

SPECIAL REPORT

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Service Delivery in Taliban-Influenced Areas of Afghanistan

By Scott S. Smith



Students take an exam outdoors because their school had suffered extensive damage in fighting between Taliban and government forces. (Photo by Jim Huylebroek/New York Times)

Contents

“One Land, Two Rules”	3
Emergence and Consolidation of the Insurgency.....	5
Education.....	8
Health	11
Electricity, Media, and Telecommunications	15
Other Services	17
Conclusion.....	18

Summary

- As the Taliban gained and consolidated their hold over territory, they were forced to become responsible for the well-being of local communities.
- Even as the Taliban leadership remained focused on military objectives, in recent years they began to develop policies to deliver education and health services in particular, in some cases reversing earlier policies that denied these services.
- A study of several diverse districts across Afghanistan reveals that the Taliban leadership has attempted to establish a certain uniformity in its governance of territory largely or partly under its control.
- For example, while the Taliban have always allowed health officials to work in their areas, in part because they too need these services, they have taken increasing ownership of how these services are provided.
- The Taliban initially opposed government schools, but they later developed policies that allowed schools to function, as well as permitting girls to attend school to age twelve.
- Should there be a peace process, the Taliban and government will need to reconcile their differences on service delivery in the areas falling under their control.



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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report synthesizes eight district-level studies on how the Taliban deliver services in areas of Afghanistan where they have control or dominance.

Funded by the United States Institute of Peace, the studies were carried out in 2018 and 2019 by the Afghanistan Analysts Network, an independent policy research organization based in Kabul.

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A boy crosses a checkpoint between areas controlled by Taliban and government forces in Dasht-e Archi on July 10, 2017.
(Photo by Jim Huylebroek/New York Times)

“One Land, Two Rules”

In recent years, the Taliban have emerged as a local governance actor in Afghanistan as they gained and consolidated their hold over territory and were forced to assume some responsibility for the well-being of local communities. One can no longer understand Afghanistan—either the nature of the conflict or the shape of a possible peace—without understanding how the Taliban have undertaken governance and service delivery tasks in areas in which they are dominant.

To further that understanding, the United States Institute of Peace partnered with the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent policy research organization, in 2018 and 2019 to examine and report on service delivery in five Afghan districts either partially controlled or dominated by the Taliban or other insurgent groups.¹ The districts were selected from five different regions (northeast, southeast, east, south, and west), and researchers looked specifically at education, health, electricity and media, and other (mostly small-scale infrastructure) services. In the course of this research, AAN observed that three of the districts had seen cases of polio leading to paralysis despite biannual national vaccination campaigns. This led to a separate cross-regional report on polio vaccination in insurgent-affected districts. Altogether, these studies provide the raw material for this current synthesis report (although the emphasis is on the five district-specific studies).

A significant part of the Afghan population is affected, directly or indirectly, by insurgent local governance, though the number is difficult to measure with any precision. The US government’s



STUDY AREAS IN AFGHANISTAN

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Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) had been tracking this metric up until April 2018, when the information on which its assessments were based was classified.² SIGAR's April 2018 quarterly report to Congress estimated that 56.3 percent of Afghanistan's approximately four hundred districts were under government control or influence (representing 65 percent of the population), 14.5 percent (representing 12 percent of the population) were under Taliban control, and the remainder were contested.³

AAN researchers selected the districts for their diversity, in terms of region, ethnic make-up, and degree of Taliban control, to reveal variations in how the movement addressed service delivery. The prevailing security situation also played a role in the selection of districts. They included Achin District in Nangarhar Province, where the Taliban were part of a three-way fight for control with the government and Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and Andar District in Ghazni Province, a district that has been under complete Taliban control since October 2018. Other districts covered were Obbeh, in Herat Province; Nad Ali, in Helmand Province; and Dasht-e Archi, in Kunduz Province. This synthesizing report seeks to present a composite picture of life in insurgent-dominated districts from the findings of the AAN studies. It is not intended to summarize or replace the individual AAN studies, which are well worth reading in their own right.⁴

The general picture that emerges from the studies is of an attempt by the Taliban leadership to establish a certain uniformity of governance.⁵ However, each district experienced important variations, owing to differing degrees of insurgent control, local community cohesiveness, proximity to active battle spaces, ethnic composition, the insurgent group in charge, and other factors. The anecdotes and observations cited in this synthesis aim to point out commonalities as well as highlight variations. As a general observation, the commonalities tend to represent the Taliban's attempt to apply policies agreed upon by the leadership operating from Quetta, Pakistan, whereas the variations reflect that the movement itself remains a geographically fragmented insurgency, with battlefield objectives that require it to retain some pragmatic flexibility where the local Taliban front meets the individual community. This dualism has helped the Taliban as an organization to endure while preventing it, despite signs of bureaucratization, from resembling anything yet like a state.

Emergence and Consolidation of the Insurgency

As the AAN's introductory report describes, the Taliban's reemergence as an insurgency after the regime was toppled by US forces in 2001 came "slowly and locally." Over the next few years, Taliban forces began to reappear in a number of areas inside Afghanistan where they had chosen to lie low rather than accept defeat: from Farah in the west through southern Ghor in the center to Shahikot in the southeast. They began reorganizing in small units, known as *mahaz*, to conduct harassment operations against international troops and government targets: "Their main mission was and still is military—expanding (or re-expanding) territorial control, harrying and trying to push back foreign troops and government forces and using assassination, bomb attacks and other means to pressure civilians into compliance." When the insurgency began to reemerge around 2003, it was, as Ashley Jackson and Rahmatullah Amiri describe, "far from unified and comprised primarily of small, autonomous, localized fighting groups."⁶ The fragmented, geographically disconnected nature of the Taliban mahaz meant that commanders of these small groups had some latitude to set their own rules in the spaces where they operated.

The mahaz began to consolidate their control over certain areas and expand into others, proving their military viability by continuing to put pressure on the government. In June 2003, Mullah Muhammad Omar, one of the founders of the Taliban who at that time was exiled in Quetta, established a ten-person leadership *shura* (council) to define political and military strategy in an effort to coordinate these groups. Until then, according to Alex Strick von Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, the overall leadership did not have a "firm position on whether to start an insurgency or try to have a voice in the new political realities within Afghanistan."⁷ The growing success of the mahaz, coupled with the increasing disenchantment of local communities with the government of President Hamid Karzai, allowed the Taliban to envisage a successful insurgency. They began to organize themselves accordingly.⁸

Once the Taliban started allowing services to be provided, they were often perceived . . . as being more effective than the government in their ability to monitor the provision of these services and ensure their equitable distribution.

