

PEACEWORKS



Displacement and the Vulnerability to Mobilize for Violence

EVIDENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN

By Sadaf Lakhani and Rahmatullah Amiri



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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines whether displaced persons in Afghanistan are more vulnerable to radicalization and mobilization to violence than groups that have not experienced displacement. Fieldwork—which included surveys and interviews conducted in eight Afghan provinces throughout 2018—was carried out by The Liaison Office (TLO), a research and peacebuilding organization based in Kabul.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Cover photo: Internally displaced Afghan men line up to receive winter relief assistance at a refugee camp in Kabul in January 2017. (Photo by Omar Sobhani/Reuters)

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Summary



A perception shared broadly both within and outside Afghanistan is that displaced persons are vulnerable to radicalization and mobilization to violence. To assess the validity of this perception, this study—based on extensive surveys and interviews involving more than 1,400 respondents across eight Afghan provinces—compared groups of displaced and nondisplaced persons on an array of socioeconomic factors that the literature suggests lead to greater vulnerability to radicalization.

The results did not support this general perception. Attitudes toward the Taliban and toward the use of violence against civilians did not vary greatly between displaced and nondisplaced groups in any given province. Yet the attitudes of any one group might vary significantly from province to province (for example, between displaced populations in Balkh and those in Nangarhar), underscoring the need for well-targeted, locale-specific interventions. The study also found that displaced persons were more likely than returnees or host community Afghans to have been approached directly for recruitment by the Taliban, but it did not find that displaced persons were more sympathetic toward the Taliban or toward the use of violence against civilians. The perception of vulnerability of displaced persons to joining armed nonstate groups was not matched by actual sympathy for the Taliban.

One exception to these findings is notable: returnees who had left and subsequently returned to Afghanistan more than five years before the time of this study were most likely to express sympathy for the Taliban. A deeper and focused understanding of this specific wave of returnees may reveal characteristics that make returnees vulnerable to Taliban messaging.

Regardless of displacement status, many respondents who expressed sympathy for the Taliban did so out of a belief that the Taliban could provide security and dispute resolution. Rather than agreeing with the Taliban's ideology, respondents expressed a willingness to put up with the negative aspects of Taliban authority, including violence toward civilians, simply to benefit from the security and protection afforded by the Taliban. The recommendations emphasize significantly improved government provision of security and rule of law to dissuade alignment of displaced persons with the Taliban or other armed groups.



Displaced Afghan men gather in the Tangi Wazir area of eastern Nangarhar Province, where ISIS militants had set houses on fire, in December 2017. (Photo by Mauricio Lima/New York Times)

Introduction and Methodology

Ascertaining whether a relationship exists between displacement and vulnerability to recruitment to violence—and, if so, the details of the dynamics of the relationship—is crucial to the success of efforts to counter violent extremism in Afghanistan.

Forced displacement currently affects a record 70.8 million people worldwide and is among the most pressing humanitarian and development challenges today. The impacts of forced displacement are disproportionately felt in developing and conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan, where seven to eight million people, or one-fifth of the population, are displaced.¹ Though natural disasters are one cause of displacement, the greatest part of forced displacement in Afghanistan today is the result of violent conflict.²

A large body of literature exists on both displacement and violent extremism, but there are few in-depth studies on the intersection of the two. This gap, combined with several high-profile attacks in Western Europe in which migrants—often displaced persons—were implicated, has led to assumptions that displacement and migration constitute a particular security and stabilization threat and that displaced persons are at greater risk of radicalization or recruitment to violence than the general population.³ Because of the scale of displacement in Afghanistan, ascertaining in the first place whether a relationship exists between displacement and vulnerability to recruitment to violence, and, if so, the details of the dynamics of the relationship, is crucial to the success of efforts to counter violent extremism in the country.

The number of conflict-related internal displacements in Afghanistan grew from 297,000 in 2009 to more than 2.5 million by the end of 2018—an eightfold increase.

At the same time, countering violent extremism evaluations and lessons learned have enabled practitioners to better understand vulnerabilities (and resiliencies) among defined subgroups or communities, with the goal of better tailoring programming and targeting support. Understanding the specific vulnerabilities of different displaced groups compared with those who have not experienced displacement helps inform policies and programs to assist displaced persons.

The goal of this study was to explore the nexus of displacement in a conflict-affected situation and vulnerability to radicalization, and to derive recommendations for government and nongovernmental organizations. The study examined factors related to radicalization that had been identified in other studies; and compared displaced and nondisplaced individuals. It also looked at differences among different displaced populations—internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees.

Afghanistan's conflict dynamics are complex. They include protracted displacement, urban displacement, returnees arriving in different waves for different reasons, differences between groups of IDPs coming from different ethnic groups and different areas of origin, and displacement because of individuals' association with or support for (or lack thereof) the government or one or another violent extremist group. The displaced may also have experienced multiple displacements, and often have been both a refugee and a returnee, as well as internally displaced.⁴ Drawing generalizations about vulnerability to radicalization based solely on individuals' categorization as "displaced" is insufficiently sensitive to the specific and divergent factors found within the experiences and current conditions of displaced people. The causes of radicalization are manifold and cross multiple domains: they do not always equate with agreement with a radical ideology or with an experience of displacement.

DEFINITIONS OF DISPLACED OR NONDISPLACED GROUPS

Forced displacement is a significant phenomenon in Afghanistan as a result of the country's protracted history of conflict and regime change. In this report the following terms are used:

Refugees and returnees. Refugees are those who have left homes because of persecution or violence and have crossed an international border in search of safety.⁵ Currently about 6 million Afghans have fled the country, including 2.4 million registered refugees and an estimated 2.7 to 3.4 million undocumented Afghans in Iran and Pakistan. These figures make Afghanistan the second-largest source of refugees in the world, after Syria.⁶

Returnees are persons who have either returned to Afghanistan from outside the country or returned to their original area in Afghanistan after internal displacement to a different region. More than 820,000 Afghans returned to the country in 2018 from Iran and Pakistan alone, the vast majority of whom were undocumented; fewer than 20,000 were documented refugees returning.⁷ UN agencies do their best to ensure that returns are voluntary. "Spontaneous returns" indicate that people have been coerced into returning to Afghanistan, usually because of actions on the part of the host country's government.⁸ The conditions surrounding forced returns can add to the vulnerabilities to radicalization that returnees face.

On returning to Afghanistan, it is common for returnees to become internally displaced as they search for secure places to live and work. For the purposes of this analysis, cross-border returnees who were also IDPs (returnees unable to resettle in their former sites) were treated as returnees because a review of the literature consistently identified the experience of being a cross-border returnee as more defining than the experience of being secondarily displaced.

Internally displaced persons. IDPs are people who have fled their homes but remain within the borders of Afghanistan. The number of conflict-related internal displacements in Afghanistan grew from 297,000 in 2009 to more than 2.5 million by the end of 2018—an eightfold increase. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported 675,000 new cases of conflict related displacement in 2016, 512,000 in 2017, 385,000 in 2018, and approximately 400,000 in 2019.⁹

Nondisplaced or host communities. Nondisplaced persons (hosts) were included for comparison purposes, to test for differences between returnees or IDPs and those who had never had to leave their place of origin because of conflict.

A robust body of research documents forced displacement as an *outcome* of conflict and insecurity (e.g., civil war, state repression) or fragility (e.g., state failure).¹⁰ Much of the current research and news reporting on displacement *driving* violent extremism, however, is fueled by fears of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) infiltration among Syrian refugees and by concerns over broader demographic and cultural shifts resulting from refugee flows into Europe. As such, both research and news commentary tend to aggregate forcibly displaced persons with economic migrants and second-generation diaspora adolescents. Often this commentary focuses on integration into recipient European countries and implicitly equates piety or religious expression with extremism.¹¹

National and international agendas around the asylum process and the protection of displaced populations may be driving much of the commentary in popular discourse, without evidentiary support. This discourse leads to self-fulfilling assessments. For example, a 2015 Rand Corporation study found that “host governments, fearing refugee violence almost from the beginning, tended to find the terrorist connection they were looking for.”¹²

A handful of recent studies have attempted to move beyond both the culture-clash narrative and fears of ISIS operatives posing as refugees to examine the ways in which the causes of flight, prior political affiliation, and the recipient nation’s desire and capacity to address refugees’ needs all shape radicalization.¹³ The evidence shows that displaced persons with inadequate support often face hardship and marginalization.¹⁴ A World Bank-UN report notes that forcibly displaced persons often suffer from “a loss of assets, lack of legal rights, absence of opportunities, and a short planning horizon.” They need dedicated support to overcome these vulnerabilities and regain confidence in their future.

SOCIOECONOMIC AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS INCREASING THE RISK OF RADICALIZATION

The literature on the radicalization of returning refugee or IDP populations (rather than foreign terrorist fighters, who can also be considered a particular type of returnee) is scant.¹⁵ Forced and “spontaneous” returnees in particular, such as those returning to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016, are less prepared for return and more likely to experience poverty and secondary displacement, according to agencies that monitor returns.¹⁶

Radicalization and recruitment occurring within refugee camps, especially that targeting children, have been the subject of some limited research and are supported by anecdotal evidence.¹⁷ One hypothesis holds that the risk of radicalization is greater the longer the displacement and the more the displaced population finds itself marginalized and disenfranchised.¹⁸ Both the Taliban and the anticommunist mujahideen forces before them recruited in long-term Pashtun refugee camps in Pakistan.¹⁹ However, the literature on the risk of radicalization of refugees in camps often does not discretize whether it is the situation of displacement or other conditions specific to refugees—such as their experience of fleeing their country or their political beliefs related to the decision to seek refuge—that are salient. The dearth of research comparing rates of refugee

radicalization with those of settled populations makes it impossible to say whether the forcibly displaced are any more or less vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment than the general population.

The social exclusion displaced persons face on their return is associated with another set of factors that could increase vulnerability to radicalization. The sense of “not belonging,” especially among returnees who left Afghanistan decades ago, has been reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and anecdotally by local organizations implementing support programs for returnees and is considered by some to be an underestimated factor in recruitment into the Taliban.²⁰

This study examined the feelings of exclusion captured in the surveys and the interviews to determine whether there is a greater feeling of exclusion among displaced groups than among host respondents. Linked to the issue of social exclusion is the experience of injustice; some researchers have proposed that perceptions of injustice and marginalization are at the very heart of radicalization. A study of groups in Colombia, Afghanistan, and Somalia found that early experiences of abuse and humiliation, whether originating within a family or initiated externally, were an important driver of joining extremist groups, more so than economic factors.²¹

Beyond the specific risks for radicalization faced by refugees, returnees, and IDPs in conflict-affected areas, several other factors are recognized as potentially increasing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism.

