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Militias: a curse or a cure

A study on factors constraining militia behaviour in North-East Afghanistan

Basir Feda, Kristóf Gosztonyi, Jan Koehler

Research Report

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Abstract

The public and the academic debates about the pros and cons of militias are beset with controversy and tend to ask in general terms whether militias do more good than harm or vice versa. The academic research on militias made significant progress in recent years. However, the conditions under which militias perform better or worse from the perspective of the civilian population are still not well understood. Our paper sets out to explore the factors that contribute to a better or worse performance of militias with regard to civilian wellbeing. We use three waves of quantitative and qualitative survey data from North-East Afghanistan to test four hypotheses derived from our qualitative research. The four hypotheses relate to mechanisms which are expected to influence militia behaviour in the sense of making militias less threatening to the civilian population. Using our survey data, we found that the integration of informal local militias into the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was associated with a less threatening behaviour of the militias and a more positive contribution by them to (local) security – as perceived by respondents. We also found that the inclusion of local elders into the vetting procedure of militias (be they informal or formal) has a positive effect on militia performance. Community cohesion and the quality of communal leadership also showed strong correlations with militia behaviour, but their effect was mostly limited to restraining local armed groups (including the Taliban) and making them less threatening. They had only very limited influence on their perceived security contribution. We used extensive qualitative material to explain and contextualise these findings. The report concludes on a set of practical implications for states and international organisations interested in protecting the civilian population from abuses by militias.

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List of Acronyms

AHRRAO	Afghan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Organisation
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
Arbab	village headman (in this context)
Arbakees	local informal anti-Taliban militias
CDC	Community Development Council
CDD	Community-Driven Development
CLDC	Cluster-Level Development Council
DDA	District Development Assembly
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MoIA	Ministry of Interior Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OSDR	Afghan Organisation for Sustainable Development and Research
PGM	Pro-Government Militia
RC North	Regional Command North
SFB 700	Sonderforschungsbereich 700 (Collaborative Research Center 700)
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
US	United States

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1 Introduction

"Tell the Germans that they should give the *arbakees* uniforms, salaries and make their commanders part of an official police structure. Somebody must be held responsible for what arbakee fighters do. Then, at least, there is an address to turn to if arbakees commit a crime." The bearded and turbaned former commander spoke intensely to the German social anthropologist visiting him in his temporary refuge in Kunduz City. The commander was in his mid-50s, tall and of a strong build with broad sensual lips. He could be ruthless and brutal, but also charming and charismatic. He had spent the better part of his life fighting: first the Soviets, then the communist government in Kabul and later, as a follower of Hizb-e Islami, fighting other factions of the civil war. For a brief period, he even joined the Taliban when they conquered large parts of the North in the late 1990s, but abandoned them – like many other Kunduz-based commanders – when the Taliban regime collapsed amidst the US bombing campaign and the onslaught of Northern Alliance forces in late 2001. Now in his fifties, he was no longer an active commander and engaged instead in development work, holding a prominent position as a respected elder in a multi-layered structure of community development councils, similar to those the World Bank has supported in many other countries of the Global South.

In March 2011, when this meeting took place, the commander was worried about the abuses committed by proliferating anti-Taliban militias, generally referred to as arbakees.[1] He wanted the German social anthropologist – one of the authors of this paper – to convey his message to the leadership of the German contingent of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), then heading Regional Command North (RC North) to which Kunduz Province also belonged. From 2008 onwards the Taliban staged a successful comeback in the North and by 2009 controlled large parts of Kunduz and Baghlan Provinces. Arbakees sprung up as a reaction to the growing Taliban threat. In spite of their Afghan state or international military backing, arbakees essentially remained an informal, though generally pro-government local fighting force. Lacking salaries and clear command structures, arbakee groups soon began taxing the population and fighting each other – often continuing feuds from the time of the civil war. The fear was that their lack of discipline and their abuses against the population would undo the successes they achieved in pushing the Taliban back.