By 2006, the Taliban had become a serious threat to the Afghan government and the international forces backing it. International military forces, however, were reluctant to admit this emerging threat and continued to refer to Taliban forces as “anti-government elements” while avoiding using the term “insurgency.”⁹ That year, Mullah Omar began exhorting Taliban fighters through annual Eid messages, which also included guidance on their behavior in

an effort to begin to unify these groups. He also issued the first *layha*, or code of conduct, for the movement’s adherents. According to AAN’s Kate Clark, the 2006 *layha* presented a “vision of guerilla warfare that is not just a fight between armed forces, but a struggle to separate the population from the state and create ‘social frontlines.’”¹⁰ This approach, however, was a negative strategy, intended to dissuade local populations from supporting the government by using intimidation and attacking government services. It was an anti-government strategy, not a population-centric one.

The *layha* had harsh messages with regard to government services. Education was to be allowed only in mosques, government schools were to be destroyed, and teachers were to be punished or killed if they continued teaching in spite of Taliban opposition. The Taliban had long run local courts to adjudicate local disputes, a traditional function of mullahs. These courts did not require resources beyond locals’ perception that the Taliban would be able to enforce their verdicts. It was an area where the Taliban found they could displace the government. Initially, the Taliban used coercion, punishing people who sought to have disputes settled by state courts. Over time, local communities came to view state courts as unjust, corrupt, and unable to enforce their decisions. For many, the Taliban’s swift, enforceable verdicts were a preferable alternative to the government’s cumbersome and corruptible legal system.¹¹ Taliban justice was effectively a service, but it also a means of asserting control over local populations.

The next *layha*, issued in 2009, prefigured a strikingly different approach to service delivery. In the intervening years, the Taliban had begun to hold more ground, and the Afghan government had begun to deliver more services. Local communities objected less to Taliban control if it did not deprive them of these services. This local acquiescence was particularly important as the Taliban expanded into areas beyond the Pashtun heartland from which they had originally emerged in the 1990s. The 2009 *layha* instructed shadow governors to create education and trade commissions that would operate alongside the military commissions, which until then had made decisions on all issues. The Taliban thus began to lay the foundations of a parallel civilian administrative capacity.

The Taliban leadership issued a third *layha* in 2010. This directive added several quasi-state bodies for health, education, and relations with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), along with ways to address civilian casualties and hear complaints about local Taliban governance. Jackson and Amiri write that “the *layha* was no longer a simple code of conduct for fighters. It provided the movement with a values-based framework and practical operational guidance.” A former member of the Taliban’s leadership council was quoted as saying, “With the *layha*, we

needed to show we could be accountable and could form an accountable government that everyone could accept.”¹²

As the AAN studies document, this new policy helped the Taliban gradually coopt the education services provided by the government—a far cry from the leadership’s earlier instructions to kill teachers and destroy government schools. Yet even as it began to provide public services, the Taliban did not lessen its focus on military objectives. They would not, for example, prevent a school from being destroyed if it became a tactical obstacle. Similarly, they would destroy an electrical power line if doing so was a battlefield necessity or if its destruction contributed to the overall political struggle by demonstrating that the government was unable to protect the population. At the same time, they had internalized that achieving their military objectives required popular support, which was partly obtained by providing services. The Taliban could demonstrate government weakness simply by coopting government services in their areas, though such actions were selective and risked backfiring by illustrating the Taliban’s inability to provide similar services from their own resources. The AAN reports show, for example, an almost complete lack of even basic infrastructure projects in Taliban-dominated areas. Interestingly, the AAN reports also note that once the Taliban started allowing services to be provided, they were often perceived, according to local witnesses, as being more effective than the government in their ability to monitor the provision of these services and ensure their equitable distribution.

One reason for this perception was that the Taliban interacted closely with local communities, mostly through elders. These elders also mediated Taliban contact with the government, which the Taliban refused to address directly. In the districts covered in the AAN studies, the government essentially governed from the district centers (or, more remotely, from the provincial centers when they did not have a real administrative presence in the districts), while the Taliban maintained direct contact with the community. In some circumstances, elders were able to change the minds of local Taliban authorities, compelling them to reverse local commanders’ more draconian policies on issues such as girls’ education. (The Taliban’s central policy has no such ban.¹³) Where communities were more cohesive, or where the Taliban felt particularly threatened, community leverage was stronger. In a subsequent study undertaken in Zurmat District, in the eastern province of Paktia Province, the AAN found that the Taliban were “regularly available to the public to meet to air their concerns.”¹⁴ Having direct links with the people made a difference. These connections enabled the Taliban to address local grievances—a stark contrast to the seeming indifference of many government representatives. Also, in each district studied, there were local Taliban officials who were community natives, a policy that was not consistently applied by the government. Where community grievances went beyond the local—for example, in demands to stop house raids and bombing attacks, or to address the issue of civilian casualties—even the national government was impotent.¹⁵ The Taliban, by contrast, had established a military commission to investigate civilian casualties that they were accused of causing. This commission, in operation since at least 2013, later expanded to deal with wider complaints about civilian governance.



Afghan boys study in a makeshift school in the village of Budyali in Nangarhar Province. The village's school building was destroyed by a Taliban attack on Budyali's district headquarters in July 2011. (Photo by Anja Niedringhaus/AP)

Education

Education is the area in which Taliban policy has shifted the most. Before 2009, the Taliban had outlawed education in government schools and sanctioned attacks on schools and teachers; since then, they have permitted education to take place—at least up to a point. Local pressure was for the most part responsible for this shift. According to Jackson and Amiri, the Taliban have outlined their education policy in several central leadership council documents, which contain guidelines on how to implement the policy at the provincial level.¹⁶ Additional policies may exist, but have not yet come to light.

As part of their policy shift, the Taliban coopted government-funded schools. In all of the districts AAN studied, the Taliban actively monitor the functioning of schools and ensure that teachers are present. In a number of these areas, the residents consider the Taliban to be more effective monitors of schools than the government had been. They cracked down, for example, on “ghost teachers”—teachers who are on the payroll but who do not show up for work. Nevertheless, the Taliban deal only with existing schools; they do not try to open new schools in areas they control. In Nangarhar's Achin District, a number of schools were badly damaged or destroyed in the heavy three-way fighting between the Taliban, the government, and ISKP. As a result, there are no girls' schools there, and the Taliban made no effort to open any during the period they had control.