Youth demographic and education. Afghanistan’s large youth population has been considered a risk factor in the growth of violent extremist groups.²² The association between youth and radicalization includes young people’s potential exposure to radical elements in the educational system. There is already research that links some types of schools—madrassas—and

some universities in Afghanistan with radicalization through the intentional spread of radical ideas and support for the use of violence. It would be important to know whether schools and universities are sites of radicalization in Afghanistan and whether there is a correlation between vulnerability to radicalization and level of education achieved. Studies that have looked at the role of education in radicalization in other contexts have noted that a large majority of terrorists are well educated.²³ Recruits into ISIS, for example, have achieved a higher level of education than the average male in their country of origin.²⁴ Others have found that the educational environment interacts with other factors to increase the risk of radicalization: research on Middle Eastern and North African youth found that young people with a secondary education who were either unemployed or underemployed were at greatest risk of radicalization.²⁵

Unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. The availability of free time to Afghan youth (which may also be associated with level of education) and the lack of meaningful or full-time employment have been singled out as factors increasing the risk of radicalization.²⁶

While the evidence is ambiguous, and some important statistical work does not consider poverty by itself to be a risk factor, including in Afghanistan, a correlation between unemployment and radicalization has been observed in a number of contexts.²⁷ A 2018 World Bank statistical analysis of nearly four thousand foreign recruits into ISIS found that “individual-level socioeconomic conditions drive participation in violent extremism.”²⁸

Social capital. A strong social network has been highlighted as playing an important role in the resilience or vulnerability to radicalization in certain contexts.²⁹ Where avenues for social connections with the nonviolent extremist community are limited, affiliation with violent extremist groups may fill the gap. Research on youth recruitment into the Taliban notes that much of it takes place in rural areas and among relatively poor young



Survey and Interview Locations in Afghanistan

Adapted from artwork by Rainer Lesniewskiparunto/ Shutterstock

The study therefore included a survey and structured interviews based on factors identified in the literature as potentially correlated with radicalization. A total of 1,405 respondents from eight provinces completed the survey, which provided the quantitative data. Of this number, 104 respondents were selected to be interviewed by personnel trained in interview methods and cognizant of and sensitive to local conditions and cultures.³² The qualitative data from the interviews complemented the survey data by exploring the specific experiences and perceptions of individual respondents. Interviews were carried out over a nine-month period (March to November) in 2018.

people with lower levels of education.³⁰ This may indicate a relationship between recruitment and lack of access to an alternative social network, or it may reflect the fact that the Taliban remain a predominantly rural phenomenon.

Ideological attraction. Research that has examined the general population’s motivations to work with violent extremist groups in Afghanistan finds that sympathy for the ideological causes prominent in the narratives of these groups is generally weak.³¹ A desire for security and some means of dispute resolution in the context of a weak national government is often the leading motivation.

STUDY METHODS

To ascertain whether displaced persons in conflict-affected areas are more vulnerable to recruitment to violent extremism than nondisplaced persons, the study asked respondents directly whether they had sympathy for the Taliban or felt that the use of violence toward civilians is justified. This approach, however, is subject to the usual fallibilities of self-reporting, particularly given the sensitivity of the subject. Another way is to examine the socioeconomic factors that have been suggested in the literature to lead to vulnerability to radicalization.

Eight provinces with relatively high numbers of displaced people, differing ethnic group composition, and located in different parts of the country were selected for inclusion in the study—Balkh, Ghazni, Helmand, Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, and Nangarhar.³³ Three individual sites within each province were selected to capture both urban and rural living environments. Roughly equal numbers of IDP, returnee, and nondisplaced respondents were chosen at each site. Roughly sixty respondents were selected from each of these three groups, with small variations resulting from difficulty accessing returnees. Interviewees were identified by the researchers based on locations and using a “snowball” method whereby those approached could refer others.³⁴ The total sample for each province averaged about 180 respondents, for a total survey sample of 1,405.

Respondents were asked to self-identify as returnee, IDP, or nondisplaced. A small number of respondents in two provinces saw themselves as both returnees and IDPs in that they had returned to Afghanistan but remained displaced from their communities of origin. This sentiment was particularly strong in Herat, where the majority of returnees identified as both returnees and internally

displaced. For the purposes of analysis, returnees who were also IDPs were counted as returnees. Additional details on the statistical methods are provided in the appendix and on the data platform created for this study.

REASONS FOR USING A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

In-depth qualitative work, such as interviewing, is needed to uncover motivations and to try to detect the presence of attitudes and experiences indicating a vulnerability to radicalization to violence. Quantitative information, such as that obtained by surveys, is needed to test whether there is statistical significance in between-group differences and to map or isolate certain factors attributable to different groups. Quantitative data can also be used to test multiple hypotheses at the same time—hypotheses that the qualitative data suggest may be of relevance—such as a possible correlation between lack of economic opportunities, grievances, or perceptions of injustice and contact with groups that promulgate the use of violence. If statistical analyses alone are used, such correlations may be missed. Further, the study used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the *perception* of poverty or inequality as expressed by the respondents about their lives, which were found to differ from some of the more commonly used metrics of poverty and inequality, such as income levels or the value of household assets.

Mixed methods approaches, such as those used in this study, may be most appropriate but have not been

commonly used in looking at radicalization because they are resource-intensive to carry out. In addition, the often limited sample and the highly subjective nature of the data collected may pose difficulties for the statistical analysis.

Another reason not to rely on either qualitative or quantitative data alone for this research is that participants (both interview and survey) tend to answer in ways that do not reveal attitudes or behaviors outside the norm, particularly when the interview touches on sensitive or taboo subjects. The mixed methods approach allowed for the triangulation of answers in the surveys and the interviews.

One weakness that plagues much research on radicalization, including this study, is that sympathy toward violent extremist groups expressed by interviewees is often used as a proxy for willingness to join such groups or to commit acts of violence on their behalf. This arises from the belief that interviewees are less likely to answer truthfully if they are asked whether they would join or have joined violent extremist groups and their use of violence than when asked about their “sympathy” for violent extremist groups. This issue was addressed in this study by asking more pointed questions about the circumstances in which respondents would approve the use of violence against civilians, rather than just questions about whether they “sympathized” with violent extremist groups. However, the relation between “radicalization” expressed as sympathizing with a group’s aims or methods and actually committing violent acts is not linear or clear, and that applies to this research study.³⁵



An internally displaced Afghan man walks through a refugee camp in Herat Province in October 2018. (Photo by Mohammad Ismail/Reuters)

Findings

Research for this study looked at those factors that have been identified in the literature or commentary as being related to radicalization and mobilization to violence.

The study compared the degree to which these factors were present in displaced versus nondisplaced groups to determine if any significant differences existed that would render displaced persons more vulnerable to radicalization. The study also compared displaced groups and nondisplaced groups for self-expressed sympathy for the use of violence against citizens and sympathy for the Taliban. Finally, models were created to identify which factors were highly correlated with sympathy, and whether these differed between displaced and nondisplaced groups. Looking specifically at resiliency, factors were identified that were strongly correlated with a lack of sympathy for violence against civilians or toward the Taliban, even in the presence of factors that have

been commonly identified in news commentary or the literature as vulnerabilities. Identifying clearly both the vulnerabilities and resiliency factors of displaced groups can assist in the development of more efficacious policy and programmatic support.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

The first set of factors examined included demographic and socioeconomic indicators such as educational attainment, level of income, and employment.

Education

Returnees, IDPs, and nondisplaced individuals exhibited stark differences in educational levels achieved. Overall, displaced persons had lower levels of education, with returnees in particular faring poorly.³⁶ In Nangarhar, 66

percent of returnees reported that they had never gone to school (the highest proportion in the survey), compared with 59 percent of IDPs and only 35 percent of host respondents. Provinces in which this pattern was different included Ghazni, where IDPs were more likely to have had at least some education compared to host communities, and Herat, the only province where returnees were more likely to have had at least some education compared with host and IDP populations, a factor attributable to the access to education these particular refugees had while they were refugees in neighboring Iran.

The findings across all provinces reveal that the majority of respondents (across all groups) had never gone to school or were not attending school at the time of the survey. The figure was highest in Nangarhar, with 52 percent of all respondents reporting having never gone to school, followed by Balkh and Kunduz. Despite a relatively high number of respondents in Ghazni reporting having completed some form of schooling, this province had the lowest average incomes, indicating that educational attainment did not necessarily lead to higher income-earning opportunities.

The reasons respondents gave for terminating their education also varied across provinces. Balkh, Helmand, and Ghazni were the provinces where the greatest proportion of respondents stated they had terminated their education because of conflict and disruption. In other provinces, the need to work or the lack of money to pay for an education were more important reasons.

Educational outcomes also have a generational aspect to them; the data show that lower educational attainment was linked to older respondents. Among those aged nineteen and younger (in the survey, this group included respondents aged sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, or nineteen years) and those aged twenty to twenty-nine years there were significantly fewer respondents who had not had any education compared with older age groups.

Reasons for terminating education, while not differing greatly between different displaced groups, did show significant differences between generations. Among the oldest age cohort surveyed, those aged fifty to fifty-nine years, conflict and disruption were the most significant reasons, as also held true for respondents in the next oldest age cohort, those aged forty to forty-nine years. This generational distinction suggests that as time went on, conflict and disruption became less of a barrier to completing an education.

Income and Livelihood

IDPs had slightly lower incomes than returnee and host respondents. There were also other between-group differences that rendered IDPs worse off in terms of income.

For example, IDPs had the same median monthly income as returnees in the survey (6,000 Afs, or \$76), while host median income was reported at 7,000 Afs (\$88). While mean monthly incomes were similar for returnees and IDPs (7,300 Afs, or \$92, for IDPs compared with 7,400 Afs, or \$93, for returnees), both were significantly lower than the mean monthly income of host respondents (8,500 Afs, or \$107). Nondisplaced individuals also had higher wages at the lower limits than did IDPs or returnees. A few returnees reported significantly higher incomes than other respondents, possibly reflecting income-earning opportunities while they were outside the country.

When asked their income levels, IDPs and nondisplaced persons were more likely to report that they had zero income coming into the household. Returnees were least likely to report having no income.

Returnees also tended to be more self-reliant: they were least likely to rely on other family members and most likely to rely only on their own jobs or livelihoods as a source of income. This finding may indicate a breakdown in social connections or a decline in social capital among returnees. Twice as many returnee respondents (17 percent) as host respondents (8 percent) and IDPs (10 percent) said they found it very difficult to make ends meet. Some

IDPs had become accustomed to identifying new ways of earning an income because of the multiple displacements they had faced. For example, in Kandahar, IDPs from Panjwayi and Zhari districts have been displaced more than ten times over the course of the past eighteen years. They have adapted to an unsettled way of life and to constantly looking for ways to generate income.

Income by province. Incomes varied considerably across provinces. Respondents in Balkh had the lowest average monthly income (6,197.74 Afs, or \$82.21) and by far the narrowest range between the lowest and the highest income reported. The difference in mean incomes across all groups in Balkh compared with the province with the highest mean income, Kandahar, was large: mean incomes in Kandahar were nearly double those in Balkh.

Livelihoods. Among those employed in some kind of work, IDPs and returnees reported more insecurity in their livelihoods and sources of income than host community respondents. IDPs were most likely to be day laborers than to work in any other occupation and more likely than other groups to do so. Host respondents were more than three times as likely as returnees and a little more than twice as likely as IDPs to hold salaried government official employment (such as a health care worker or teacher). All three groups were as likely to be shopkeepers or small traders; returnees were the group most likely to be street vendors—that is, to lack a permanent physical structure from which to sell their goods. Host community respondents were twice as likely as IDPs to farm or tend livestock, but not significantly more likely than returnees. All three groups were equally likely to be employed by a nongovernmental organization.