The proliferation of arbakees polarised political and public opinion in Afghanistan. Many in Kabul, including prominent members of Afghan civil society, associated arbakees with the anarchy of the 1980s civil war and vehemently opposed them, but were powerless to prevent their rise. Reportedly, even President Hamid Karzai viewed them critically and only reluctantly agreed to their establishment. Others, mostly from the former Northern Alliance warlord elite and the US military establishment, condoned them and justified their establishment as a cheap and effective tool to halt the advance of the Taliban. The Hizb-e Islami commander sending a message to the German ISAF was not flatly against the establishment of militias to fight the Taliban, but wanted them better regulated and controlled by the state to limit the harm they could do to each other, to civilians and ultimately to the legitimacy of the Afghan state.

[1] Originally the term *arbakee* refers to tribal militias in Eastern Afghanistan (in fact one of the authors of this article also briefly participated in such a militia in his home town in Khost). In order to gain legitimacy by adopting the name of these respected local self-defence forces, anti-Taliban militias in other parts of Afghanistan also came to be referred to as arbakees.

1.1 Militias in the grey and academic literature

The debate in the academic and grey literature about militias resembles the positions noted for the debate in Afghanistan in 2010 about the emergence of arbakees. The public and the academic debates about the pros and cons of militias are beset with controversy and tend to ask in general terms whether militias do more good than harm or vice versa (e.g. Sanford 2003; Schwarz 2007; Abbas et al. 2015; Human Rights Watch 2011; Jones 2012; Gosztonyi et al. 2015). Among the **positive** aspects associated with militias, the literature usually mentions local knowledge and intelligence, which allow better targeting of insurgents (Jones 2012; Clayton et al. 2014; Lyall 2010); that they complement armed forces, providing efficiency and information gains (Mitchell et al. 2014) and that they allow overstretched state security forces to exert rural control (Jones 2012). Militias are usually also cheaper than regular militaries (Goodhand et al. 2014; Donahue et al. 2011) and they reduce coup risks as compared to regular armed forces (Carey et al. 2015).

The **negative** aspects usually associated with militias include human rights violations and general abuses against the population (Goodhand et al. 2014; Jones 2012); Schneckener (2015) speaks in this context of a removal of constraints on violence (*Entgrenzung der Gewalt*). A further frequently levelled criticism is that militias are unwieldy, inefficient and can even be counter-productive (Dube et al. 2015; Williams 2009). Militias also often break free of the control of their principal and become a liability to them (Schneckener 2015). Because of frequent human rights violations and the tendency of militias to act independently of the interests of their principals, militias are also often accused of undermining state authority and legitimacy (Jones 2012; Goodhand et al. 2014). In essence, as Ahram emphasises, this is an exacerbated form of a principal-agent problem (Ahram 2011).

Militias are, however, not always equally ambiguous, that is, they do not always show positive as well as negative characteristics simultaneously and to the same degree. Based on a comparative analysis of 130 insurgencies since World War II, Seth Jones (2012, 11) finds that the negative assessments relating to militias are

> *"gross over-generalizations. Militias do not always undermine state authority, are not always unwieldy, and do not always commit human rights abuses – especially compared to state forces. The reality is less categorical."*

Therefore "the emphasis [...] should be on the quality of regulation" (Jones 2012, 34) and on the conditions under which militias perform better and under which they perform worse. While research on militias has progressed significantly in recent years, the conditions under which militias perform better or worse are still little understood. It is only recently that scholars systematically began to investigate the conditions under which militias perform better, commit fewer abuses against civilians and pose lower risks to states employing them – or at least having to live with them.

Recent studies show that the information gains associated with militias are linked to locally recruited and deployed militias[2] (Clayton et al. 2014) and/or to ethnic militias fighting co-ethnic insurgents (Lyall 2010). With regard to human rights abuses and abuses against the population, Mitchell, Carey and Butler (2014), using data from the Pro-Government Militia (PGM) Database (Carey et al. 2012), found in a cross-country survey that the presence of *informal* militias is associated with a significant increase in torture, disappearances and killings. In contrast, the presence of *formalised* militias has no statistically significant impact on such human rights abuses. In their sub-national study on militias in North-East Afghanistan, Gosztonyi, Koehler and Feda (2015) came to similar conclusions. They found that the integration of unregulated anti-Taliban militias (arbakees) into the Afghan Local Police (ALP) in late 2011 and early

[2] Locally recruited militias – also referred to as "home guards" or "civilian self-defence forces – differ from mobile militias like the Janjaweed who were deployed far from their homes" (Clayton et al. 2014).