Although the Taliban now accept most of the school curriculum as prepared by the Ministry of Education, which includes studying the Quran, they also tend to introduce new Islamic subjects

such as *talim ul-islam* (Islamic education), *hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), *tafsir* (exegesis), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). They also emphasize the teaching of religious subjects at the beginning of the school day, when students are more alert, before subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, and English. In some places, they have banned the teaching of English and instead insist on instruction in Arabic and Pashto. In Nad Ali, AAN reported that the Taliban used schools to encourage boys to join the jihad—essentially using schools as recruiting centers in violation of international humanitarian law.¹⁷

The Taliban allow boys to study up to the end of high school. They do not prevent those who are able from leaving a district to pursue higher education, but in the districts covered in the AAN studies few boys took advantage of such opportunities. In Andar, the Taliban restricted the movements of students into government-controlled parts of the province to prevent them from joining government security forces. Most young men in these areas either remain there or seek jobs outside Afghanistan: AAN's Andar study reported that "many high school graduates go to foreign countries such as Pakistan, Iran or the Gulf, or to other provinces in order to find work." All but one of the studies reported that girls were allowed to study only until age twelve (sixth grade); in most cases, this restriction was described as being more the result of conservative community attitudes than Taliban policy. The one exception was Obeh, where the Taliban initially closed the girls' secondary schools but local elders managed to get them reopened after reaching an agreement with the Taliban that high school-aged girls would be taught by women teachers only. Where there was a shortage of teachers for girls' schools, the elders arranged for recent female high school graduates from the district to teach in these schools.

One of the two girls' schools in Dasht-e Archi fell under Taliban control in November 2018. The Taliban did not close the school, but an elder from the community said that some Taliban members had told him that girls would not be allowed to study beyond age thirteen. This was an example of Taliban preferences being closer to local customs on certain issues than the aspirations and policies of the government. The Taliban further prefer that girls are taught by women or elders and kept separate from boys, creating additional space and hiring burdens. A lack of girls' education, however, means there are few local women qualified to fill these positions—creating a vicious circle that will have a generational impact. In some places (Obeh and Achin were mentioned specifically), the Taliban allow girls to be taught by older men (although a resident of Obeh pointed out that "old men can be as lustful as younger ones!") In Obeh, the local community proposed that girls who had graduated from high school but who had not passed the teachers' exam be allowed to teach younger girls, and the local Taliban authorities agreed. This was yet another example of the Taliban adapting their policies to local conditions. Community demand for girls' secondary education, however, was a rare occurrence, and perhaps stemmed from Obeh's proximity to Herat City, which is both more open than some of the southern cities and where the Taliban's influence is not as strong. In Dasht-e Archi, where AAN reported that the Taliban did allow girls to be taught by men, some families actually refused to send their girls to school for this reason.

Male teachers are vetted by the Taliban to root out potential spies and to ensure that new recruits will not teach subjects the Taliban consider to be inappropriate. According to the AAN reports, local government education officials have cooperated with this demand, and have

officially appointed only teachers approved by the Taliban. In Zurmat, where the Taliban exert a high degree of control, Taliban permission is required before candidates can take the Ministry of Education's teachers' exam. In Nad Ali, AAN reported that some teachers were taxed by the Taliban—a phenomenon that Jackson and Amiri also noted in Paktia Province, but one that does not appear to be widespread and was not noted in any of the other AAN studies.

Increasingly, the Taliban have begun to present their own members as teachers. These individuals tend to be madrassa-educated religious scholars who are not necessarily qualified to teach the government curriculum; nonetheless, they are paid from the government budget. In some instances, a hybrid system has emerged: in Obeh, Taliban members work as government-paid teachers “usually tasked with teaching religious subjects in schools.” In Dasht-e Archi, respondents noted that the Taliban sometimes introduce their own members to serve as school teachers, “thereby assuring their influence on society and the education sector and getting their own people paid government salaries.” In Achin, there were no reports of the Taliban providing teachers; instead, they closely monitor the performance of government teachers and check for ghost teachers. In Nad Ali, a respondent noted that while ghost teachers, who are often relatives or family members of school principals, are a problem, if the “phenomenon did not exist, the principals benefitting would probably leave their jobs.” The Taliban have agreed to tolerate ghost teachers, but they also began taking a cut of the funds the ghost teachers brought in. In areas where the Taliban gained control before the 2009 policy change that allowed schools, teachers were under threat and many fled, creating spaces that Taliban teachers had to fill after 2009. This dearth of non-Taliban teachers particularly affected girls' schools.

Taliban commanders and education officials on the ground have some leeway in how the movement's official education policy is implemented. In areas that had few schools, no effort has been made to create new educational institutions (except, in some cases, madrassas). AAN noted one possible exception to this trend in Andar. Here, local Taliban officials allowed a construction company to implement a government-funded project to renovate several school buildings. When local communities are cohesive and care enough about an issue to lobby for it, the Taliban can be sensitive to popular feeling. Most local communities seem to want some sort of education, especially for boys, but they do not seem to be overly concerned about older girls' education or Taliban curriculum changes. Over time, in some cases, there has also been a demonstration effect: according to Jackson and Amiri, local Taliban commanders in the northern districts of Zabul Province resisted allowing schools to function until 2019, and subsequently “the shift to opening schools appeared to be the result of local advocacy, which eventually persuaded local commanders in Zabul that doing so was in their interest.”¹⁸

These observations leave a mixed picture of education in Taliban-influenced or Taliban-controlled areas. Educational institutions exist but are dispersed unevenly, with new schools not being built and damaged schools rarely renovated, and with a huge disparity between educational opportunities for boys and girls. Admittedly, owing to cultural factors that drive the removal of girls from schooling at around age twelve, this disparity exists in government-controlled areas as well. Unfortunately, the parlous state of education in government-held areas has meant that the Taliban have not needed to do much to gain local credit for their minimal achievements in providing some schooling.



