established in Iraq in 2003 using seized regime funds, CERP was later institutionalised through U.S. congressional appropriations and extended to Afghanistan, where more than US$2.3 billion was disbursed between 2004 and 2014. The section traces the programme's operational development, from its early focus on small, rapidly executed local projects to its expansion during the U.S. troop surge, when spending increasingly targeted agriculture

and economic development in conflict-prone southern provinces. It also reviews the evolving Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), particularly as formalised in the Money as a Weapon System Afghanistan (MAAWS–A) handbook, which codified project selection, management, and accountability standards. Despite these efforts, persistent weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation, combined with inconsistent data entry and incomplete reporting, significantly obstructed reliable assessments of CERP's impact.

The final section sets out the theoretical rationale for choosing Afghanistan as a case study. Drawing on case selection logic, it argues that Afghanistan constitutes a most-likely case for testing the "hearts and minds" theory: it was a setting where extensive, sustained, and highly localised aid was deployed explicitly to improve public perceptions of the government and coalition forces. The availability of fine-grained administrative and survey data further strengthens its suitability for empirical analysis. However, as the dissertation argues, if the expected positive relationship between aid and local attitudes does not emerge even in such a context, this would call into question the core assumptions of the hearts and minds framework itself.

Chapter 4

Data and Empirical Strategy

This dissertation combines individual–level (Level 1) public opinion data from the Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People" (SoAP), with district–level (Level 2) data on reconstruction aid from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). This chapter will outline these data sources and the empirical strategy which will be used to test the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds. First, the chapter begins by introducing the survey data and key variables measuring attitudes toward government. Second, it proceeds to describe the main source of aid data, the procedures for data cleaning, and constructing the independent variable. Third, it reviews several individual– and district–level control variables that are likely to affect both the dependent and independent variables, or to explain variation in outcome. Finally, it details the logistic multilevel strategy which is used to accommodate the nested structure of the data.

4.1 The Survey of the Afghan People (SoAP)

The impact of aid on hearts and minds will be explored using the Asia Foundation's "Survey of the Afghan People" (SoAP), which is the broadest and longest-running nationwide barometer of Afghan attitudes and opinions (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a).[1] Each year, approximately 6,000 Afghans aged 18 years and over are interviewed using a multistage systematic sampling procedure (Breslawski, 2021). This dissertation studies six waves of surveys (W5–W10) collected from 2008 to 2013. These six survey waves were selected as they are the only ones that include all of the core questions about attitudes toward government, which are essential for the analysis of this research project. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the start and end dates of each collection period. The remainder of this section describes the sampling strategy employed by the SoAP, the sample covered by this dissertation, and the three survey items used as the dependent variables.

[1]Note that the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinions Research (ACSOR), a highly regarded market and opinion research firm, is contracted to help design and field the survey. ACSOR is extremely experienced in conducting survey research in Afghanistan having also conducted the fieldwork for D3's "Afghan Futures Survey" and NATO's "Afghanistan Nationwide Quarterly Research" (ANQAR) survey (Iyengar et al., 2017a).

Table 4.1: Summary of SoAP Survey Waves and Collection Periods

Wave	Year	Start Date	End Date
5	2008	12 June	2 July
6	2009	17 June	6 July
7	2010	18 June	5 July
8	2011	2 July	1 August
9	2012	17 June	1 July
10	2013	17 July	25 July

Note: The table shows the start and end date for each SoAP survey wave included in the sample. Data are obtained from the SoAP annual reports.

4.1.1 Sampling Strategy

The SoAP covers all eight regions and 34 provinces in Afghanistan. The primary sampling unit is the administrative district and is selected on the basis of Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) random sampling (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a; Breslawski, 2021). From among the sampled districts, the secondary sampling units (villages in rural areas/neighbourhoods in urban areas) are chosen via simple random sampling (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a). In order to secure access to sample neighbourhoods and ensure the safety of its enumerators, the SoAP works to establish ties with village headman and other local leaders (Varughese, 2007). A random walk is used to select target households, and the Kish grid method is used to randomise the respondent interviewed from within each selected household (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a; Breslawski, 2021).[2] The sampling strategy employed

[2]A "Kish grid" is a tool used to randomly select the household member while avoiding selection bias. After listing household members by name and age in descending order, the respondent is selected using the rules of the Kish grid. Importantly, the numbers in the Kish grid are pre-coded so as to help prevent fraud or convenience

by the SoAP is therefore comparable to that of other large-scale surveys conducted in conflict-affected settings, such as the Arab Barometer (2009) and the Afrobarometer (2015) (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a).[3]

In addition to the extremely difficult security conditions, conducting survey research in Afghanistan entails a number of context-specific practical challenges including. As Varughese (2007) puts it, "Widespread illiteracy, hostility to research, severe cultural restrictions on access to households, and especially to women, unfavorable physiographic conditions, and so on have to be confronted". The SoAP therefore takes several measures so as to secure a representative sample of responses. For example, to account for the high rate of illiteracy in Afghanistan the survey is carried out orally and face-to-face (Kaltenthaler et al., 2022; Varughese, 2007).[4] The survey is also administered in many of the different languages that are spoken across Afghanistan (Kaltenthaler et al., 2022; Varughese, 2007).[5] In order to ensure that the interviews are conducted in a culturally appropriate manner, the enumerators are matched with respondents by gender (i.e., men interviewed men, and women interviewed women) and ethnicity (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a; Varughese, 2007). Finally, the enumerators are trained in proper household and respondent selection, appropriate

sampling of the people present. The interviewers are not allowed to substitute an alternate household member if the individual selected by the Kish grid is not available or refused to be interviewed. Instead, the interviewer moves on to the next household in accordance with the random walk (Tariq et al., 2011, p. 188).

[3]For a more detailed description of the survey methodology see the SoAP annual reports, for example, Rennie et al. (2008; 2009), Tariq et al. (2010; 2011; 2012) and Shawe (2013).

[4]In 2008 the literacy rate in Afghanistan was estimated to be only 26% (NRVA, 2008).

[5]The SoAP conducts the interviews in Pashto, Dari, Uzbek, Turkman, Hazaragee, Baloch, Pashayee, Norestanee, among others.

interviewing techniques, correctly recording responses to questions, and the secure storage of respondent information (Condra and Wright, 2019; 2021). These measures taken by the SoAP help to increase our confidence in the design and implementation of the survey.

The confidence in the survey is further bolstered by diagnostics performed by the SoAP which are summarised in Table 4.2. They show that during the period under investigation the refusal rate never exceeds 6%, the non-contact rate ranges between 11% and 29%, and the response rate exceeds 67% across all of the rounds. These are consistent with or exceed other large-scale national surveys—even those conducted in non-conflict settings such as the BHPS (British Household Panel Survey) in Britain, the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics) in Australia, and the SOEP (German Socio-Economic Panel) in Germany (Wright et al., 2018; Watson and Wooden, 2011). According to Varughese (2007), it is not unusual to complete the survey on the first attempt due to the high unemployment rate in Afghanistan and correctly choosing the appropriate time of day for interviewing. The results of the survey diagnostics therefore suggest that the SoAP data can provide a reasonable basis for making inferences about the Afghan population and their attitudes toward government.

Table 4.2: Survey Diagnostics Conducted by the SoAP

Wave	Year	Refusal Rate (%)	Non-Contact Rate (%)	Response Rate (%)
5	2008	6	11	83
6	2009	4	14	82
7	2010	5	14	81
8	2011	5	27	67
9	2012	4	29	67
10	2013	4	17	79

[1] Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.
[2] Data are obtained from the SoAP annual reports.

4.1.2 The Sample

Unfortunately, the sampling frame used by the SoAP contains a number of "unofficial" districts (formed before 2004 by the previous government, often by splitting existing parent districts) and "temporary" districts (formed after 2004 by then President Karzai due to security concerns or other considerations, but not yet approved by parliament) (EASO, 2019; Nixon, 2008). Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessarily dropping respondents from the sample, individuals from unofficial and temporary districts are merged back into their corresponding parent districts.[6] This approach has been widely adopted by other conflict scholars when using survey data from Afghanistan, including Deglow and Sundberg (2021a) and Condra and Wright (2019; 2021). Finally, the SoAP has sampled the different subdistricts in Kabul separately, and these have therefore been

[6]For example, Dularam is merged back into its parent district Kish Rod, Chinarto is merged into Choran, Dand into Kandahar, and Taktha Pul into Daman.

consolidated into a single district for Kabul City (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a). After the above steps have been taken to clean the data, the sample studied by this dissertation covers a total of 38,805 individuals (Level 1) nested within 381 districts (Level 2).[7] Table 4.3 summarises the total number of individuals and districts in each survey wave.

Table 4.3: Individuals and Districts Included in the Sample

Wave	Year	Individuals	Districts
5	2008	5644	254
6	2009	5689	270
7	2010	5664	270
8	2011	5742	263
9	2012	7566	302
10	2013	8500	342

Note: The table shows the number of individuals and districts from each survey wave included in the final sample after list-wise deletion has been used to drop respondents with missing values.

Figure 4.1 visually depicts the number of times that each district in Afghanistan was sampled by the SoAP between 2008 and 2013. It shows that 161 (40%) districts are sampled in all six years, 55 (14%) districts are sampled in five of the years, 58 (15%) in four years, 43 (11%) in three years, 35 (9%) in two years, and 29 (7%) districts are sampled in just one

[7]Note that listwise deletion has been used to drop individuals from the sample if missing values on any of the variables included in the main analysis.

year. In each wave, the enumerators are unable to survey a number of the districts due to inaccessibility caused by logistical problems, natural disasters, and insecurity (Tariq et al., 2010). In order to therefore collect information on the perceptions of individuals from insecure areas, intercept interviews are conducted with respondents travelling out of these areas to towns, bazaars, and hospitals in areas that are more secure (Shawe, 2013). Finally, in comparison to other surveys, the SoAP accurately reflects the urban-rural breakdown of the Afghan population and therefore does not suffer from the problem of urban bias, which is common for surveys fielded in conflict-affected settings (Kaltenthaler et al., 2022; Kalyvas, 2004).

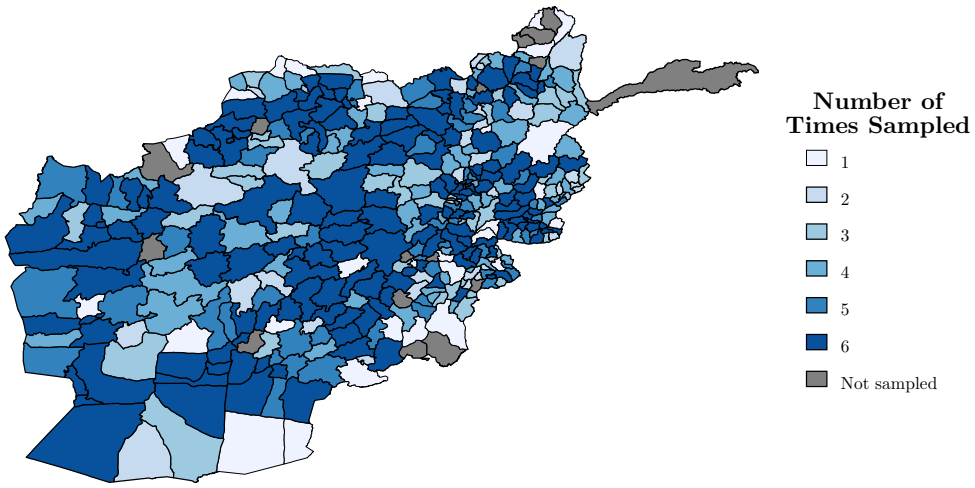


Figure 4.1: The figure shows the number of times that each district in Afghanistan was sampled by the SoAP between 2008 and 2013. District boundaries are depicted.

4.1.3 The Dependent Variables

There are three dependent variables of interest from the SoAP which are used to gauge respondent perceptions of the government at the national, provincial and local levels. Table 4.4 displays the three survey items used as the dependent variables and the wording used for each question.[8] The survey uses a 4-point Likert scale which is given to respondents with the following options: "very bad job", "somewhat bad job", "somewhat good job", and "very good job".[9] However, in the main analysis the variables are dichotomised so that negative responses (very bad job/somewhat bad job) are grouped and coded as 0, and positive responses (somewhat good job/very good job) are grouped and coded as 1. The reason for recoding each variable into a dichotomous indicator is that the change from positive to negative attitudes, or vice versa, is deemed more important in magnitude and impact than changes within categories (i.e., from positive to more positive, or from negative to more negative). In addition, this approach greatly simplifies the statistical analysis and interpretability of the results.

[8]It should be noted that urban respondents are questioned about their perception of municipal authorities, while rural respondents are questioned about local authorities.

[9]A Likert scale is a rating system that is used to measure data on opinions, attitudes, and preferences of respondents. Starting with a question or statement, respondents are then asked to select one answer that best captures their opinion, attitude or preference from a list of options.

Table 4.4: Survey Items from the SoAP used as the Dependent Variables

Variable Name	Survey Item	Question Wording
National Government	x37a	Thinking of the National Government, how do you feel about the way it is carrying out its responsibilities? Is it doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?
Provincial Government	x37b	Turning to your Provincial Government, do you think that overall it is doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?
Local Government	x37c/x37d	And what do you think about the job done by your [Municipal/Local] authorities, do you think that overall it is doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?