2012 has indeed led to an improved performance of these militias in the eyes of the population: fear of militias dropped, while their perceived positive security impact increased when compared to their assessment prior to the establishment of ALP.

Jessica Stanton (2015), also using the PGM Database (Carey et al. 2013), concluded that militias were less likely to target co-ethnics for abuses, that abuses against civilians were much more likely when regular state security forces also committed abuses, and were less likely if they did not. Lastly, she found little evidence of government forces systematically outsourcing abuses against the population to informal militias. It is a frequent assertion in the militia literature that governments deliberately leave certain militias *informal* but task them with abuses against the population so that they can plausibly deny responsibility for their crimes.

Lastly, in a recently published study, Carey and Mitchel attempt a typology of pro-government militias and develop theory-derived expectations regarding the risks associated with the different types of militias to civilian well-being and to regime security (Carey et al. 2017). The authors identify four types of militias: community militias, ethnoreligious militias, political militias and off-duty or parallel forces militias. They further subdivide these militias, based on their degree of formalisation, into informal and semi-official militias, thus arriving at a total of eight militia subtypes. The hypothesised risk profiles of the eight militia subtypes differ significantly with regard to both regime security and the wellbeing of civilians. As an example, they expect militias established on the basis of exclusionary in-group/out-group differentiations (ethnoreligious militias and political militias) to be more violent towards civilians than militias that recruit their members on a less exclusionary basis (e.g. community militias). The authors expect community militias to pose the lowest risks both to civilians and to the state, particularly if they are regulated as semi-official militias.

Our paper fits into this strand of recent research exploring the factors at the sub-national level in North-East Afghanistan that contribute to a better or worse performance of militias with regard to civilian wellbeing. Like the commander who features in our introductory anecdote, we seek to identify mechanisms that make militias less threatening and better harness the protective potential of these fighters as seen by the local population. We identify four factors which we believe have a strong influence on how militias perform with regard to civilian wellbeing: whether or not they instil fear in the population and whether or not they positively contribute to local security as seen by the population. Two of the four factors we identified relate to specific modalities of how militias were set up and how they relate to government security structures, while the remaining two factors concern features of the local community-level governance institutions, in other words, the prevailing conditions under which militias are set up. In the following, we discuss these four factors and formalise them as testable research hypotheses.

1.2 Hypotheses

For the purposes of our paper, we define militias as a particular form of **sub-state armed actor that is sponsored or at least tolerated by the state, but is not under full state control**. In this understanding, the context of statehood is a defining element of militias. Crucially, states willingly or out of weakness tolerate or even support armed actors that are not fully under their control and which thus question the state's monopoly of violence. This ambivalent and often shifting relationship with the state (Jenss 2015)

is the key characteristic of militias, setting them apart from other armed groups such as state security forces, on the one hand, and insurgents, criminal groups or gangs, on the other.[3]

Two dominant types of militias in the narrower research region (North-East Afghanistan) fit this definition in the period under observation (2010-2015):[4] informal arbakees – the anti-Taliban militias that worried the commander featured in our introductory anecdote – and formalised Afghan Local Police (ALP), which were set up from 2011 onwards, largely along the lines demanded by the commander. Our previous research (Gosztonyi et al. 2015) showed for the time period from 2010/11 to 2012 that formal ALPs evoked less fear and were generally perceived as contributing more positively to security than informal arbakees. After 2012, however, the security situation deteriorated significantly and ALP and arbakee militias proliferated further. Moreover, with the withdrawal of ISAF, US special forces, until then the main trainers and sponsors of the ALP, also terminated their direct cooperation with the ALP programme. Would the benefits associated with ALP as compared with informal arbakees persist even under such circumstances? Or are the observed differences between the two militias short-lived, conditioned on a comparatively peaceful setting (as measured during our 2012 survey wave) and on the presence of a militarily and financially powerful national or international sponsor?