The Taliban have generally supported widespread polio vaccination campaigns, like this one shown in Kabul in August 2018. Afghanistan is one of only three countries where the disease has not been eradicated. (Photo by Rahmat Gul/AP)

Health

Unlike education, which is provided directly by the government's education ministry, health services in Afghanistan are provided by national and international NGOs contracted by the Ministry of Public Health in each province to deliver the ministry's Basic Package of Health Services.¹⁹ This decentralized approach means that the quality and reach of health services vary by province. An overarching observation in the AAN reports is that despite relatively high expenditures on health by developing country standards, health care across the country is generally poor in both Taliban- and government-influenced areas.²⁰ For example, in Afghanistan there are 2.3 physicians and five nurses and midwives per ten thousand people, compared to global averages of thirteen and twenty, respectively. The AAN polio study found that

in most [insurgent-held] districts, services at the local level are sub-standard. Health facilities lack the basics, from a scarcity of female health workers to a scarcity of electricity for the refrigerators used to store vaccines. In some districts, health facilities have been destroyed by fighting or temporarily occupied by parties to the conflict. Especially in remote villages, health facilities may not be available at all.²¹

In contrast to their position on schools, the Taliban have a long history of allowing health facilities to operate, knowing their fighters would require medical services as much as (if not more than)

As with schools, the Taliban monitor health clinics, though with even less specialized knowledge. If they determine that something is lacking or a position is vacant, they raise the issue with the relevant NGO or the Ministry of Public Health.

the local populations. Under the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate regime (1996–2001), health work also was one of the very few areas in which women were legally allowed to work. In other words, the Taliban have always treated health somewhat differently from other sectors. All of the AAN studies indicate that the Taliban interfere far less in the provision of health services than in education—a difference illustrated in this anecdote in the Nad Ali report:

The insurgents are generally more lenient towards health personnel who travel into areas under their control than towards other people. Many of the key informants said the Taleban do not control health workers’ appearance; for example, they do not punish doctors for shaving their beards or growing their hair in the way they do the teachers and pupils.

This suggests that the Taliban were not so much coopting health services, as they were with education, but rather allowing them to flourish so that they could use them as required—albeit sometimes coercively, or even at the expense of the local population’s access to health services.

As with education, the Taliban established a health policy implemented by a health commission at the central level based in Quetta. At the same time, Taliban health commissions were established at the provincial and district levels in Afghanistan. The need to coopt health facilities forced the Taliban to interact with the NGO service providers. These service providers, in turn, had to negotiate access with the Taliban. In the early days of the insurgency, these negotiations tended to be held in secret. NGOs did not want to admit that they were cooperating with the Taliban out of fear that working with the insurgency could jeopardize their funding from the Afghan government or international donors. Community elders played a vital mediating role in these interactions.

At times, the Taliban interfered in the provision of health services mainly to ensure their own access to health care, especially for wounded soldiers. Jackson and Amiri claim that there was nonetheless a political dimension to the Taliban’s health policy (though this was not a clear finding in the AAN studies):

The Taliban want to demonstrate their dominance over NGOs and the government by controlling health services. In doing so, they challenge the authority of the Afghan government and NGOs. It has a performative aspect, in that the Taliban want civilians to see this dominance. They also want credit from the local population for cracking down on corruption and “delivering” health care.²²

Even though the Taliban may have felt that the delivery of health services posed less risk to their political and ideological agenda than that posed by the expansion of education, in some cases they were careful to vet health personnel for contacts with government security officials. When they controlled Achin, for example, a respondent said that they made sure that “medical personnel were not in contact with security forces and the intelligence [of the Afghan government].” It was vital that local health officials (who might end up treating Taliban members) not betray the movement. Health officials, much more than teachers, tend to come from outside Taliban areas and go back and forth more frequently to visit their families. The AAN studies

showed that the Taliban can interfere in the selection of health officials and sometimes insist that their own loyalists are hired. (Salaries for doctors, it must be said, are considerably more lucrative than those for teachers.) In Nad Ali, a respondent said that “they recommend staff [health workers] to the NGOs, and the NGOs recruit staff according to the will of the Taleban.” In Andar, a respondent said that a qualified candidate was overlooked because he did not have connections with the Taliban, and an untrained but connected candidate was selected instead. AAN’s polio report also noted that the Taliban “recommended their own people for hire by the health department” to conduct the vaccination campaigns.

All of the AAN studies showed that the Taliban prioritize health care for their members, especially their wounded, over the needs of the local community. This sometimes takes the form of compelling doctors to go to areas where there are wounded Taliban and treat them. An Obeh respondent described these demands as follows:

The Taleban come to them on their motorbikes at night. They make them go with them to treat their injured and sick members. They have to go and fulfil their requests. The Taleban can come anytime at night. So they go, do their work, and come back. They cannot say no to the Taleban. They cannot continue their work if they say no to these requests.

What was described in the Obeh study as the Taliban’s “privileged use of health personnel” ultimately has affected the overall provision of health services:

Many health personnel struggle to work efficiently and effectively during the day as they have been up all night. In many cases, the civilian sick and injured have to wait for long periods of time for health personnel to come back from Taleban areas, or they return home having had no access to health services on particular days.

Similarly, in Nad Ali, “the Taleban’s track record of harsh behavior against government employees and NGO workers [has made it] quite difficult for doctors and other medical personnel to stand up to the Taleban demanding priority or preferential treatment.”

As with schools, the Taliban monitor health clinics, though with even less specialized knowledge. But if they do determine that something is lacking or a position is vacant, they raise it with the relevant NGO or the Ministry of Public Health. In some districts, the Taliban work with “health shuras” established by local communities. Andar has a health support council established by the government and made up of tribal elders, imams, teachers, and other influential people. Council members have intervened with the Taliban, for example, to stop attacks on government positions near clinics. Local elders in Dasht-e Archi set up health shuras “in order to ensure medical workers’ safety and the security of health clinics in a way that is independent from the Taleban, but also respected by them.”

It is interesting to contrast the Taliban’s accommodation of government-provided services in districts where they have significant control to the policies of ISKP when they were in control of Achin. The AAN study reported that ISKP banned government-supported health services, and that local providers did not dare operate in ISKP areas. At the same time, ISKP provided some health services of their own (which a respondent described as “well-equipped”) and permitted some private health facilities to operate. These private doctors, however, were forced to treat ISKP wounded. In one case, a doctor had been severely beaten for refusing to do so.