Host respondents were slightly more likely than IDPs to be long-term unemployed. Returnee long-term unemployment was significantly lower than that of either hosts or IDPs. Short-term unemployment rates were highest among IDPs and lowest among returnees. These findings are interesting as they give us insights into the access to opportunities, attitudes, resiliency,

and possession of assets by the three groups, and show some important differences between them.

Children per household. The average number of children in the household of each respondent was 4.1, with Ghazni, Kabul, and Kunduz having above-average numbers and Helmand and Herat having below-average numbers. Returnees across all provinces except Herat and Kunduz had a higher number of children per respondent than did IDPs and host community respondents. Across all eight provinces surveyed, returnees had more children per respondent than did IDPs, who had more children than host community members.

This difference is important, as higher fertility rates may indicate greater vulnerability to poverty, violence, insecurity, and lack of access to health services. Higher fertility rates may also make returnee and IDP households vulnerable to resource scarcity within the household, as household income must spread to cover more people. Ghazni had the greatest range in number of children per respondent and Kandahar had the narrowest range but some outliers: a few respondents had more children than the average range.

Length of time in current location. The data were sorted to look at how long respondents had been displaced: for returnees, how long since they had *returned* to Afghanistan, and for IDPs, how long they had been in their current place of displacement. The objective was to see whether the length of time spent in displacement (for IDPs) or the timing of displacement (for both IDPs and returnees) would have an impact on other variables. The data revealed some subtle differences in the length of time IDPs or returnees had been in their current locations. While longer-term resettlement (since their return from host countries) was more likely the case with returnee respondents (68 percent of the returnees surveyed reported they had been in their current locations in Afghanistan for five years or more, compared with 54 percent of IDPs), and medium-term resettlement rates (24.5 percent of returnees and 26 percent of IDPs had arrived

at their current location in the previous year) were similar for the two groups, the pattern was different for more recent movements. Close to three times as many IDPs had relocated in the previous six months as had returnees. Across all the provinces surveyed, internal displacement is a newer and ongoing phenomenon compared with the return of refugees who had left the country.

The length of time spent in the current location of displacement, however, varied considerably across provinces. More than 80 percent of returnees in Ghazni, Helmand, and Kandahar had been settled in the province for more than five years. The majority of IDPs in Kandahar and Helmand had also been settled in the province for five years or more. Kunduz showed recent movements of both IDPs and returnees, while Balkh, Herat, Kabul, and Kunduz showed recent movements of IDPs. Interestingly, Kunduz also had the lowest levels of basic education completion of any of the provinces surveyed, with 67 percent of IDPs and 48 percent of returnees having never gone to school. Kunduz also had the second-highest number of children in the household.

A significant correlation was the percentage of returnees who had returned to the country more than five years prior to this study (a much smaller percentage of protracted IDPs had done so) and the majority percentage of respondents in Helmand who replied that they did not find the Taliban to be “significantly difficult” or “very difficult” in their lives (almost twice the number of IDPs and almost three times the number of displaced respondents who responded that way). This reinforces interview data and anecdotal observations about the radicalization of older returnee groups that had spent time in Pakistan. What is not clear is whether sympathy for the Taliban developed before people left the country, during their displacement as refugees, or upon their return to Afghanistan and whether it is correlated with another variable that has not been included, or identified, in this study. Another finding that may provide some clues is that in provinces where there was a greater percentage of more recent returnees (e.g., Balkh and Kabul) returnees responded very similarly

to IDPs and host respondents when asked whether the Taliban posed a significant difficulty in their lives. This raises the question of whether protracted displacement and/or the multiple displacements that returnees often experience play a key role in radicalization.

EXPERIENCE OF HARDSHIP

Survey respondents were asked about the “hardships” they experienced in their lives and the degree to which they experienced them. Perceptions of hardship are subjective interpretations of respondents’ own lives. While studies often use quantitative socioeconomic metrics such as income to gauge the degree of hardship faced, respondents’ own perceptions of their lives, regardless of the quantitative metrics, tell us more about how they had experienced their socioeconomic situations; such data can also provide insights into their attitudes and beliefs and their resiliency in challenging situations.

Factor analysis of the multiple-choice questions regarding sources of hardship faced by respondents was used to determine which variables, if any, are related to each other. These responses were clustered into two groups: hardship caused by exposure to violence and hardship arising from material conditions (see table 1).

There was little difference among IDP, returnee, and host populations with regard to exposure to violence, but definite differences were reported in material conditions as sources of hardship, with IDPs and returnees reporting greater difficulties than hosts. Of the three groups, returnees reported the greatest experience of hardship related to material conditions, followed closely by IDPs.

There were some standout findings when individual factors were scrutinized. Returnees reported significantly more difficulty in accessing services such as health care and education than did host or IDP respondents. One quarter of returnees reported that accessing services was very difficult, and close to 50 percent reported that accessing services was very or significantly difficult. By contrast, 28 percent of host community respondents

and 39 percent of IDPs reported that accessing services was very or significantly difficult. Across the five hardship issues, access to services presented the greatest difficulty for all three groups; interestingly, despite being the greatest challenge for each of the groups, the challenges in accessing services showed the greatest *variance* across the three groups, with returnees reporting the greatest levels of hardship compared with IDPs and nondisplaced persons. Returnees may find it difficult to navigate access to services, and when they do succeed, they may find that the services are not of the same quality as they received in their host countries.

Respondents reported that harassment and the political situation created fewer challenges. Surveyors asked respondents to rate to what extent harassment or bribe solicitation by police, local leaders, or officials caused them difficulty. There was a small difference among the three groups: IDPs and returnees reported they had experienced more difficulty than host community members reported.

The degree of hardship experienced due to the prevailing political situation was reported to be very similar across the three groups. The only difference was that fewer IDPs reported that the political situation was “not difficult at all,” but the responses “not difficult at all” and “a little difficult” when aggregated were the same across all groups. The probable reason for this finding is that all the groups have been treated the same way by the political elites, regardless of whether they are displaced or not. Qualitative interviews revealed that regardless of ethnicity, or whether respondents had been displaced or not, or whether they showed more sympathy or antipathy toward the government, respondents felt there was little good about the current political situation.

Feelings of Exclusion

Returnees in each province except Kandahar reported greater feelings of exclusion than did IDPs. These findings align with anecdotal observations of feelings of exclusion experienced by displaced groups, particularly

Box 1.

PERCEIVED SOURCES OF HARDSHIP

Factor Group 1: EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

Exposure to terrorism

Exposure to crime

Political situation

Challenges caused by Taliban

Factor Group 2: MATERIAL CONDITIONS

Poor housing conditions

Poor or no income or work

Harassment or requests for bribes from police, local leaders, or officials

Difficulty accessing government services, such as education and health care

Worries about the future

returnees, who may not have the same social support networks as IDPs do, depending on their place of displacement. The difference between returnees and host and IDP groups was most pronounced in Kunduz and Ghazni, where returnees reported that their experience of feeling excluded was “very difficult” or “significantly difficult.” In Kunduz, by contrast, all six returnees interviewed said that IDPs were the most “marginalized” and “excluded.” A twenty-seven-year-old Pashtun IDP, an unemployed resident of Kunduz with a madrassa education, captured the overt differencing he felt:

The host community has never considered us one of their own. . . . They don't allow their children to play with our children because they consider IDPs strangers. . . . They [the nondisplaced] always argue with us over small conflicts. Clearly, they don't want us to live beside them.

Across all provinces, displaced groups felt greater social exclusion than host respondents. In Kandahar, which has a central role in the history of the ruling elite, host respondents reported no feelings of social exclusion.

The interviews also captured the link between displacement, social exclusion, and access to social capital and the impacts those factors had on individuals' sense of grievance toward the state (or toward the Taliban, in some cases). A thirty-five-year-old Pashtun IDP residing in Loya Wiala, Kandahar, recounted this story

A member of my extended family was a victim of a robbery—criminals attacked him, beating him, and robbed money from his small business. Without local connections (he is an IDP), he was not able to get help from the police to complain. He also thought he was a victim because he was perceived as defenseless.

Feelings of Political Violence

Across all provinces, IDP, returnee, and nondisplaced respondents gave similar responses when asked whether exposure to political violence constituted a significant difficulty for them. Political violence was defined in the survey as violence committed by the Taliban, ISIS, the Afghan

Local Police, or government forces that was not strictly criminal in nature; it did not, for example, include tribal land dispute violence. Political violence associated with the elections also was not captured in the data set, as the survey and interviews took place in early to mid-2018.

Kunduz was the province where respondents in all three groups reported the greatest levels of difficulty, with around 50 percent of all respondents reporting that political violence posed very difficult (the most extreme category of difficulty) or significantly difficult conditions for them in their everyday lives. The lowest levels were reported in Ghazni. Across all provinces, however, both returnees and IDPs reported more difficulty from political violence than did nondisplaced persons.

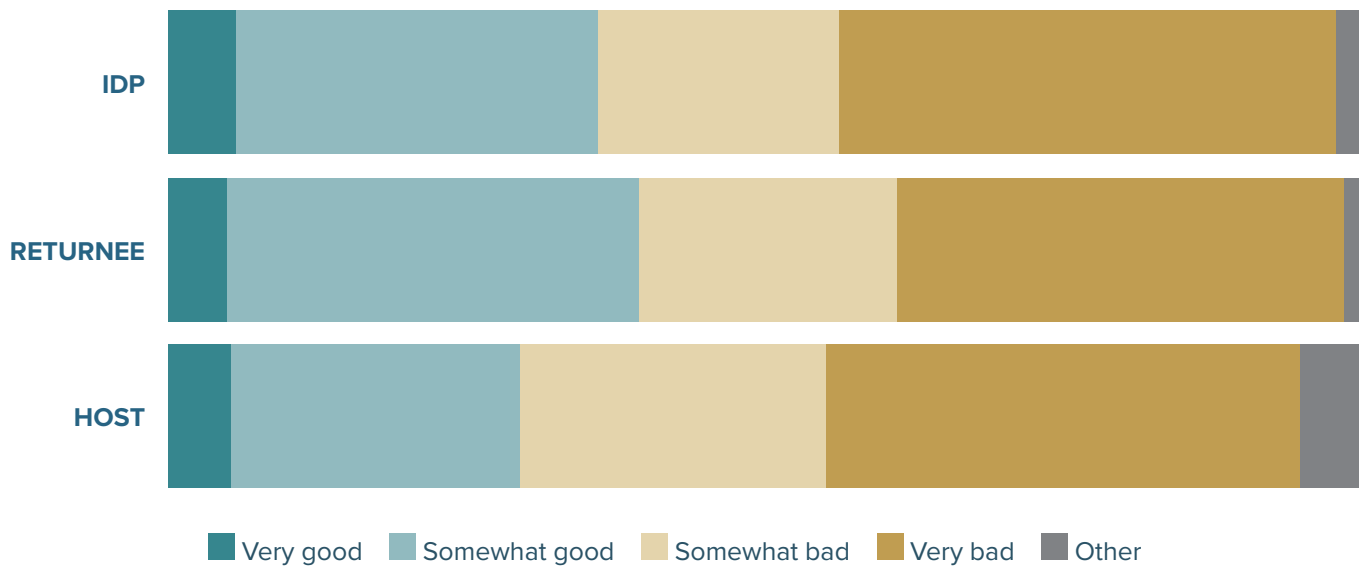
ATTITUDES TOWARD VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

A central question the study looked at was whether the different groups held different attitudes toward the Taliban and other armed nonstate groups, and toward the use of violence more generally. The question explored earlier—whether respondents felt that the Taliban constituted a difficulty in their lives—gives insights not only into objective hardships experienced but also subjective perceptions of the legitimacy of the Taliban and whether they conferred benefits on respondents' lives. The survey presented a multiple-choice question—What kind of people are the Taliban?—to gauge the level of positive perceptions of the Taliban.

