

# Rebel Schools: the Strategic Timing of Education Provision in Afghanistan

Alexis Palmer

October 2020

## **Abstract**

Why do rebel groups invest in education? Rebel groups, defined as armed groups which use violence to challenge the state (Mampilly 2012), usually have limited revenue and capacity compared to well-funded state forces. Yet they still divert resources to non-essential service provision. While insurgent violence against schools has rightly garnered public outrage, few have considered why the same groups also provide educational services in the territories they occupy. Combining theories from the emerging literature on rebel governance, government information control, and education as a means of indoctrination, I present a two-step theory. When first gaining control over a population, a rebel group will block access to education because schools are an active representation and tool of the state. Then, once a group moves towards establishing long-term stability in a territory, it not only allows but supports and directs public education in order to demonstrate its governing legitimacy and spread its ideology. The Taliban in Afghanistan provides an illustration of this pattern. I estimate the relationship between changes to the number of schools and students based on Taliban presence and shifts in conflict. I find that despite initial school closures, the Taliban supports education under conditions of both long-term governance and contested territorial claims. I further consider the provision of another social service, healthcare, and find that this pattern is unique to education.

# 1 Introduction

Attacks against education by insurgent groups or even governments have spurred international outrage and action, even as compared to other acts of violence. The targeting of youth in a space considered outside the boundaries of conflict triggers an emotional response. However, it also presents an interesting puzzle. Why would an armed group, especially one with limited resources, such as a rebel group, direct their efforts towards education which has little tactical value? The shock value alone does not answer this question. More interesting, why do these same groups which attack schools, such as the Taliban, simultaneously use not just their authority but also their manpower to run them (Giustozzi and Franco 2013)?

Despite extensive research into the political role of education, it has never been considered as a strategic element of conflict. However, both the violence against schools that is associated with insurgent groups and the provision of education by those same actors indicates there is a double-edged value to education in a conflict setting. This can be seen in numerous conflicts, including in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Sudan (Mampilly 2012). I aim to take the first step towards explaining this duality.

The emerging literature on rebel governance explains insurgent service provision mainly through the established need for civilian support during an internal conflict (Grynkewich 2008) and the potential to legitimize the group as state-like, either to internal or external audiences (Stewart 2018; Mampilly 2012). While there is evidence that both of these motives are at work, the positioning of education as a specific choice rather than part of a general suite of activities speaks to a third mechanism. Much like states, rebel groups governance efforts may include symbolic identity building based around their emerging pseudo-state (Mampilly 2015). There has long been evidence on the use of education as a method of indoctrination or, more palatably, state and identity building (e.g. Weber 1976; Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich 2013). However, as service provision has been viewed largely as a block of services, this potential motive for education provision has yet to be specifically investigated. When education is viewed as a mechanism through which the state connects to the population

in both an official capacity and an identity forming one, the opposing aspects of insurgent actions towards schools becomes clearer.

This paper outlines a theory that insurgent groups will make strategic decisions around education specifically, apart from other state-like activities. The case of Afghanistan is particularly interesting, and will be used to demonstrate the progression in policy and provide quantitative evidence. While the Afghan Taliban's attacks against schools have been frequently publicized, their public shift in narrative barring their fighters from attacks on schools and instead encouraging attendance demonstrates a far more complex set of decisions and motivations. Given the long history of the Taliban and past research on their curricula, it provides a valuable opportunity to shed new light on education as a strategic tool.

The main barrier to this work is the extensive data challenges. Even in insurgent situations where data is available, which is already limited, detailed information on education is hardly a priority. Further, in this case in particular, comprehensive information on incidents such as attacks against schools is suppressed by the group responsible. To work around these challenges, this paper will focus on the non-violent set of decisions; namely when schools are forced to close or alternatively encouraged to operate. Given the limited data, I will demonstrate a novel pattern of both education and enrollment under the conditions which indicate Taliban control. I will also provide evidence that this pattern is unique to education as opposed to other forms of rebel governance, in this case healthcare provision, which supports the argument for a multi-faceted mechanism behind service provision decisions. In this instance, education, which uniquely facilitates identity building, is given priority over other forms of governance which only serve the first two goals of generating public support and legitimization.

In the next section, I will lay out the existing literature and propose my own theory. The third section will provide some background on the case study, qualitative evidence on the pattern described, and ground the decisions made in my empirical strategy. Fourth, I will describe my empirical strategy and data sources. The fifth section will present results and

analysis. Finally, the last section will conclude and suggest paths for further research.

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Relevant Literature

#### 2.1.1 Provision of Education

There is an emerging set of literature on rebel governance.<sup>1</sup> Though non-state groups assuming governing functions is not a new phenomenon, there is still relatively little work on the non-violent aspects of an insurgent war. Despite the antagonistic connotations of a state fighting an insurgent group, many rebel governments emerge from de facto agreements with the state for shared governance, for instance as divided by territory, spheres of influence, or even hours of operation (Staniland 2012). Despite the relative lack of resources non-state groups possess, they invest in such governance efforts nonetheless. Arjona (2014) found that rebel groups face the most resistance from a population when “preferences for preserving the status quo are sufficiently strong to make it worth the cost.” As such, providing a viable alternative to the state contributes to the support for, or at least minimizes resistance to, an insurgent movement. However, service provision and other forms of governance are costly for non-state groups, and thus a balance must be struck between fighting and governing (Stewart 2020). This paper explores why rebel groups would engage with education specifically in their efforts towards pseudo-governance despite not usually being considered part of the strategic canon during an internal war.

The first explanation for why rebels would attempt to establish a governing presence relates to the need for civilian support. The necessity of civilian support for winning an insurgent war goes back to Mao’s theories of protracted war and has been included in the doctrine of both state and non-state forces (Stanton Jr, Thiel, and Cummerata IV 2007).

---

<sup>1</sup>I borrow Mampilly’s definition of a rebel group as an armed group which uses violence to challenge the state and use it interchangeably with several other terms within this paper, including insurgent group.

The civilian population can provide key information on force movements, as well as the resources needed to support combatants, and as such play a role in a groups success or failure (Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011; Koren 2019). One method of garnering such support is service provision by either rebel groups (Grynkewich 2008) or the state government (Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011). Further, as strong local institutions increase the likelihood of resistance against a rebel group (Arjona 2014), non-state actors are particularly incentivized to assume control of government institutions and functions. As such, any service which can benefit or is in demand by the population can shore up needed support for an insurgent group. As we will see in the case of Afghanistan, education is a common demand from local leaders in exchange for support.

The second motive for rebel governance is legitimization. Both internally and externally, the provision of social services can undermine state legitimacy by highlighting the state's failures, providing an alternate entity to be loyal to, and allowing a rebel group to assume command of a population's resources (Grynkewich 2008). It can also help demonstrate legitimacy to the other actors operating in the area with whom a rebel group may need to cooperate (Mampilly 2012). While exclusive provision to in-group members can be seen as an act of loyalty or to motivate membership, inclusive service provision especially can legitimize a group's claim to govern rather than serve their own members. This is particularly common with movements that purport to declare their own state or assume state function (Stewart 2018). While education can be an interesting example of an inclusive service, both legitimization and civilian support can be generated by any number of services.

The third link between governance and rebel group strategy is identity building. Fostering identity can "entrench and legitimize" a rebel group. This can not only increase support for the group, but reduce the effort required of the group to govern. As Mampilly (2015) put it, "Symbolic processes reduce the need for a rebellion to use force to ensure compliance. In addition, they may increase civilian identification with the rebel government producing several distinct benefits." Thus creating a new "national" identity can increase support, move

towards a new, cohesive state, and lower the costs of maintaining a presence, as well as undermine the existing government.

Education has long been recognized as a method of building a national identity, not just directly to students but also through the transmission of taught ideals through families (Weber 1976). Similarly, indoctrination into a state system through education can persist in the form of ideals and policy well beyond the system itself (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007), creating a kind of future insurance for a group looking establish a long-term presence. There are numerous examples of the long-term impacts of education on governing. For instance, in Soviet block countries where the education systems included the “transmission of a national identity separate from, and often directly opposed to, the communist regimes,” which were established before the formation of the Soviet Union, were more likely to vote communists out of office following the fall of the Soviet Union (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006). Education that encourages viewpoints or identities that align with a particular group have shifted policy and allegiances towards both state (Cantoni et al. 2017) and non-state (Clots-Figueras and Masella 2013) groups in different contexts. This ability to generate allegiance can lower the costs of state actions and serve as an alternative to totalitarianism (Lott Jr 1987). Despite these clear links to the logic behind identity building by rebel groups, education has never been considered as a unique entity in the suite of service provision by insurgents.

Further, though many aspects of service provision may benefit an insurgent group, education is in a unique position to serve multiple purposes. Past work has argued that inclusive service provision is separate by necessity from recruitment as it includes the out-group (Stewart 2018) and similarly that symbolic processes usually focus on a core constituency (Mampilly 2015). Given the use of education for both identity creation and indoctrination into that identity, it is able to serve both in and out group members as benefits the provider. This ability to sway opinion in a larger population than a rebel group’s identified copatriots can also explain the investment in education despite it being in some ways a relatively long

term strategy. Additionally, as is taught in schools affects not only the student but the wider community as ideas are transmitted within a family and across generations (Weber 1976). Thus, education can play the unique role of generating general support, demonstrating governance legitimacy, and fostering group identity, which can in the short term lower the cost of insurgent group actions and in the long term contribute to group longevity.