For this report, we have an additional survey wave from 2014/15 at our disposal, which was not yet available to us at the time of the publication of our first militia-related paper (ibid.). Our first hypothesis thus examines the persistence of the benefits associated with the formalisation of anti-Taliban local militias as the ALP.

Hypothesis 1: Formal ALPs will perform better than informal arbakees with regard to both dependent variables: (a) ALPs will arouse less fear than arbakees, and (b) their security contribution will be evaluated more positively than that of arbakees.

A key feature of setting up ALP militias was the vetting of their members by Afghan security and intelligence agencies and by local community elders (Goodhand et al. 2014). Communal vetting was, however, applied very inconsistently as several critics of the ALP had pointed out (AIHRC 2012; Human Rights Watch 2011). An initial examination of our qualitative data suggested, however, that wherever communal vetting was applied, local elders reported being able to control local militias (be it arbakees or ALPs). However, in areas where militias were not vetted by the community, interviewed elders felt that they had little or no control over militias. That vetting of potential militia fighters can contribute to a more disciplined militia force is not a new idea. For example, the Mexican government also introduced certain vetting procedures for members of anti-cartel vigilante groups (Felbab-Brown 2016). In Latin American indigenous communities, too, communal assemblies are known to approve or even elect members of local customary police forces (e.g. authors' own interviews on 30 June 2017, San Juan Mazatlán). With our dataset, however, we can test how effective one specific vetting procedure – vetting by community members – actually is. Our second hypothesis is thus:

Hypothesis 2: Communities that were involved in the vetting of local militias will exert more control over local militias, resulting in (a) less abusive behaviour and (b) a more positive contribution to security by these militias as perceived by respondents.

[3] Without this reference to statehood, e.g. in the context of the stateless anarchy of the Afghan civil war in the 1990s, it makes no sense to speak of militias. The conflict parties, the various Mujahedin *tanzims* (groups), were just armed factions fighting each other in ever-changing coalitions.

[4] There were of course official and unofficial attempts to set up militias. For an overview of the different programmes, see e.g. Goodhand et al. (2014) and Lefèvre (2010).

Turning to features of local governance that might influence militia performance, we start from the observation made by Oliver Kaplan (2013) and Kaplan and Nussio (2015) in Columbia that cohesive indigenous communities can influence the behaviour of outside armed actors. The research region, North-East Afghanistan, is also home to often strong and cohesive local communities. We proxy the cohesion of local communities by using three questions from our quantitative survey, which we believe comprehensively assess different aspects of a community's capacity for collective action and thus for cohesion. The first question asks respondents to assess how widespread participation in communal works (referred to as *hashar* in Afghanistan and most of Central Asia) is in their community. Another question asks respondents to assess their community's own contribution to development, while the last question asks respondents to assess their community's contribution to their own security. We thus formulate our third hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 3: A more cohesive village community will exert stronger control over local militias, resulting in (a) less abusive behaviour and (b) a more positive contribution to security by these militias.

Since the already quoted findings of Kaplan and Kaplan and Nussio (ibid.) suggest that community features influence the behaviour not only of pro-government militias but of armed actors in general, we include an additional hypothesis relating to insurgents:

Hypothesis 3a: A cohesive village community will be able to restrain the Taliban, resulting in less abusive behaviour by the Taliban vis-à-vis the local population.