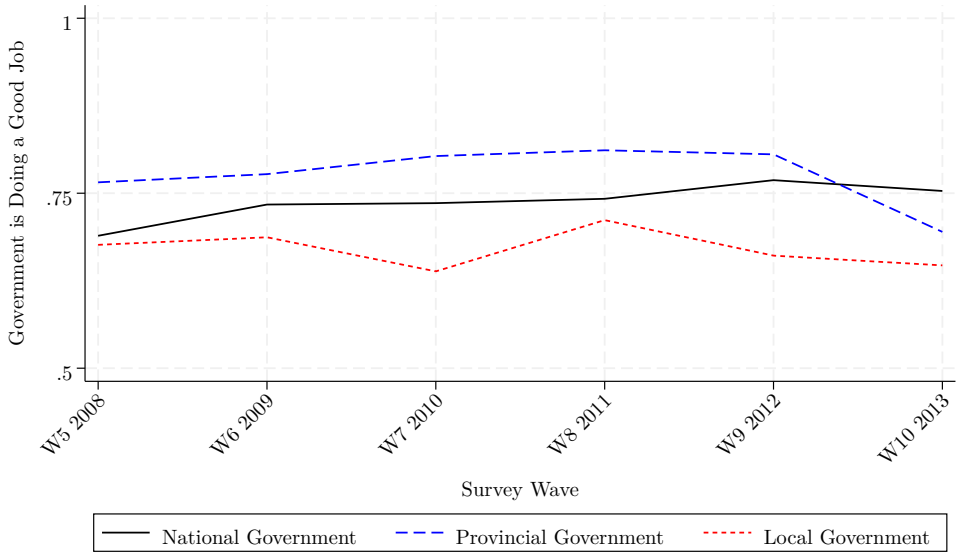


Figure 4.2: The figure shows a times series of the average response to the three dependent variables between 2008 and 2013.

Table 4.5: Original Response Scale from the SoAP and Recoded Response Scale

Variable	Original Response Scale	%	Recoded Response Scale	%
National Government	Very good job	19	Good job	74
	Somewhat good job	55		
	Somewhat bad job	19	Bad job	26
	Very bad job	7		
Provincial Government	Very good job	25	Good job	77
	Somewhat good job	53		
	Somewhat bad job	17	Bad job	23
	Very bad job	6		
Local Government	Very good job	19	Good job	67
	Somewhat good job	47		
	Somewhat bad job	24	Bad job	33
	Very bad job	9		

The time series of the average response to the three dependent variables is visualised in Figure 4.2. Overall, it indicates that individuals hold quite positive attitudes toward the Afghan government. However, looking at the original response scale from the SoAP shows that most respondents think that the Afghan government is only doing a "somewhat good job" (see Table 4.5 on page 72). Bearing this in mind, a possible concern is that the results in this dissertation may be affected by the decision to dichotomise the dependent variables. Therefore, as a robustness check, the models will be re-run using the original 4-point Likert scale and a multilevel ordered logistic regression (see Chapter 5 Section 5.3.1).

Another potential issue is that despite the aforementioned confidence in the design and implementation of the survey, concerns still remain regarding the reliability of responses. Indeed, previous research on conducting surveys in conflict settings shows that participants may falsify their preferences or refuse to answer sensitive survey questions (see e.g., G. Blair et al., 2014; Bullock et al., 2011; Lyall et al., 2013; De Juan and Koos, 2021; Matanock and García-Sánchez, 2018). This can occur for a number of reasons, for example; respondents may fear insurgent retaliatory attacks, respondents may face pressure to provide answers which are perceived as socially desirable, and respondents may not trust the enumerators enough in order to be able to answer the survey questions truthfully (Kaltenthaler et al., 2022; G. Blair, 2015). The dissertation will therefore as part of the extended analysis and discussion, in Chapter 6, test the possibility that the results have been affected by falsification and non-response (see Chapter 5 Section 6.1 on page 114).

Despite these concerns, there are strong reasons to believe that using data from the SoAP will provide a valid test of the "hearts and minds" theory. It was argued earlier in this dissertation (see Chapter 1 section 1.1) that the previous literature has predominantly studied the effect of aid on violence-related outcomes. Subsequently, the observed reduction in violence has been attributed to the positive effect of aid on attitudes. However, scholars have been unable to provide convincing evidence for this explanation beyond its compatibility with the data. Therefore, my argument is that using attitudinal data from the SoAP will provide a more accurate test for the effect of aid on hearts and minds. In addition, while

a small number of studies have used public opinion data to investigate the relationship between aid and support for the government (see e.g., Beath et al., 2012; Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023; De Juan et al., 2020), they have typically drawn on samples from relatively safe parts of North Afghanistan (Berman and Matanock, 2015). In contrast, the sample studied by this dissertation covers all of Afghanistan's eight regions and 34 provinces. Thus, while we should still remain cautious about the generalisability of the findings in this dissertation, there is reason to be optimistic that the sample of Afghans (38,805) and districts (381) to enable use to draw meaningful conclusions.

4.2 The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP)

Data on reconstruction aid comes from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Commander's Emergency Response Program" (CERP). Details about the programme were presented in the previous chapter of this dissertation. The data were obtained from the Combined Information Data Network Exchange (CIDNE), which was made available for download by Public Intelligence (2010). The original dataset contains the details of 19,187 CERP projects implemented during the conflict in Afghanistan. Each project is coded with information on the start and end date, sector, status, location, and estimates of allocated and spent funds. The remainder of this section details the steps taken to clean the data and to construct the

main independent variable which will be used throughout this dissertation.

4.2.1 Data Cleaning

A common problem with conflict data is that it is often beset with reliability issues due to inconsistent data, and the restricted access to classified sources (Fischerkeller, 2011). In order to prepare the data for empirical analysis therefore, extensive data cleaning was first required to correct coding errors and inconsistencies. First, some cleaning of project dates was required to account for missing and erroneous values. For instance, approximately 6% of projects have not been coded with either the start and/or end dates. Moreover, a handful of projects display evidently incorrect dates because they fall outside of the time frame for which CERP was operational. To give an example, one project in the dataset is coded as ending on "Jan 03 1900", which is—for obvious reasons—not a possible date of completion. Such projects have thus been dropped from the final sample. In addition, projects which coded with a status of "cancelled" are dropped because there is no way to determine at which point in time a project was actually terminated.

Second, the CERP data has been coded with the name of the district and province in which a project was implemented. However, these are both patchy and littered with inconsistencies and variations in spelling. An example is Shakardara district in Kabul province, which appears in the dataset as "Shakar Dara", "Shakar Darah", "Shakar Darrah", and "Shakar Darreh". Since these data cannot be relied on to geographically

locate projects, a two-step process is instead used to code projects to the appropriate district and province. The first is to use the Military Grid Reference System (MGRS) to extract the longitude and latitude of each CERP project.[10] The second step is to use these coordinates to district-locate projects using the "geoinpoly" command in Stata and the administrative boundary shapefile from the Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) Project at Princeton University (ESOC, 2022). The shapefile follows the Afghan Ministry of Interior's June 2005 designation of 398 districts across 34 provinces (Nixon, 2008; Child, 2019). It must also be noted that a considerable share of CERP projects (8%) have not been coded with accurate geo-coordinates and have thus been dropped from the final sample.

Third, the CERP data unfortunately only provides reliable spent estimates for a subset of the projects. Only 17% (3,273) of CERP projects report a non-missing value for the amount spent, and of those 404 show that no money was spent at all. This is a potential problem when trying to evaluate the effectiveness of CERP if the data is systematically missing, which can introduce bias into the regression estimates, and not missing at random. Thus, whereas some scholars have examined the effect of project expenditures on conflict (e.g., Berman et al., 2011b; Sanchez-Cuevas, 2018; Chou, 2012; Child, 2014), this dissertation uses project counts as its main independent variable throughout. This approach has been successfully

[10]The MGRS is the geo-coordinate standard used by NATO militaries for locating points on Earth. For more information see, for example, the Defense Mapping Agency's (1988) technical manual "Datums, Ellipsoids, Grids and Grid Reference Systems".

employed by, among others, Iyengar et al. (2011), Wells (2013) and Child (2019). After the above steps have been take to clean the data, the total number of CERP projects in the final sample is reduced to 9,421.

4.2.2 The Independent Variable

Throughout the dissertation, the main independent variable measures the total number of CERP projects active in the district in which a respondent resides in the 12 months prior to the date of interview. In order to construct the variable, each individual survey respondent is iterated within a loop. For each respondent, a timeframe of 12 months preceding the date of their interview is considered (that is, a period ranging from 12 months prior to the interview to the date when the interview took place). Subsequently, for each respondent, we will then iterate over each project listed in the CERP dataset that matches the respondents own district. Given that each project in the CERP data contains both a start and end date, it is possible to look for an intersection between the active period of a project and the 12 months timeframe of the survey. In other words, this process allow us to count how many projects were active in the respondents district within a period of 12 months prior to them being surveyed. The figures are expressed as projects per 1,000 population instead of absolute number of projects in order to take into account differences in population size across districts. These have been calculated using population estimates from the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (CSO, 2022). It should be noted that since the interview

dates differ slightly for respondents from the same district and survey wave, the number of projects that respondents are exposed to in the 12 months preceding the date of their interview also vary slightly.

4.2.3 Why CERP?

It must be pointed out that CERP is just one of many sources of funding for relief and reconstruction. For example, as of 31st March 2011, the U.S. had spent more than US$60 billion rebuilding Afghanistan, of which approximately US$2.64 billion had been disbursed through CERP, US$11.14 billion through USAID, and the rest through multiple other agencies (SIGAR, 2011b, p. 142). This therefore raises the following question: Why use CERP as the main source of aid data in this dissertation?

There are two principal reasons for this: The first is that CERP is one of the few publicly available sources of data on aid projects in Afghanistan. CERP data is in the public domain having been released pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Though there do exist more comprehensive databases, they are not publicly available for use in academic research because they are classified, or have restrictions on access. An example is the Afghan Country Stability Picture (ACSP), which is a NATO database used to collect information on reconstruction and development initiatives from across Afghanistan, and contains the details of approximately 85,000 projects (Davids et al., 2010). However, the ACSP is designated as FOUO (For Official Use Only) and as such, special permission must be granted before the data can be accessed (Querze, 2011).

This in part explains why the CERP data has been used extensively in previous academic research on Afghanistan (see e.g., Adams, 2015; Child, 2014; Chou, 2012; Wells, 2013; Egel et al., 2016; G. Blair et al., 2014; Condra and Shapiro, 2012).

The second reason is that unlike other sources of reconstruction and development, the CERP programme has a definitive mandate to "win the hearts and minds" of the local population. As was discussed in Chapter 3 Section 3.2, the MAAWS-A handbook states that: "Warfighters at brigade, battalion, and company level in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment employ money as a weapons system to win the hearts and minds of the indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents" (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 1). It is, therefore, considered highly likely that by using CERP we will observe the expected positive impact of aid on attitudes toward the Afghan government. Thus, despite the obvious concerns about data quality, there are both strong practical and theoretical reasons for using CERP as the main independent variable throughout this dissertation. Moreover, Fischerkeller (2011, p. 142) opines that "If a well-designed statistical model looking at thousands of cases concluded that CERP had been associated with changes in the desired effects in a statistically significant manner, confidence that an effect can be generalized would be warranted".

4.3 Control Variables

The models incorporate a set of common individual– and district–level controls which are believed to affect both the independent and dependent variables, or to explain variation in outcome. This section briefly introduces the control variables, including how they have been coded and the rationale for including them. Lastly, at the end of this section, Table 4.6 on page 85 provides a summary of the variable descriptions.

4.3.1 Individual Control Variables (Level 1)

- **Age.** The continuous variable records a respondents age, in years, at the time of interview.

- **Gender.** The gender of the respondent. The dummy variable is coded as 1 if a respondent is male, and coded as 0 if a respondent is female.

- **Ethnicity.** The ethnicity of the respondent. The dummy variable included in the models encoded as 1 if a respondent is ethnically Pashtun, while all other ethnicities (e.g., Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara) are grouped and coded as 0. The logic behind grouping all non-Pashtun respondents under a single value is that the Taliban is a predominantly Pashtun movement which is seen, by some Pashtuns, as a legitimate alternative to the Karzai government (Giustozzi, 2008; 2010; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023). Therefore, we might expect to observe lower levels of support for the government among

the Pashtuns in the sample as opposed to other ethnic groups.

- **Avg. Household Income.** The average household income of the respondent. In the SoAP, it is measured as an ordinal variable, which has been recoded to take three values: 1 for low income households (less than 2,000 afs.), 2 for middle income households (between 2,001 and 10,000 afs.), and 3 for high income households (more than 10,000 afs.). These categories are based on the income brackets used in the SoAP annual reports (see e.g., Rennie et al. (2008; 2009), Tariq et al. (2010; 2011; 2012) and Shawe (2013).

- **Rural/urban.** Whether the respondent resides in a rural or urban area. We should therefore expect to observe lower levels of support for the Afghan government in rural as opposed to urban areas. The dummy variable is coded as 1 if a respondent resides in an urban setting, and coded as 0 if a respondent resides in a rural setting.

- **Education.** The level of education of the respondent. The models include this as a dummy variable which is coded as 1 if a respondent has received formal education, and coded as 0 if a respondent has not received formal education.

- **Corruption.** A metric of the respondent's perception of corruption being a problem or not. Polling by the SoAP shows that corruption is identified as one of Afghanistan's biggest problems, and that it is "a major problem in all facets of life and at all levels of government" (Tariq et al., 2012, p. 107). It is possible, therefore, that

corruption is a confounding variable in the relationship between aid and attitudes toward the Afghan government. Thus, the models include a dummy variable which is coded as 1 if a respondent thinks that corruption is a problem, and coded as 0 if a respondent thinks that corruption is not a problem.