Women's access to health care suffers not only because of traditional customs that restrict women's travel but also because of specific Taliban policies, such as only allowing women to travel with a male relative or an older woman. Maternal and children's mortality rates remain high in Afghanistan overall. There were few or no women health professionals in any of the districts AAN studied; working in insurgency-affected areas is not an attractive option, even for the few women from those places who have obtained a medical education. As a respondent in Obeh said, "They prefer to work outside Obeh such as in Herat city, or abroad such as in neighbouring Iran." The AAN report on Dasht-e Archi noted that "generally, female doctors are not interested in working in insecure, Taleban-dominated districts." A respondent in Achin said bluntly that "there is no female doctor. The health department said there would be double salary and other bonuses for any female doctor who would work in Achin, but no one wants to go and work there." This confluence of impeding factors was common in all of the AAN studies: lack of local women health professionals, poor roads, local customs preventing women traveling, Taliban policies restricting women's travel, and fighting. A respondent in Achin put the situation in all its bleak tragedy: "Women just die when they fall ill. Most of those who die, die during childbirth."

While carrying out its research on health service delivery, AAN found that in three of the districts it was studying there had been cases of poliomyelitis (polio) leading to paralysis in the previous five years. AAN decided to look specifically at this phenomenon and see if polio cases—which are particularly unfortunate because they are preventable—were more likely to occur in areas under Taliban control. Polio has been eradicated in every country of the world except Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria. The emergence of these cases in Taliban-controlled areas therefore has global, regional, and national repercussions in addition to the tragic consequences for the individuals who are infected.

Most states control the spread of polio by ensuring routine immunization of children, but the limited reach of health authorities during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s required a more intensive approach. In 1997, the international community supported supplemental campaigns, scheduling national immunization days each year when vaccinators went door to door to immunize children under age five. In recent years, more than one campaign has taken place per year.

The Taliban have no ideological opposition to polio vaccinations, and in some cases view the vaccination programs more favorably than local populations. The supplemental campaigns in fact began under the Taliban's Islamic Emirate regime. According to the AAN report, a Taliban spokesman stated that "there is a serious need for people to vaccinate their children." But as with other aspects of health and education services, vaccinations are secondary to military objectives. If there is a perception that allowing vaccinators will undermine the military effort, local commanders have been given discretion to ban the campaign teams. Between May and December 2018, when the Taliban were facing heavy aerial attacks, they banned vaccinators from working in Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, and Uruzgan Provinces, fearing that vaccinators were providing coordinates for the attacks. The AAN's polio report cited a Taliban spokesman who claimed that the international community "was misusing vaccinators for collecting intelligence data" in those provinces. However, according to the same spokesman, because this sort of intelligence collection had not been observed elsewhere, door-to-door vaccination campaigns were allowed to proceed in other provinces. In an effort to allow the vaccinations to continue in Helmand, the Taliban proposed that they take place in either the mosque or the house of the local *malek* (tribal leader). According to

The Taliban have no ideological opposition to polio vaccinations, and in some cases view the vaccination programs more favorably than local populations. The supplemental campaigns in fact began under the Taliban's Islamic Emirate regime.

people the AAN spoke to in Nad Ali, the proposal was inadequate: "Most people, especially women, cannot bring their children to the mosque." Nonetheless, the effort shows a willingness to be pragmatic on the issue, provided that Taliban military objectives are protected.

As with the provision of health services more generally, the Taliban also had to be responsive to local elders on vaccinations. The local Taliban committee for the Prevention of Vice

and Promotion of Virtue in Dasht-e Archi banned the door-to-door campaign between March 2016 and February 2017, claiming that the vaccinations were harmful to children and that the vaccinators were taking pictures for the government. This injunction prevented 176,000 children from receiving vaccines. The ban was lifted after local elders pressured the Taliban. The AAN study concluded that

The solution at the local level ie, between community elders, provincial government officials and Taleban shadow provincial government officials, shows how powerful and successful communities can be, if united on an issue of concern. It was essentially local elders who stood firm for vaccinations to be carried out, in opposition to the Taleban committee's decision.

There are several explanations for the persistence of polio in Afghanistan: the ongoing conflict, low vaccination coverage, sporadic community opposition, discrimination against women, and a porous border with Pakistan that makes it difficult to track target at-risk populations. Cases appear to track more with conflict zones than with areas of Taliban control. On the other hand, the several instances of Taliban-instituted bans on vaccination campaigns, as identified in the AAN study, could not but increase the chances of polio infections.

Electricity, Media, and Telecommunications

The AAN studies also looked at electricity and cell phone services in areas affected by the Taliban. None of the districts that were reviewed obtained electricity from the public grid. Dasht-e Archi had had some public power until 2014, when its hydroelectric plant was destroyed by fighting. In all districts, local residents compensated for the lack of public electricity supply by using solar energy or, for those who could afford it, diesel generators. Solar power is sufficient to run electric lights, recharge phones, watch television, or listen to the radio. In a few cases (especially Nad Ali, which is traversed by a canal), microhydropower generators are used.²³ The district of Obeh in western Herat was supposed to have been connected to the grid but the project was never completed, reportedly because of local insecurity. A local official from the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, however, told AAN that the real reason was that the contractors exaggerated the security risks of the project in order to obtain a more lucrative contract. AAN noted that in Obeh "the Taleban have thus far allowed the implementation of publicly-useful projects such as roadbuilding and bridge construction, after their agreement has been secured



An Afghan man carries a solar panel through floodwaters in Nangarhar Province in February 2015. Small-scale solar installations have proliferated in parts of southern Afghanistan cut off from the power grid. (Photo by Parwiz/Reuters)

and, of course, their ‘tax’ paid.” This example adds a murkiness to the intersection of security and service delivery, suggesting that fears of Taliban violence can be used to create rents even when the threats are not substantiated.

The Taliban operate their own radio station (Voice of Jihad), but most on-air media are broadcast from government-controlled

areas. In Nangarhar’s Achin District—which is contested by the government, the Taliban, and ISKP—all three groups have radio stations.²⁴ The Taliban had issued bans on government radio and television in most of the districts studied by AAN. Sometimes this was because the Taliban considered certain broadcast programs to be “immoral and promiscuous,” as a respondent in Obek put it. More generally, it was because of the Taliban’s recognition that media is a powerful tool for the government to influence local populations. In the districts where there was an explicit ban, however, the local population mostly ignored it. Many also reported that the ban was not strictly enforced. One exception to this general state of affairs was Paktia’s Zurmat District, where the Taliban have attempted to enforce the policy:

Most people watch TV programmes. They use satellite dishes because of the variety of channels the dishes can broadcast. They watch news, political debates, sports and other entertainment programmes. In most cases, people hide their dishes and TV antenna from the Taleban because the Taleban prohibit watching TV programmes. If the Taleban notice that people place dishes or TV antenna on the top of their roofs, then they search the house and smash the television.