Finally, our past research (Gosztonyi et al. 2016) suggests that the cohesion of local communities is not the only factor determining a community's capacity for collective action. We found that local communities with a strong leadership (as proxied by the self-assessment of the elected leadership of community development councils – CDCs) performed better on a number of local governance measures than communities with a weaker or less active leadership. Our results fit well with the existing literature on the benefits of community-driven development (CDD) structures (see e.g. the meta-evaluation by Wong [2012]) to which the CDC structure also belongs. In fact, it seems that the cohesion of communities and the strength of their leadership represent different dimensions of a community's capacity to solve problems of collective importance. This justifies treating communal leadership as a separate variable from communal cohesion that might impose restraint on militias (and possible other armed actors), as expressed in *Hypotheses 3* and *3a* above. Our fourth and last hypthesis is thus:

Hypothesis 4: A strong and effective communal leadership will exert more control over local militias, resulting in (a) less abusive behaviour and (b) a more positive contribution to security by these militias.

In line with the observations of Kaplan (2013) and Kaplan and Nussio (2015), we will also explore a strong communal leadership's influence on insurgents:

Hypothesis 4a: A strong and effective communal leadership will be able to restrain the Taliban, resulting in less abusive behaviour by the Taliban vis-à-vis the local population.

With these four main hypotheses, we believe that we rather comprehensively investigate local factors that contribute to better or worse performance of local militias with regard to abuses against the (civilian)

population (proxied through fear of different militia types) and their capacity to provide protection locally (proxied through the perceived positive contribution of different militia types to security). We consolidate our hypotheses in the following model:

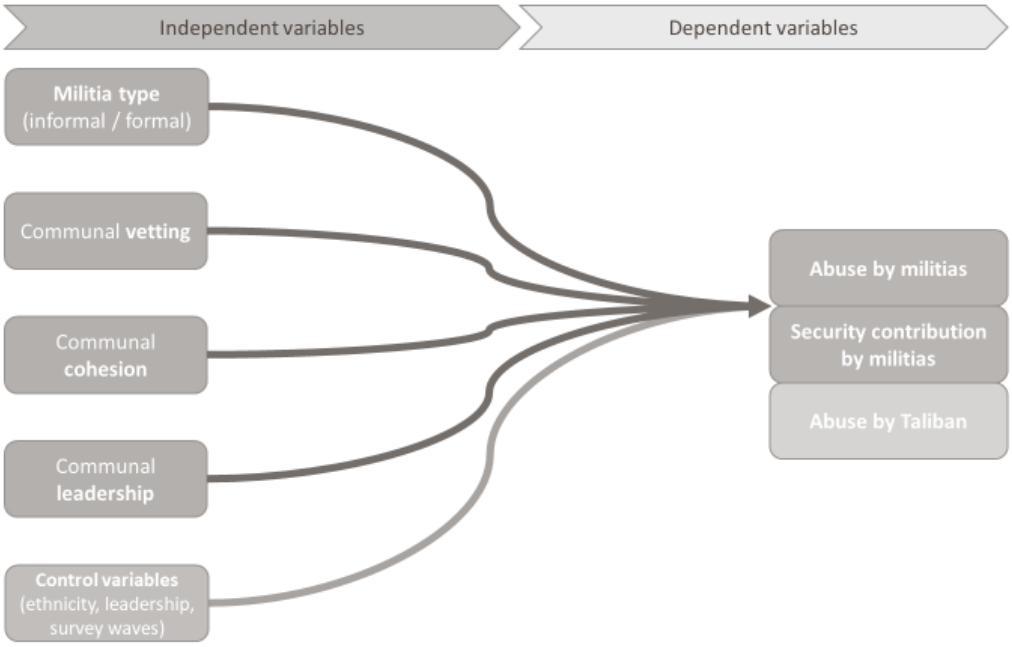

Figure 1: *Impact model derived from our main hypotheses*

In addition to the four main hypotheses outlined above, we will include a number of further explanatory variables in our models. These variables serve as theoretically relevant controls to ensure that potential relationships between the key dependent (respondent) and independent (explanatory) variables remain robust. These control variables include:

Ethnicity: Ethnicity plays a key role in the insurgency. The main Taliban movement and the regional insurgency in Kunduz and Baghlan remain overwhelmingly Pashtun – despite efforts by the Quetta-based Taliban leadership to reach out to non-Pashtun ethnic groups. However, around 2012, a local Tajik Mujahedin insurgency gathered pace in Eastern Badakhshan and allied itself with the Taliban. Thus, from 2012, there were two epicentres of the insurgency in the research region: a mainly Pashtun insurgency in Kunduz and Baghlan that formed part of the core Taliban movement, and a Tajik Taliban affiliate in Eastern Badakhshan. Whereas the Taliban were mostly Pashtun in Kunduz and Baghlan[5] and mostly Tajik in Badakhshan, the anti-Taliban militias throughout the region were mostly non-Pashtun ethnics (with exceptions in Baghlan-i Jadid, Imam Sahib and Aliabad). This control variable thus takes the ethnic factor in armed group membership into account.

- **(Subjective) assessment of district security by respondents (district security rating):** During past research (Koehler et al. 2015), we observed that this survey question, i.e. the subjective assessment of district security, closely correlates with security incident counts in a district. The indicator is thus a control for the general security situation in a district.

[5] It should be noted that in Takhar (also one of our survey provinces), the Pashtun dominance of the insurgency was less pronounced. In some districts, non-Pashtuns dominated the insurgency, e.g. in Khwaja Ghar District located in Northern Takhar, where insurgent groups were recruited among local Uzbeks.

- **Perceived most powerful person in a community apart from the head of the (CDC) shura:** Village-level governance can take different forms in the research region. As the section describing the research region will show, Community Development Councils (CDCs) have emerged as the most dominant village-level governance institutions in recent years. Other actors, however, can also play a key role in village-level governance. With the emergence of anti-Taliban militias, local commanders regained power in some communities, whereas in others, Taliban representatives came to the fore following insurgent victories. In yet other communities, traditional village authorities dominate, such as elders, mullahs, *arbabs* (state-appointed village headmen) or *sayeds* (descendants of the Prophet).
- **Fixed-time effects** control for context-specific changes over time from 2010-2015. This introduces more robustness into our statistical models by considering changes over time.

We will only briefly report results regarding these additional explanatory (independent) variables, concentrating instead on results regarding our four main (and two auxiliary) hypotheses.

1.3 The dataset

We analyse these hypotheses using different sets of quantitative and qualitative data that the project team has gathered since it first started conducting research in North-East Afghanistan in 2003. In particular, we use three sets of data.

- **Qualitative and quantitative survey data:** Since 2010, a research team led by Jan Koehler has conducted three waves of mixed-method research in North-East Afghanistan (Wave 1 in 2010/11, Wave 2 in 2012 and Wave 3 in 2014/15). The research extends to 25 districts in four provinces: Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan (see *Figure 2*, 11*)*. The quantitative component encompasses a total of more than 15,000 survey interviews for the three waves. The qualitative component comprises more than 1,000 guideline interviews conducted in two waves. Among other questions, the qualitative and quantitative component also asks about respondents' relations with militias and other relevant armed actors, including the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Taliban.
- **Extensive qualitative interviews at the community level:** In addition to the above-mentioned dataset, in 2012/13 we conducted a series of in-depth background interviews with key informants at the village cluster level in the 25 districts. The interview partners/key informants include three categories of respondents: (a) representatives of what we term the "traditional elite" such as religious leaders or former Jihadi commanders (fighters against the former Soviet Union and the communist state it was backing in Afghanistan during the 1980s), (b) representatives of the village "intelligentsia" (e.g. teachers, agricultural extension workers), and (c) representatives of the "new elite" (mostly members of the recently established CDCs). The interviews explicitly also addressed the security situation, insurgents and militias. A full rerun of this qualitative survey was carried out in 2015/16. Both waves of transcribed interviews were processed and coded in NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software.