### **2.1.2 Suppression of Education**

Given the numerous incidences of violence against schools by insurgent groups, I would be remiss to consider only the provision of education. In a broad sense, anything that has the ability to benefit a group also has the ability to threaten it. Since violence and provision are both used by state and non-state groups, they may be considered as part of the same strategic evolution. In the case of insurgent warfare, though both sides of a conflict have provided services, they also have prevented their provision. The most effective tactic against an insurgent group looking to establish a state-like presence is displacement - shutting down the insurgent groups service organizations and establishing their own state apparatus (Grynkewich 2008). Insurgent groups use a similar strategy. As Lee (2020) put it “the physical capture or destruction of state’s infrastructure is one of the mechanisms through which subversion undermines state authority,” and insurgent groups have been shown to violently oppose new government projects in the areas in which they operate (Sexton 2016; Crost, Felter, and Johnston 2014). Repressive control over access to social services can thus be seen as an element of shoring up power against an external or internal enemy. Though it has not been considered in a rebel context, past work has shown that changes to education are most likely under the threat of democratization (Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich 2013). Especially given the aspects of indoctrination through education, preventing access to education as established by an opponent through violence or otherwise could be a particularly powerful method of undermining the same.

This paradigm of provision and restriction can be extended into the role of information

in conflict, and is in fact explicitly acknowledged in this literature. Controlling the flows of information is one method of consolidating power, as information contrary to the group looking to influence a population can undermine their ideology or promote rebellion (Boix and Svulik 2013; Edmond 2013). Manipulating information can help a group to project strength or falsify competence (Guriev and Treisman 2015). The main methods for countering the threat of information include blocking access, which is often the preferred route of weak governments (Ananyev et al. 2019) or various ways of manipulating the information available to generate support for the group in power (Roberts 2018; Edmond 2013; Kitamura and Kuroda 2020). Despite studies of information and power often focusing more on the media, education can be a powerful means of information dissemination. For instance, learning about other successful movements against repressive governments can contribute to generating new ones (Lynch 2011). Particularly higher education, can induce political participation, contribute to transitions to democracy (Glaeser, Ponzetto, and Shleifer 2007), and make it more difficult to control the public through repression (Guriev and Treisman 2019). There would therefore be similar motives for weak governments to repress and strong governments to control what is taught in schools. Thus far, such considerations are not been included in a rebel context.

## **2.2 Path Forward**

As described, education plays an interesting role as the inflection point of the contrasting considerations of an insurgency. While education is rarely viewed as a strategic element of conflict, for a group looking to project power into an area, it could play a key role. There is a clear and present incentive to suppress education, both as an indirect representation of the state and for its direct influence on the population. Much like weak governments are more likely to attempt full censorship, such an action could serve as an initial step towards subverting the central government.

However, once an insurgent group has established a presence and is able to divert the

needed resources and manpower, there is a similarly rooted motive to instead assume control of education. As a form of service provision which is often in demand by the population, it can serve to generate local support. To both internal and external observers, providing inclusive education is tantamount to assuming the role of the state. Especially as an activity that is not explicitly related to group success, as contrasted with other pseudo-governing actions like tax collection, provision of education can contribute to the case for recognition as a legitimate governing body. Most interestingly, education can contribute to the formation of an identity and indoctrination into beliefs that can spread beyond those immediately impacted and persist beyond the established system.

Thus, as a conflict progresses, there should be a similar evolution in a groups' approach to education. Consequently, this paper makes two predictions, though the quantitative evidence will focus more on the second than the first for reasons described below. As a non-state group attempts to establish a presence in a territory, I expect:

1. Education will be opposed, agnostic to mechanism (violent or otherwise), when a group is looking to gain control over a population and the intensity of this opposition will vary based on the existing support from the population. There are no initial predictions about direction for the latter, as a heavily opposed area may be especially attractive to rein in or it may be difficult enough to divert attention elsewhere.
2. Education will be allowed or prioritized when two conditions are met:
  - The group in question shifts from needing to gain power to needing to maintain it,<sup>2</sup>
  - The group has sufficient power to control what is taught in schools and thus indoctrinate students.

---

<sup>2</sup>I don't specify what this turning point is as I expect it may vary by conflict. If we take @stewart2020rebel's premise that governance is practiced by sessionist groups, it may be when they achieve a degree of territorial control. It could alternately be when there is sufficient control over resources, key tactical positions are held, or there is a turning point with local support. In this paper, I use territorial contestation and full control and the level of conflict, as these seemed to be the relevant factors in Afghanistan.

Both of these conditions may vary depending on the level of support or contestation in the territory.

It is important to note that this last condition applies to their ability to influence what is taught in schools, not necessarily a cessation of conflict. Therefore, it is separate from the ability to operate services in the absence of conflict, no matter the primary actor. While I believe that other forms of service provision driven by the need for support and legitimization will also be active, I argue this pattern is unique to education because of its ability to build and represent identity. As a way to undermine the state's presence and demonstrate power first and to build a new identity second, education will display this evolution and in applicable circumstances its provision will be prioritized.

This project uses the Taliban as a case study, but there are numerous examples of rebel groups involving themselves in the provision of education (for example, see Mampilly (2012) on Sudan, Sri Lanka, and the DRC). Future work may look at other instances of non-state involvement in education. In addition, though the most direct application of this theory applies to the initial attempts to establish a presence in an area, I believe similar strategies may be used when a governing power is particularly weak and looking to reestablish themselves or being challenged by an opposing force. There has been relatively little work on the government use of education as a tool of conflict, but existing work such as Alesina, Giuliano, and Reich (2013) shows that this pattern described is far from unique to rebels.

There are several contributions this paper aims to make. First, especially as the research into rebel governance is a relatively nascent venture, there are still many questions to be answered. In particular, more intangible aspects of governance such as the role of information are relatively unexplored when it comes to rebel groups. Within this topic, to what degree governing strategies towards education are also needed in these non-traditional scenarios is an as-yet unaddressed question. Second, the existing work on service provision by rebel groups views services as a lump package. By breaking out a particular aspect of governance and examining the various mechanisms that may be behind its use, I hope to contribute

to the conversation on resource allocation towards social services by rebel groups. Lastly, despite extensive research on the politics of education, it is rarely considered as a unique factor in armed conflict, information warfare, or rebel governance, perhaps because changes in education directly impact only children. However, as I have laid out, I believe there is reason to believe that education could play a strategic role in conflict and governance that is as of yet largely unexplored.

### **3 History of the Taliban and Education**

“Control over education is a crucial aspect of any competition for political influence.”

Giustozzi and Franco - *The Battle for Schools; The Taleban and State Education.*

#### **3.1 Background of the Conflict**

The Soviet backed government in Afghanistan collapsed in 1992, following several decades of resistance by U.S. backed mujaheddins as part of American opposition to Soviet spheres of influence (Leede and Brief 2014). In the new power vacuum, these same groups jockeyed for power, including the group which consolidated and rose as the Taliban in 1994 under the leadership of Mullah Mohammad Omar (Organizations, n.d.). Rather than a religious versus secular battle, both sides of the civil war were Islamic. However, the Taliban, which was largely Pashtun and educated in local mosques and madrassas, was pitted against a more urban opposition, largely educated by Islamic scholars outside Afghanistan (Burde 2014). By 1996, the Taliban had seized the capital Kabul and remained in power, controlling about 90 percent of the country, until 2001 (Maizland and Laub, n.d.). That year the government’s refusal to turn over Osama Bin Laden following the September 11th attacks prompted the U.S. invasion and overthrow of the Taliban (Organizations, n.d.).

Following the end of the official Taliban government, the movement shifted again to an insurgency based in Pakistan (Maizland and Laub, n.d.). Starting in 2003, they began

establishing governing commissions while in exile, including departments of military, finance, and a media and communications wing. This ‘shadow government’ started being visible in Afghanistan in the form of provincial military commanders and governors around 2006. By the mid-2010s such governors were present in the majority of provinces. The commissions have grown over time, including multiple branches and covering a wide range of issues such as health care and agriculture (Jackson 2018). As Taliban presence expanded and attacks escalated, the U.S continued to commit troops despite the majority of forces being diverted to the conflict in Iraq. This included the ‘surge’ of 2009 following a spike in suicide bombings which brought the total count of US troops to 100,000 (Organizations, n.d.). Following the initial surge, US forces began to withdraw, leaving only 13,500 troops by 2017 (Jackson 2018).

While changes in the Taliban code of conduct away from non-combative violence also began in 2009, the de facto rise of Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansur as leader in 2010 (followed by the full transition when Omar died in 2015) is credited with shifting the Taliban towards a political movement. This shift came alongside the recognition that indiscriminate violence undermined popular support and instead the Taliban began to develop “more sophisticated planning, policy, and structures” (Jackson 2018, 9).

### **3.2 The Taliban’s Opposition to and Provision of Education**

“Most Afghans do not reject education, though their attitude towards it has been influenced by the fact that education as been manipulated as a key vehicle for inculcating religious adherence and for maintaining the power of those who transmit it.”

Burde, *Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan*

State education was originally controversial in the 1950s and the educational reforms of 1978-79 were opposed by conservative and Islamic groups, including attacks against schools and teachers that prevented education in many rural areas. However, when the Taliban government began closing schools in the 1990’s there was nonetheless popular resistance

(Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Where it did exist, education was often influenced by political motives, including during the Taliban's tenure a US funded curriculum designed to teach children to oppose the Soviets and to encourage militancy, often using language related to jihad (Burde 2014). When the new government arose in the 2000s, they began to expand education again, which was opposed by the now insurgent group Taliban (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). At that point, enrollment had declined from about 1.4 million in 1980 to around 900,000 (Burde 2014).

By 2006 the Taliban code of conduct included violently opposing schools which did not follow the Taliban approved curriculum (including the textbooks the group used in the 1990s) (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Schools and teachers were targeted as symbols of the government but it was more sporadic than systematic (Jackson 2018) and attacks were less likely on "community based" schools organized by local leaders as opposed to those directly tied to the government (Kapit et al. 2018). However, the Taliban faced backlash from villagers who wanted their children to be educated and communities put pressure on them to allow schools to operate (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Therefore, in 2007 the Taliban announced that they would reopen their own schools in areas they controlled. This was included in an extension of other shadow governance services, such as health care, that were being established at this time (Jackson 2018).