4.3.2 District Control Variables (Level 2)

- **Conflict Intensity/1000.** The mapping of CERP activity in Chapter 3 Section 3.2.2 revealed that the biggest share of CERP spending went to the areas that were the most insecure (Johnson et al., 2012; Zürcher, 2017). At the same time, existing literature shows that inability of the state to provide citizens with security can signal a lack of competence, which, in turn, negatively impacts legitimacy and trust (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021b; S. Gates and Justesen, 2020; De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016). Therefore, the implication is that violence is a confounding variable that leads to both more aid projects and worse perceptions of the Afghan government. In order to control for violence as a potential confounder, the models include a measure of conflict intensity from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) (Sundberg and Melander, 2013).[11] The variable measures the total number of fatalities (per 1,000 population) in the district in which a respondent

[11]The UCDP GED defines a conflict event as "an instance of organized violence with at least one fatality" (Sundberg and Melander, 2013, p. 523). Data are gleaned from a range of different sources, including newspapers, NGO reports, and historical archives, among others (Högbladh, 2022; Sundberg and Melander, 2013).

resides in the 12 months prior to the date of interview.

- **Population (Logged).** The models control for district population size (logged) from the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (CSO, 2022). It should be noted that since the CSO provides separate estimates for unofficial and temporary districts, these have been added to the population estimates of the corresponding parent districts. The variable is time invariant and is based on 2009 estimates.

- **Opium (Hectares Logged).** The variable measures the total hectares of land (logged) in a district-year used for opium poppy cultivation, and is obtained from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2013). The reason for including this variable is that the cultivation of opium poppy was connected with the funding of the Taliban via taxation on the cultivation, processing, and smuggling of drugs (Felbab-Brown, 2020).

Table 4.6: Variable Descriptions

Variable Name	Question/Description	Categories/Scale	Source
Reconstruction Aid			
CERP Aid Projects/1000	Number of CERP projects active in the district in which a respondent resides in the 12 months prior to interview	Count per 1000 population	CERP
Public Opinion			
National Government	"Thinking of the National Government, how do you feel about the way it is carrying out its responsibilities? Is it doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?"	0 = Bad Job; 1 = Good Job	SoAP
Provincial Government	"Turning to your Provincial Government, do you think that overall it is doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?"	0 = Bad Job; 1 = Good Job	SoAP
Local Government	"And what do you think about the job done by your [Municipal/Local] authorities, do you think that overall it is doing a very good job, somewhat good job, somewhat bad job or a very bad job?"	0 = Bad Job; 1 = Good Job	SoAP
Individual–Level Control Variables			
Ethnicity	"Which ethnic group do you belong to?"	0 = Other Ethnicity 1; = Pashtun	SoAP
Gender	Gender	0 = Female; 1 = Male	SoAP
Age	"How old were you on your last birthday?/ How old are you?"		SoAP

Table 4.6: Variable Descriptions

Variable Name	Question/Description	Categories/Scale	Source
Avg. Household Income	"For statistical purposes only, we need to know your average monthly household income. Will you please tell me which of the following categories best represents your average total family monthly income?"	1 = Low Income; 2 = Middle Income; 3 = High Income	SoAP
Education	"What is the highest level of school you completed?"	0 = No Formal Education; Yes Formal Education	SoAP
Rural/urban	Whether interview is conducted in rural or urban setting	0 = Rural; 1 = Urban	SoAP
Corruption	"Please tell me whether you think that corruption is a major problem, a minor problem, or no problem at all in the following areas... In your neighborhood"	0 = No Problem; 1 = Major Problem	SoAP
District–Level Control Variables			
Conflict Intensity/1000	Number of conflict-related fatalities in the district in which a respondent resides in the 12 months prior to interview	Count per 1000 population	UCDP GED
Population (Log)	District population, based on 2009 estimates	Logarithm of the count	CSO
Opium (Hectares Log)	Hectares of land used for opium cultivation in each district year	Logarithm of the count	UNDC

4.4 Empirical Strategy

The dissertation will use multilevel logistic regression in order to empirically test the impact of aid on winning hearts and minds.[12] The choice of model takes into account the binary nature of the dependent variable, as well as the hierarchical structure of the data which has individuals (Level 1) nested within districts (Level 2). The need for multilevel analysis is further confirmed by running a so-called null model—since it does not include any predictors—in order to obtain the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), also known as the Variance Partition Coefficient (VPC).[13] The ICC is then used to determine the share of the total variance in attitudes toward government that can be attributed to differences between districts.[14] As Table 4.7 below shows, 13.5% of variance in the national government can be explained by between-district differences, as can 15.2% in the provincial government, and 11.4% the local government. This suggests that a multilevel approach is the most appropriate choice of modelling strategy in this dissertation. The models include dummy variables for the survey wave in order to control for potential wave effects. The descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the main analysis are presented in Table 4.8 at the end of the chapter.

[12]It should be noted that the empirical strategy adopted by this dissertation has been informed by Deglow and Sundberg (2021a) "Local Conflict Intensity and Public Perceptions of the Police: Evidence from Afghanistan". The authors use SoAP data and a multilevel modelling approach to investigate the impact of conflict on perceptions of the police in Afghanistan.

[13]The ICC is calculated using the following formula: $\frac{\tau^2}{\tau^2+\frac{\pi^2}{3}}$

[14]It should be noted that in logistic regression models, the lowest level (i.e., the individual) is set to $\frac{\pi^2}{3} = 3.290$.

Table 4.7: Proportion of the Total Variance by Analytical Level

Variable Name	Analytical Level	Variance (SE)	Proportion of Total Variance
National Government	Individual	3.290	86.5%
	District	0.513 (0.049)	13.5%
Provincial Government	Individual	3.290	85.2%
	District	0.573 (0.054)	14.8%
Local Government	Individual	3.290	88.7%
	District	0.421 (0.040)	11.3%

4.5 Summary

This chapter outlines the data sources, variable construction, and methodological framework used to assess whether aid influenced public attitudes toward the Afghan government. It combines individual–level survey data from the Survey of the Afghan People (SoAP) with district–level information on the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which will be used in a multilevel analysis of how aid interventions shaped perceptions of governance.

The SoAP provides nationally representative data collected annually across all 34 provinces between 2008 and 2013, capturing a range of demographic and attitudinal indicators. Three dependent variables were constructed to measure confidence in national, provincial, and local government institutions. These were analysed alongside a key independent variable derived from geo-referenced CERP records, measuring the number of aid projects per 1,000 population in each district over the preceding

year. This chapter also summarises the data cleaning process used for addressing inconsistencies and missing information to ensure analytical reliability.

The empirical strategy employs multilevel logistic regression models to account for both individual– and district–level variation in attitudes. This approach enables an examination of whether local exposure to CERP projects corresponded with more favourable perceptions of government performance, thereby testing a central tenet of the "winning hearts and minds" hypothesis within Afghanistan's conflict context.

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	%	N
CERP Aid Projects/1000	0.093	0.243	0	4.144	-	38805
National Government (*ref: bad job*)	0.740	0.439	0	1	-	38805
Provincial Government (*ref: bad job*)	0.772	0.420	0	1	-	38805
Local Government (*ref: bad job*)	0.668	0.471	0	1	-	38805
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	0.441	0.497	0	1	-	38805
Gender (*ref: female*)	0.591	0.492	0	1	-	38805
Age	34.908	12.953	18	96	-	38805
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.415	0.493	0	1	-	38805
Rural/urban (*ref: rural*)	0.188	0.391	0	1	-	38805
Corruption (*ref: no problem*)	0.849	0.358	0	1	-	38805
Avg. Household Income						
Low Income	-	-	-	-	10	3780
Middle Income	-	-	-	-	67	25943
High Income	-	-	-	-	23	9082
Population (Log)	11.476	1.356	8.537	14.894	-	38805
Opium (Hectares Log)	1.730	2.909	0	10.020	-	38805
Conflict Intensity/1000	0.360	0.897	0	18.904	-	38805
Year						
Survey Wave 2008	-	-	-	-	15	5644
Survey Wave 2009	-	-	-	-	15	5689
Survey Wave 2010	-	-	-	-	15	5664
Survey Wave 2011	-	-	-	-	15	5742
Survey Wave 2012	-	-	-	-	20	7566
Survey Wave 2013	-	-	-	-	22	8500

Note: The table shows the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the main regression analysis. The percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer. The reference categories for binary variables are shown in parenthesis.

Chapter 5

Empirical Results

This chapter reports the empirical results and is organised in three principal sections. The first section presents the findings from a series of multilevel logistic regression models exploring the relationship between aid (Level 1) and individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government (Level 2). The second section provides a discussion of these results. In the third and final section, a number of robustness checks are performed in order to address potential concerns about model specification and other estimation issues.

5.1 Empirical Results

The main regression results are presented in Table 5.1. For each dependent variable, three different models are estimated: a bivariate model, a model which includes the individual–level controls, and a full model which includes both the individual– and district–level controls. The coefficients

are reported in log odds, which ensures that values remain between 0 and 1 while providing a meaningful interpretation through odds ratios. The first three columns of the table (Models 1, 2 and 3) test the effect of aid on individual–level perceptions of the national government. The results show that across all models the regression coefficient for aid is both negative and statistically significant ($p < .001$). In other words, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also *less* likely to think that the national government is doing a good job. This indicates that, contrary to expectations, the provision of aid does not actually improve civilian attitudes toward government. Instead, it suggests that aid has a negative effect on public opinion, which is the opposite result from what the "hearts and minds" theory would otherwise suggest. These results are in line with the research of scholars such as Crost et al. (2014), Child (2019), and Weintraub (2016), who argue that aid not only fails to secure the "hearts and minds" of local populations but may, in fact, promote violent insurgency.

Table 5.1: Effect of Aid on Individual-Level Perceptions of the National, Provincial and Local Government

	National Government			Provincial Government			Local Government		
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
CERP Aid Projects/1000	−0.254***	−0.243***	−0.226***	−0.321***	−0.309***	−0.280***	−0.228***	−0.214***	−0.185**
	(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.063)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)		−0.042	−0.035		−0.101*	−0.079		−0.122***	−0.102**
		(0.038)	(0.038)		(0.041)	(0.041)		(0.036)	(0.036)
Gender (*ref: female*)		−0.263***	−0.260***		−0.225***	−0.221***		−0.123***	−0.119***
		(0.028)	(0.028)		(0.030)	(0.030)		(0.026)	(0.026)
Age		−0.001	−0.001		0.001	0.001		0.001	0.001
		(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)		0.111***	0.111***		0.129***	0.128***		0.134***	0.134***
		(0.028)	(0.028)		(0.029)	(0.029)		(0.026)	(0.026)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)		0.216**	0.203**		0.227**	0.211**		−0.035	−0.045
		(0.067)	(0.068)		(0.070)	(0.071)		(0.060)	(0.061)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)		−0.152***	−0.152***		−0.042	−0.040		−0.122***	−0.120***
		(0.036)	(0.036)		(0.037)	(0.037)		(0.033)	(0.033)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)									
Middle Income		−0.079	−0.077		−0.078	−0.070		−0.178***	−0.171***
		(0.046)	(0.046)		(0.049)	(0.049)		(0.043)	(0.043)
High Income		−0.124*	−0.123*		−0.094	−0.085		−0.126*	−0.118*
		(0.052)	(0.052)		(0.056)	(0.056)		(0.049)	(0.049)
Population (Log)			0.077			0.061			0.026
			(0.053)			(0.054)			(0.047)
Opium (Hectares Log)			0.002			−0.032**			−0.032**
			(0.011)			(0.011)			(0.010)
Conflict Intensity/1000			−0.064***			−0.095***			−0.082***
			(0.019)			(0.019)			(0.017)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)									
2009	0.263***	0.268***	0.271***	0.089	0.093	0.093	0.068	0.068	0.070
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
2010	0.279***	0.296***	0.301***	0.277***	0.294***	0.295***	−0.177***	−0.173***	−0.170***
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.042)
2011	0.263***	0.293***	0.299***	0.275***	0.301***	0.310***	0.153***	0.167***	0.176***
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
2012	0.368***	0.402***	0.409***	0.219***	0.249***	0.257***	−0.083*	−0.064	−0.052
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.041)
2013	0.333***	0.374***	0.384***	−0.395***	−0.358***	−0.339***	−0.176***	−0.150***	−0.127**
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.041)
Constant	0.895***	1.245***	0.432	1.312***	1.498***	0.901	0.881***	1.183***	0.951
	(0.050)	(0.081)	(0.570)	(0.054)	(0.085)	(0.587)	(0.047)	(0.075)	(0.508)
Individuals	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805
Districts	381	381	381	381	381	381	381	381	381
Akaike information criterion	42687.115	42567.632	42558.756	39534.521	39463.750	39431.396	47507.308	47439.731	47409.273
Bayesian information criterion	42755.646	42704.693	42721.515	39603.051	39600.811	39594.156	47575.838	47576.792	47572.033

[1] Multilevel logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government (0 = bad job, 1 = good job).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

In addition to statistical significance, it is important to estimate the substantive effect of aid so as to determine whether or not these results can be considered meaningful. Due to the fact that log odds can be difficult to interpret, it is common to also estimate predicted probabilities in order to make the results somewhat easier and more intuitive to understand. These are visually depicted in Figure 5.1, which shows one plot for each dependent variable. Interpreting Model 3 in substantive terms shows that increasing aid from the minimum to maximum observed value (0–4.144), when the continuous control variables are held at their mean and the categorical variables their mode, decreases the predicted probability of an individual thinking that the national government is doing a good job by 24% (from 74% to 56%), or 18 percentage points. Thus, the effect of aid on attitudes toward the national government is not only statistically significant, but also substantively quite large.