In addition, to determine attitudes toward the Taliban, the survey asked what respondents thought of other armed nonstate groups (such as, for example, the Islamic State's Khorasan branch) and what a respondent would do if he or she knew that someone close to them was going to join such a group. This last question is a little more complex as an indicator of individual vulnerability to radicalization, but it does elicit a potential resiliency factor related to the willingness and capacity of social networks to intervene in the recruitment and radicalization process.

Figure 1. Responses to the Survey Question, “What Kind of People Are the Taliban?”

Of the 1,405 survey respondents, nearly 35 percent said that the Taliban were “very good” or “somewhat good.”



Further, to explore general attitudes toward the use of violence and to frame the question about the legitimacy of violence in a way that was not specifically connected to the Taliban, the survey asked respondents whether violence against civilians was justified in defense of one’s religion, whether violence against civilians was justified in defense of one’s ethnic group, and whether violence against civilians was justified to retaliate for actions against one’s group.

Perceptions of the Taliban

To explore whether displaced populations are more likely to sympathize with the Taliban and other armed groups than host populations, the survey asked respondents, “What Kind of People Are the Taliban?” Multiple choice responses ranged from “very bad” to “very good” people (see figure 1). The responses were subsequently sorted and analyzed on a yes/no binary.

Across all groups the findings were highly differentiated by province, with interprovincial differences more striking than differences among the three groups. The lowest level of sympathy for the Taliban was recorded in Balkh, where only 10 percent of all respondents stated that they thought the Taliban were good people, followed by Nangarhar. (It

is worth noting that Balkh has a large population of ethnic Uzbeks and Tajik, while Nangarhar has historically had a smaller Taliban presence than Kandahar or Helmand.) The highest level of support was found in Kandahar, where over two-thirds of respondents stating that they thought the Taliban were good people. In Helmand, sympathy was reported by around 50 percent of respondents, with the remaining provinces all recording less than 50 percent.³⁷

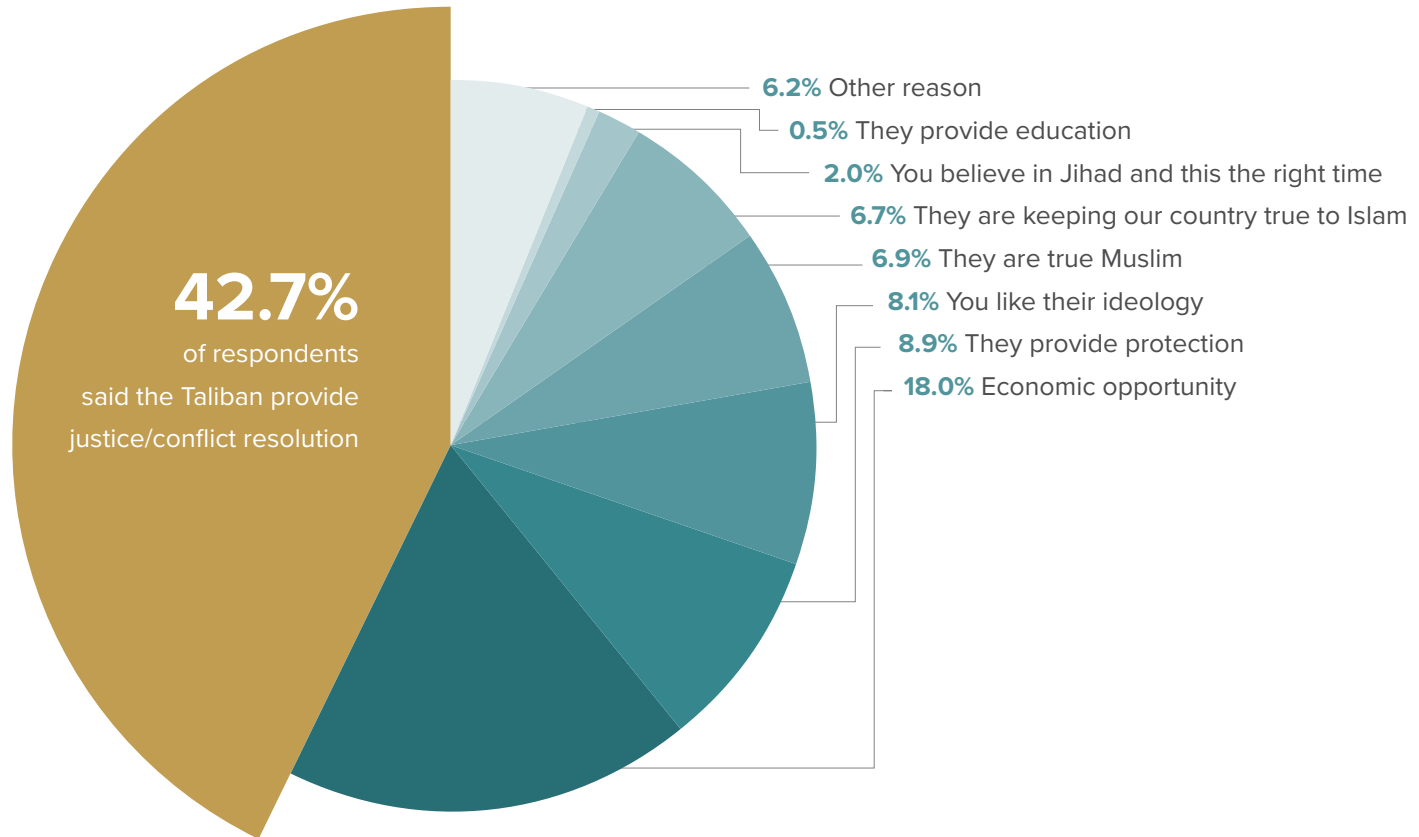
Responses by Village or Site

The data showed significant within-province variation in positive perceptions of the Taliban or levels of sympathy for them. For example, respondents from Greshk and Mukhtar Camp in Helmand showed far greater sympathy toward the Taliban than did those from Safiyan, also in Helmand. One of the sites in Herat, Jebrael, had the sixth-fewest responses that the Taliban are good people, while respondents from another site in Herat, Tourghondi, had the sixth-most responses that the Taliban are good people.

On the other hand, sympathy for the Taliban was occasionally consistent across locations in some provinces. For example, the three locations assessed in Ghazni all exhibited similar attitudes toward the Taliban. The

Figure 2. Respondents' Reasons for Considering the Taliban "Good"

Of the survey respondents who said the Taliban were "very good" or "somewhat good," the reason cited most often was that the Taliban provide justice and resolve conflicts.



local area with the greatest positive perception of the Taliban among both displaced and host respondents was the Loy Wiala and Mirwais Mena neighborhoods in Kandahar city.

Responses by Displaced versus Nondisplaced Persons

Overall, some differences were noted between displaced and nondisplaced respondents in their degree of sympathy for (or positive perception of) the Taliban, but the degree of difference was highly dependent on the province (or site). In Helmand, 75 percent of returnees said the Taliban were good people, compared to only 27 percent of host community respondents. By contrast, in Kandahar, the province with the greatest sympathy for the Taliban across all groups, host community respondents were only

slightly more likely than either returnees or IDPs to say that the Taliban were good people.

Reasons for Expressing Sympathy for the Taliban

Respondents cited both ideological and material or grievance-based reasons in the qualitative interviews for supporting the Taliban. Ideological reasons were most commonly associated with returnees. One forty-five-year-old journalist in Ghazni recounted this episode:

Returnees from Pakistan usually hold extreme views. They mostly have studied in Pakistani madrassas. These returnees beat those who oppose their ideas. For example, about three months ago, the imam was preaching after the prayer. During his speech, the mullah said that Islam permits women to work. Then Niaz Mohammad, a returnee from Pakistan, stood up and accused the mullah of infidelity and

being a foreign spy. Niaz Mohammad and a couple of other returnees were about to beat the mullah. They forced the mullah to apologize in the next prayer and announce that Islam does not permit women to work outside the home.

Economic reasons were also compelling. One unemployed IDP in Torghundi, a twenty-five-year-old university graduate, said that “unemployment is the main reason why many join extremist groups” and that he personally had “heard many stories about a youth who has joined the Taliban in Torghundi because of unemployment and financial problems.”

Between-Group Differences in Reasons for Sympathy for the Taliban

The view that returnees, who are commonly believed to be more extreme in their views, have stronger ideological reasons for sympathizing with the Taliban was not corroborated by the quantitative data, which revealed that only a slightly greater percentage of returnees held ideological reasons for sympathy for the Taliban than did nondisplaced respondents and IDPs. When the answers “You like their ideology,” “You believe in jihad and now is the right time,” “They are true Muslims,” and “They keep our country true to Islam” are aggregated, the following percentages of respondents expressed ideological reasons for holding a positive view of the Taliban: 20.6 percent of IDPs, 24.6 percent of nondisplaced persons, and 26 percent of returnees.

The most common reason for thinking that the Taliban were good people was that they provide justice and conflict resolution: more than twice as many respondents chose this answer as chose the next most popular reason—for economic opportunity (see figure 2). This finding was consistent across all three groups. IDPs and returnees may be in particular need of assistance with dispute resolution because of the disruption to community and social networks and the need for trusted sources to assist in managing conflicts and disputes. A twenty-five-year-old IDP, a university student in Ghazni, pointed

to the preference of many for a sharia-based system to settle disputes:

When there are disputes among people, like land disputes or someone did something to a family member . . . [the] Taliban step in and try to resolve it as soon as possible. This is how people sometimes prefer their court and justice system; mostly because they think it is based on Islamic jurisprudence and they believe [the] Taliban make just decisions. After [the case is resolved] they become loyal to them and absolutely sympathize with them whenever Afghan national forces attack them.

As well, practical concerns such as protection and security were almost twice as important to both IDPs and returnees than to host community respondents, which likely lent strength to their sympathy for the Taliban. One host community respondent, a forty-five-year-old journalist in Pashtunabad, pointed out other practical benefits of supporting the Taliban:

A good number of IDPs want to return to their permanent residences, and they have kept connections and support the Taliban so they can get access to their farm land once they return to their homes. On top of that, even people on the district council pay taxes to the Taliban because they are scared of target killings; therefore, sympathy for the armed groups [exists] among government officials as well.

Attitudes toward Recruitment by the Taliban

When respondents were asked what they would do if someone close to them tried to join the Taliban, across all provinces it was host community respondents who were most likely to report that they would support the decision, followed by returnees, and last IDPs. However, the between-group differences amounted to just a couple of percentage points. When the responses “I would support their decision” and “I would do nothing” are aggregated, more returnees than either host community respondents or IDPs chose those responses, but the difference was only a few percentage points. Returnees were also most likely to seek help in their community but least likely to try themselves to talk the person out of joining.