The original education commission was established in Quetta in 2006 and a second emerged in Peshawar in 2009; the provinces are divided between these two authorities (see Figure 1). Among other differences, the Peshawar Commission claims to be better organized than its counterpart and has a centralized network of provincial and district commissioners who report upwards, while the Quetta commissioners report to their respective provincial governors. This institutional structure of the Peshawar Commission allows them to work with military commissioners and enforce a commission-wide policy where school closures, and as a last resort attacks, are only used to enforce Taliban education policies. Quetta's decentralized structure has been described as leaving commissioners weaker with more local

discretion over attacks and less ability to enforce policy. In fact, the Peshawar commission has criticized the Quetta commission for their lack of organization and allowance of attacks on schools (Giustozzi and Franco 2013).

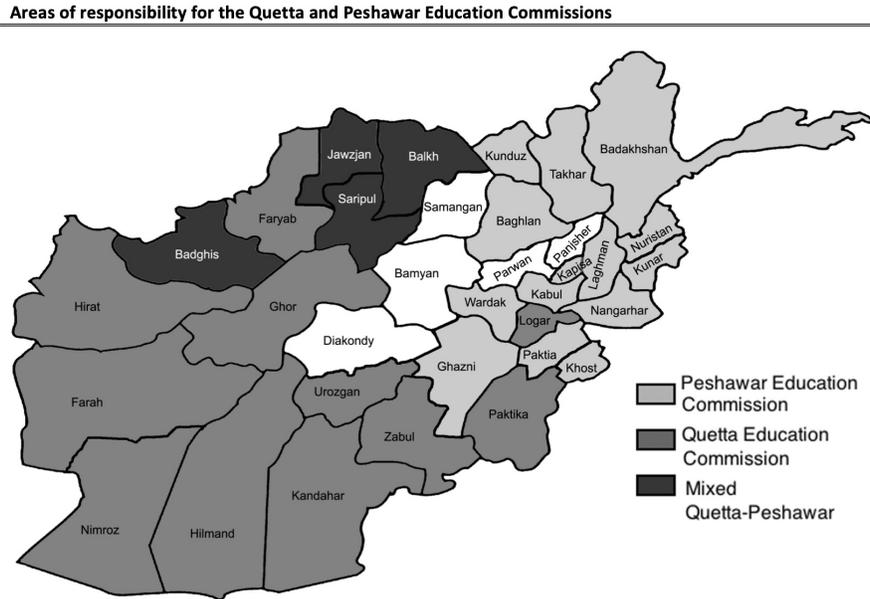


Figure 1: Education Commissions. Source: Giustozzi and Franco 2013

Attacks against schools escalated from 2006 to 2009 and by 2010, about 4,000 schools in Afghanistan had been closed by the Taliban (Giustozzi and Franco 2013). One analyst says that the targeting of schools was not (purely) ideological, but was to “deny the government a venue to propagate views”, while another said it was in part to prevent schools from providing a workforce for the government’s forces. Further, several interviewees acknowledged that “madrassa education is the backbone of the Taliban fighting spirit,” noting the the impact of different types of education. In this same period, the Taliban’s rapid territorial expansion shifted the organization’s priorities to needing “a new image of a movement able to govern as opposed to just fight” (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Despite this open acknowledgement of education as a tool used by both sides of the conflict in Afghanistan that has evolved alongside the war, its strategic uses have been largely overlooked.

As part of the shift towards governance, in 2009 the Taliban removed the authorization

to attack schools from their code of conduct and instead shifted their priorities towards compelling adherence to their policies on education (Jackson 2018). This was followed by a substantial drop in violence as the group began investing resources in supervising education, in part from “the realization that one key weakness of the Taliban is their limited ability to provide services to the population, which demands them insistently” (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Negotiations with the Ministry of Education (MoE) began from communication on both sides with tribal elders who pushed to reopen schools. Starting in early 2010 negotiations had progressed to meetings between high level MoE officials and Taliban representatives. This continued through 2012 and resulted in the Taliban largely controlling education in rural areas where they were present (Giustozzi and Franco 2013). Especially as the push began with local representatives, the demand for education varied across areas, and those which were more united and coherent or had strong existing government structures may have been better positioned to negotiate (Jackson 2018).

These negotiations led to reopening schools, but only with Taliban conditions met. These included (Jackson 2018; Giustozzi and Franco 2013):

- approval of teachers,
- monitoring both students’ and teachers’ attendance and behavior,
- banning mixed gender teaching,
- allowing women’s education through primary school,
- vetting the curriculum and use of Taliban textbooks,
- making allowances for more Islamic subjects to be taught in schools,
- for students to have time for madrassa education,
- and increasing funds to madrassas.

Many of the texts used in these schools are those originally developed by a US funded project which were written to inspire Islamic militancy (Burde 2014). Government officials have acknowledged that the Taliban has most of the bargaining power and, outside of urban areas, high levels of control over schools where they are present (Jackson 2018). Beyond villages' willingness to work with the Taliban on education, these changes have at times been popular with citizens, in part because the Taliban has improved both student and teacher attendance and reduced corruption attached to schools (Jackson 2018; Burde 2014). By March 2013, only 471 schools remained closed (Giustozzi and Franco 2013).

As the Taliban barred attacks against education, their policy shifted instead towards enforcing school attendance (Jackson 2018). When sanctioned attacks have occurred, it is usually to force compliance with their educational policies (Giustozzi and Franco 2013). Such educational monitoring has continued to be prioritized, even when more conventional military pressure has increased (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Despite with this detente, several factors have resumed tensions around schools. For one, attacks on schools spiked during the 2014 presidential elections, in part because of their use as polling places (Kapit et al. 2018). More interestingly, government challenges to Taliban authority, such as a motorbike ban in Ghazni in 2012 or anti-Taliban remarks by MoE officials in Wardak, have triggered additional school closures. These closures tend to disproportionately affect Pashtun areas, which are often rural and such organized education-related responses to government actions mainly occur under the institutionally coherent Peshawar commission (Giustozzi and Franco 2013). This further demonstrates the use of school control to undermine the state's authority.

There are several key facets of this narrative. The first is the acknowledgement of schools as threatening to the Taliban as they began to reestablish themselves in Afghanistan. An addendum to this pattern is the well known Taliban antipathy to women's education, though this has eased over the years (they denied their opposition in 2011) (Jackson 2018), while research has shown that men's support of the group increases with more education while women display the opposite trend (Burde 2014). Despite this, the Taliban often allows

separate gender education for women up through primary school, though not beyond. This is likely due to a combination of a compromise between ideology and public demands and that in rural areas, primary education for women may be considered sufficient by residents (Giustozzi and Franco 2013; Jackson 2018).

Despite the attention paid to the Taliban’s attacks on schools, there has been a clear shift to reopening schools as territorial control consolidates. The group’s open claim was that this shift was due to their desire to serve the community and because of the progress they made in their negotiations with the government (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). In essence, they recognized both the need for support from the community as they moved towards stability and that their increased leverage over the government allowed them to pursue their own educational agenda. “They get the government to pay for something that ultimately reinforces their recruitment basis or, at the very least, does not produce any support for the government” (Giustozzi and Franco 2011). Additionally, though the Taliban is pursuing their own goals related to education, the operation of schools and who attends is often the result of compromises between the group and the local population, indicating a dual benefit of education provision (Giustozzi and Franco 2013). Provision of services such as education can be seen as a measure of government commitment to a population and thus connected to their legitimacy and popularity (Burde 2014). Therefore, the evolution of the Taliban’s education policies prove an interesting demonstration of the theory described above, as the group has evolved from weak to strong territorial presence and their approach to education has shifted from repression to controlled provision.

## **4 Data and Methods**

### **4.1 Data**

Unsurprisingly, data in this context is sparse and has a relatively limited degree of granularity. Due to these challenges, there are several adaptations made which will be

described as well as opportunities for future work.

#### 4.1.1 Dependent Variable

The main outcome of interest is changes in education which are attributable to decisions made by the Taliban. Unsurprisingly, documentation of Taliban controlled schools is not publically available. However, as described above, the groups control of schools is through an agreement with the Ministry of Education and thus those schools and students are included in government data. Therefore the main source of data on education is through the Afghan government and includes counts of schools and students operating in each province, broken up by gender and level of education (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary). This is available for Afghan years 1386, 1387, and 1391-1397 or approximately 2007, 2008, and 2012-2018.<sup>3</sup> While in some datasets the government separates the city and province of Kabul, I have grouped them together for the purpose of uniformity. Thus, we can observe changes in education and given the qualitative knowledge of where the Taliban is able to influence the same, draw reasonable conclusions.

There are two main technical problems with this data set. First, as it includes all schools it is difficult to directly recognize Taliban influence. The approach to this will be described as part of the empirical strategy, but it is worth mentioning as a possible area for further data collection. The second is that there is a problem with so called ‘ghost schools’ being recorded as in operation while there are no attendant teachers or students; it is estimated this could be as many as 1 in 12 reported schools (Jackson 2018). However, much of the reporting on this issue has attributed it to corruption around use of US government funds that were earmarked for education. Therefore this may actually downward bias our estimate, since those schools would be in ‘government’ held areas. Additionally, as part of the check on which mechanisms are in operation, I examine whether similar patterns exist in the provision

---

<sup>3</sup>Afghanistan uses the Hijri calendar, which begins from the Islamic New Year in 622CE and begins a new year in mid-March by the Gregorian calendar. Where possible, data (such as conflict incidents) has been adjusted to the Hijri calendar.

of other services. While imperfect, if education demonstrates a different pattern, there is reason to believe there is a different incentive structure for *either* reporting or operating schools. While the problem of misreporting demands further attention, if it is in operation in Taliban held areas as well, it would speak to the legitimization mechanism rather than the identity driven one I focus on.