Turning to the middle three columns of the table (Models 4, 5 and 6), these test the effect of aid on perceptions of the provincial government. The coefficient for aid remains statistically significant ($p < .001$) across all models, and continues to display the negative sign. The substantive effect is quite large as well; the increase in aid from the minimum to maximum (0–4.144) observed value decreases the predicted probability of an individual thinking that the provincial government is doing a good job by 36% (25 percentage points), from 69% to 44% (based on M6). The continuous control variables are held at their respective mean values, and the categorical ones their mode.

The final three columns of the table (Models 7, 8 and 9) test the effect

of aid on perceptions of the local government. The results follow the same pattern; the coefficient for aid is statistically significant ($p < .01$) across all three models and exerts a negative effect. That is to say, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also *less* likely to think that the local government is doing a good job. Interpreting the full model (M9) in substantive terms shows that the change in aid from the minimum to maximum (0–4.144) observed value decreases the predicted probability of an individual thinking that the local government is doing a good job by 6% (from 65% to 48%, or 17 percentage points). Therefore, the substantive effect of aid on attitudes toward the local government is much more modest by comparison.

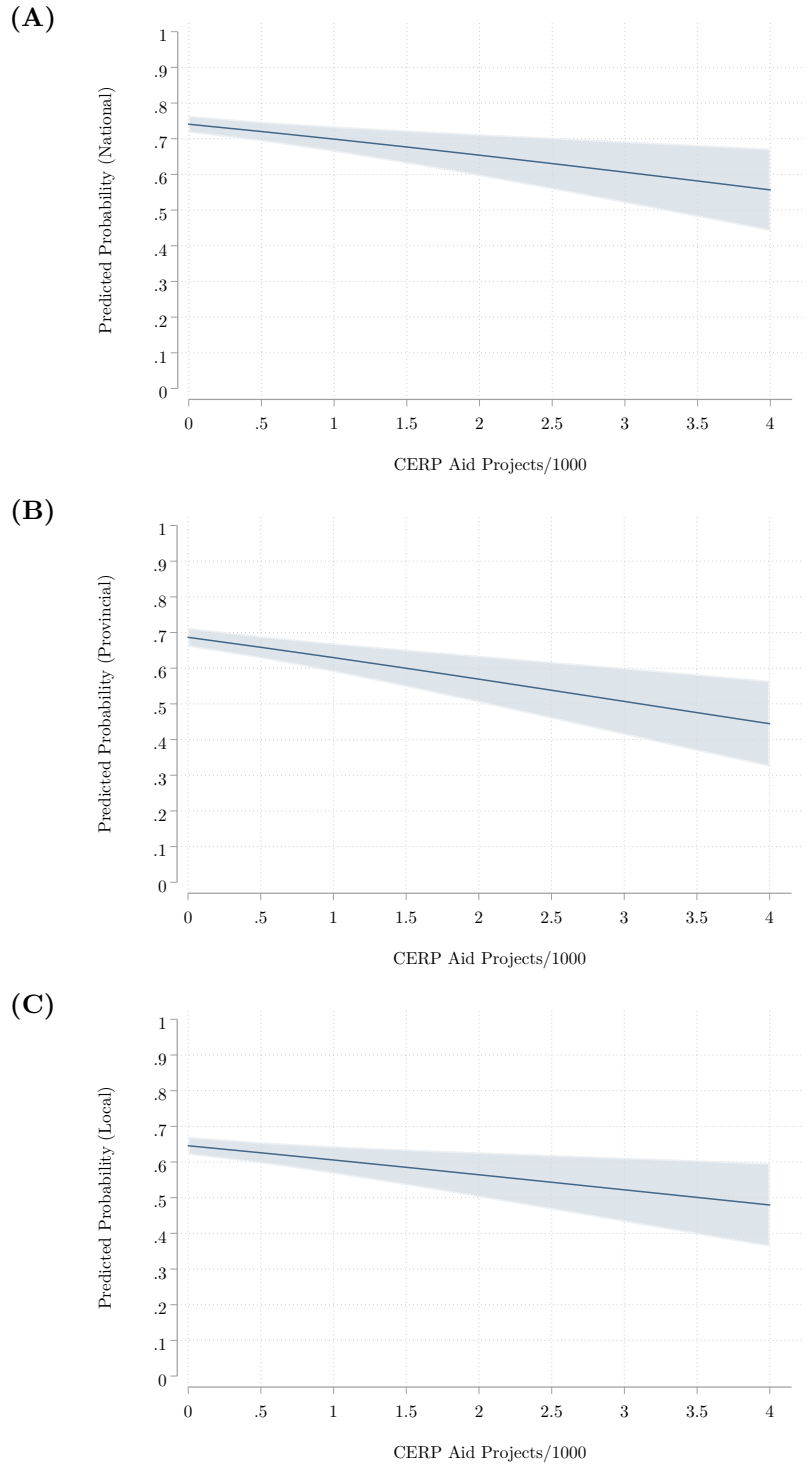


Figure 5.1: Predicted probability (y-axis) that an individual thinks the national (plot A) provincial (plot B) and local (plot C) government is doing a good job as CERP aid projects/1000 increases from the minimum (0) to maximum (4.144) observed value (x-axis). Continuous control variables are held at their mean, and categorical variables their mode value. The shaded area depict 95% confidence intervals.

Additionally, a number of the control variables exert a statistically significant effect. In all of the full models (M3, M6 and M9), the level of conflict intensity in a district has the expected negative effect on attitudes toward the Afghan government. This suggests that the government is rated on average more negatively as the level of conflict intensity increases. Moreover, individuals who have received formal education are more likely to think that the Afghan government is doing a good job, as opposed to those who have not received any formal education. Finally, male respondents are less likely to perceive the the government as doing a good job, compared to females as the reference category.

Taken together, these results contradict the assumption that aid can help to win over the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population by providing valuable goods and services. Instead, the results from this analysis support the notion that aid can actually erode support for the Afghan government. Moreover, the substantive effect is quite large. The predicted probabilities indicate that an increase in aid projects from the minimum to maximum observed value (0–4.144) decreases the likelihood that an individual will perceive the national, provincial and local government as doing a good job by 24%, 36% and 6%, respectively. These findings suggests that the development of aid programmes in Afghanistan, which were ostensibly designed to win over the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population, may actually have in practice produced unintended consequences, potentially doing more harm than good to the very communities they seek to assist and ultimately weaken rather than strengthen the relationship between the population and governing authorities. In light

of these results, it is important to understand the reasons behind these findings, i.e. *why* it is that aid not only failed to win over the hearts and minds of the local population, but seem to have produced the opposite effect. The following section therefore provides a discussion of these results and offers a plausible causal mechanism that might explain the negative association between aid and perceptions of government.

5.2 Discussion

Based on the review of the previous literature in Chapter 2, we know that aid can improve attitudes toward recipient governments through a number of mechanisms. For example, the execution of foreign–funded aid projects that are aligned with community preferences can help to foster improved perceptions of government (Child and Scoones, 2017; Child, 2019). Additionally, the presence of foreign–funded aid projects can increase the perceived competence of local politicians for managing to secure the funds from foreign donors (Dietrich et al., 2018; Cruz and Schneider, 2017; Guiteras and Mobarak, 2015). Moreover, the foreign–funding of aid can send citizens a positive signal about programme quality (Lyall et al., 2020; Winters et al., 2017), so much so that citizens may prefer foreign–funded aid projects to government–funded projects (Zürcher, 2010; Milner et al., 2016; Findley et al., 2017). Finally, the existing literature shows that politicians can take credit for foreign aid projects "by advertising that their personal effort and ability to attract resources have led to the receipt of the project" (Cruz and Schneider, 2017, p. 396).

Indeed, there is evidence from Afghanistan that the U.S. military employed a range of tactics to give the Afghan government credit for projects in order to strengthen its legitimacy (Johnson et al., 2012). One such tactic was the use of Afghan-led ceremonies in order to position the government as leading reconstruction and development initiatives (see e.g., Weis, 2007; Danner-Jones, 2010; Campbell, 2006; Mercurio, 2011; Skillman, 2010; Young, 2010; Hart, 2009; Shafran, 2009; Buzanowski, 2009). For example, on 11th July 2006, the Parwan Deputy Governor Gulam Sedeeq Sedeeq led a ribbon-cutting ceremony to inaugurate a new bridge in the north of the province (Kurle, 2006). Although the bridge was funded though CERP and executed by the Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), Sedeeq took centre stage while U.S. military personnel stayed mostly in the background. This was done to reinforce the message that it was the Afghan government, and not external actors, that were responsible for infrastructure projects. In the experience of one anonymous soldier; "they were always trying to have an Afghan face on it so that when they put pictures out about the opening of a building, they tried to ensure that there were no Americans in it" (quoted in Egel et al., 2016, p. 157).

In addition, in December 2009 the Corps introduced a new design for informational signs which were erected at hundreds of reconstruction sites across the country (U.S. Army, 2009). These signs prominently featured the seals and logos of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) and its ministries, and omitted any reference to the United States or the Corps. Additionally, the signs were written in Dari or Pashto, and featured the black, red and green colours of the Afghan flag. According to

the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) leadership:

> "We're going to tie the projects into one of the local Afghan ministries and put a sign up that says 'Done by the Ministry of the Interior' ... or 'Ministry of Defense,' or whatever. If we can give face time to the central government for doing these projects throughout the country, maybe people will start recognizing that they do have a central government that does do good things for them" (Darrel Johnson, Chief of Contracting, USACE Afghanistan Engineer District–North, quoted in U.S. Army, 2009).

Thus, as the above quote illustrates, the signs were intended to visibly credit the Afghan government for infrastructure projects, even though they had been built with CERP funds and executed by U.S. military commanders. It was hoped that by emphasising government ownership of projects, it would help to build legitimacy in the eyes of the local population.

While the review of the existing literature suggests that governments can take credit for aid through tactics similar to the ones described above, there is reason to doubt that this was the case in Afghanistan. As was pointed out earlier in the dissertation (see Chapter 3 Section 3.2), CERP was an initiative of the U.S. military that enabled "Warfighters at the brigade, battalion, and company level in a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment [to] employ money as a weapons system to win the hearts and minds of the indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents" (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 1). As such, it was the responsibility of military personnel on the ground, through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), to plan and implement CERP projects (Egel et al., 2016; Jensen, 2019). Therefore, my argument for the observed negative relation-

ship is that Afghans attributed credit for aid projects to the U.S. military, and not their own government. This in turn undermines the government's legitimacy by demonstrating that it is unable or unwilling to provide goods and services to the population.

Indeed, while local Afghan politicians took centre stage at inauguration ceremonies, it was U.S. troops who were physically present during the execution of CERP–funded projects (Egel et al., 2016). For example, as part of the project identification and selection process, soldiers would meet with *shuras* in order to ask village elders about their community's needs, such as the availability of water, electricity, healthcare, education, and security (Jefferson, 2010; Cushman, 2008; Wasem, 2013). As such, these *shuras* provided PRTs with an opportunity "to ask local village elders questions, get to know each other, build and plan as a team, and share in each other's culture" (Tech. Sgt. Christopher Loar quoted in Jefferson, 2010). Importantly, then, these meetings ensured that CERP projects were executed in line with community preferences which, as the previous literature has shown, is necessary if aid is to have the intended positive effect on attitudes (Child and Scoones, 2017; Child, 2019). However, the fact that it was the U.S. military meeting with the *shuras* only served to highlight to citizens that it was they and not the Afghan government who were responsible for the provision of goods and services. For example, according to one anecdotal account, in Parwan Province, shop keeper Ali Rezah praised the PRT for building what the elders in the local village *shura* had requested (Van Etten, 2010).

In addition, there were other points throughout a projects execution

cycle in which it was made clear that CERP activities were carried out under the auspices of the U.S. military. For example, in order to implement CERP projects, PRTs would hire local contractors (SIGAR, 2021a), and provide cash payments to the Afghans employed to work on them (Abbott, 2010). The "Money as a Weapons System–Afghanistan" (MAAWS–A) handbook also required that the project manager (PM) make regular site visits in order to inspect the quality and progress of work being done (USFOR-A, 2011, pp. 50–51). According to U.S. Army Major David Kaczmarek: "A lot of times, if you ask some of the locals, they'll tell you the PRT is the government because they gave the service deliveries up until this point" (quoted in DoD, 2010, p. 23).

Moreover, the scale and speed in which CERP projects could be executed was far beyond the capabilities of the Afghan government. As was discussed in Chapter 3 Section3.2.4, the streamlined planning process for CERP enabled commanders to authorise projects and release funds quickly. For instance, this streamlined process meant that the construction of CERP–funded roads could begin within two months (Warden, 2009). Furthermore, these roads were usually completed around 180 days after construction had begun, whereas roads constructed using other means of funding may not be finished for up to three years (ibid.). In contrast, the Afghan government experienced a number of significant challenges when building roads. According to a United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, the Ministry of Public Works—the ministry responsible for road construction—lacked the staff, financial resources, and institutional organisation to implement large road programmes (GOA,

2008a). It is therefore difficult to conceive how the Afghan government could take credit for such large-scale CERP projects. As the MAAWS–A handbook acknowledges:

> "A road project, for example, may be too complex to attribute to the government regardless of ground-breaking ceremonies or other information campaigns. A simpler project, such as community-built infrastructure or training at a district center, can more clearly be attributed to the government by providing opportunities for government representatives to be involved in the project visibly and positively" (USFOR-A, 2012, p. 121).