The data revealed marked differences among the provinces between displaced and nondisplaced groups. In Ghazni, a similar percentage of returnee (16 percent) and host respondents (19 percent) answered that they would support the decision, while not a single IDP did so. In Herat, three times as many returnees responded that they would support the decision than IDP respondents, but only a few more than host community respondents. In Kandahar, host community respondents had the highest level of support for, or indifference to stopping, potential recruits, followed by returnees, with IDPs indicating far less support.

Perceptions of Other Armed Nonstate Groups

In addition to the Taliban, the survey explored respondents' perceptions of other armed nonstate groups, in particular the Islamic State's Khorasan branch (IS-K) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The findings were very different from those regarding perceptions of the Taliban and provide insights into provincial and group differences. Overwhelmingly, for all groups across all provinces (with one exception), respondents said that other armed nonstate groups were "very bad." Returnees were the group with the greatest (but still very limited) sympathy: in all provinces where some respondents reported they felt that armed groups were "somewhat good" or "very good," it was returnees who had the greatest percentage of sympathizers. In Kandahar, host community respondents exhibited the greatest ambivalence, with nearly three quarters stating that the armed groups were "somewhat bad" rather than "very bad," versus almost 50 percent of returnee respondents and fewer than 25 percent of IDP respondents.

Conflict resolution was most frequently mentioned as the reason why respondents sympathized with other armed nonstate groups. Other reasons related to defense of religion, such as "They are keeping our country true to Islam" or "Their ideology is the right one" or "[They are] true Muslims." A small number of respondents (in Nangarhar) noted that the IS-K and IMU provided guidance and purpose in life. Economic opportunity

was rarely cited as a reason for sympathizing with other armed nonstate groups, whereas it was quite frequently cited as a reason for sympathizing with the Taliban.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE USE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS

The survey explored attitudes toward the use of violence against civilians to achieve particular ends. Three questions were asked: (1) whether violence against civilians was justified to defend one's religion, (2) whether violence against civilians was justified to defend one's ethnic group, and (3) whether violence against civilians was justified as retaliation for violence that had been committed against the respondent or the respondent's group. (See figure 3.)

Use of Violence to Defend One's Religion

In Balkh, all groups—IDPs, hosts, and returnees—answered overwhelmingly that violence was "never" or "rarely" justified in defense of one's religion. Yet in Kandahar, Kunduz, and Herat, all groups responded overwhelmingly that violence was "sometimes" or "always" justified in defense of one's religion. Differences between displaced and nondisplaced groups were marked in some provinces but not in others. In Balkh, returnees were more likely than both IDPs and host community members to say that violence was rarely justified. In Ghazni, however, they were more likely than both IDPs and host community members to say that violence was "always" justified.

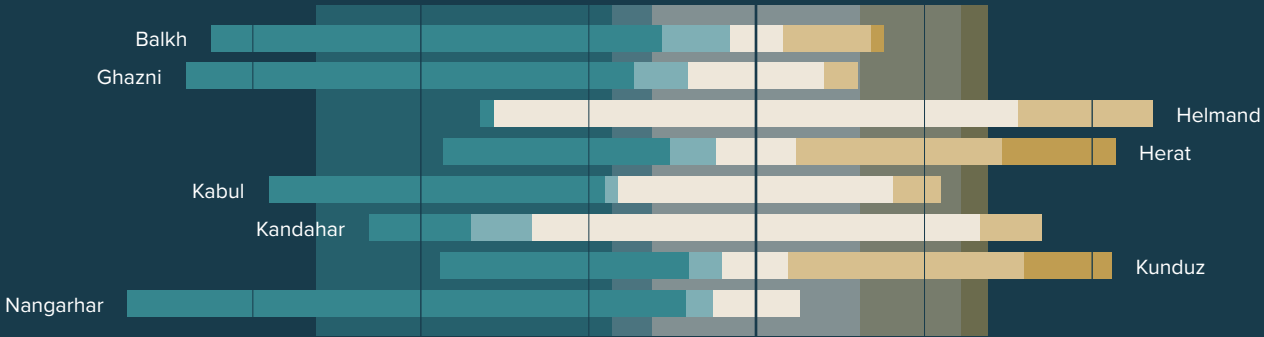
Use of Violence to Defend One's Ethnic Group

There were far more "never" answers by all groups to the question of whether the use of violence to defend one's ethnic group was ever justified. Nangarhar, Ghazni, and Balkh had the highest percentages of "never" responses across all groups. "Always" was a significant response (more than 5 percent of all responses) only in Balkh, Herat, and Kunduz Provinces. Kunduz yielded the greatest percentage of "always" and "sometimes" answers, and this finding was consistent among hosts, IDPs, and returnees. A comparison of displaced with nondisplaced groups showed little within-province variance in responses other than in Helmand, where 3 percent of IDPs responded

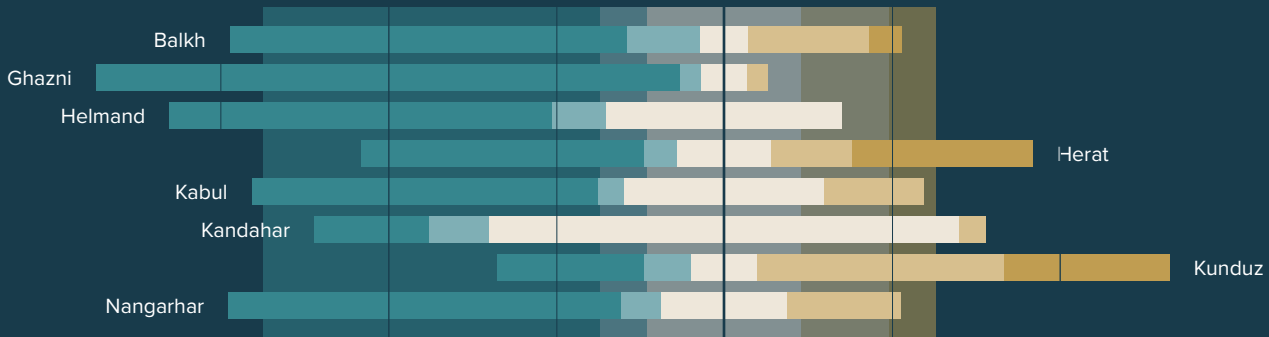
Figure 3. Attitudes toward the Use of Violence against Civilians

Never Rarely Not sure Sometimes Always

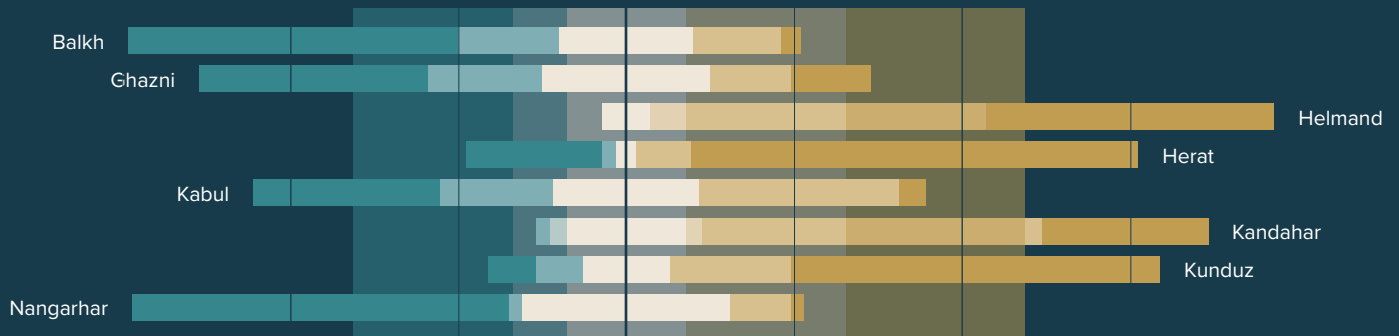
IS VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS JUSTIFIED TO DEFEND ONE'S ETHNIC GROUP?



IS VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS JUSTIFIED TO RETALIATE FOR VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST YOU OR YOUR GROUP?



IS VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS JUSTIFIED TO DEFEND ONE'S RELIGION?



Each bar represents 100% of the responses for each province. The larger rectangles represent the distribution of responses for all respondents in the eight provinces.

“never,” while more than 50 percent of host community respondents chose that response. In Balkh, returnees were half as likely as both host community respondents and IDPs to respond to this question with “always” or “never.”

Use of Violence to Retaliate against Another Group for a Wrongdoing

There was far less support for the use of violence in retaliation for another group’s perceived wrongdoing than there was for the use of violence to defend one’s religion or ethnic group, illustrating that there is a calibrated sense of the legitimate use of violence, and, as a means of retaliation, it is questionable. Despite strong cultural norms of *bada’* or “revenge,” being prevalent in some provinces there were significant between-province differences, even in provinces where Pashtuns are the majority ethnic group. Across all groups, respondents in Kunduz were most likely to say that violence against civilians was “always” justified. In Kandahar, the majority of respondents across all groups replied “not sure.” IDPs in Ghazni, returnees in Balkh and Kabul, and host respondents in Helmand most often reported “never.” No clear pattern emerged of any one group more likely to justify the use of violence against another group in retaliation for perceived wrongdoing.

VULNERABILITY TO RECRUITMENT TO THE TALIBAN

To gauge how vulnerable different groups were to recruitment, respondents were asked whether they had ever personally been approached by the Taliban for recruitment. The question is a sensitive one, so the responses likely underreported the actual number of respondents who had been approached.

IDPs were more likely overall than returnees and hosts to have been approached for recruitment into the Taliban across all provinces, except in Ghazni, where not a single IDP respondent (and only one returnee respondent, or 2 percent) reported having been approached for recruitment, compared with 13 percent (eight individuals) of host community respondents. The greatest variance between

displaced and nondisplaced respondents was registered in Kandahar, where close to 25 percent of all IDPs (twelve respondents) responded that they had been approached, but only 3 percent (one) of host community members and no returnees reported the same. Nangarhar had the highest number of respondents who reported that they had been approached: close to one-third of all IDPs (twenty respondents), but the figure fell to almost half for hosts, at 17 percent (seven), and 26 percent (nineteen) for returnees. Balkh was the province with the lowest rates across all three groups, with approximately 5 percent of all IDPs, returnees, and nondisplaced respondents reporting they had been approached.

Qualitative data from the interviews support the notion that IDPs may be more likely to sympathize with or support the Taliban. The interviews revealed that many IDPs maintain strong links to family in their villages of origin. If these villages are in Taliban-controlled areas, it is very likely that the respondents will have a family member who is involved with the Taliban and that they too will be encouraged or coerced into supporting the Taliban. Economic incentives may also be at work. One interviewee, a twenty-three-year-old unemployed graduate living in Compani, Kabul, provided details on a typical arrangement:

Those who have returned from other places and displaced to our area have relationships with the Taliban and other armed groups, and they still keep their ties with the armed groups because they have family members and relatives among them. Suicide attackers and their people keep IEDs [improvised explosive devices] and other explosive devices in their houses or transport them so that they could later distribute them to the Taliban, or [they] keep their weapons or provide them safe havens.

PERCEPTIONS OF VULNERABILITY TO RADICALIZATION

Given the supposition, supported by some anecdotal information, that displaced groups are more likely to sympathize with and join the Taliban, the survey asked respondents, “In your opinion, who is most likely to join the Taliban or other armed nonstate groups?”