It is also worth noting what data isn't included here. First, though the theory outlined has a component that argues an insurgent group will close schools as the move into an area, the limited time span of this data obscures much of this period in Afghanistan. What remains can therefore only describe part of the theory outlined, as will be shown in the analysis section. There are, however, indications of conditions in which schools close. Second, given the limited time span, there are insufficient data points to look at decisions related to education before and after the 'official' change in policy by the Taliban. Third, this theory originated in questions about attacks on schools. However, this can only be tracked with the permission of the Taliban and those that are able to broker such agreements cannot share that data as part of the collection agreement. The lack of reliable attack data in this context is part of the reason for the focus on school operation; it works to my advantage in this case as, while insurgent violence is expected to some degree, the provision of services is a far more interesting phenomenon. Additionally, in a philosophical sense, anything worth destroying can be worth possessing, i.e. the rational behind attacks against schools likely overlap with the motives for operating them.

#### **4.1.2 Independent Variables**

There are three main independent variables, namely the degree of conflict, Taliban presence, and the proportion of the population which is rural. The reasons for this will be described in the empirical strategy.

First, there is extensive data on incidences of conflict within Afghanistan. For this, I use data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program through the Uppsala Department of Peace and

Conflict Research, because it has the most extensive time span of the open source data sets, 1998-2018.<sup>4</sup> I aggregated the number of incidents and the number of deaths by province and Afghan year, subsetted by incidents which involved the Taliban as one of the main parties. I also created similar measures for incidents which involve only the Taliban and a government entity, as competition over territory is part of the topic of interest. As with any conflict data set, there are concerns about misreporting or misattribution of parties; in this context, I expect this would take the form of underreporting and thus downward bias my estimates.

Second, I created a measure of the extent of Taliban presence in each province. To do this I used Longwar Journal's map of Taliban control which marks each district as government controlled, contested, or Taliban controlled based on public information and assessments by NATO's command in Afghanistan at the recommendation of several regional experts (see Figure 2). Since the education data I have is concentrated at the province rather than district level, I created several measures. First was a dummy measure where each district was marked as 1 if it had any Taliban presence and all else 0. Then a province level index was created by weighting districts by either population or area (results were very similar, the subsequent analyses use the population weighting). This was repeated using a scaled measure of Taliban presence where contested territories were marked .5, Taliban controlled districts 1, and all else 0. Again, there were minor differences between these two indexes.

Last, given the qualitative evidence that in rural areas with Taliban presence, the group largely has control over education decisions while urban areas remain more contested, I created a variable for the proportion of the population that's rural. While this data was available for most years, there were several missing years in the spread needed (1387, 1391, 1394, 1397, 1398). These were filled in with the last available year. This may present a slight problem, but there was very little variation across years (standard deviation of either 0.00 or 0.01 when grouped by province) and is thus a largely safe assumption.

---

<sup>4</sup>This may be replaced with NATO data in the near future, I haven't had time to make compare datasets since I only recently got access.

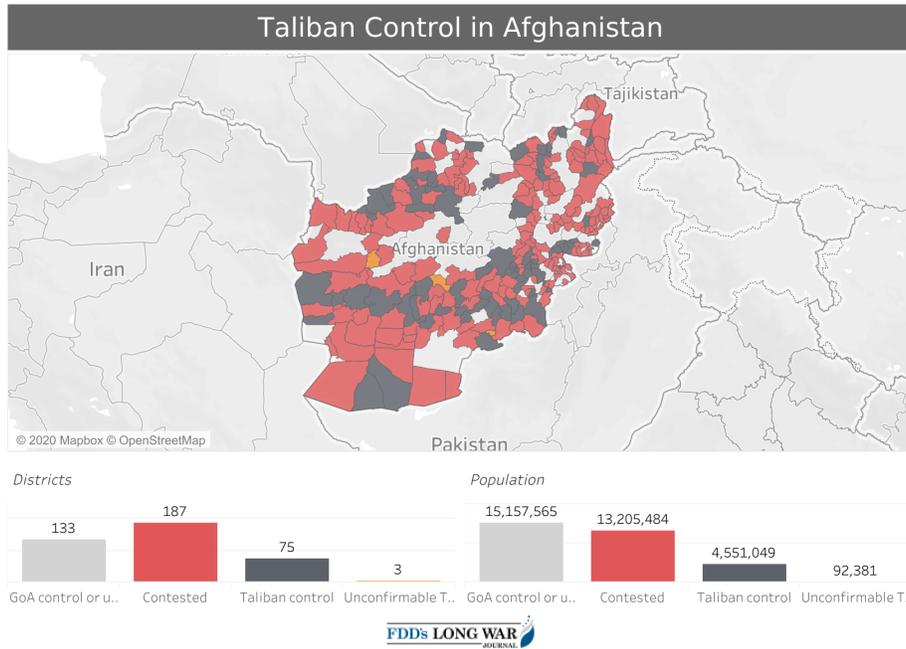


Figure 2: Territorial Control. Source: Longwar Journal

#### 4.1.3 Other Data Sources

Since the regressions are run with province and year fixed effects there is limited additional data needed. Many of the possible controls would also change based on the level of conflict or Taliban presence (such as the population) or may have a reciprocal relationship with changes in education (such as trust in village governments). The needed data on population and land area for the created variables above come from the World Bank and from the Afghan government, when available. From Giustozzi and Franco (2013)'s qualitative work in Afghanistan, I pulled the provinces of operation for the two different education commissions run by the Taliban (see map in Figure 1).

In order to compare education provision to other services, I also aggregated data on the operation of medical facilities in each province each year. This was available through the Afghan National Statistical Handbooks from 1390-1397, so a very similar time span as compared to the education data.

## 4.2 Empirical Strategy

As discussed, due to the challenges with data availability, there is no way to directly examine the Taliban’s influence on education. Therefore, the focus of the empirical strategy has been to examine the patterns under the conditions where qualitative research has said the Taliban should have significant control over education. To do this, the main specification uses a triple interaction (and the permutations of those variables):

$$\Delta Education_{i,t} = \beta \Delta Incidents_{i,t} * Territory_i * Rural_{i,t} + \delta_i + \delta_t + \epsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

For the main tests, the left hand side is the relative change in an education metric in province  $i$  and year  $t$  as compared to the previous year. The first portion of analysis uses the change in the number of schools in a province. Subsequent testing uses the number of students by gender and level of education. This allows me to compare changes in women in education through primary school, which is considered more leniently by the Taliban versus upper and lower secondary school.

On the right hand side there are three parts of the interaction term. The first term, *Incidents* is the relative change in violent incidents that involve the Taliban or alternately that are between the Taliban and a government entity (i.e. do not involve civilians as one of the main parties). Since in the set of observations, there are only 17 province-year observations where conflict ‘started’ i.e. there were violent incidents in the current year but not the previous and 13 where conflict ‘ended’, the gradient measure captures the majority of the shifts in conflict. This is used as a measure of the intensity of contestation in a given province-year, as this is a main interest of the theory put forth.

The second term is used to denote the degree of Taliban presence in a province. The *Territory* term is the continuous index created to represent the degree of Taliban presence in a territory based on who holds each district and scaled by population into a province measure. The results presented use the measure that assigns .5 to contested districts and

1 to completely Taliban held districts; using the alternate measure only minorly impacted results, and these can be seen in the Appendix. Presence is necessary but not sufficient for the outcome of interest, because, as the theory puts forth, the degree of competition over the territory should influence education decisions and Taliban controlled over education is variable in urban versus rural areas.

The third term *Rural* is the proportion of the population that is rural in that province-year, as the qualitative evidence suggests in rural areas the Taliban has far more control over education than in urban areas. Further, especially in contested areas, the Taliban usually has a strong rural presence while the urban areas remain contested. Thus the marginal effect of this combined interaction looks at the effects of changes in competition over territory in areas with high Taliban presence and a high rural population on changes in education. I believe under this context, the effect on education can be reasonably attributed to the Taliban, while without the rural component the result would be, in effect, the impact of contestation on education. Instead, by looking at the intersection of these terms, we can see the impact of territory with Taliban presence where they have a high degree of control over services, i.e. in rural areas (Jackson 2018) and how this changes with contestation, represented by changes in conflict incidents. Combined, this approximates the outcome of interest: what changes are made to education under Taliban governance and how does this change with contestation.

Finally,  $\delta_i$  and  $\delta_t$  represents province and year fixed effects respectively and  $\epsilon$  is a cluster robust error term. As province and year fixed effects are used, I have not introduced any control variables. This is in part because variables such as changes in population are likely both represented in the updated proportion rural term and affected by the changes in conflict. Basic testing showed that, though varying by province, there was a high correlation between population change and changes in conflict, introducing concerns about collinearity if a control was included. Other possible controls, such as trust in local institutions, are likely themselves affected in part by changes in education and would thus confound the results.

In order to compare the changes in education provision to other forms of service provision,

I use a similar specification on changes in healthcare facilities. In this instance, the left hand side becomes  $\Delta Health$ , which is the relative change in the number of basic and comprehensive healthcare facilities as compared to the previous year.

Finally, an alternate version is used to test the effects of the two different Taliban education commissions. As mentioned, Afghanistan was divided into two separate commissions (see Figure 1), each with a separate leadership structure, though obviously still under the Taliban umbrella leadership. I was interested in to what degree the decisions made by commissioners would impact the changes to education. A similar regression was run replacing the term for *Territory* with a term for, alternately, the degree of Taliban presence under the Quetta Commission and the degree of Taliban presence under the Peshawar Commission. I removed the four provinces with mixed commission presence from the total data set to allow for a clearer comparison.