Interestingly, in Andar, where there was no explicit ban, respondents reported that residents were nonetheless wary of watching television for fear of drawing Taliban retribution even though there was no specific ban.

The Taliban have greater concerns about cell phones, particularly smartphones. In many instances, they blame smartphones for revealing their locations, leading to air or drone strikes. According to the Dasht-e Archi study, “The Taleban perceive mobile networks as a tool that US and Afghan intelligence use to locate their hideouts.” It also was reported that in 2016 the Taliban banned their own soldiers from using smartphones in Dasht-e Archi after a series of drone attacks against them. In all of the districts studied by AAN, the Taliban have insisted that network towers be shut down at night, when most of their attacks against government positions

take place, thus hampering the ability of government security forces to coordinate their defenses and preventing local inhabitants sympathetic to the government from reporting Taliban movements. The Taliban are able to do this by threatening the mobile phone companies that their towers will be attacked or destroyed if they do not shut down service. In all cases, the companies appear to comply. In Obeh, companies have hired Taliban guards to “protect” their towers; this is likely a more common phenomenon, even if it was reported in only one study. In a number of districts, the Taliban tax the phone companies, though not the local users.

As with other services, there are some variations in Taliban policy regarding cell phones to account for local contexts. The most liberal policy was in Achin. When the Taliban were fully in control of the district between 2009 and 2015, there was no coverage during the night. Since 2019, when the government regained the upper hand, the networks have been running all the time (except when service is disrupted due to fighting), and many residents have smartphones. When ISKP controlled the district between 2015 and 2018, however, they banned all mobile phone use. It appears that when the Taliban are confident of their degree of control, they will relax some of their more restrictive policies. Another factor in the fairly lenient policy for Achin may be a desire to contrast their governance favorably to that of ISKP.

The most severe policy against the use of cell phones was in Ghazni’s Andar District. At the time the AAN report was published in June 2019, cell phone coverage had been allowed for only two hours in the morning during the previous nine months. The Taliban had also banned people from using cell phone SIM cards from the state-owned company, Salam, out of concern that those phones were being used to target Taliban units. Smartphones in certain situations pose their own problems for locals, as the Dasht-e Archi study pointed out:

Residents in Taleban areas are supposed to have pro-Taleban songs on their smart phones (not connected to the internet), as well as religious scholars’ speeches on Jihad in case their phones were checked. . . . However, if people’s devices are checked by government forces and they carry pro-Taleban songs, they are perceived to be Taleban fighters and risk being arrested. In Dasht-e Archi, locals are forced to adjust their lives according to this doubly-coercive system. All in all, it is safer not to have a smart phone.

Other Services

Development activities taking place in the districts covered by the AAN studies tended to be small scale. In Obeh, one of the districts with ongoing development projects, a respondent said that the Taliban had to approve all projects and also taxed private contractors. In Nad Ali, elders convinced the Taliban to allow a roadbuilding project, but the contractor had to give the Taliban a negotiated share of the funding (essentially a tax or fee). In Achin, the Taliban themselves contracted some roadbuilding work, although the AAN study remarked that this effort was “more motivated by tactical requirements for repelling ISKP advances than facilitating rural life.” In Dasht-e Archi, respondents said that neither the government nor NGOs were interested in carrying out development projects.

The case of Andar District in the strategic province of Ghazni best illustrates the Taliban’s overall approach to rural infrastructure services. The district is located in an area through which

two important national highways were being built. The Taliban had forcibly stopped work on the government-funded Andar–Ghazni City roadbuilding project out of fear that improvements would facilitate the movement of government troops. They had similarly blocked work on the Ghazni–Paktika highway, objecting to the presence of government soldiers protecting the construction, but agreeing to allow the work to proceed if government troops were removed.²⁵ The government ultimately gave in. In this case, the Taliban wanted to block government reinforcements moving in from Paktika to attack Ghazni, but also to demonstrate that it could control what happened in the area. Yet, as AAN reported, the Taliban “sometimes encourage local residents [in Andar] to pave small roads between the different villages or repair those destroyed by rain and snow over winter. They go from village to village and tell community elders to bring the villagers out for work.”

Overall, these infrastructure services are rudimentary and their provision or nonprovision is usually motivated by security concerns and battlefield objectives. For the most part, they are not aimed at improving rural lives. The few resources that the Taliban are able to raise or coopt generally are applied to the military effort. Roads improve Taliban forces’ mobility in areas that they control and allow them to impose tolls to raise funds for fighting. The Taliban also raise various “religious taxes,” including *ushr*, the 10 percent tax on a range of revenue-generating sources, particularly on productive land, and *zakat*, an obligatory payment for Muslims to give either as alms to the poor or as a tax collected by a Muslim state. (Naturally, the Taliban take this second option.²⁶) As the AAN reports describe, the Taliban also “tax” truckers, cell phone companies, and others in a manner that may seem more akin to a protection racket than an administrative act. Hardly any of these revenues go into the provision of services, and most go to maintaining the viability of the Taliban movement in its combat against the government.

Conclusion

The first, somewhat remarkable takeaway found in the AAN reports is that service delivery is not much worse (and sometimes may be better) in Taliban-controlled rural areas than in government-controlled rural areas. In general, as one respondent in Dasht-e Archi said, the Taliban “out-govern” the government. This is attributable more to government failures than Taliban competence, and in particular to the metastasized problem of corruption in Afghanistan.²⁷ The government’s inability to take and sustain the offensive on the battlefield, the low level of service delivery in the areas it controls, and its apparent indifference to local grievances have made the similarly low level of service delivery that takes place in insurgent-dominated areas appear comparable to the government’s. Afghans, whether under Taliban or government rule, are badly served; a nationwide poll conducted by Gallup in September 2019 found that zero percent of Afghans described themselves as “thriving” and 85 percent—a record high not just for Afghanistan, but any country since Gallup began asking the question—described themselves as “suffering.”²⁸

The second major takeaway concerns the degree to which the Taliban, by coopting or allowing service delivery, have gained support or at least acquiescence from local populations, and whether the Taliban’s motivations are predominantly military or have a political character as well.