Even when roads were constructed, the Afghan government often lacked the capacity to maintain them. This was despite the fact that "sustainability by the GIRoA" was a key to project selection, and that the MAAWS–A handbook required a signed "Sustainment Memorandum of Agreement" in order for projects to be approved (ibid.). The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) conducted an audit of 1,640 kilometres of U.S.–funded national and regional highways, which equated to approximately 22 percent of all paved roads in Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2016). Out of the 20 road segments inspected, it found that 19 of them had damage varying from deep surface cracks, to destroyed road sections and bridges (ibid.). Meanwhile, 17 of the segments had either been poorly maintained or not been maintained at all, which resulted in major road defects that affected drivability (ibid., p. 8).

However, the lack of sustainability of CERP was a problem not only limited to the construction of roads. For example, many CERP–funded schools were not operational because the Ministry of Education (MoE)

had insufficient capacity to properly staff and maintain them (Adili, 2013; Burde, 2014; Sopko, 2015; SIGAR, 2013a). Similarly, hospitals were often left abandoned due to staffing issues, as well as poor planning and unsustainable running costs (SIGAR, 2021b; Banerjee, 2017; SIGAR, 2017). In one such case, the CERP–funded Walayatti Medical Clinic in Kabul province—constructed at a cost of almost US$200,000—had for two years stood empty and never been used because the Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) had been unable to staff and equip the facility (SIGAR, 2013b). The MoE had agreed that the clinic would be used as a library and administrative facility until the MoPH could staff and equip it as a medical clinic as originally intended (ibid., p. 4). Such projects were likely to undermine the government's legitimacy by demonstrating that it lacked the capacity to maintain them once responsibility had been handed over by the U.S. military to the appropriate Afghan ministry (SIGAR, 2021c).

Further compounding this problem is the fact that instead of trying to build Afghan capacity, PRTs often just worked around the government (Jackson, 2013). In the case of CERP, the focus on providing quick impact projects meant that the standard operating procedures (SOP) allowed commanders to authorise projects without obtaining approval from Afghan ministries. Even at the local level, CERP projects were often planned and executed without consultin local officials. As such, PRTs and CERP have often been criticised for operating as a parallel and at times competing structure to that of the Afghan government (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012). Indeed, in February 2011, President Hamid Karzai stated that:

> "Afghanistan clearly explained its viewpoint on Provincial Reconstruction Teams and structures parallel to the Afghan government - private security companies and all activities or bodies which are hindering the Afghan government's development and hindering the governance of Afghanistan" (President Hamid Karzai quoted in BBC News, 2011).

However, bypassing Afghan ministries was often necessary due to rampant corruption. Indeed, the existing literature (see Chapter 2 Section 2.5) shows that it is common for donors to bypass recipient governments in countries with poor quality governance in order to limit the opportunities for rent seeking and corruption. In one anecdotal account disgruntled residents killed Haji Abdul Jabar, a district governor in Kandahar Province, when they discovered that he had been skimming from U.S. reconstruction funds and not distributing the resources more widely (Chandrasekaran, 2012, pp. 168–169).

In summary, these findings contradict the hearts and minds theory, but are in line with the previous studies which indicate that the positive effect of aid stems less from the actual provision of goods and services, and more from an increased perception among the population that the government is capable of responding to their needs (see e.g., Bodnar and Gwinn, 2010; Lyall et al., 2020; De Juan et al., 2020). The physical presence of PRTs during the planning and implementation of CERP projects—and absence of their own government—meant that Afghans attributed credit for the provision of goods and services to the U.S. military. This served to undermine the government's legitimacy by signalling that it was unable to provide for its own citizens.

Importantly, this suggests that in order for aid to win over hearts

and minds, there needs to be greater ownership of foreign–funded aid projects by recipient governments. As the above discussion has shown, however, this is easier said than done. In the case of Afghanistan it would require extensive capacity building, as well as the tackling of widespread corruption which makes it necessary to bypass the Afghan government. However, it was not possible to build Afghan capacity through CERP because of its focus on providing small–scale, quick impact projects, which was often to the detriment of longer–term development goals. This lack of capacity meant that even when large-scale infrastructure projects were executed, the government was unable to claim credit despite Afghan-led ceremonies positioning them as leading reconstruction and development initiatives.

5.3 Robustness Checks

The main results show that district–level CERP is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. The following section presents a series of robustness checks in order to determine the validity of these results.

5.3.1 Multilevel Ordered Logistic Regression

In the main regression analysis, each of the three dependent variables were collapsed from a 4-point Likert scale into a dichotomous indicator measuring positive and negative attitudes toward the Afghan government. As was argued in Chapter 4 Section 4.1.3, the rationale for collapsing the

original response scale from the SoAP was twofold. Firstly, the change from positive to negative attitudes, or vice versa, was more important in terms of magnitude and impact than changes within categories (i.e., from positive to more positive, or from negative to more negative). Secondly, it simplified the statistical analysis and interpretation. As Table 4.5 on page 72 shows, the dichotomised variable indicates that individuals hold quite positive perceptions of the Afghan government. The mean scores for the national, provincial and local government are 0.74, 0.77, and 0.67, respectively.

However, when comparing this with the SoAP 4-point scale, we can see that most respondents only think the Afghan government is doing a "somewhat good job". Importantly, this suggests that the dichotomous variable portrays Afghans' attitudes toward their government as being more positive than that of the original scale. This section therefore re-runs the full models (M3, M6 and M9) using the 4-point Likert response scale from the SoAP, and a multilevel ordered logistic regression. The scale has been reverse coded so that higher scores indicate more positive attitudes toward government. As Table 5.2 below shows, the coefficient for aid remains statistically significant (p 3$<$ .01) and continues to display the negative sign across all models. This helps to alleviate the concern that the results could have been affected by the decision to collapse the 4-point Likert scale of the dependent variables.

Table 5.2: Original Response Scale from the SoAP

	M3 National	M6 Provincial	M9 Local
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.263***	-0.184**	-0.165**
	(0.057)	(0.056)	(0.054)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	-0.049	-0.077*	-0.024
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.031)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.203***	-0.157***	-0.102***
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Age	-0.000	0.001	0.000
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.134***	0.092***	0.120***
	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	0.204***	0.123*	-0.117*
	(0.054)	(0.054)	(0.052)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	-0.146***	-0.058*	-0.165***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)			
Middle Income	-0.067	-0.098**	-0.139***
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)
High Income	-0.063	-0.097*	-0.084*
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.041)
Population (Log)	0.074	0.082	0.032
	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.043)
Opium (Hectares Log)	-0.005	-0.036***	-0.034***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Conflict Intensity/1000	-0.047**	-0.055***	-0.079***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)			
2009	0.269***	0.071	0.072*
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.036)
2010	0.216***	0.149***	-0.218***
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.036)
2011	0.215***	0.305***	0.154***
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.036)
2012	0.193***	0.186***	-0.092**
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)
2013	0.473***	-0.227***	-0.168***
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)
cut1	-2.066***	-2.360***	-2.516***
	(0.499)	(0.530)	(0.469)
cut2	-0.400	-0.658	-0.873
	(0.499)	(0.530)	(0.469)
cut3	2.257***	1.870***	1.393**
	(0.499)	(0.530)	(0.469)
No. of Individuals	38805	38805	38805
No. of Districts	381	381	381
Akaike Information Criterion	86358.387	85878.224	93381.725
Bayesian Information Criterion	86538.279	86058.116	93561.618

[1] Multilevel ordered logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government (0 = bad job, 1 = good job).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5.3.2 Fixed Effects Logistic Regression

The main results were estimated using multilevel logistic regression with random intercepts at the district level. This approach was used in order to accommodate the nested structure of the data in which individuals (Level 1) are nested within districts (Level 2). In order to confirm this approach, the calculation of Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICC) were performed in Chapter 4 Section 4.4. These show that the share of the total variance in attitudes toward the national, provincial and local government explained by between-district differences is 13.5%, 15.2% and 11.4%, respectively.

However, another modelling strategy that can be considered instead of a multilevel approach is to employ a fixed-effects logistic regression. Therefore, as a robustness check, this section re-runs the full models (M3, M6 and M9) using this alternative approach. It should be noted that the time invariant controls (i.e., district population size) have been excluded from the model. In addition, Kabul as the district with the biggest number of individuals is dropped from the analysis because this type of model is not able to cope with large sample sizes (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a). Table 5.3 below shows that for all three dependent variables the results continue to show that aid has a negative and statistically significant effect on attitudes toward the Afghan government.

Table 5.3: Fixed Effects Logistic Regression

	M3 National Government	M6 Provincial Government	M9 Local Government
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.165*	-0.232***	-0.245***
	(0.066)	(0.070)	(0.066)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	-0.076	-0.000	0.010
	(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.045)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.235***	-0.200***	-0.080**
	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.028)
Age	-0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.116***	0.140***	0.133***
	(0.029)	(0.031)	(0.027)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	0.210**	0.204**	-0.035
	(0.070)	(0.072)	(0.063)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	-0.140***	-0.051	-0.121***
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.035)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)			
Middle Income	-0.062	-0.055	-0.158***
	(0.047)	(0.051)	(0.045)
High Income	-0.081	-0.053	-0.108*
	(0.056)	(0.059)	(0.053)
Opium (Hectares Log)	-0.011	-0.048**	-0.044***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.013)
Conflict Intensity/1000	-0.074***	-0.108***	-0.078***
	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.019)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)			
2009	0.231***	0.161**	0.111*
	(0.048)	(0.052)	(0.047)
2010	0.231***	0.228***	-0.195***
	(0.048)	(0.053)	(0.046)
2011	0.300***	0.306***	0.041
	(0.049)	(0.053)	(0.047)
2012	0.397***	0.285***	-0.108*
	(0.048)	(0.051)	(0.045)
2013	0.372***	-0.289***	-0.167***
	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.044)
No. of Individuals	34799	34769	34976
No. of Districts	.	.	.
Akaike Information Criterion	35219.007	32712.832	39493.338
Bayesian Information Criterion	35354.324	32848.136	39628.737

Values in parenthesis are robust standard errors clustered on District.

Reference categories are in italics.

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001.

5.3.3 Omitted Variable Bias

The main regression models include a series of individual– and district level control variables that are likely to affect both the independent and dependent variables, or to explain variation in outcome. Nonetheless, the concern that the results could be affected by omitted variable bias remains. In order to address this concern, this section follows the approach employed by Deglow and Sundberg (2021a) and Henrich et al. (2019) by running linear probability (OLS) models (see Table 5.4) using binary measures for the national, provincial and local government in order to obtain Altonji ratios (Altonji et al., 2005). Here, it is important to note that the main results remain robust and the coefficient for aid is both negative and statistically significant. For each of three dependent variables, two different models are run: (1) a restricted model that only includes the dummy variables for the survey year, and (2) a full model that includes all of the control variables. The next step was to calculate the Altonji ratios which measure how strong an unobserved confounder would need to be, relative to all of the included control variables, in order for the effect of aid to be reduced to zero. The Altonji ratios indicate that any unobserved confounders would need to be 9.47 (national), 9.10 (provincial) and 7.49 (local) times stronger than all included control variables combined.

Table 5.4: Omitted Variable Bias

	National Government		Provincial Government		Local Government	
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.045**	-0.041**	-0.048***	-0.043***	-0.046***	-0.040**
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)		-0.003		-0.000		-0.003
		(0.008)		(0.007)		(0.008)
Gender (*ref: female*)		-0.046***		-0.033***		-0.023***
		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)
Age		-0.000		0.000		0.000
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
Education (*ref: no education*)		0.021***		0.021***		0.029***
		(0.005)		(0.005)		(0.005)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)		0.037**		0.034**		-0.007
		(0.012)		(0.011)		(0.013)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)		-0.030***		-0.008		-0.023***
		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.007)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)						
Middle Income		-0.011		-0.009		-0.032***
		(0.008)		(0.007)		(0.008)
High Income		-0.018		-0.009		-0.018
		(0.009)		(0.009)		(0.010)
Population (Log)		-0.042***		-0.052***		-0.043***
		(0.010)		(0.008)		(0.012)
Opium (Hectares Log)		-0.002		-0.007**		-0.010***
		(0.002)		(0.002)		(0.003)
Conflict Intensity/1000		-0.015***		-0.018***		-0.018***
		(0.004)		(0.004)		(0.005)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)						
2009	0.051***	0.052***	0.014	0.015	0.014	0.015
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
2010	0.054***	0.057***	0.043***	0.046***	-0.039***	-0.038***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
2011	0.051***	0.057***	0.043***	0.048***	0.030***	0.035***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
2012	0.070***	0.077***	0.036***	0.041***	-0.017*	-0.012
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
2013	0.066***	0.075***	-0.071***	-0.061***	-0.035***	-0.026**
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Constant	0.651***	1.293***	0.755***	1.502***	0.582***	1.269***
	(0.009)	(0.150)	(0.009)	(0.118)	(0.010)	(0.176)
No. of Individuals	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805	38805
No. of Districts						
Adjusted R^2	0.066	0.069	0.075	0.078	0.063	0.065
Altonji ratios	**9.471**		**9.102**		**7.489**	

"All models include heteroskedasticity robust standard errors and district-level dummys."
Reference categories are in italics.
*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001.