1.4 Structure of the paper

In Section 2, we will present the context by discussing the research area (North-East Afghanistan), the emergence and prevalence of different types of militias, and features of sub-national communal-level governance in this region. Section 3 will present our results, focusing first on the statistical analysis of our four hypotheses and turning then to the explanation of the results of this analysis in light of our qualitative data. Lastly, we also examine a possible case of reverse causality regarding Hypothesis 4. Is there indeed a causal link between a more functional communal leadership and less fear of militias or is it violence that determines both the strength of communal leadership (as proxied through CDC functionality) and the fear of militias? In other words, do communities have strong leadership only where there is less violence and therefore also less fear of militias, or can functional CDCs reduce fear of militias *in spite* of high levels of violence? Finally, in Section 4 we will summarises our results, discuss possible implications of our findings for conflict-affected countries and outline areas for further research.

2 The context

2.1 North-East Afghanistan

Our research focuses on North-East Afghanistan, specifically on the provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan. Our analysis relies mainly on data collected for the period from 2010 to 2015. This section provides a brief introduction to the study area and period (see *Figure 2*, 11).

The study area is home to a large number of ethnic groups, most importantly Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and Pashtuns. In terms of religious composition, the area is majority Sunni, with Shia and Ismaili minorities. In the aftermath of the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, several of the main Mujahedin factions retained a strong presence in the north. This period of civil war was characterised by the arbitrary rule of local commanders, with extortion, murder and rape being common against the backdrop of constant infighting between the various factions and sub-factions. This was the anarchy that the Taliban movement vowed to end (Linschoten et al. 2010; Rashid 2000).

While *Pax Talibana* was initially welcomed in the south, the message was less convincing in the ethnically mixed north. As a mostly ethnic Pashtun movement itself, the Taliban found support among northern Pashtuns, but were overwhelmingly resisted by the other non-Pashtun ethnic groups who joined forces in what came to be known as the Northern Alliance to resist the onslaught of the Taliban (Rubin 2002). The events of 9/11 and the subsequent US invasion changed the defining fault lines of the conflict. With US help, the Northern Alliance swiftly recaptured the north and went on to push out the Taliban from the rest of the country. An initial period of increasing peace and stability followed the fall of the Taliban.

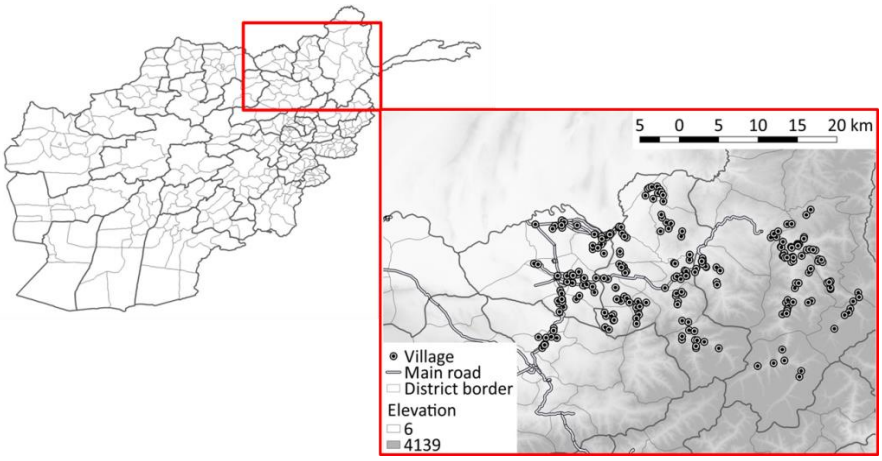

Figure 2: *The geographic area under investigation*

In the following, we will first describe how a renewed escalation led to the emergence of two different types of militias in the North-East, one informal, the other formalised and what characterises these two different forms of militias (Gosztonyi et al. 2015). Subsequently, we will discuss sub-national governance in the North-East, concentrating in particular on the village level. Here we will focus on communal leadership structures and communal cohesion, which we consider as two distinct features of communities.

2.2 The history of militias in the research region

After a few peaceful years following the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, the insurgency made a comeback by 2008/2009 in two provinces of North-East Afghanistan: Kunduz and Baghlan. Both provinces are strategically important and have significant Pashtun populations. The Taliban, being a largely Pashtun movement, infiltrated these provinces by using ethnic networks. The Taliban offensive of 2008/2009 was further facilitated by a power and security vacuum in the North-East. By this time, the militias of the anti-Soviet Jihad and the subsequent civil war were largely disarmed and demobilised, while the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) had not yet been effectively built up and were thus not yet capable of offering serious resistance to the onslaught. Moreover, Germany, the main foreign troop contributor in the North-East, was not willing or able to engage in serious combat with determined insurgents (Koehler 2014, 70).