Unemployed individuals and madrassa students were consistently cited across all provinces and among all three survey groups as the top two kinds of people respondents felt were most likely to join the Taliban. IDPs and returnees were named as the third- and fourth-most likely groups to join. There were a few exceptions to this general pattern. In Kandahar, both returnees and hosts reported that IDPs were most likely (more so than madrassa students) to sympathize with or join the Taliban, while IDPs in Kandahar felt that madrassa students were twice as likely as IDPs to join militant groups. Balkh and Helmand Provinces registered a significant percentage of “other” responses, with “illiterate people” and returnees from Pakistan being the most common “other” groups cited in Balkh. In six of eight provinces, approximately the same number of returnee respondents as host respondents and IDPs reported that returnees as a group were likely to join the Taliban. However, in Kunduz, twice as many IDP respondents said returnees as a group were likely to join the Taliban, and in Helmand, 12 percent of host respondents said that returnees were likely to join the Taliban, whereas IDPs and returnees selected that response at less than half that frequency. IDPs were far less likely to report that IDPs as a group were likely to join the Taliban, with more hosts and returnees in six provinces registering that opinion at a higher response rate than IDPs themselves did.

Returnees and IDPs are often perceived as more vulnerable to radicalization. One of the common themes that came up in interviews with all three groups was the role of “foreign countries” and “foreign interference” in leading to radicalization, both in terms of foreign interference and foreign presence as a motivation factor for those who become radicalized in Afghanistan and in terms of the influence of madrassas and other elements in Pakistan funded by foreign entities that intentionally radicalize. A twenty-three-year-old returnee, an unemployed graduate living in Compani, Kabul, provided this insight:

Russia and Pakistan are involved in the area and they support the Taliban by providing them new weapons and even training, and financially they also help them so they can fight

ISIS in Afghanistan. That is the main reason this war is not coming to an end. . . . And speaking of ISIS, it was created by the United States so they could excavate our intact mines secretly. Americans spent a lot of capital during this time and they want to [offset] it by extracting our minerals.

A countervailing view of Pakistan as the site of radicalization came from a thirty-year-old IDP and grade twelve graduate, now working as a laborer, who had lived in Pakistan. His narrative highlights that the reasons for leaving a host country can play a large role in how the returnee views the country and the government on return. The interviewee’s exasperation with his continued hardships are also apparent:

I believe living in Pakistan has no effect on being radicalized. Most refugees who were living in Pakistan were day laborers; they just worked to make some money for themselves and their families. I am so tired of this life! When I was in Iran, I worked a lot. I have tried to make some money, but I could not make any difference in my life! We lived for over thirty years in Pakistan. We heard a lot of bad things from them, and they humiliated us a lot. They would bully us and call us names like, “Hey, refugee, come here!” Now I am back, I cannot find jobs here with the government, and we need a lot of money to provide for the needs of our family. I work as a day laborer, but work is not available most of the time.

Another factor often cited as motivation for radicalization was a family member who had already joined the Taliban. That connection was expected to be exploited by the Taliban to gain more support, or the recruit him- or herself would pressure family members into joining. Loss of control over children was one of the more unusual responses given in Helmand and points to the breakdown of familial relationships and social cohesion:

When a family becomes IDPs, their control over their children decreases. . . . This loss of control reaches a point where the teenager or young adult no longer listens to their parents or older family members. The moment a member of the family no longer feels afraid or thinks that the family can control him, he starts doing whatever he likes, from joining the Taliban [or other] criminal groups to [committing] robberies or joining the police.

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT EXTREMIST MESSAGING

Across all the provinces surveyed, there was no significant difference in responses among IDPs, returnees, and host community members in the frequency of exposure to violent extremist messaging, whether from the Taliban or from ISIS. Taliban messaging is encountered far more frequently than ISIS messaging: 50 percent of respondents across all groups said that they received Taliban messaging hourly, daily, or weekly. Fewer than 10 percent reported that they were “never” exposed to Taliban messaging. With regard to ISIS messages, approximately 70 percent of all groups reported that they “never” or only “one time per year” had been exposed to messaging from ISIS.

At the provincial level, significant differences in exposure to violent extremist messaging appeared. Respondents in Balkh and Nangarhar reported the least exposure to Taliban messaging, while for ISIS messaging the lowest exposure was in Balkh, Helmand, and Herat provinces. Ghazni and Kunduz stood out as the provinces where respondents were most likely to encounter violent extremist messaging frequently, with more than 50 percent of respondents reporting hourly or daily exposure to violent extremist messaging from the Taliban. ISIS messaging was far less frequently received, with the greatest frequency of exposure in Ghazni, followed by Kabul, but well below the frequency of Taliban messaging.

The frequency of exposure to Taliban messaging did not follow a clear pattern across displaced groups or host respondents. Instead, provincial differences played a larger role in determining exposure. Returnees living in Kunduz were significantly more frequently exposed to Taliban messaging, followed by those living in Ghazni and Kabul. IDPs were significantly more likely to receive frequent Taliban messaging in Helmand than were host and returnee respondents, but only slightly more likely than returnees or

nondisplaced respondents to receive such messaging in Balkh and Nangarhar.

Host respondents in Kabul were far more frequently exposed to ISIS messaging, and in Kunduz IDPs were somewhat more frequently exposed to messaging from ISIS than either returnees or host respondents. In Helmand, hosts reported that they never or only once per year received ISIS messaging, while among both displaced respondent groups (IDPs and returnees), close to 25 percent said they were exposed to ISIS messages either weekly or monthly. In Kandahar, returnees seem to be far less exposed to messaging than either IDPs or host respondents, who reported exposure to messaging with very similar frequency.

When messaging by the Taliban and messaging by ISIS are aggregated, respondents in Balkh had the least exposure to violent extremist messaging and respondents in Ghazni had the most, with close to 70 percent of all respondents reporting that they encountered messaging on a daily or weekly basis.

Social media are a common and growing channel for messaging by violent extremist groups. Many interviewees, particularly younger urban respondents, noted that it was hard to avoid such messaging because they used social media as their main source of information. Content disseminated by social media was also described as having a particularly virulent impact on viewers, though some questioned whether the posts and accompanying photographs were genuine. Facebook was mentioned specifically by many interviewees, with Viber, WhatsApp, and IMO mentioned less frequently. A couple of interviewees noted that social media had been used, along with mosque sermons, to entice local youth to join the war in Syria, which some did. Sermons, word of mouth, and social gatherings were more frequently cited by older respondents as ways in which the Taliban disseminated content, and respondents noted that these channels, especially religious gatherings, were used frequently.



An Afghan man sells vegetables in Kunduz, in May 2017, where residents had been displaced twice by Taliban assaults in just a little over a year, each time returning to damaged homes. (Photo by Najim Rahim/New York Times)

Analysis

To answer the overarching question of whether displaced Afghans are more vulnerable to radicalization than nondisplaced Afghans, this study tested several socioeconomic and experiential factors identified in the literature as potentially leading to radicalization. The study then looked for factor associations, distilled from participants' responses, suggestive of vulnerability or resilience to radicalization to violent extremism. To address vulnerability, the modeling sought to identify which variables may be associated with a favorable opinion of the Taliban (as a proxy indicator of radicalization) or with support for the use of violence against civilians (as a proxy indicator for mobilization to violence). The associations do not imply causality. Rather, they indicate strong odds that a specific variable or set of variables is present when a respondent expresses a favorable opinion about armed nonstate groups or the use of violence.

Other than the finding on returnees who had reentered Afghanistan more than five years earlier, the analysis found no other associations between displaced groups specifically and sympathy for the Taliban. Instead, intergroup comparisons showed that all groups may be vulnerable to sympathy for the Taliban or support for the use of violence against citizens if their life experience includes certain conditions or hardships. Because displaced persons in some locales are more likely to have experienced these conditions or hardships than displaced persons in other locales or nondisplaced persons, they may be incorrectly thought to be at greater risk of mobilization to violence *solely because of displacement*. The findings show that, contrary to this common misperception, all three groups—returnees, IDPs, and hosts—across all provinces studied exhibited similar vulnerability to radicalization.

Finding central government actors such as the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, and other government agencies helpful in everyday life was associated with having an unfavorable opinion of the Taliban.

The following breakdown of factor associations considers first factors associated with vulnerability to mobilization to violent extremism, followed by factors associated with resilience to mobilization.

SYMPATHY FOR THE TALIBAN

The factors most strongly correlated with sympathy for or a favorable opinion of the Taliban included being a resident of Kandahar, having little or no schooling, and frequent—hourly or daily—exposure to violent extremist messaging. Also, returnees who reentered Afghanistan more than five years before the time of the study were much more likely than recent returnees to express sympathy toward the Taliban. There was no association between the length of time IDPs had spent in displacement and sympathy for the Taliban.

Perceptions that local powerbrokers or nonstate militias were helpful in everyday life were associated with a more sympathetic attitude toward the Taliban. Respondents who noted that the availability of government-provided services such as schooling or health care was important to them in deciding whether or not to join armed nonstate groups were less likely to join than those who answered that the availability of government services did not influence their decision.

ACCEPTABILITY OF USING VIOLENCE (PROXY FOR MOBILIZATION TO VIOLENCE)

To determine what factors might correlate with a response indicating a vulnerability to mobilization to violence, the survey and interview questions asked specifically whether it was permissible to use violence, including violence against civilians, to defend one’s religion, to defend one’s ethnic group, or in retaliation for perceived wrongdoings. Factor associations included level of education, locale, exposure to violent extremist messaging, and grievances against Afghanistan’s official government. Use of violence

toward civilians in the defense of religion was most strongly supported, with notably high support in some provinces.

To defend one’s religion. The factors most strongly correlated with support for the use of violence to defend one’s religion included residence in Helmand, Kandahar, or Kunduz provinces and having only a primary school education. Frequent exposure (hourly or daily) to violent extremist messaging also showed a very strong correlation, especially in Kandahar and Kunduz.

The answer “not at all” to the question of whether the availability of government-provided services would play a role in the decision to join armed nonstate groups was also associated with justifying the use of violence against civilians in defense of religion. This may indicate that religious concerns are conditioning responses, separate from concerns about material conditions or hardships.

Having a grievance against the government was associated with agreeing that the use of violence against civilians to defend one’s religion is justified. This association indicates that grievances may be subjective interpretations of a material situation that are guided by other, intersecting factors. For example, the most commonly cited grievance against the government was corruption. The lack of services was perceived to be an artifact of corruption rather than an isolated complaint, and the corruption is what seems to provoke a stronger reaction from respondents than the lack of services in and of itself.

In retaliation for perceived wrongdoings. The use of violence to retaliate for perceived wrongdoings was not well supported. The few variables that were found to have an association were having a grievance against the government, frequent (hourly or daily) exposure to violent extremist messaging, and answering “not at all” when asked whether the availability of government

services would play a role in the respondent's decision to join an armed group or not.

LACK OF SYMPATHY FOR THE TALIBAN (AND OTHER ARMED NONSTATE GROUPS)

Using regression analysis, the analysis identified a range of variables that were inversely related to support for the Taliban. The regressions used only one question as the proxy for sympathy—What is your opinion of the Taliban?—and applied a binary (“good” or “bad”) valuation to the responses. The most notable finding, in agreement with some existing studies, was that a higher level of educational achievement was associated with lack of sympathy for the Taliban. Those who did not have a grievance against the government were also less likely to have a favorable opinion of the Taliban.