## 5 Results and Analysis

### 5.1 Conflict and Education

The main question of interest is whether the Taliban is making strategic decisions related to education when attempting to establish a presence in a territory. If the theory described is in action, there should be a change in the schools which are open when the Taliban is present, is able to establish control over what is taught in schools, substituted by the proportion of the population which is rural, as well as when these same areas are contested, i.e. there is a challenge to Taliban control. I focus on changes in the number of schools for the main specification, as the number of schools is a governance decision while the number of students attending a school is dependent on both governance and individual decisions. Though not ideal, a school can be open without any students or closed despite many students available, and thus this metric relates most directly to the question about group decisions rather than public behavior. Further, as a point of interest, on average only about half of the schools in

Afghanistan are held in buildings so there is an above average degree of flexibility year over year to school operation. The main results for this outcome are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Change in Schools

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Change in Number of Schools	
	(1)	(2)
Change in Conflict	0.201 (0.165)	
Government Conflict		0.219 (0.146)
Prop. Rural	1.211 (2.098)	1.265 (2.079)
Conflict*Taliban	-1.149* (0.589)	
Conflict*Rural	-0.239 (0.183)	
Gov. Conflict*Taliban		-1.273** (0.566)
Gov. Conflict*Rural		-0.260 (0.163)
Taliban*Rural	12.328** (6.081)	12.110** (6.005)
Conflict*Taliban*Rural	1.370** (0.649)	
Gov.*Taliban*Rural		1.520** (0.627)
Observations	213	213
R <sup>2</sup>	0.147	0.157
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.045	-0.033
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

As mentioned, I used both the change in all conflicts involving the Taliban and those

which include the Taliban and a government entity. This was to determine if what was driving the results was any form of violence, which included civilians and other non-state groups, or competition with a state actor. The difference between the two variables is minimal, both in value and impact to the regression, and if anything has a slightly higher magnitude marginal effect for conflicts which involve a government, which works towards the theory described. Given this, I use only the government incidents variable throughout the rest of the paper.

Overall, these results indicate support for the second half of the theory. The first outcome of interest, that of Taliban presence in a rural area, i.e. one where they have high de facto control over education, is both positive and by far the largest in magnitude. Since an uncontested Taliban is in a stronger position, it fits with the predictions made that this circumstance would have the largest positive effect on education.

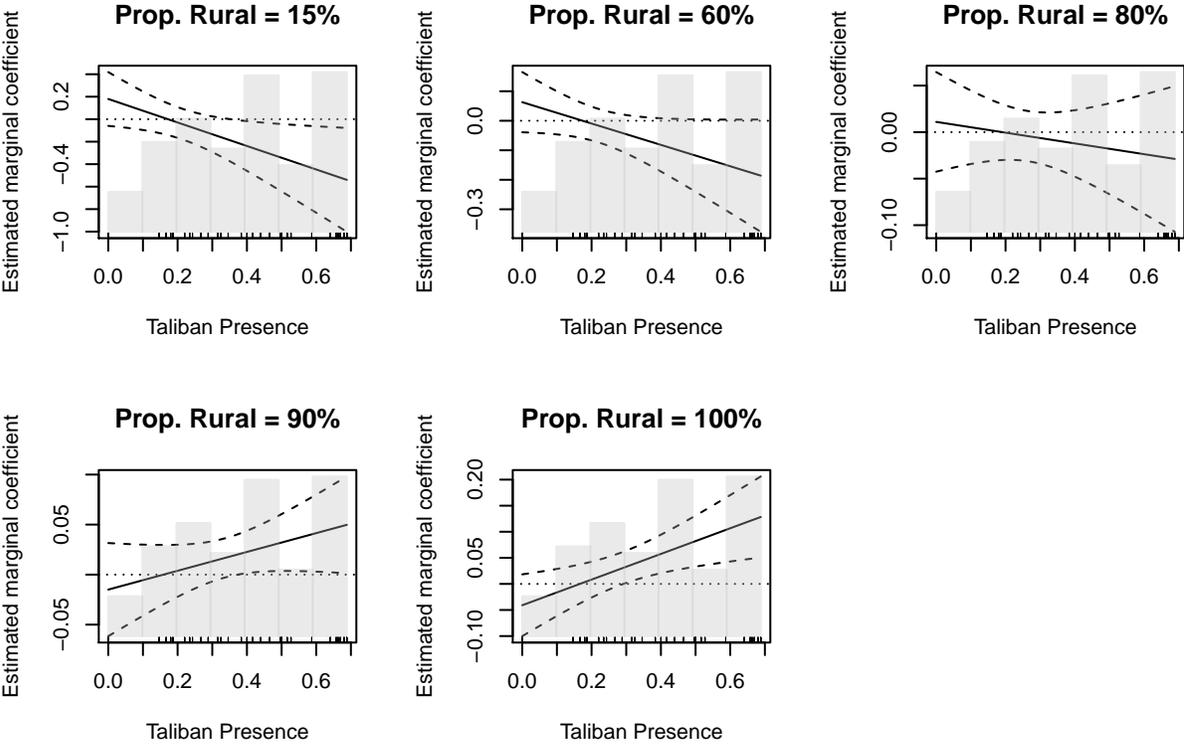
The other main terms of interest was on the triple interaction, which represents areas where the Taliban had a presence, had control over education systems, and was being challenged by the government. There is a positive, significant marginal effect on this term, indicating that these factors contribute to rebel governance efforts to open schools. This is particularly interesting given that, in a situation with active conflict, the common logic might be that a group is *less* likely not more to invest in education. However, this result indicates that where the Taliban is attempting to cement control over a population when they have already established a presence, there is a reason to invest in education.

The positive coefficient on both the main terms of interest may speak to both the short and long term benefits of education; first, for undermining the current government and second by building a national identity.

The only remaining term of interest is the interaction between the change in levels of conflict and the degree of Taliban presence, which have a combined negative marginal impact on change in the number of schools open. I believe there are three main, possible interpretations of this term. The first is this represents areas with a Taliban presence where they are not generally able to exercise authority, and either because of safety concerns

or other worries related to the Taliban, the Afghan government is closing schools. The second is, this represents areas where the Taliban has some measure of influence but cannot exercise their authority effectively over what is taught in schools and thus the Taliban is closing schools. Third, it is possible safety concerns are heightened in largely rural areas as conflict is in closer proximity to the population, and schools are closed regardless of political motives. Unfortunately, due to the data that is currently available, I cannot make an accurate assessment as to which or in what degree these dynamics may be playing out.

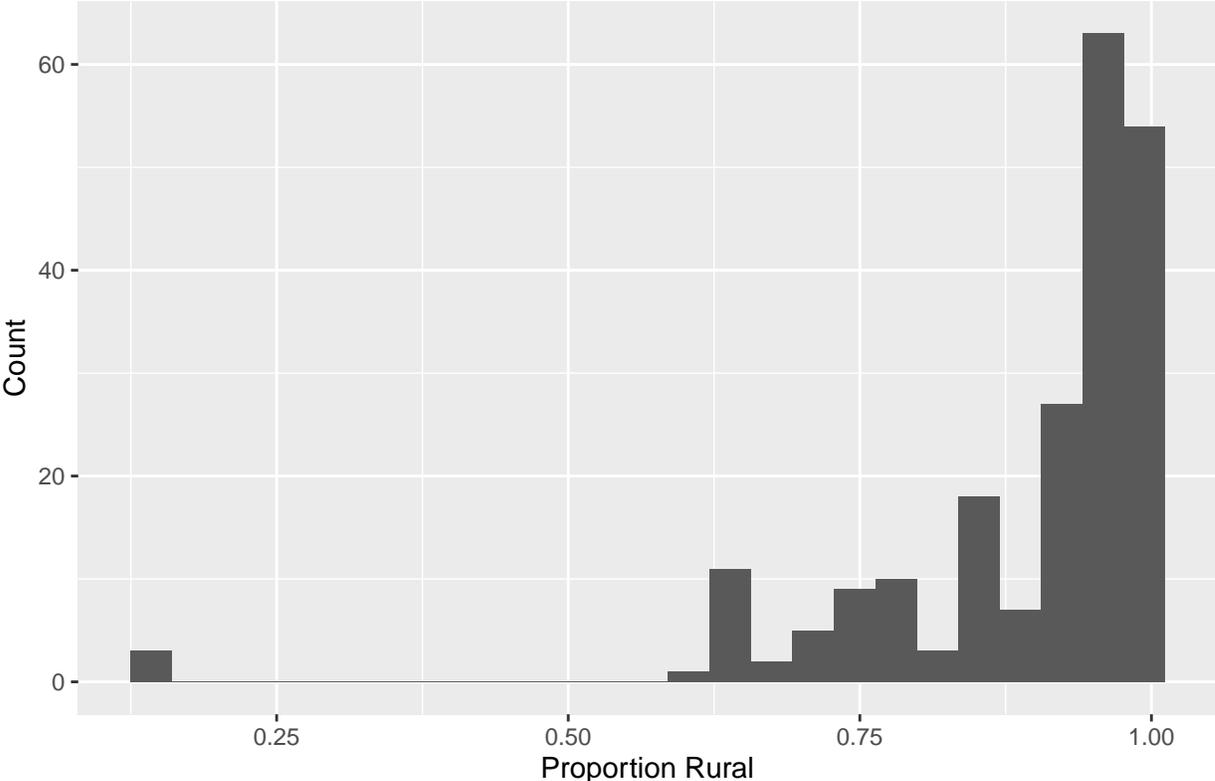
Figure 3: Marginal Effect of Conflict on Changes in Schools



Plotting the marginal impact of conflict provides a bit more insight. Figure 3 demonstrates how the marginal interactive effect of conflict shifts with degrees of Taliban presence at set levels of the proportion of the population that is rural. As context for this depiction, Kabul is the only province in Afghanistan which is below 60% rural. However, the exclusion of Kabul does not significantly impact the results, as can be seen in the Appendix. These plots show that it is indeed only for the most rural areas that the combination of Taliban presence and conflict have a positive effect on the number of schools in operation. Again, this could

be due to lower safety concerns or even the fact that rural areas are predominately Pashtun and thus may be more in alignment with the Taliban generally or their education goals specifically. However, as Figure 4 shows, the majority of provinces in Afghanistan fall within the proportion rural for which the Taliban and conflict have a positive effect on education.