5.4 Summary

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical findings of this research, which examines the relationship between reconstruction aid and citizens' attitudes toward the Afghan government. Using multilevel logistic regression models, the analysis reveals a consistent and statistically significant negative association between exposure to CERP-funded aid projects and perceptions of the national, provincial, and local government. In substantive terms, the results indicate that increasing the number of aid projects from its minimum to maximum observed value decreases the predicted probability of citizens believing that the national government is performing well, suggesting that aid may have eroded rather than strengthened public support.

The discussion situates these findings within the wider literature, arguing that Afghans were more likely to attribute credit for aid projects to the U.S. military rather than their own government. This dynamic undermined government legitimacy and highlights a key paradox of counterinsurgency aid: initiatives intended to win "hearts and minds" may have instead reinforced dependency and weakened state legitimacy. A series of robustness checks—including multilevel ordered logistic and fixed-effects models—confirm the validity of these results and reduce concerns over potential model specification errors or omitted variable bias.

Chapter 6

Extended Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the extended analysis and discussion. It investigates four concerns regarding the empirical results. First, the chapter probes the possibility that the results could have been affected by preference falsification and item non-response. The reason being is that when surveys are conducted in contexts of conflict and fragility, respondents may not answer the survey questions truthfully, or refuse to answer sensitive questions. Second, it tests the effect of aid on attitudes toward two other key actors in the Afghan conflict, namely armed opposition groups and international security forces. Third, it re-runs the full models while testing an alternative source of aid from AidData's "Afghanistan AIMS Geocoded Research Release". Finally, the chapter tests the effect of aid on the opportunity costs for insurgency, which has also been used by scholars to explain the observed reduction in violence.

6.1 Preference Falsification and Item Non-Response

It has previously been noted (see Chapter 4 Section 4.1.3) that survey data may not be a reliable tool for examining the effect of aid on winning hearts and minds (Böhnke and Zürcher, 2013). Scholars have acknowledged that when direct questions are used to investigate sensitive issues, such as support for the government, the results are likely to be biased (G. Blair et al., 2014; Lyall et al., 2013; Rosenfeld et al., 2016; Matanock and García-Sánchez, 2018). For example, respondents may self-censor their answers out of fear of retaliation or possible legal sanctions, which can lead to an overestimation (or underestimation) of the level of support for the government within the population (Brück et al., 2016). Moreover, respondents may refuse to take part in a survey altogether. And, if the responses of participants differ from those of non-participants, then inferences about the population will suffer from non-response bias (G. Blair, 2015).

This section therefore follows that approach employed by Deglow and Sundberg (2021a) to investigate the possibility that the results have been affected by preference falsification. Table 6.1 reports the average response for the three main dependent variables. The top half of the table shows the responses of ethnically Pashtun respondents, and the bottom half of the table non-Pashtun respondents. The logic is that some Pashtuns might seek to conceal their support for the Taliban by reporting more positive perceptions of the Afghan government (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a). This is because the Taliban is a largely Pashtun movement which

is seen, by some Pashtuns, as a legitimate alternative to the Karzai government (Giustozzi, 2008; Giustozzi, 2010; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023). As the table below shows, Pashtuns on average report slightly *worse* perceptions of the Afghan government at all three levels. This result helps to ease concerns about potential preference falsification by Pashtuns in the sample.

Table 6.1: Preference Falsification

	Mean	SD	N
Pashtun			
National Government	0.733	0.442	17118
Provincial Government	0.740	0.438	17118
Local Government	0.630	0.483	17118
Non-Pashtun			
National Government	0.746	0.436	21687
Provincial Government	0.797	0.402	21687
Local Government	0.698	0.459	21687

However, the absence of preference falsification does not preclude the possibility that respondents have refused to answer questions because they are deemed too sensitive. Table 6.2 therefore displays non-response for the three survey items which are used to measure perceptions of the Afghan government.[1] Again following the approach of Deglow and Sundberg (2021a), the top half of the table shows non-response for the top

[1]Note that non-response includes respondents that replied to the survey items with "don't know", or refused to provide a response altogether.

5% of conflict-affected individuals, and the bottom half of the table shows non-response for individuals not affected by conflict (i.e., zero fatalities as reported by the UCDP GED). The logic is that respondents residing in districts with higher conflict intensity will be more likely to refuse to answer the questions about perceptions of government because they fear insurgent reprisal (Deglow and Sundberg, 2021a). Encouragingly, the results in the top half of the table reveal that non-response is actually *lower* for the top 5% of conflict-affected individuals, compared to those not affected by conflict.[2] This suggests that respondents living in districts with higher conflict intensity are not more likely to refuse to answer the survey questions about government.

Table 6.2: Item Non-Response

	No. of Individuals	No. of Non-Response	% of Non-Response
Top 5% Conflict Affected			
National Government	2075	26	1.25
Provincial Government	2075	43	2.07
Local Government	2075	28	1.35
Not Conflict Affected			
National Government	13369	308	2.30
Provincial Government	13369	335	2.51
Local Government	13369	378	2.83

[2]Of course, the higher non-response in districts not affected by conflict could indicate that individuals refuse to answer questions because they harbour negative attitudes and fear reprisal from government authorities rather than rebel forces. However, the difference in non-response between districts affected by conflict and districts not affected by conflict is not sufficient enough to think that this is the case.

Finally, respondents may not provide reliable answers if they feel uncomfortable, or do not understand the survey questionnaire (Condra and Wright, 2019). Enumerators were therefore tasked with rating the interviews on each of these dimensions using a 4-point Likert scale.[3] These have been collapsed into dichotomous indicators based on whether or not a respondent was comfortable (1 = comfortable/0 = uncomfortable) and understood the survey (1 = understanding/0 = no understanding). Additionally, it could also be that individuals are less likely to answer the survey questions truthfully when the interviews are conducted in the presence of a large number of people (Condra and Wright, 2021). The enumerators were therefore asked to record the number of people present.[4] These measures are incorporated into the full models (M3, M6 and M9) in Table 6.3. Encouragingly, the core results on the effect of aid on attitudes toward the national, provincial and local government remain unchanged. The coefficient for aid is statistically significant ($p < .01$) and displays the negative sign across all models.

Although this section provides a rudimentary way of testing for preference falsification and item non-response, the results are nonetheless encouraging. They suggest that respondents are not more likely to falsify their answers along ethnic lines, nor to refuse to answer sensitive survey questions. Moreover, the main results remain robust even after accounting for a respondents level of comfort and understanding of the survey

[3]Z17: Which of the following statements best describes the level of comfort or unease that the respondent had with the survey questionnaire?. Z16: Which of the following statements do you think best describes the level of comprehension of the survey questionnaire by the respondent?.

[4]Z14: Record number of people present for the interview.

questionnaire, as well as the number of people present for the interview. While it must be acknowledged that individuals might seek to conceal their preferences for any number of reasons, this section has tested the most prominent explanations given the context of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Table 6.3: Accounting for Comfort, Understanding and Number of People Present for Interview

	M3 National	M6 Provincial	M9 Local
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.223***	-0.278***	-0.179**
	(0.063)	(0.067)	(0.063)
Level of Comfort (*ref: uncomfortable*)	0.225***	0.045	0.231***
	(0.048)	(0.051)	(0.046)
Level of Understanding (*ref: no understanding*)	0.277***	0.246***	0.059
	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.043)
No. of People Present for the Interview	0.008	0.014	0.012
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	-0.030	-0.077	-0.102**
	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.036)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.261***	-0.220***	-0.119***
	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.026)
Age	-0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.100***	0.120***	0.131***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.026)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	0.197**	0.208**	-0.049
	(0.068)	(0.071)	(0.061)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	-0.149***	-0.036	-0.118***
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.033)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)			
Middle Income	-0.078	-0.071	-0.172***
	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.043)
High Income	-0.128*	-0.089	-0.123*
	(0.052)	(0.056)	(0.049)
Population (Log)	0.070	0.055	0.024
	(0.052)	(0.054)	(0.046)
Opium (Hectares Log)	0.002	-0.032**	-0.032**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Conflict Intensity/1000	-0.059**	-0.091***	-0.078***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.017)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)			
2009	0.285***	0.100*	0.078
	(0.045)	(0.048)	(0.043)
2010	0.281***	0.277***	-0.179***
	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.043)
2011	0.283***	0.299***	0.171***
	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.043)
2012	0.391***	0.244***	-0.057
	(0.044)	(0.048)	(0.041)
2013	0.352***	-0.367***	-0.141***
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.041)
Constant	0.036	0.670	0.680
	(0.570)	(0.586)	(0.505)
No. of Individuals	38805	38805	38805
No. of Districts	381	381	381
Akaike Information Criterion	42478.144	39401.866	47377.860
Bayesian Information Criterion	42666.603	39590.324	47566.319

[1] Multilevel logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level sympathy for armed opposition groups (0 = no sympathy, 1 = yes sympathy).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

6.2 Attitudes Toward Other Actors in the Afghan Conflict

The empirical results show that, contrary to expectations, district–level aid is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. As was earlier pointed out (see Chapter 3 Section 3.2), CERP provided U.S. military commanders with the funds to execute "[...] urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief, and reconstruction projects and services that immediately assist the indigenous population" (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 13). My argument for the observed negative relationship is that Afghans attribute credit for CERP projects to the U.S. military and not the Afghan government.

Importantly, there are two potential implications of this argument. Firstly, if aid erodes attitudes toward government because it undermines legitimacy, then aid may lead to an increase in support for the insurgency. Secondly, if Afghans attribute credit for CERP projects to the U.S. military, then we may observe that aid improves perceptions of foreign troops. The following section therefore investigates the effect of aid on attitudes toward two other actors in the Afghan conflict: (1) armed opposition groups and (2) international security forces.

6.2.1 Armed Opposition Groups

A potential implication of the main findings from Chapter 5 is that a lack of support for the government translates into increased support for

the insurgency. Indeed, a number of recent studies find evidence to this effect; for instance, Lyall et al. (2020) find that a cash transfer programme for at-risk youths in Afghanistan increased recipients' support for the Taliban. Similarly, Sexton and Zürcher (2023) find that development aid in northern Afghanistan led to improved perceptions of armed groups. Relatedly, insurgents can themselves directly claim credit for aid programmes when they allow projects to implemented in the territories that they control (Breslawski, 2023; USAID, 2015; Berman et al., 2018). There is anecdotal evidence that insurgents have successfully taken credit for aid in numerous conflict settings, including Syria (Martínez and Eng, 2016; Meininghaus, 2016), Colombia (Breslawski, 2023), Sri Lanka (Matfess, 2022; Flanigan, 2008) and Afghanistan (Jackson, 2018; Jackson and Amiri, 2019; Maloney, 2009), among others.

There is one variable from the SoAP which will be used for testing the effect of aid on attitudes toward insurgents. The survey item asks individuals the following "Thinking about the reasons the armed opposition used violence during the past year, would you say that you in general have a lot of sympathy, a little sympathy or no sympathy at all for these armed opposition groups?". The responses are on a 3-point Likert scale which has been recoded so that "a lot of sympathy" and "a little sympathy" are grouped and coded as 1, and "no sympathy at all" is coded as 0. The survey item is available for a shorter time period from 2009 to 2013; which means that the analysis is conducted on a subset of the full sample. The number of individuals is thus reduced to 31,756 nested within 380 districts.

As can be seen in Table 6.4, the coefficient for aid is both positive and

statistically significant ($p < .05$). That is, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also *more* likely to report sympathy for armed opposition groups. This result is in line with the previous literature which argues that aid can both erode support for the government and improve attitudes toward insurgents (e.g., Lyall et al., 2020; Sexton and Zürcher, 2023).

Table 6.4: Sympathy for Armed Opposition Groups

	M1 Armed Opposition Groups
CERP Aid Projects/1000	0.145*
	(0.069)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	0.177***
	(0.042)
Gender (*ref: female*)	0.162***
	(0.030)
Age	0.000
	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	-0.040
	(0.029)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	-0.178**
	(0.067)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	0.136***
	(0.037)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)	
Middle Income	0.021
	(0.048)
High Income	-0.083
	(0.056)
Population (Log)	0.104
	(0.064)
Opium (Hectares Log)	-0.040**
	(0.013)
Conflict Intensity/1000	0.096***
	(0.023)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2009*)	
2010	-0.864***
	(0.043)
2011	-1.343***
	(0.046)
2012	-1.241***
	(0.045)
2013	-0.913***
	(0.044)
Constant	-0.837
	(0.694)
No. of Individuals	31523
No. of Districts	380
Akaike Information Criterion	38156.160
Bayesian Information Criterion	38306.613

[1] Multilevel logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level sympathy for armed opposition groups (0 = no sympathy, 1 = yes sympathy).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

6.2.2 International Security Forces

The provision of aid in the Afghan conflict was not only intended to improve perceptions of government, but to also foster more positive attitudes toward the coalition. As the former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (2007) puts it: "By building trust and confidence in coalition forces, these CERP projects increase the flow of intelligence to commanders in the field and help turn local [...] Afghans against insurgents and terrorists." However, there have surprisingly been few quantitative studies that examine the effect of aid on perceptions of international forces in Afghanistan, and those that do find mixed empirical results. For example, in their analysis of original survey data collected across four northern districts, Böhnke and Zürcher (2013) find that development aid had no significant effect on perceptions of international military actors. Analyses by Child (2023) show that when individuals exhibit favourable opinions of development, they are also more likely to support the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF).