Should a peace agreement be reached, perhaps leading to an interim transitional arrangement, existing local governance arrangements would likely continue in the short and medium term.

The AAN studies sought to report on *how* services are delivered, not *why*. Nonetheless, the introductory report describes the evolution of the Taliban from an ad hoc guerrilla movement to a more consolidated one with political ambitions, from which one may speculate on the Taliban's strategic thinking. The mere fact of controlling territory in which civilians live created a problem that needed to be

solved. No insurgency can survive if the local population actively opposes it. The AAN studies offer little insight into whether the service delivery that the Taliban allow has given them local support or merely acquiescence; this would have been a difficult and sensitive issue to ask about, risking undercutting interviewees' confidence in the researchers' intentions. The few respondent statements on this question suggest at best an indifference between life under government or Taliban control and a strong aversion to life in contested areas. As a farmer in Nad Ali told the researcher David Mansfield, in contested areas "there is no difference to me between the Taleban and the government. But if we just have one of them in the area it is better; if we have both, there is fighting."²⁹ Another annoyance to local populations clearly expressed in the reports is the problem of crossing from one area to another, which locals often must do in search of health care, employment, or commerce. The case of Andar confirms this: once the Taliban took over the district, people were relieved that they did not have to go back and forth across front lines within the district.

Two other factors suggest that Taliban actions in the provision of services is seen as more than just a military necessity. The first is the gradual consolidation of the movement, increasingly guided by a central authority and consistent in the way policies issued from the center are implemented. This is seen in the evolution of the layhas and the creation of various civilian-oriented commissions as described in AAN's introductory report. Consolidation began as a means of forging a more effective insurgency, but the Taliban's growing territorial claims soon forced them to become a more effective political movement. A second factor—why the Taliban have chosen centralization rather than a franchising model—concerns the movement's claim to be the real legitimate government in Afghanistan and its aspirations to either replace the current government with its own "emirate" or, through negotiations, become what it surely believes will be the dominant part of a future Afghan political order. The more the international community tired of its engagement in Afghanistan, and the more the official Afghan government proved unlikely to be able to defeat the insurgency even with significant international military and financial support, the more it made sense for the Taliban leadership to begin presenting its erstwhile insurgency—to Afghans and to the international community—as a political movement capable at the same time of governing.

The final major takeaway from the AAN series concerns the future effect of the current disposition of governance, in both government- *and* insurgent-controlled areas, on a possible future peace agreement. Should a peace agreement be reached, perhaps leading to an interim transitional arrangement, existing local governance arrangements would likely continue in the short and medium term. Governance vacuums in contested areas would have to be resolved, but the peace negotiations could do so in a way that essentially formalizes the current hybrid system. The existing degree of tacit cooperation on health, some small infrastructure projects,

and education could be formalized, possibly leading to improvements in the provision of these services through a somewhat seamless transition.

That said, large ongoing differences would remain in the educational curriculum and in the provision of justice services, especially in the early phase of the agreement's implementation. If the agreement calls for a "freeze-in-place" of administrative orders, the Taliban will continue adjudicating disputes according to their more conservative understanding of sharia law and teaching according to their revised curriculum until these issues are resolved at the national level. Here, the decisive factor in rural areas, whether under government or Taliban influence, might end up being the communities themselves, whose influence even in wartime—when the Taliban retain an overwhelming capacity to use violence to intimidate—has been demonstrated by the AAN studies. Communities, leaders, and elders could determine what is acceptable and desirable. They may continue to prefer Taliban courts, for example, but also want more government schools, more television options, and uninterrupted cell phone service. One of the broad conclusions of the AAN studies is that ultimately communities solve their own problems to the degree possible within the constraints set by the conflict parties.

There are, needless to say, far more pessimistic and perhaps more likely scenarios—where intractable local conflicts lead to a renewal of a more general conflict; where international support is disastrously withdrawn and service delivery mechanisms collapse from the center; where spoilers prevent local-level peace; and where local authorities, whether former Taliban or former government, continue to abuse their powers and prolong the injustices that have been at the root of so much local conflict. What may be retained from the AAN studies, however, are a variety of local-level models of cooperation that in theory could be extended into a postagreement future—where the Taliban's overall strategy fully acknowledges that they must meet civilian needs, and where existing tacit cooperation with government entities provides a foundation that will help solidify a peace agreement rather than undermine it.

Notes

1. The main non-Taliban group in Nangarhar's Achin District was Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP).
2. The actual number of districts in Afghanistan remains unclear, ranging from 387 to more than 400. (The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction [SIGAR] counts 407.) The higher figures tend to count provincial capitals as separate districts. The existence of some districts has been disputed over time; through years of war, "unofficial" districts have been created and sometimes are included in the official district count. For a discussion of this issue, see Thomas Ruttig, "The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News about District Numbers," Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), August 16, 2018, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-afghanistan-election-conundrum-12-good-news-and-bad-news-about-district-numbers. For a different interpretation of the SIGAR data, see Bill Roggio and Alexandra Gutowski, "Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan," Long War Journal, www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan. Given the amount of time that has elapsed since the last published SIGAR data and the changes on the battlefield, data regarding degrees of territorial and population control by the government and Taliban should be treated with caution.
3. SIGAR, Quarterly Report to Congress, April 30, 2018, www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-04-30qr.pdf.
4. The eight studies, in order, are as follows: Jelena Bjelica and Kate Clark, "One Land, Two Rules (1): Service Delivery in Insurgent-Affected Areas, an Introduction," AAN, December 6, 2018, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-1-service-delivery-in-insurgent-affected-areas-an-introduction; Said Reza Kazemi, "One Land, Two Rules (2): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Obbeh District of Herat Province," AAN, December 9, 2018, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-2-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-obeh-district-of-herat-province; Obaid Ali, "One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Dasht-e Archi District in Kunduz Province," AAN, February 26, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-3-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-dasht-e-archi-district-in-kunduz-province; Rohullah Soroush and Said Reza Kazemi, "One Land, Two Rules (4): Delivering Public Services in Embattled Achin District in Nangrahar [sic] Province," AAN, March 25, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-4-delivering-public-services-in-embattled-achin-district-in-nangrahar-province; Jelena Bjelica, "One Land, Two Rules (5): The Polio Vaccination Gap," AAN, May 9, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-5-the-polio-vaccination-gap; Ali Mohammad Sabawoon, "One Land, Two Rules (6): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Nad Ali District of Helmand Province," AAN, June 2, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-6-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-nad-ali-district-of-helmand-province; and Fazl Rahman Muzychy, "One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Andar District in Ghazni Province," AAN, June 13, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/one-land-two-rules-7-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-andar-district-in-ghazni-province. AAN applied a similar methodology to studies subsequently undertaken in Zurmat District, in Paktia Province, and Jalrez District, in Wardak Province.
5. These are explained in a parallel USIP report: Ashley Jackson and Rahmatullah Amiri, "Insurgent Bureaucracy: How the Taliban Makes Policy," Peaceworks no. 153 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, November 2019) www.usip.org/publications/2019/11/insurgent-bureaucracy-how-taliban-makes-policy.
6. Jackson and Amiri, "Insurgent Bureaucracy."
7. Alex Strick Van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth About the Taliban–Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244.
8. Martine van Bijlert, "Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan," in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, ed. Antonio Giustozzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 155–78; and Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007).
9. A 2006 UK House of Commons inquiry into Afghanistan, for example, stated: "While we note the assertion made by the Ministry of Defence that the Taliban does not present a 'strategic threat' to security in Afghanistan, we are concerned at reports that violence is increasing and spreading to the relatively peaceful Kabul and the Northern Provinces" (House of Commons Defence Committee, "UK operations in Afghanistan," 13th Report of Session 2006–07," July 3, 2007, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmdfence/408/408.pdf>). This was typical of many assessments at the time.
10. Kate Clark, "The Layha: Calling the Taliban to Account," AAN, July 4, 2011, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/publication/aan-papers/the-layha-calling-the-taliban-to-account.