**Figure 4: Province–Years by Proportion Rural**



There are several possible alternate explanations for these results. The safety concern factor mentioned could be at work, but the conditionality of when conflict causes a negative versus positive effect I believe suggests safety is not the primary driver of results. Second, given the notable difference between urban and rural areas, it is possible there are ‘floor and ceiling’ effects taking place, where there are so few schools in rural areas, that any positive change is significant whereas there is less room to grow in urban areas. The magnitude of the marginal effect on the interaction between Taliban presence and proportion rural I believe assuages some of these concerns, as well as the fact that in a rough sense the impacts of the Taliban and conflict on rural versus urban areas do not cancel out. Last, as the data available

are relatively coarse and there is no direct data on Taliban decision making, there is a burden of proof that is difficult to meet in this instance. However, the fact that the results presented agree with the story told by qualitative evidence suggests that the explanation presented is perhaps the most likely and certainly worth further exploration when and where possible.

These results speak mainly to the second portion of the theory presented, that of when schools will be reopened or education encouraged. However, there was only a limited time span of data available, and I believe it did not include the bulk of the Taliban's initial movements into territories which would have accorded with the first portion of the theory. Depending on the interpretation of conflict with the Taliban in an urban term as described above, the results at least do not work against this theory, which could be tested with additional data on education and more detailed tracking of Taliban presence. Additionally, the significant trends of schools opening indicates they were either previously closed or there was a notable lack of education services; both could work towards different parts of the explanation offered. The differing conditions of opening versus closing schools will also be discussed alongside some of the secondary results.

## **5.2 Variation by Commission**

Since this is largely a story about governance decisions made by rebel groups, I wanted to consider the impact of two separate governing commissions on education operating in Afghanistan. I removed the four provinces that have mixed commissions in order to allow for more straightforward interpretation and created variables for the degree of the Peshawar commission's presence and the degree of the Quetta commission's presence. The regressions therefore compare one commission to the combined other commission and commission-less provinces, as including only the latter did not allow for sufficient points of comparison. While this is a flawed methodology, the results presented in Table 2 are interesting.

Though relatively crude, these results can be interpreted as demonstrating there is a degree of decision making by who is in charge of the governance system. I can see four

Table 2: Peshawar vs. Quetta Education Commissions

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Change in Number of Schools	
	(1)	(2)
Change in Conflict	0.038 (0.153)	-0.005 (0.141)
Prop. Rural	2.511* (1.304)	6.276*** (1.581)
Conflict*Peshawar Com.	-0.271 (0.306)	
Conflict*Quetta Com.		-0.047 (0.493)
Conflict*Rural	-0.010 (0.164)	0.002 (0.153)
Peshawar*Rural	8.029*** (2.930)	
Conflict*Peshawar*Rural	0.265 (0.342)	
Quetta*Rural		-7.658* (4.294)
Conflict*Quetta*Rural		0.231 (0.529)
Observations	187	187
R <sup>2</sup>	0.157	0.238
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.038	0.061
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

primary explanations for the opposing signs on the marginal effect of Taliban presence in rural areas dependent on which commission serves as the baseline, which may be independently or jointly in operation. The first two address organizational aspects. First, that different commissions have different priorities in terms of resource allocations. As mentioned, the Peshawar commission is organized to enforce Taliban school policies and to use schools to exert authority over the government, so may have prioritized providing educational services that fit group goals. Second, the Peshawar commission claims it is better organized and has a more centralized structure, therefore it could be more effective and have a consistent policy that promotes education despite the ongoing conflict. Without this organization, education may be unevenly provided or unorganized enough so as to not provide benefits which outweigh the costs.

The next two explanations address perspective. First, that one commission is more ‘progressive’ than the other and therefore puts more effort towards the newer policy of Taliban support of education that requires cooperation with the Afghan government versus the older standard opposition, especially as the commission with a positive marginal effect on education is the more recently established one. There is some anecdotal evidence that such leadership holdovers contribute to the degree of violence against education despite the reversal in official policy. Last, it is possible that one system is prioritizing the ‘shut down’ of education, i.e. blocking the reach of the current government and demonstrating their ability to wholly block services and the other is more invested in local support and identity formation. To these latter two points, there is some knowledge that both the Quetta commission allows more regional control over both education and violence decisions and the Peshawar commission is more in favor of promoting Taliban controlled education. I would posit that some or all of these forces are operating to different degrees, rather than one mechanism.

Despite the limited information on the operation of the commissions, this serves as an interesting demonstration of the criticality of decision making and prioritization. This dynamic of when force and totalitarianism versus cooperation and civilian concessions are

implemented, or alternately the role of centrally organized versus disparate decision making, even within the same organization is an interesting element of rebel governance that deserves further exploration. Papers such as Stewart (2020) indicate decisions around service provision could vary on group strength and whether they hold territory. However the variation within the same group brings up questions about governance structures and autonomy within actively fighting armed groups. It also offers a unique opportunity to explore the consequences of different strategies within the same conflict and umbrella group.

### **5.3 Evidence of Local Concessions**

The results thus far indicate that there is reason to believe the Taliban involves itself in education in the areas it has a presence, but also that these decisions vary by the governing structure. There is further reason to believe that there is variation in who these decisions apply to as well. Though the insurgent group has conducted numerous attacks against women's education, interviews have indicated that their narrative related to allowing girls in schools has evolved over time. This has been largely attributed to prompting by local officials and villagers who want some degree of education for their daughters. As a result, the open policy is to support women's education through primary school, but there is more push back against upper levels of public education. To look at whether such negotiations between an insurgent group and the population are, in fact, effective, I looked at the change in the proportion of male students enrolled in primary and secondary schools as an outcome of the discussed variables. These results are displayed in Table 3.

Though few of the outcomes are significant, it does begin to display a general pattern. In areas with conflict and a rural population or conflict and Taliban presence, the proportion of girls attending schools is decreasing. This could point towards parents being more reluctant to send girls to school when there are safety concerns. Second, the two main coefficients of interest, on rural areas held by the Taliban and those same areas while contested, there is actually an increase in girls attending school relative to boys. This could be the result of

Table 3: Change in Proportion of Male Students

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	All Students	Primary St.	Secondary St.
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Change in Conflict	-0.056 (0.054)	-0.026 (0.066)	-0.118** (0.052)
Prop. Rural	-1.094 (0.773)	-1.332 (0.942)	-0.646 (0.740)
Conflict*Taliban	0.210 (0.210)	0.141 (0.256)	0.383* (0.201)
Conflict*Rural	0.056 (0.061)	0.025 (0.074)	0.123** (0.058)
Taliban*Rural	-0.473 (2.241)	-0.825 (2.733)	-1.030 (2.147)
Conflict*Taliban*Rural	-0.227 (0.233)	-0.154 (0.284)	-0.420* (0.223)
Observations	211	211	211
R <sup>2</sup>	0.052	0.055	0.063
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.165	-0.160	-0.151

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

either fewer boys attending school as they may have cause to be involved in a conflict or if more girls left school during the initial Taliban entry which is largely excluded from this data set, and now there is more room for growth.

However, as noted, few of these results are significant and there is substantial variance, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions. This in and of itself is interesting, when contrasted with the consistent results on changes in schools. As mentioned, while schools are a governance decision, student attendance is a personal one. Thus there may be significantly more variation in attendance numbers as it reflects not just the conditions but families or villages values and risk considerations. Additionally, there is a larger magnitude on the secondary school variable, which is in opposition to the expected results for this test. I hypothesize that this is because there are far fewer secondary schools and secondary school students, making any changes more significant.

As it is difficult to draw conclusions from this set of testing, and as the previous sections displayed the internal variation in policy between governing commissions, I included the commission variable as part of the student enrollment breakdown. Table 4 shows changes in the proportion of male students by primary and secondary schools comparing the Peshawar commission to the Quetta commission. Figure 5 displays these results for clearer comparison.

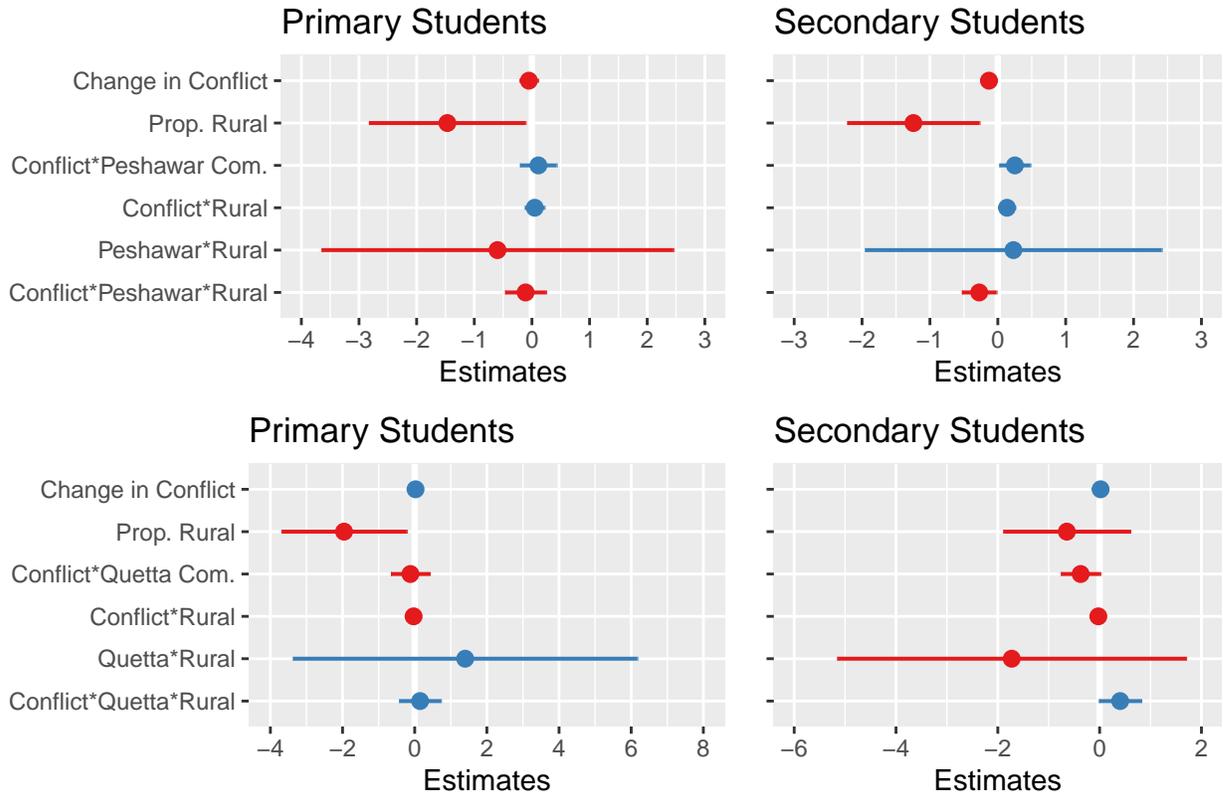
Table 4: Change in Proportion of Male Students