There are thus strong reasons to believe that CERP might have improved attitudes toward international forces in Afghanistan. It was noted earlier in the dissertation (see Chapter 3 Section 3.2.4) that as part of the project identification and selection process, soldiers from U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) would meet with local *shuras* in order to consult with village elders about what projects were needed. As a result, Afghans attributed credit for the provision of goods and services to the U.S. military and not their own government. Moreover, there is evidence

that these interactions helped to build rapport between PRTs and local community members. In practice, according to one anecdotal account, "villagers went from throwing rocks at PRT convoys to smiling and waving as they saw the benefits of a PRT presence in their region" (McNerney, 2005, p. 39).

There is only one survey item from the SoAP that measures individual-level perceptions of international security forces. The question asks interviewees the following: "Now I will read you five different activities that you could participate in. Please, tell me, whether you would participate in the following activities with 'no fear', 'some fear' or a 'lot of fear' ?... When encountering international forces". The responses are again on a 3-point Likert scale which has been recoded so that "some fear" and "a lot of fear" are grouped and coded as 1, and "no fear" is coded as 0. The question is only available for the survey waves fielded between 2011 and 2013; which further reduces the sample to 21,662 individuals nested within 374 districts.

Table 6.5 below shows that the coefficient for aid is statistically significant ($p < .05$) and displays the negative sign, as expected. In other words, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are *less* likely to report fear of international forces.

Table 6.5: Fear of International Forces

	M1 International Forces
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.590*
	(0.286)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	0.283***
	(0.057)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.582***
	(0.043)
Age	-0.001
	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	-0.195***
	(0.041)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	-0.255**
	(0.097)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	0.223***
	(0.051)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)	
Middle Income	0.340***
	(0.070)
High Income	0.334***
	(0.079)
Population (Log)	-0.053
	(0.063)
Opium (Hectares Log)	0.032*
	(0.016)
Conflict Intensity/1000	0.086*
	(0.040)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2011*)	
2012	0.185***
	(0.052)
2013	-0.012
	(0.052)
Constant	1.903**
	(0.691)
No. of Individuals	21532
No. of Districts	374
Akaike Information Criterion	20462.483
Bayesian Information Criterion	20590.120

[1] Multilevel logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level fear of international forces (0 = no fear, 1 = yes fear).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Taken together, the results presented in this section further support the argument that it is the U.S. military and not the Afghan government that is credited for the provision of goods and services. However, these results should be treated tentatively since the survey items seek to measure different concepts ("sympathy" and "fear"), and use a different response scale and question wording compared to the three dependent variables measuring public perceptions toward the government. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume that these findings are informative in terms of both the direction (positive/negative) and magnitude of the effect of aid on public opinion.

6.3 Testing an Alternative Source of Aid Data

Throughout this dissertation, the independent variable comes from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). As was earlier discussed (see Chapter 4 Section 4.2.3), there are two reasons for using CERP as the main source of aid data in this research. The first is that CERP is one of the few publicly available data sources of reconstruction and development projects in Afghanistan. Most other sources have restrictions on access or are classified, and were therefore not available for use in this study. The second reason is that, unlike other aid programmes, CERP has a definitive mandate to "win the hearts and minds" of the local population. It was therefore assumed that by using

CERP, we would observe the expected positive impact of aid on attitudes toward the Afghan government.

However, as was earlier pointed out (see Section 4.2.3 on page 78), CERP was just one of many sources of reconstruction and development. Indeed, according to estimates by 2006 there were more than 800 aid agencies operating in Afghanistan (Olson, 2006). In contrast to CERP, under Afghanistan's 2005 "Law on Non-Governmental Organizations" (NGOs), all NGOs—both domestic and foreign—were required to register, report and coordinate their activities with the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) (ICNL, 2005). Thus, it is possible that while CERP does not improve attitudes toward government, other aid programmes are more successful in helping to win over the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population.

In order to test this proposition, the full models (M3, M6 and M9) are re-run using an alternative source of aid from AidData's "Afghanistan AIMS Geocoded Research Release" (Version 1.1.1). The original dataset contains the details of 7168 projects from Afghanistan's Development Assistance Database (DAD)—also known as the State Budget Planning System (SBPS)—launched in 2008, and maintained by the Ministry of Finance (AidData, 2016).[5] However, as with the CERP data, there are a number of coding errors and inconsistencies which first necessitated cleaning.[6] For example, approximately 6% of projects are missing accurate

[5]The Development Assistance Database (DAD)—a type of Aid Information Management System (AIMS)—is an information and communications (ICT) application that enables donors and recipient governments to track reconstruction and development initiatives.

[6]Note that unlike CERP, all of the AidData projects have been coded with accurate

longitude and latitude coordinates, and are thus dropped from the sample. In addition, only 10% (716) of the projects have a non-missing value for the amount spent. The variable is therefore constructed in the same manner as the CERP variable used in the main analysis. In other words, it measures the total number of AidData projects (per 1,000 population) active in the district in which a respondent resides in the 12 months prior to the date of interview.

As Table 6.6 below shows, the coefficient for AidData is positive across all models, however it only reaches statistical significance ($p < .05$) for the provincial government (M6). That is, individuals residing in districts with more AidData projects are also *more* likely to think that the provincial government is doing a good job. This provides tentative support that other types of aid programmes may be more successful in winning over hearts and minds. Therefore, a potential line of further research is the effect of different types of aid on attitudes.

start and end dates.

Table 6.6: Testing an Alternative Source of Aid Data

	M3 National	M6 Provincial	M9 Local
AidData Projects/1000	0.024	0.115*	0.067
	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.041)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	-0.038	-0.081*	-0.105**
	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.036)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.261***	-0.220***	-0.119***
	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.026)
Age	-0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.110***	0.127***	0.133***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.026)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	0.203**	0.210**	-0.047
	(0.068)	(0.071)	(0.061)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	-0.151***	-0.037	-0.118***
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.033)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)			
Middle Income	-0.081	-0.076	-0.175***
	(0.046)	(0.049)	(0.043)
High Income	-0.127*	-0.091	-0.122*
	(0.052)	(0.056)	(0.049)
Population (Log)	0.088	0.087	0.041
	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.047)
Opium (Hectares Log)	0.001	-0.033**	-0.032**
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Conflict Intensity/1000	-0.071***	-0.111***	-0.092***
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.018)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)			
2009	0.253***	0.073	0.058
	(0.044)	(0.047)	(0.043)
2010	0.283***	0.270***	-0.186***
	(0.044)	(0.049)	(0.042)
2011	0.309***	0.319***	0.182***
	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.043)
2012	0.440***	0.293***	-0.029
	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.040)
2013	0.420***	-0.299***	-0.101*
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.039)
Constant	0.277	0.570	0.755
	(0.578)	(0.592)	(0.509)
No. of Individuals	38805	38805	38805
No. of Districts	381	381	381
Akaike Information Criterion	42571.175	39442.731	47415.237
Bayesian Information Criterion	42733.935	39605.491	47577.997

[1] Multilevel logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government (0 = bad job, 1 = good job).
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

6.4 Testing the Opportunity Cost Explanation

As was argued in the introduction to this dissertation (see Chapter 1 Section 1.1), the existing literature on winning hearts and minds has predominantly studied the effect of aid on violence–related outcomes. Subsequently, scholars have assumed that the observed reduction in violence is caused by the positive impact of aid on attitudes. However, scholars have been unable to provide convincing evidence for this explanation beyond its compatibility with the data. As a result, the violence–suppressing effect of aid can be accounted for by a number of alternative explanations. One of the most prominent explanations in the literature is that aid can increase the opportunity costs for insurgency. The logic is that aid can provide young men with economic opportunities, making them less likely to join rebel groups and participate in violent insurgency (Crost et al., 2016; Zürcher, 2017). Over time, this will weaken insurgents, and security eventually improves (Zürcher, 2019).

In the context of Afghanistan, there are strong reasons to believe that we will observe the expected positive effect of aid on the opportunity costs for insurgency. As the U.S. Army's Counterinsurgency Field Manual states:

> "Without a viable economy and employment opportunities, the public is likely to pursue false promises offered by insurgents. Sometimes insurgents foster the conditions keeping the

> economy stagnant. Insurgencies attempt to exploit a lack of employment or job opportunities to gain active and passive support for their cause and ultimately undermine the government's legitimacy. Unemployed males of military age may join the insurgency to provide for their families. Hiring these people for public works projects or a local civil defense corps can remove the economic incentive to join the insurgency" (U.S. Army, 2007, pp. 172–173).

Indeed, according to the "Money as a Weapons System – Afghanistan" (MAAWS–A) handbook, one of the five keys to project selection was "local national employment" (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 5). Indeed, as part of the developing the project proposal, the project manager (PM) was required to complete a letter of justification (LoJ) listing the number of local Afghans expected to be employed by the project (ibid., p. 132). While no official statistics exist for the total number of Afghans employed through CERP, there exist many anecdotal accounts showing that CERP–funded projects provided local Afghan employment. For example, just outside of Shindand Air Base, in Herat Province, CERP funds were used to hire local Afghans to help repair a karez—an underground aqueduct—which had collapsed after heavy rainfall in the area (Hickok, 2011). Similarly, a cash–for–work initiative in Kunar Province to clean culvert denials—grates at the entrance and exits of culverts used to prevent insurgents from hiding improvised explosive devices in water ways—employed many local Afghans from the surrounding villages (Abbott, 2010).

In addition, the December 2009 update to the MAAWS–A handbook made it a requirement that all CERP projects adhere where possible to the "Afghan First Initiative" (also known as the "Afghan First Program") (SIGAR, 2011a). The logic was that too much donor money was spent on purchasing goods from Pakistan, China, Turkey and other countries (SIGAR, 2018a). The initiative therefore sought to prioritise the purchasing of goods and services from Afghan companies in order to ensure that more money stayed within the country and that more jobs would be created (ibid., p. 151).

Moreover, as was noted earlier in the dissertation (see Chapter 3 Section 3.2.2), during the surge there was a shift in CERP spending toward projects that would help to improve local economic conditions (SIGAR, 2018b). For example, while the funding of private businesses had initially been prohibited by the programme, an exception was made in 2009 for micro grants (SIGAR, 2018a). The MAAWS–A handbook states that the purpose of these grants was "to increase economic activity, particularly in areas where small businesses have suffered because of insurgent or sectarian violence" (USFOR-A, 2009b, p. 45). As such, the micro grant programme authorised commanders to "provide cash, equipment, tools, or other material support [...] to disadvantaged entrepreneurs engaged in small and micro-business activities" (ibid., p. 45). For instance, in Daykundi Province, store owner Abdul Qadar received a micro grant to re-establish his auto repair business after the Taliban had stolen his tools and equipment (Mesta, 2012). Similarly, in Ghazni Province, the PRT provided micro grants to small businesses restock inventory, repair damage

to shops, and hire employees (The White House, 2008).

It is possible therefore that while CERP does not appear to win over the hearts and minds of the local Afghan population, it does help to increase the opportunity costs for insurgency, and in turn reduce violence. In order to test this proposition, two variables from the SoAP are used for measuring an individuals' economic well-being. The questions ask respondents the following:

- Compared to two years ago, would you say that the situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following?... Financial well-being of your household / Financial situation of your household

- Compared to two years ago, would you say that situation for your household has gotten better, remained the same or gotten worse with respect to the following?... Employment opportunities

Interviewees are given the same 3-point Likert scale with the options "gotten better", "remained the same", and "gotten worse". Since the response scale does not easily lend itself to dichotomisation, the data is analysed using ordered multilevel regression. The scale has been reverse coded so that higher scores indicate that respondents had better financial well-being and employment opportunities. The variables are only available for the period ranging from 2008 to 2012; which thus reduces the sample to 30,049 individuals nested within 361 districts.

Table 6.7: Opportunity Costs for Insurgency

	M1 Financial Wellbeing	M2 Employment Opportunities
CERP Aid Projects/1000	-0.040	0.181**
	(0.062)	(0.061)
Ethnicity (*ref: non-Pashtun*)	-0.027	-0.022
	(0.035)	(0.035)
Gender (*ref: female*)	-0.195***	-0.141***
	(0.026)	(0.025)
Age	-0.004***	-0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education (*ref: no education*)	0.255***	0.136***
	(0.026)	(0.026)
Rural/Urban (*ref: rural*)	0.116	0.289***
	(0.063)	(0.062)
Corruption (*ref: no corruption*)	-0.041	0.042
	(0.033)	(0.033)
Avg. Household Income (*ref: Low Income*)		
Middle Income	0.258***	0.118**
	(0.040)	(0.040)
High Income	0.607***	0.379***
	(0.048)	(0.047)
Population (Log)	-0.041	0.018
	(0.043)	(0.043)
Opium (Hectares Log)	0.002	0.025*
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Conflict Intensity/1000	-0.079***	-0.061**
	(0.020)	(0.020)
Survey Wave (*ref: 2008*)		
2009	0.724***	0.480***
	(0.039)	(0.039)
2010	1.177***	0.940***
	(0.039)	(0.039)
2011	1.190***	1.118***
	(0.039)	(0.039)
2012	1.516***	1.372***
	(0.039)	(0.038)
cut1	-1.547**	0.686
	(0.472)	(0.465)
cut2	1.103*	2.905***
	(0.472)	(0.465)
No. of Individuals	30049	30049
No. of Districts	361	361
Akaike Information Criterion	55590.321	58310.224
Bayesian Information Criterion	55748.222	58468.125

[1] Multilevel ordered logistic regression estimating the effect of aid on individual–level perceptions of economic wellbeing.
[2] Standard errors in parentheses.
[3] Statistical significance indicators: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

As can be seen in Table 6.7, the impact of aid on the opportunity costs for insurgency is mixed. We can see that there is no significant effect of aid on an individuals perceived financial well-being. At the same time, however, we observe that aid exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on the perceived availability of employment opportunities. That is, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also more likely to report that employment opportunities for their household have gotten better in the last two years. This finding may therefore suggest that in order to reduce violence, donors and governments need to prioritise projects which create employment opportunities for the local population. It is important to note, however, that this section tests only the first part in the causal chain linking aid to reduced insurgent violence. In other words, the fact that aid appears to increase employment opportunities does not guarantee that individuals will not join rebel groups and participate in violent insurgency. Indeed, some recent empirical evidence has cast doubt on the link between levels of employment and violence. For example, a recent micro-level study of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Philippines was unable to find support for this hypothesised relationship (Berman et al., 2011a). Moreover, an important caveat noted by Zürcher (2017, p. 516) is that we should only be able to observe a violence-reducing effect in conflicts in which insurgents are primarily driven by private economic gain. In contrast, we would not expect to observe an effect of aid in conflicts which are primarily ideologically driven (Zürcher, 2017). Thus, a potential line of future research may be to re-investigate the subsequent link in the causal chain between economic conditions violence.