Factors correlating with lack of sympathy for the Taliban included having started or completed university, unemployment or only seasonal employment, inability to spend on nonessential items, and infrequent exposure to violent extremist messaging (“yearly or less” or “never”). Two of these associations—unemployment or seasonal employment and the lack of spending on discretionary items—run counter to some theories of radicalization, which generally view straitened economic circumstances as a driver of mobilization. The results suggest that individuals' own interpretation of their economic circumstances are more important than objective measures of their economic situations, and this correlation may indicate that respondents view the Taliban as responsible for their economic hardships.

Finding central government actors such as the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, and other government agencies helpful in everyday life was associated with having an unfavorable opinion of the Taliban, as was the respondents' stated view that political violence posed a “significant” difficulty in life. Those who responded that lack of access to government services would only “to some extent” be a motivating factor in their decision to join armed nonstate groups were more likely to have

an unfavorable opinion of the Taliban, as were those who did not have a grievance against the government.

An important correlation was found concerning sources of information on Islam. Respondents who primarily listened to preaching by mullahs at a mosque were two times less likely to have a favorable opinion of the Taliban than those who listened to *naat* (religious poetry), read the Quran alone, or talked to a friend about religious obligations. This factor association suggests a useful insight for countering violent extremism (CVE) interventions through narratives on religion provided by credible voices.

SOURCES OF RESILIENCY TO MOBILIZATION TO VIOLENCE

In addition to looking at displaced groups' experience of hardships and difficulties and how these experiences may condition a propensity toward mobilization to violence, the study also explored the strength of social support networks and mode of religious learning as resiliency factors that may protect against radicalization or mobilization to violence by armed nonstate groups. The findings also provided a strong indication of which formal and informal institutions the respondents trusted.

Social support networks. Respondents were asked whom they relied on for support in decision making or to help solve problems in their daily lives. Multiple-choice responses were offered on a scale ranging from “unhelpful” to “very helpful.” A factor analysis was then conducted that grouped the actors based on respondents' answers. The three main groupings produced by this method were (1) armed actors, including powerbrokers or strongmen, the Taliban or other armed nonstate groups, militias, and members of the Afghan Local Police (ALP); (2) family and community, including the household, “immediate family not living in your household,” siblings, extended family members, neighbors, the “local community in which you live,” and community leaders, tribal elders, and imams; and (3) government representatives, including representatives of the Afghan National Police, Afghan National Army, or other government officials.



Sayed Mohammed, whose family has been displaced from their farm and home by fighting, holds his daughter Halima at their shelter in Tirin Kot, Afghanistan, on February 11, 2019. (Photo by Mujib Mashal/New York Times)

The second (family and community) and third (government representatives) groups were the most helpful, and were seen as equally helpful by IDPs and nondisplaced respondents (according to the mean responses). Interviews also highlighted that advice respondents obtained from family members and from imams and community elders was more important than advice from any other actors. Returnees found the third group (government representatives) less helpful than did IDPs and nondisplaced persons, but the mean response indicated that they were still seen as somewhat helpful. This finding may be a manifestation of indifference, a sense of grievance, or lack of expectations on the part of returnees with respect to the government and government representatives. Significantly, least useful as a source of support in their daily lives were the actors in the first group (armed actors); this applied to all three groups of

respondents, with little variation in the mean responses from IDPs, returnees, and nondisplaced persons.

Notable is the distrust of the ALP, which is grouped with other “least trusted” actors, and the perceptions of illegitimacy expressed in some interviews. As one nondisplaced Tajik, a forty-two-year-old shopkeeper, holder of a grade fourteen diploma, and resident of Bagh Sherkat, Kunduz, said:

People are not happy with the ALP. They are made up of nondisplaced [persons] but they create insecurities in the region. They use force and commit theft in the region. . . .The ALP are worse than the Taliban because they don't abide by the law, and, just like the Taliban, the ALP use force and take farmers' harvest by force. They misuse their authority.

All groups of respondents in all provinces found local armed actors to be of only limited help to them in their everyday lives.

The findings disclose far more variability between provinces than between displaced and nondisplaced groups. Family and community were similarly helpful to both displaced and nondisplaced groups, though their relative importance was much greater in Helmand, Kandahar, Herat, and Nangarhar Provinces, possibly indicating either the strength of family and community ties or the lack of trust in other providers. There is also notable variation across provinces in whether respondents found the government to be helpful; this observation may align with political affiliations or with the level of service provision, and with perceptions of corruption and a corresponding confidence in government institutions.

A cross-provincial analysis of how respondents evaluated the overall strength of support networks again revealed strong interprovincial differences. Values were highest for all support groups in Ghazni and Nangarhar, showing a strong degree of support and trust across a range of actors. The lowest values, and therefore the lowest levels of social support and trust, were assigned to Helmand and Kandahar. Notably, in only three provinces did the median values reported by respondents indicate robust support from that group (i.e., the respondent found the actors in the support group to be “very helpful”). Median values for the first group, the armed actors group (which includes the Taliban and other armed groups, such as the ALP), were low (the highest value given by respondents being “a little helpful”) across all provinces and were assigned by both displaced and nondisplaced groups. Surprisingly, median values for central government representatives were fairly high for most provinces, indicating that

these institutions are considered “fairly helpful” to respondents in their everyday lives. However, the range of responses is broad and encompasses low to higher values, indicating respondents were less in agreement on the degree of helpfulness of the government. This finding suggests that locale-specific differences are important and need to be considered in designing CVE interventions that are well targeted.

Religious instruction. Because the narrative of jihad has been used by armed groups to justify the use of violence in defending one’s religion, it was important to look at respondents’ sources for learning about religion. There was great similarity in the favored channels for listening to messages about Islam. Nondisplaced and displaced persons alike reported that their preferred means of instruction was hearing from mullahs preaching at a mosque, followed very closely by reading the Quran by themselves. Displaced persons—IDPs in particular—were more likely than returnees or hosts to report reading the Quran, and both IDPs and returnees were slightly less likely than host community members to listen to the preaching of mullahs at mosques, perhaps as a result of recent arrival in the community and greater isolation.³⁸ A far less favored method for displaced and nondisplaced persons alike was talking with a friend about religious obligations, and the least favored method was listening to *naat*, though returnees favored this method more than the other groups did.

Employment. Another source of resiliency that was noted in the interviews was employment. Some existing commentary and some of the interviewees for this study have suggested that being busy during the day means individuals find their lives purposeful and have less time to talk with others or browse social media and thereby come in contact with violent extremist messaging.

Recommendations



The major findings of this study, that displaced persons—IDPs and returnees—are not per se at greater risk for recruitment to violent extremism or more vulnerable to radicalization than nondisplaced persons, and several associated findings guide these recommendations. These recommendations are intended for Afghanistan’s government, international donors supporting stability operations, and agencies that work with displaced people in policy and program formulation. Targeted support for displaced populations should not be thought of as a stability intervention.

Where displaced persons are vulnerable, it is in the specific areas arising from the conditions of their displacement. Assistance should be targeted toward those Afghan IDPs and returnees who are in particular need of social safety nets and services, regardless of their possible sympathy for armed nonstate groups: their living conditions are often worse than those faced by nondisplaced groups. To put it clearly, there is no reason to target CVE programs based on displacement status alone. There is a need to address mitigable factors that leave displaced Afghans preferring the security, dispute resolution, and opportunities afforded by a nonstate group to the services they receive—or fail to receive—from the government.

The findings of this study did elicit clear distinctions between displaced and nondisplaced persons *along certain lines*. The most important distinction, as noted, is in the living conditions and experiences of IDPs and some returnees. This reality warrants focusing mitigation efforts on areas where material needs are greatest, but with a differentiated approach that recognizes and responds to the needs of different displaced groups. A couple of points can be made here.

First, more recently displaced persons (recent returnees, and in particular recent IDPs) have different experiences and different immediate needs from those who have been in their place of displacement for a long time. Support should prioritize the stabilization of living conditions and the provision of access to critical services such as health care and schooling for children.

Second, if further research does find that some long-time returnees may be particularly vulnerable to radicalization or have already been radicalized, special initiatives to engage with these groups are needed to address the grievances that might have led to an increased likelihood of supporting the Taliban. Long-term returnees are overall less likely to benefit from existing programming by the government or other aid providers, and this research shows they rely less on the support systems and coping mechanisms used by nondisplaced persons.

Locale- and issue-specific programs. Because the research found greater variation between or even within provinces than among the three groups of returnees, IDPs, and nondisplaced persons, assistance programs should also include nearby nondisplaced communities. This is particularly important where the host or nondisplaced community is bearing an increased burden from the presence of displaced populations. This approach should complement locale-specific interventions, especially improvements in governance and sociopolitical situations, and can benefit all groups if designed and delivered with different needs in mind.

Strengthening critical governance functions. Among IDPs and returnees, one of the most frequently cited reasons for sympathizing with the Taliban was the structure of law and dispute resolution services that the

There is no reason to target CVE programs based on displacement status alone. There is a need to address mitigable factors that leave displaced Afghans preferring the security, dispute resolution, and opportunities afforded by nonstate groups.

Taliban provide (this reason was less frequently cited by nondisplaced groups). Therefore, strengthening government institutions that ensure equitable law enforcement and support access to dispute resolution for displaced populations through targeted locale-specific assistance may be critical interventions that would undermine sympathy for the Taliban and mitigate feelings of grievance against the state. Insofar as grievances against the government were often driven by perceptions of corruption, addressing local-level corruption in areas with displaced groups and in agencies and bodies that interface with displaced persons most often—such as provincial, district, and subdistrict police departments; offices that issue *tazkira* (national identity cards); governors' offices; land agencies; local health clinics; and schools—could go a long way toward addressing corruption affecting these groups and building confidence in the government. In addition, timely government services (or government-sponsored services) as a first response for addressing recent returnees' and IDPs' needs can assist in preventing the Taliban from filling this critical need for displaced persons.

Ensuring inclusion in development programs.

Displaced populations are often invisible to development programs that assist with poverty alleviation, the provision of services, and livelihood support within the country. Targeted interventions to increase the access of displaced groups—whether recent arrivals or those living in protracted displacement—to such programs and services should help reduce perceptions of injustice or unfair treatments, as well as address critical needs. Ensuring the inclusion of displaced persons in local decision-making processes involving service delivery and other development interventions is also important both to foster a sense of inclusion and to ensure services and projects are tailored appropriately to their needs.

Addressing exposure to messaging by violent extremist groups.

Violent extremist groups have successfully used both social media and other channels to spread their messages and attract recruits. Respondents in all groups were frequently exposed to messaging by the Taliban; in turn, frequent exposure to Taliban messaging was found to be correlated with sympathy for the Taliban and offered as justification for the use of violence to defend one's religion. Reducing exposure to narratives of violence would help curb the exposure of potentially vulnerable populations (regardless of displacement status). It is important to work with the religious establishment on focused messaging regarding CVE to counteract and decrease the risk of exposure to religious suasion on the part of the Taliban and other groups using violence. It should be noted, however, that the qualitative research indicated that the consumption of such messages appears to be related more to the availability of time than to a genuine interest and seeking out of the content.