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Primary Peshawar (1)	Secondary Commission (2)	Primary Quetta (3)	Secondary Commission (4)
Change in Conflict	-0.052 (0.081)	-0.130** (0.058)	0.023 (0.078)	0.019 (0.056)
Prop. Rural	-1.468** (0.694)	-1.243** (0.497)	-1.958** (0.886)	-0.644 (0.636)
Conflict*Peshawar Com.	0.112 (0.162)	0.252** (0.116)		
Conflict*Quetta Com.			-0.119 (0.275)	-0.373* (0.197)
Conflict*Rural	0.049 (0.087)	0.136** (0.062)	-0.031 (0.086)	-0.025 (0.061)
Peshawar*Rural	-0.597 (1.557)	0.230 (1.115)		
Conflict*Peshawar*Rural	-0.110 (0.181)	-0.274** (0.130)		
Quetta*Rural			1.399 (2.434)	-1.727 (1.748)
Conflict*Quetta*Rural			0.149 (0.295)	0.404* (0.212)
Observations	185	185	185	185
R <sup>2</sup>	0.056	0.088	0.058	0.086
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.166	-0.126	-0.163	-0.129

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Figure 5: Proportion of Male Students



Again, it is difficult to draw extensive conclusions from these results, but the clear heterogeneity between the governing commissions brings a story more into focus. The two main outcomes of interest are Taliban presence in rural areas and the same when also contested by the government (the bottom two terms in each figure). Similar to the findings in the previous section, the commission which was organized to support education demonstrates comparatively more progressive patterns. This also displays more consistency on the expected results, that women’s education would be more allowable for primary education on the two terms which represent areas with high Taliban control of education. These results back up some of the speculation from the generalized findings: first, given the consistent increase in women’s education in rural areas, there was likely an existing deficit that allows for a type of floor effect. Second, the variation in direction of coefficients on secondary school outcomes aligns with the idea that the low level of secondary school attendance allows for greater magnitude, but also greater variation in outcomes.

This overall pattern has several interesting implications. First, it supports the finding that there are different governing decisions being made by the two commissions, as this was a test of the proportion of male and female students, not the overall number. This aligns with the division between a more service oriented commission and a comparatively less so commission. Given that researchers have acknowledged that there is also local leeway given to attacks against schools despite the main Taliban directive, this could be significant in more ways than simply education attendance.

Second, as mentioned, school attendance includes individual decisions. The increase in women attending school points towards parents willingness to send their daughters to school in a Taliban held area. Whether this is due to the desire for education or support for Taliban education policies that focus more on religion and conservative values is an open question that likely has a high degree of individual variation.

Third and most interesting, is the support for the Taliban claim that, at least in certain places, they have indeed shifted their stance on women's education. Given the group's reputation, this is a bit of a surprising finding. However, it indicates some combination of local concessions to citizens desire for women's education and the potential for cultural transmission through women (Weber 1976). Again, the exact motive cannot be determined through empirical testing, but it does indicate both a degree of working with a population and flexibility in decision making that is surprising in the context of an extremist group.

Despite this, there is a degree of variation in these results which makes the above analysis speculation. The counter-intuitive direction and internal variation which accorded with earlier findings was interesting enough to be worth discussing, but these results are far from conclusive. In particular, these results are difficult to attribute to a particular actor or motive, and likely display an interplay of multiple actors each working with mixed or individualized motives. However, as noted, there are overall indications of pro-education governance decisions being made, and concessions which could only benefit the Taliban through public support and identity building, particularly as women are not usually directly

recruited.

## 5.4 Education vs. Other Service Provision

One of the main aims of this paper was to establish that there are incentives for particular forms of service provision, rather than lumping together all forms of rebel governance. In this case, it was to highlight that education's ability to facilitate identity formation and a path towards state building, as well as being a publicly demanded service that can demonstrate inclusive governance, should set it apart in terms of prioritizing what services are available. In order to compare these results to an alternate form of service provision, I looked at the changes in the number of healthcare facilities that are operating in each province and year. These results are presented in Table 4. At the very least because there is an ongoing conflict that should both affect the ability to provide services and create a need for healthcare, it would be expected before education to show a significant pattern of service provision and is thus a strong comparison point. Further, much of the literature on Taliban shadow governance includes provision of healthcare and that they expended efforts towards securing both doctors and teachers to staff their relative facilities.

Despite reasonable predictions, there is no significant change in overall available healthcare facilities. Though only the results on changes in comprehensive facilities are significant, it appears as if particularly where the Taliban is present, there is a switch happening from comprehensive to basic facilities. However, the increase in basic facilities is highly variable. This suggests that despite operating in a conflict context, there is a general decline in the availability and quality of care, and what provision exists is far from consistent. Given the criticality of healthcare as compared to education, the contrast in the two patterns displayed suggests there is indeed something unique about the provision of education. I suggest the most likely explanation for this is the mix of returns on providing education, including as a venue for identity formation. As an important note, unlike the results for education, healthcare was highly affected by the inclusion or exclusion of Kabul, I believe because it represents such an

Table 5: Healthcare Provision

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	All Facilities	Basic Facilities	Comprehensive Facilities
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Change in Conflict	0.512 (0.935)	2.111 (2.249)	-2.646 (1.779)
Government Conflict	1.956 (14.903)	16.841 (35.851)	7.777 (28.350)
Prop. Rural	-0.406 (3.603)	-8.846 (8.667)	15.189** (6.853)
Conflict*Taliban	-0.627 (1.039)	-2.617 (2.498)	3.294* (1.976)
Conflict*Rural	-7.230 (40.979)	127.422 (98.581)	-87.846 (77.954)
Gov. Conflict*Taliban	0.410 (4.013)	10.358 (9.655)	-17.747** (7.635)
Observations	187	187	187
R <sup>2</sup>	0.012	0.069	0.057
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.241	-0.170	-0.186

*Note:*

\*p&lt;0.1; \*\*p&lt;0.05; \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

outlier in terms of rural population. As such, these results exclude Kabul so as not to be obfuscated by an outlier, but the full results are in the Appendix; they do not significantly alter the interpretation however.

There are two main criticisms to these results. First, that the years in question do not directly overlap with the years included in the education tests. Because of the availability of data, there was no good way around this except to limit what was included in both and, again because of the sparsity of data, I was reluctant to do this. However, once the variables used are converted to a change rather than static value, there is only one year difference, so unless there was an extremely critical event in that one year, it is unlikely the results can be attributed to this. Second, because this occurs in a conflict setting, there may be more reluctance to close healthcare facilities or the government and Taliban may provide them at similar rates. However, though highly variable, the negative marginal effect of Taliban presence in rural areas on the change in healthcare indicates this is not the case. Further, lack of any significant marginal effects on pure conflict assuage some of these concerns. However, as with any comparison between two divergent systems, there is no way to satisfy perfect comparison requirements completely.

Despite these concerns, the results described provide a strong indication that there is in fact a difference between different forms of service provision. I claim that the role of identity transmission in education as opposed to other services is the main differentiator. Further, this demonstrates the strategic use of education in a conflict and that information manipulation is an element of a rebel governance strategy, both concepts which could be expanded on.

## **6 Conclusion and Future Research**

There is evidence not only that the Taliban provides education when they have stable control over an area, but also that such provision is prioritized even during an increase in conflict. Along with the result that other forms of service provision, such as healthcare, do

not display similar patterns, I argue that education is indeed unique. This demonstrates several things. First, that service provision by rebel governments should be broken apart in future research rather than treated as a monolith. Second, there is a motivation to provide a ‘soft’ service even during a conflict; I attribute this motivation to the additional identity building mechanism of education that separates it from the legitimization and public support aspects of general service provision. Additionally, the internal variation in education decisions points to this being an active strategic decision, as well as indicating that the structure of a rebel government plays a key role in its efficacy and policy decisions. The structure of rebel governments rather than simply their goals is as yet largely unexplored in the literature. Third, the weak evidence of local concessions in allowing women’s education points to the other mechanisms of legitimization and public support still being very much at work, as well as brings up questions about women’s role in identity transmission. Last, these results indicate that education can be a strategic choice as a conflict evolves; despite the research on the effects of education this aspect of strategic timing is new.

Despite the myriad of difficulties that come with working in this context, these results indicate there are interesting phenomena at work to explore. While education is not often viewed as a strategic element of conflict, particularly as the main population affected by it are minors, it clearly is valued by combatants even when actively fighting for control of territory. If studies of conflict are used to elucidate the path towards peace, then further understanding the role of education is a crucial missing piece of the puzzle. In the short term, these findings may contribute towards understanding why education is violently targeted. In the long term, what rebel control over education means for the future of the population and how it intersects with state-building attempts by rebel groups may have a significant impact on attempts to build stability in conflict ridden countries.