6.5 Summary

This chapter presents an examination of the robustness and broader implications of the empirical findings on the relationship between foreign aid and public attitudes in Afghanistan. It addresses four key concerns: (1) preference falsification and item non-response, (2) attitudes toward other conflict actors, (3) alternative sources of aid data, and (4) the opportunity cost explanation.

First, the analysis tests whether the survey results were distorted by preference falsification or non-response bias. By comparing answers across ethnic groups and levels of conflict exposure, the findings show no evidence that respondents concealed their true preferences or refused to answer sensitive questions. Moreover, controlling for respondents' comfort, comprehension, and interview conditions did not alter the main results, indicating that the negative relationship between aid and perceptions of government remains robust.

Second, the chapter explores whether aid influences attitudes toward other actors in the Afghan conflict, such as armed opposition groups and international security forces. The results suggest that while aid does not improve views of the Afghan government, it may be associated with reduced fear of international forces and an increase in sympathy for insurgents. This further supports my argument that Afghans attribute the benefits of aid primarily to foreign military actors rather than to their own government.

Third, the robustness of the findings is further tested using an alternative dataset from AidData's Afghanistan AIMS release. Unlike CERP,

this source includes projects coordinated through Afghan government systems. Using this dataset yields a positive and statistically significant effect on perceptions of provincial government performance, suggesting that locally managed aid may lead to more favourable attitudes than military-administered aid.

Finally, the chapter examines whether aid may influence conflict dynamics indirectly through economic opportunity, rather than through attitudinal change. Drawing on the opportunity cost framework, it argues that CERP projects may have provided short-term employment and income, thereby increasing the cost of participation in insurgency. Although the data show no direct attitudinal improvement, such initiatives could still contribute to stabilisation by improving livelihoods and reducing incentives for rebellion.

The extended analysis strengthens the credibility of the main findings and highlights that aid intended to win hearts and minds may fail to enhance government legitimacy, even if it contributes to temporary security gains through economic mechanisms.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This final chapter summarises and contextualises the research findings of this dissertation, outlines the original contribution of this research, acknowledged some of its limitations, and discusses potential avenues of future research.

7.1 Summary of Findings

The previous research on aid and "winning hearts and minds" has primarily studied this relationship using violence-related outcomes. Scholars have subsequently attributed any observed reduction in violence to winning hearts and minds without providing compelling evidence for this explanation beyond its compatibility with the data. This research project has therefore sought to overcome this limitation by re-investigating the hearts and minds mechanism using survey data from the conflict in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2013 as a most-likely case. Afghanistan represents a

"most-likely" case (Levy, 2008; Eckstein, 1975) for examining the winning hearts and minds given the substantial financial resources that were allocated via CERP and the longevity of its programme, spanning 12 years (2004 to 2016). The empirical results from this research demonstrate that, contrary to widespread belief, district–level aid is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. These results are robust to the inclusion of a number of relevant control variables, as well as alternative model specifications and variable measurements.

My argument for the observed negative relationship is that the physical presence of PRTs during the planning and implementation of CERP projects—coupled with the absence of the Afghan government—led many Afghans to attribute credit for the provision of aid and services to the U.S. military. This dynamic undermined the government's legitimacy by signalling its inability to provide for its citizens. Since the conflict in Afghanistan was used as a most-likely case, the absence of this hypothesised relationship suggests that the theory may be flawed or limited to certain cases (Schmoll and Swenson, 2024). Therefore, it is probable that aid may only win over the hearts and minds of local populations in contexts where recipient governments have greater ownership over projects. This argument aligns with previous research suggesting that the positive effects of aid derives less from the actual delivery of goods and services, and more from the perception among local populations that their government is capable of meeting their needs (see e.g., Bodnar and Gwinn, 2010; Lyall et al., 2020; De Juan et al., 2020).

I contend that much of the existing research on aid and counterinsurgency has inferred the success or failure of the "hearts and minds" approach primarily through violence-related outcomes, often interpreting reductions in conflict as evidence of improved civilian attitudes. However, such interpretations frequently rest on indirect inference rather than direct empirical validation. In response, this dissertation sought to address these limitations by re-examining the relationship between aid and local attitudes beyond violence-related outcomes alone, using the conflict in Afghanistan as a most-likely case through which to assess the broader validity of the "winning hearts and minds" hypothesis using attitudinal data from the SoAP. This dissertation therefore provides new empirical and theoretical insights into the complex relationship between aid and attitudes toward government.

7.2 Empirical Results

The main empirical results (see Chapter 5), show that district–level aid is negatively associated with individual–level perceptions of the national, provincial and local government. In all full models (M3, M6, and M9), the coefficient for aid is both negative and statistically significant ($p < .01$). In addition, predicted probabilities were estimated in order to determine the substantive effect of aid on attitudes. These reveal that increasing aid from the minimum to maximum (0–4.144) observed value decreases the predicted probability of an individual thinking that the national, provincial and local governments are doing a good job by 24%, 36% and

6%, respectively.

These results were obtained using a multilevel logistic regression, testing the effect of reconstruction aid on winning hearts and minds. Utilising three approaches to modelling, namely (1) a bivariate model between aid and attitudes toward government, (2) a model including the individual-level controls, and (3) a model which includes all individual– and district–level control variables, this research concluded that, across all three modelling approaches, the coefficient for aid is both negative and statistically significant ($p < .01$). In other words, reconstruction aid is linked with a decrease in attitudes towards the government at the national, provincial and local levels. That is, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also less likely to report that the government is doing a good job. This is a result that is the complete opposite of what we would have expected to observe should the hearts and minds mechanism hold true for the conflict in Afghanistan.

In summary, the main analysis of this research project found not only little evidence of the "hearts and mind" mechanism in action in the context of Afghanistan, but often the opposite of it: aid, in some contexts, had a negative correlation with the perceptions of the population towards the government.

However, throughout this research, it is acknowledged that a lack of support for the local government does not necessarily constitute as evidence of support for the insurgency. Because of this, an extended analysis was carried out on the empirical effect that aid has on sympathy for armed groups, as well as involving other important issues. This extended analysis

and discussion touched four important issues which are related to the main empirical findings: (1) preference falsification and non-response, (2) attitudes toward other conflict actors, (3) the impact of alternative aid data, (4) testing the effect of aid on the opportunity costs for insurgency. The summary of the findings of this extended analysis are:

- Encouragingly, the main empirical findings do not appear to be affected by preference falsification and non-response. The tests show that respondents have not falsified their preferences along ethnic lines, nor have they refused to answer sensitive survey questions due to the fear of insurgent retaliation. Moreover, the results remain robust after controlling for the number of people present for the interview and understanding of the survey questionnaire.

- The lack of support for the government seemingly translates into increased support for the insurgency. The coefficient for aid projects is positive and statistically significant ($p < .05$). In other words, individuals residing in districts with more aid projects are also more likely to report feeling sympathy for armed opposition groups.

- The provision of CERP projects appears to reduce fear of international security forces in Afghanistan. This result further supports the argument that it is U.S. military and not the Afghan government who are credited for the provision of goods and services. This is because it was the responsibility of PRTs to plan and implement CERP projects.

- The impact of an alternative source of aid from AidData provides tentative support for the possibility that other types of aid positively impact attitudes toward the Afghan government.

- Aid projects appear to increase the availability of employment opportunities; providing support for the opportunity costs explanation.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

Despite the important contributions that this dissertation makes to the literature on aid and insurgency, it is important to acknowledge some of its limitations. Many of these limitations arise from the inherent challenges of working with data collected in conflict-affected environments, where conditions of insecurity, institutional weakness, and limited oversight often undermine data reliability. In the Afghan context, survey data and administrative records are subject to measurement error, inconsistent reporting practices, and gaps in spatial or temporal coverage. Respondents' answers may also be influenced by fear, social desirability bias, or shifting political allegiances, all of which complicate the interpretation of their actual attitudes. Furthermore, datasets such as the one tracking CERP projects were often compiled under operational pressures, leading to data entry errors, missing values, or misclassifications that inevitably limit the precision of statistical analysis.

A further concern is that the results in this dissertation could be affected by potential reverse causality. In other words, it could be that attitudes affect the distribution of aid resources and not the other way

around. One way in which this dissertation safeguarded against potential reverse causality is that the independent variable was measured before the dependent variable, i.e. it measured the total number of CERP projects in the district in which a respondent resided in the 12 months prior to the date of interview. While we are unable to conclusively state that there is no reverse causality effect on the results, this step taken gives some reassurance that the results obtained are robust and meaningful.

These limitations do not negate the findings presented here but rather underscore the complex empirical realities of studying aid and conflict in volatile settings. They highlight the need for caution in drawing causal inferences and for transparency about the quality and provenance of available data. By acknowledging and addressing these data constraints explicitly, this dissertation situates its findings within the broader methodological debates on research in fragile contexts, where the pursuit of analytical rigour must often coexist with the pragmatic use of incomplete or uncertain information.

7.4 Avenues of Future Research

There are several potential avenues for further research. First, the research in this dissertation should be replicated in order to determine whether or not the results from Afghanistan hold in other contexts. Of particular interest are the conflicts in Iraq and the Philippines, where CERP was also widely used as a counterinsurgency tool by the U.S. military. As was pointed out in Chapter 3 Section 3.2, in addition to CERP funding for Afghanistan,

the U.S. Congress had also authorised funding of US$4.1 billion in Iraq and US$2 billion in the Philippines (Egel et al., 2016). It is possible that these results would also translate well to other insurgencies, both past and present, such as Vietnam, Somalia, and Mali, among many others. If the same effect would be observed in these different conflicts, i.e. spending in programmes similar to CERP would also undermine government legitimacy, it would strengthen the argument against the effectiveness of the "winning hearts and minds" approach in conflict settings.

Second, this dissertation had for both practical and theoretical reasons used aid data from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). As well as being one of the few publicly available sources of data on aid projects in Afghanistan, CERP has a definitive mandate to win over the "hearts and minds" of the local population. It was therefore assumed that we would observe the expected positive impact of aid on attitudes toward government. However, the previous literature has shown that aid can still increase support for the government, even when programmes are not mandated to win hearts and minds. Future research should therefore seek to replicate the research in this dissertation using an alternative source of aid data for the independent variable. For example, access permitting, the aforementioned Afghan Stability Picture (ACSP), which contains the details of approximately 85,000 reconstruction and development projects from across Afghanistan, would provide the opportunity to investigate the effect of aid using a comprehensive database of projects from several sources, including governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Third, as earlier noted (see page 52) the majority of CERP funds in Afghanistan were channelled through U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) (Jensen, 2019). While PRTs had first been developed by the U.S. in late 2002, ISAF subsequently adopted the PRT model in order to expand its reach across Afghanistan (NATO, 2006, p. 156). Out of a total of 26 PRTs, the U.S. had served as lead nation for 12 of them, and the rest were led by other ISAF troop contributing nations (TCNs) (e.g., the U.K in Helmand, Germany in Kunduz, Spain in Qal'eh-Now, Turkey in Wardak, Italy in Herat, Norway in Maymaneh and Sweden in Mazar-e Sharif) (SIGAR, 2009). Importantly, each of these PRTs varied substantially in terms of structure, funding, leadership, and strategic focus depending on the lead nation. Therefore, the findings in this dissertation are only applicable to aid projects that were implemented by U.S.–led PRTs. This raises the possibility that projects executed by PRTs led by other TCNs may be more successful at improving attitudes toward the Afghan government and highlights another potential avenue of research.

Fourth, and finally, the research in this dissertation has tested only the first part in the causal chain that links aid to insurgent violence. In other words, it has tested the assumed relationship between aid and perceptions of the Afghan government. However, the fact that CERP appears to erode attitudes does not necessarily guarantee that individuals will actively support the insurgency by providing food, shelter, or information. Therefore, a potential avenue of further research is the subsequent part in the casual chain linking aid to violence.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

From this research, a clearer picture of the complexity of the case of Afghanistan emerges, one that shows the complex relationships between the presence of international aid and reconstruction projects, and their effect on the perception of government by the Afghan population. My empirical research has found evidence against the notion that aid can help to win over hearts and minds in the context of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. This is a surprising result, as the mechanism itself has been a widely accepted and has informed attitudes across both academic and military fields. This includes the main guidance found in the "Commander's Guide to Money as a Weapons System", which describes how winning hearts and minds should become a military aim in order to facilitate defeating the insurgency (USFOR-A, 2009a, p. 1).

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