11. Soraya Sarhadi Nelson, "Taliban Courts Filling Justice Vacuum in Afghanistan," NPR, December 16, 2008, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98261034; Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, "No Shortcut to Stability: Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan," Chatham House, December 2010, www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf; Thomas Ruttig, "How Tribal Are the Taleban?," Thematic Report 04/2010, AAN, June 2010, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20100624TR-HowTribalAretheTaleban-FINAL.pdf. See also Bjelica and Clark, "One Land, Two Rules (1)."
12. Jackson and Amiri, "Insurgent Bureaucracy."
13. Thomas Ruttig, "Schools on the Frontline: The Struggle Over Education in the Afghan Wars," in *Education and Development in Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. Uwe H. Bittlingmayer et al. (Bielefeld, Germany: transcript Verlag, 2019), 101–40.
14. Obaid Ali, Sayed Asadullah Sadat, and Christian Bleuer, "One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Insurgent-Controlled Zurmat District," AAN, September 4, 2019, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/one-land-two-rules-8-delivering-public-services-in-insurgency-affected-insurgent-controlled-zurmat-district.
15. A subjective but enlightening account of Karzai's growing frustration with his inability to get international military forces to reduce civilian casualties can be found in Kai Eide, *Power Struggle over Afghanistan: An Inside Look at What Went Wrong—and What We Can Do to Repair the Damage* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2012) 70–76.
16. Jackson and Amiri refer to two documents: (1) the education policy itself, containing 101 articles, and (2) guidelines drawn from experiences on the ground shaped by multiple entities involved in education services ("Insurgent Bureaucracy").
17. See International Committee of the Red Cross, Customary IHL Database, "Rule 136. Recruitment of Child Soldiers," https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule136.
18. Jackson and Amiri, "Insurgent Bureaucracy."
19. A devastating coronavirus pandemic emerged as this paper was in the final stages of publication. At that time, the full effect of the pandemic in Afghanistan was not clear, in part due to insufficient testing and in part due to the weaknesses of Afghanistan's health infrastructure. In some areas under Taliban control, the Taliban have responded with attempts to educate the population about the virus and have distributed sanitizers and face masks. (For example, these videos posted by @Zabehulah_M33, the Taliban's official Twitter account, show their response in Wardak and Kunduz Provinces: "Anti-Coronavirus campaign by Health Commission in Kunduz," March 29, 2020, www.twitter.com/i/status/1244275769146302469; and "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Health Commission carried out campaign against Covid-19 in Maidan Wardak province," March 30, 2020, www.twitter.com/i/status/1244574450990841856.) The author's initial assessment of likely effects on Afghanistan and on the peace process can be found in Scott Smith, "Coronavirus Poses Yet Another Challenge to the Afghan Peace Process," United States Institute of Peace, March 24, 2020, www.usip.org/publications/2020/03/coronavirus-poses-yet-another-challenge-afghan-peace-process.
20. Afghanistan spends 9.5 percent of its gross domestic product on health services.
21. Bjelica, "One Land Two Rules (5)."
22. Jackson and Amiri, "Insurgent Bureaucracy."
23. The proliferation of micro-solar power across southern Afghanistan has had major positive and negative effects and is an understudied phenomenon.
24. Government, private Afghan (Radio Killid and others), international (BBC, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty), Taliban (Voice of Sharia), and ISKP (Voice of the Caliphate) stations compete for attention.
25. This 2010 AAN report details the complications behind such projects. According to AAN, the Taliban initially had welcomed the road until the Karzai-backed governor, Jamdad Hamdard, began distributing contracts to his family and friendly tribes rather than making a more equitable distribution of the project's contracts. This atmosphere of corruption contributed to local opposition and the Taliban's decision to halt the project (Kate Clark, "Wikileaks and the Paktia Governor," AAN, December 6, 2010, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wikileaks-and-the-paktia-governor).
26. Soroush and Kazemi, "One Land, Two Rules (4)."
27. See Andrew Wilder and Stuart Gordon, "Money Can't Buy America Love," *Foreign Policy*, December 1, 2009, www.foreignpolicy.com/2009/12/01/money-cant-buy-america-love.
28. Steve Crabtree, "Inside Afghanistan: Nearly Nine in 10 Afghans Are Suffering," Gallup, September 16, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/266825/inside-afghanistan-nearly-nine-afghans-suffering.aspx>.
29. David Mansfield, "Stirring up the Hornet's Nest: How the Population of Rural Helmand View the Current Counterinsurgency Campaign," Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, October 2018, <https://areu.org.af/publication/1814>.

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