As such, there are numerous questions still to be answered and thus several paths forward this research could take. The first is to expand on the patterns discussed in this paper. This could include further work to improve our understanding of the education situation on the

ground in Afghanistan and the extent to which the Taliban has involved itself in education. This expansion of information could encompass a full life-cycle of this theory, from when schools close to when they open to when they are attacked. Following a similar line, this could include further case studies as the Taliban is far from the only rebel group to involve themselves in education. Lastly, I am interested in how this theory applies to weak states as well as non-state groups, and what are the similarities and differences between these patterns dependent on context.

Second, in terms of what the inclusion of education means for conflict, it is key to understand what are the effects of such curricula on the population. Does it increase civilian support or recruitment in the short term? Does it make the affected population more resistant to the central government in the long term? How does encountering these teachings affect the mindset of citizens towards the state, the rebels, and what they want their future to look like? Alternatively, do such state building efforts contribute to the groups international legitimacy? Do they move them towards a future as a stable state? All of this could be investigated in further research and field work. There are multiple possible case studies, but the Afghan context of moving in and out of a Taliban education system could prove unique.

Lastly, while the perspective from which textbooks are written has long been acknowledged as influential on a population's perceptions of who is in the 'right', rarely has this been considered from the perspective of conflict. This is interesting in the context of an ongoing conflict, especially as the textbooks in the Afghan context are known to contain inflammatory language and could contribute to support and recruitment. It also presents a set of research for after a conflict ends. How does, for instance, what was taught at indigenous schools in North America and Australia carry forward over generations? There is a novel opportunity using tools such as text-as-data to interrogate how education affects the long term impact of a conflict in terms of well-being and reconciliation.



## 7 Appendix

### 7.1 Results using Alternate *Territory* Measure

Table 6: Change in Schools

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Change in Number of Schools Scaled Taliban Variable	
	(1)	(2)
Change in Conflict	0.148 (0.161)	
Government Conflict		0.169 (0.143)
Prop. Rural	1.084 (2.253)	1.179 (2.232)
Conflict*Taliban	-0.569 (0.345)	
Conflict*Rural	-0.190 (0.180)	
Gov. Conflict*Taliban		-0.637* (0.334)
Gov. Conflict*Rural		-0.218 (0.162)
Taliban*Rural	7.739* (4.153)	7.540* (4.098)
Conflict*Taliban*Rural	0.708* (0.382)	
Gov.*Taliban*Rural		0.795** (0.372)
Observations	213	213
R <sup>2</sup>	0.145	0.154
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.048	-0.037
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

## 7.2 Main Results Excluding Kabul

Table 7: Change in Schools

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Change in Number of Schools Scaled Taliban Variable	
	(1)	(2)
Change in Conflict	0.215 (0.173)	
Government Conflict		0.245 (0.155)
Prop. Rural	1.301 (2.127)	1.428 (2.111)
Conflict*Taliban	-1.188* (0.608)	
Conflict*Rural	-0.254 (0.191)	
Gov. Conflict*Taliban		-1.354** (0.590)
Gov. Conflict*Rural		-0.288* (0.173)
Taliban*Rural	12.160** (6.135)	11.811* (6.060)
Conflict*Taliban*Rural	1.413** (0.669)	
Gov.*Taliban*Rural		1.608** (0.653)
Observations	210	210
R <sup>2</sup>	0.148	0.159
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.042	-0.028
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

### 7.3 Health Results Including Kabul

Table 8: Healthcare Provision

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	All Facilities (1)	Basic Facilities (2)	Comprehensive Facilities (3)
Change in Conflict	-3.850*** (0.793)	-2.287 (2.138)	-0.675 (1.075)
Government Conflict	11.379 (15.620)	279.677*** (42.087)	9.462 (21.169)
Prop. Rural	14.664*** (3.828)	15.629 (10.316)	8.597* (5.189)
Conflict*Taliban	4.167*** (0.907)	2.431 (2.443)	1.132 (1.229)
Conflict*Rural	-53.182 (48.367)	-528.718*** (130.326)	-81.393 (65.552)
Gov. Conflict*Taliban	-16.210*** (4.307)	-17.100 (11.605)	-10.487* (5.837)
Observations	193	193	193
R <sup>2</sup>	0.146	0.253	0.043
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	-0.071	0.062	-0.201

*Note:*

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## Works Cited

Alesina, Alberto, and Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln. 2007. “Goodbye Lenin (or Not?): The Effect of Communism on People’s Preferences.” *American Economic Review* 97 (4): 1507–28.

Alesina, Alberto, Paola Giuliano, and Bryony Reich. 2013. “Nation-Building and Education.” National Bureau of Economic Research.

Ananyev, Maxim, Dimitrios Xefteris, Galina Zudenkova, and Maria Petrova. 2019. “Information and Communication Technologies, Protests, and Censorship.” *Protests, and Censorship (August 20, 2019)*.

Arjona, A. 2014. “Civil Resistance to Rebel Governance.” HiCN Working Paper 170. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Berman, Eli, Jacob N Shapiro, and Joseph H Felter. 2011. “Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq.” *Journal of Political Economy* 119 (4): 766–819.

Boix, Carles, and Milan W Svoblik. 2013. “The Foundations of Limited Authoritarian Government: Institutions, Commitment, and Power-Sharing in Dictatorships.” *The Journal of Politics* 75 (2): 300–316.

Burde, Dana. 2014. *Schools for Conflict or for Peace in Afghanistan*. Columbia University Press.

Cantoni, Davide, Yuyu Chen, David Y Yang, Noam Yuchtman, and Y Jane Zhang. 2017. “Curriculum and Ideology.” *Journal of Political Economy* 125 (2): 338–92.

Clots-Figueras, Irma, and Paolo Masella. 2013. “Education, Language and Identity.” *The Economic Journal* 123 (570): F332–F357.

Crost, Benjamin, Joseph Felter, and Patrick Johnston. 2014. “Aid Under Fire: Development Projects and Civil Conflict.” *American Economic Review* 104 (6): 1833–56.

Darden, Keith, and Anna Grzymala-Busse. 2006. “The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse.” *World Politics* 59 (1): 83–115.

Edmond, Chris. 2013. “Information Manipulation, Coordination, and Regime Change.”

*Review of Economic Studies* 80 (4): 1422–58.

Giustozzi, Antonio, and Claudio Franco. 2011. “The Battle for the Schools: The Taleban and State Education.” *Afghanistan Analysts Network*.

———. 2013. “The Ongoing Battle for the Schools.” *AAN Briefing Paper* 2: 2013.

Glaeser, Edward L, Giacomo AM Ponzetto, and Andrei Shleifer. 2007. “Why Does Democracy Need Education?” *Journal of Economic Growth* 12 (2): 77–99.

Grynkewich, Alexis G. 2008. “Welfare as Warfare: How Violent Non-State Groups Use Social Services to Attack the State.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31 (4): 350–70.

Guriev, Sergei, and Daniel Treisman. 2015. “How Modern Dictators Survive: An Informational Theory of the New Authoritarianism.” National Bureau of Economic Research.

———. 2019. “Informational Autocrats.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (4): 100–127.

Jackson, Ashley. 2018. *Life Under the Taliban Shadow Government*. Overseas Development Institute.

Kapit, A, A Mazzarino, C Downing, and A Manivannan. 2018. “Education Under Attack 2018.” *New York: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA)*. Retrieved from [Http://Www. Protectingeducation. Org/Sites/Default/Files/Documents/Eua\\_2018\\_full. Pdf](Http://Www.Protectingeducation.Org/Sites/Default/Files/Documents/Eua_2018_full.Pdf) Graham, HR, Minhas, RS, and Paxton, G.(2016). *Learning Problems in Children of Refugee Background: A Systematic Review*. *Pediatrics* 137 (6): 1–15.

Kitamura, Shuhei, and Toshifumi Kuroda. 2020. “Public Media Do Serve the State: A Field Experiment.” *Available at SSRN 3484318*.

Koren, Ore. 2019. “Food Resources and Strategic Conflict.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63 (10): 2236–61.

Lee, Melissa M. 2020. *Crippling Leviathan: How Foreign Subversion Weakens the State*. Cornell University Press.

Leede, Seran de, and ICCT Policy Brief. 2014. “Afghan Women and the Taliban: An Exploratory Assessment.” *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—the Hague (ICCT)*

8.

Lott Jr, John R. 1987. "Why Is Education Publicly Provided—a Critical Survey." *Cato J.* 7: 475.

Lynch, Marc. 2011. "After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State." *Perspectives on Politics* 9 (2): 301–10.

Maizland, Lindsay, and Zachary Laub. n.d. "The Taliban in Afghanistan." *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/taliban-afghanistan>.

Mampilly, Zachariah. 2015. "Performing the Nation-State: Rebel Governance and Symbolic Processes." *Rebel Governance in Civil War* 74.

Mampilly, Zachariah Cherian. 2012. *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*. Cornell University Press.

Organizations, Mapping Militant. n.d. "Afghan Taliban." *Stanford University*. [https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/afghan-taliban#text\\_block\\_16833](https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/afghan-taliban#text_block_16833).

Roberts, Margaret E. 2018. *Censored: Distraction and Diversion Inside China's Great Firewall*. Princeton University Press.

Sexton, Renard. 2016. "Aid as a Tool Against Insurgency: Evidence from Contested and Controlled Territory in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 110 (4): 731–49.

Staniland, Paul. 2012. "States, Insurgents, and Wartime Political Orders." *Perspectives on Politics*, 243–64.

Stanton Jr, Mr David, Llewellyn Thiel, and Mr Noah Cummerata IV. 2007. "The Us Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: US Army Field Manual No. 3-24." *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5*.

Stewart, Megan A. 2018. "Civil War as State-Making: Strategic Governance in Civil War." *International Organization* 72 (1): 205–26.

———. 2020. "Rebel Governance: Military Boon or Military Bust?(Isard Award Article)." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 37 (1): 16–38.

Weber, Eugen. 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France*,

*1870-1914.* Stanford University Press.