Assisting durable returns. Most of the 2.3 to 3 million Afghan refugees currently living outside the country are undocumented. Because recent returns have been either forced (by the host country) or spontaneous, many returnees find themselves experiencing significant difficulties on return. There is a need to provide support for undocumented Afghan refugees and those at risk of spontaneous return to better prepare them for a durable return. Such forms of assistance would be similar to those received by documented and assisted returnees and include the provision of information on safe areas and housing, assistance in planning and successfully executing a physical return, assistance with the documentation needed to access services in Afghanistan once they return, support for retaining or recovering assets they have accumulated in their host countries, financial assistance, and continued support to meet critical needs in the initial phase after return.

Notes

1. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018,” January 2019, www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018; Government of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Organization (CSO), *Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016–17* (Kabul: CSO, 2018). See also International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Return of Undocumented Afghans,” Weekly Situation Report, December 23–29, 2018, https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/default/files/Reports/iom_afghanistan-return_of_undocumented_afghans-_situation_report_23_-_29_dec_2018_003.pdf; and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), “Afghanistan,” www.internal-displacement.org/countries/afghanistan.
2. See IDMC, “Afghanistan”; and World Bank, “Internally Displaced Persons, New Displacement Associated with Conflict and Violence (Number of Cases)—Afghanistan” (database), <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IDP.NWCV?locations=AF&view=chart>.
3. Two of the perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015 reached Europe by falsely claiming to be Syrian asylum seekers; another nine individuals were involved in terror attacks between July 2016 and October 2017 across five countries (David McKeever and Naureen Chowdhury Fink, “Complex Migration, Terrorism, and Violent Extremism Needs Comprehensive Response,” IPI Global Observatory, November 27, 2017, www.theglobalobservatory.org/2017/11/migration-terrorism-violent-extremism-needs-comprehensive-response). Speculation that displaced or migrant persons may pose a greater security and stabilization threat than the general host population is typically based on isolated cases. However, refugee-related terrorist attacks represent only a small fraction of overall terrorist attacks worldwide. An example of this type of reporting is Robin Simcox, “The Asylum-Terror Nexus: How Europe Should Respond,” Heritage Foundation, June 18, 2018, www.heritage.org/terrorism/report/the-asylum-terror-nexus-how-europe-should-respond.
4. Khalid Koser, “Internal Displacement in Afghanistan,” Brookings Institution, November 8, 2017, www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/internal-displacement-in-afghanistan.
5. The definition of refugee is found in Article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (modified by Article 1 of the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees) as any person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” The definition of refugee has since been expanded to include persons fleeing generalized violence (international war, internal armed conflict, foreign aggression or occupation, severe disruption of public order, or massive violations of human rights) in the whole or part of the country of nationality.
6. IOM and UNHCR, “Returns to Afghanistan in 2018,” May 2019, www.reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/returns-afghanistan-2018-joint-iom-unhcr-summary-report-endaripashto.
7. IOM and UNHCR, “Returns to Afghanistan in 2018,” May 2019, www.reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/returns-afghanistan-2018-joint-iom-unhcr-summary-report-endaripashto.
8. Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, “The Forced Return of Afghan Refugees,” Peace Brief no. 199, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), January 2016, www.usip.org/publications/2016/01/forced-return-afghan-refugees-and-implications-stability; Ahmadi and Lakhani, “Returnees: The Afghan Refugee Crisis in 2016,” Peace Brief no. 220, USIP, February 2017, www.usip.org/publications/2017/02/afghan-refugee-crisis-2016.
9. See United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Internal Displacement due to Conflict,” www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps.
10. Alex P. Schmid, “Links between Terrorism and Migration: An Exploration,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, May 2016, www.icct.nl/publication/links-between-terrorism-and-migration-an-exploration.
11. For example, see Soeren Kern, “The Islamization of Belgium and the Netherlands in 2013,” Gatestone Institute, January 13, 2014, www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4129/islamization-belgium-netherlands.
12. Barbara Sude, David Stebbins, and Sarah Weiland, “Lessening the Risk of Refugee Radicalization: Lessons for the Middle East from Past Crises,” Perspective no. 166, Rand Corporation, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE166>.
13. For example, see Marina Eleftheriadou, “Refugee Radicalization/Militarization in the Age of the European Refugee Crisis: A Composite Model,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, September 13, 2018. For one of the few empirical studies on refugee flows and violent extremism, see Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley, “Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism,” *International Interactions* 39, no. 5 (2013): 621–45.

14. World Bank, *Forcibly Displaced: Toward a Development Approach Supporting Refugees, the Internally Displaced, and Their Hosts* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2017).
15. Returning refugees, in limited contexts, are also seen as a threat, but the evidence is highly anecdotal. Some examples are Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, those from Kenya returning to Somalia, and more recently Syrian refugees. For example, Milo Comerford, "Between Refuge and Radicalisation," Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, September 7, 2017, www.nstitute.global/insight/co-existence/between-refuge-and-radicalisation; Sude, Stebbins, and Weiland, "Lessening the Risk."
16. "Spontaneous return" is the official term used by refugee agencies to describe returns that are voluntary but not assisted by national or international agencies. Spontaneous returnees to Afghanistan are typically ill-prepared because the decision to move was made quickly in response to conditions in the host country. See IOM and UNHCR, "Return to Afghanistan in 2017."
17. Muhsin Hasan, "Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of al-Shabab and Somali Youth," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 8 (August 2012); UNHCR, "Recruitment and Use of Children: The Need for Response in Jordan," n.d., <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/42527>.
18. For example, see Khalid Koser, "IDPs, Refugees, Violent Extremism: From Victims to Vectors of Change," Brookings Institution, February 20, 2015, www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/02/20/idps-refugees-and-violent-extremism-from-victims-to-vectors-of-change; Milton, Spencer, and Findley, "Radicalism of the Hopeless"; Sude, Stebbins, and Weiland, "Lessening the Risk."
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21. Mercy Corps, "Youth and Consequences: Unemployment, Injustice and Violence," February 2015, www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/youth-consequences-unemployment-injustice-and-violence.
22. For example, see William J. Parker III and Tara Kangarlou, "Addressing the Refugee Crisis and Terrorism Simultaneously and Immediately," EastWest Institute, June 23, 2017, www.eastwest.ngo/idea/addressing-refugee-crisis-and-terrorism-simultaneously-and-immediately; Marco Funk and Roderick Parkes, "Refugees versus Terrorists," Issue Alert no. 6, European Union Institute for Security Studies, January 29, 2016, www.iss.europa.eu/content/refugees-versus-terrorists.
23. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (2003): 119–44; Anneli Botha, "Assessing the Vulnerability of Kenyan Youths to Radicalisation and Extremism," ISS Paper no. 245, Institute for Security Studies Africa, April 2013, www.files.ethz.ch/isn/164232/Paper245.pdf.
24. Krueger and Maleckova, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism."
25. Kartika Bhatia and Hafez Ghanem, "How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism? Evidence from Eight Arab Countries," Global Economy & Development Working Paper no. 102, Brookings Institution, March 2017, www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/global_20170322_violent-extremism.pdf.
26. Belquis Ahmadi, "Afghan Youth and Extremists: Why Are Extremists' Narratives So Appealing?," Peace Brief no. 188, USIP, August 2015, www.usip.org/publications/2015/08/afghan-youth-and-extremists.
27. On poverty as a risk factor, Eli Berman, Michael Callen, Joseph H. Felter, and Jacob N. Shapiro found a negative relationship between unemployment and localized violence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines ("Do Working Men Rebel? Insurgency and Unemployment in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 4 [2011]). On the correlation between employment and radicalization, see, for example, Stig Jarle Hansen, ed., *Al Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
28. Mohamed Abdel Jelil et al., "Unemployment and Violent Extremism: Evidence from Daesh Foreign Recruits," Policy Research Working Paper no. 8381, World Bank, March 2018, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29561>.
29. Kamaldeep Bhui, Brian Everitt, and Edgar Jones, "Might Depression, Psychosocial Adversity, and Limited Social Assets Explain Vulnerability to and Resistance against Violent Radicalisation?," *PLoS One*, September 24, 2014.
30. Ahmadi, "Afghan Youth and Extremists."
31. Reza Fazli, Casey Johnson, and Peyton Cooke, "Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan," Special Report no. 379, USIP, September 2015, www.usip.org/publications/2015/09/understanding-and-countering-violent-extremism-afghanistan.
32. Survey respondents were asked directly at the end of the survey if they would like to be interviewed, and the interview process was explained to them. It should be noted that this self-selection may result in some biases in the answers, as those most likely to agree are those who have the time to answer questions and may have stronger opinions that they want to share. The field team, however, took care to encourage those who did not seem immediately willing to be interviewed, reassured concerns about anonymity, and made the timing of interviews as convenient as possible for the interviewees.

33. Criteria for selecting provinces and districts to be included in the study were determined through research and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports indicating a sizable population of IDPs and returnees in locales. Other variables that were used to select the provinces included whether the majority of the displaced persons in the province were originally from the province or not; whether the province was predominantly periurban, urban, or rural; the existence of significant extremist activities or groups; the availability of social services for (1) displaced persons and (2) host population; demographic factors, such as median age and types of ethnic group (diversity); economic factors, such as poverty level, land availability, and kinds of livelihood pursued; and anecdotal information or existing research on the radicalization of IDPs or returnees in the province.
34. The snowball sampling method was one of the main methods used to select survey respondents. (Snowball sampling is a non-probabilistic method that may introduce bias.) Because there were three distinct categories of interviewees—returnees, IDPs, and hosts—the snowball method was applied to each group individually. All respondents had to be at least eighteen years old, and consent was required. Consent was obtained sometimes through written agreement and sometimes through oral agreement. To ensure that surveys and interviews were conducted with bona fide IDPs and returnees, respondents were required to present documentation proving that they were in fact IDPs or returnees. Though most respondents were able to present some sort of documentation, others were not. For those lacking documentation, the field team would ask local teachers, doctors, or tribal elders whether the person identified for an interview or survey was an IDP or returnee, to confirm that person’s status informally. Surveyors sometimes worked with local tribal elders, teachers, doctors, and other respected people from the community to help identify survey respondents and interviewees. This was the case mostly in Balkh and Herat provinces. Demographic parameters were set to assist with selection of participants to ensure that qualitative data and insights were collected from respondents who were a representative sample of the demographic and socioeconomic diversity of the survey respondents.
35. Fazli, Johnson, and Cooke, “Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan.”
36. The study did differentiate between religious and secular education.
37. The findings indicated higher levels of sympathy for the Taliban than were reported in Asia Foundation, *A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2018* (San Francisco, CA: Asia Foundation, 2018), www.asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018_Afghan-Survey_fullReport-12.4.18.pdf.
38. It is important to compare the channels cited for learning about Islam with the most common channels cited for acquiring everyday information about politics, events, and so on. Many respondents noted that they most frequently used television and radio, while younger residents noted that they used social media for their “everyday” information.

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A perception shared broadly both within and outside Afghanistan is that displaced persons are vulnerable to radicalization and mobilization to violence. To assess the validity of this perception, this study—based on extensive surveys and interviews across eight Afghan provinces—compared groups of displaced and nondisplaced persons on an array of socio-economic factors assumed to lead to greater vulnerability to radicalization. Counter to the general perception, the study found that the attitudes of displaced and nondisplaced groups toward the Taliban and the use of violence against civilians did not vary greatly, while the attitudes of any one group varied significantly from province to province, underscoring the need for well-targeted, locale-specific interventions to counter recruitment efforts.

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