The confluence of these factors resulted by mid-2009 in a near collapse of government control in Kunduz and Baghlan. At this point in time, neither the central government in Kabul nor international military forces (most importantly the US) could offer relief. Facing impending collapse, provincial-level Afghan elites turned to dormant Jihadi networks to fight the Taliban (e.g. Goodhand/Hakimi 2014, 25-37; Human Rights Watch 2011, 27; Koehler, Jan/Gosztonyi, Kristof 2014). The degree to which this process was approved or even directed by Kabul is unclear. The task of arming and re-activating former Jihadi groups to fight the Taliban fell to the provincial branches of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Typically, they relied on networks of mostly non-Pashtun Jihadi commanders to mobilise their fighters. On occasion, however, former insurgents were also admitted as arbakees. The arbakees, together with the thinly spread ANSF and an increasingly assertive German ISAF contingent, succeeded in holding out against the insurgents until the arrival of the first US surge troops

in early 2010. By mid-2010, international and national pro-government forces were on the offensive and by 2012 managed to significantly push back the insurgents and pacify the region. Subsequently, as the withdrawal of international troops progressed, security once again began to deteriorate. In particular, 2015 saw a dramatic escalation of violence in large parts of the North-East, reaching or even surpassing the intensity of violence in 2010.

This renewed escalation spread from the irrigated plains of Kunduz and Baghlan to adjacent parts of Takhar Province and to some remote and mountainous districts in Badakhshan, resulting in the hurried setting up of local militias in the affected districts. The gradual increase over the years in the number of "militia" districts clearly illustrates this escalation. During the first survey wave (2010/11), we identified militias in only seven of our 25 survey districts. During our third survey wave (2014 until spring 2015), however, we noted militias in 12 of the 25 districts. By the end of 2015, when we conducted our qualitative cluster-level interviews, militias were present in a further three districts, bringing the total to 15 militia districts as compared to only 10 survey districts remaining without militias.

Our data captures all three phases of conflict escalation and militia establishment. The first wave (conducted in 2010/11) coincides with the initial escalation and setting up of militias (informal arbakees). The second wave (conducted in 2012) took place at a time of temporary stabilisation and the partial formalisation of militias within the framework of the Afghan Local Police (ALP). Lastly, the third wave of the survey (conducted in 2014/15) occurred at a time of foreign troop withdrawal, concurrent escalation of the insurgency and a renewed proliferation of formal and informal militias throughout the research area.

Having described the overall setting and the emergence of militias in the research region, we now turn to the description of the two types of militias we have already touched upon: the informal arbakees and the formal ALP.

2.2.1 Arbakees

The arbakee fighting force that first emerged in 2009/10 to resist the insurgents was a typical militia force. It was local, with fighters pledging allegiance to their commanders who in turn belonged to parties and networks going back to the anti-Soviet Jihad and the subsequent civil war. Their district and provincial state principals had often only tentative control over the groups of fighters they had helped to set up. Given the *ad hoc* setup, tentative formalisation and lack of regular salary, arbakees soon came to be known for abuses, taxation of the population and infighting (Gosztonyi/Koehler 2010, 74-75; Human Rights Watch 2011, 27-42).[6] Past research by this team of authors found that arbakee militias evoked significantly more fear in districts and villages where militias had been introduced than the ALP did (Gosztonyi et al. 2015). Moreover, within "militia districts" we found no meaningful difference in the opinions of respondents living in villages with or without arbakees. We interpreted this result as a lack of local social control restraining the behaviour of arbakees. Had social control restrained arbakees, we would have found that arbakees were less feared in their home villages than in neighbouring villages of the same districts. This observation points to a fundamental problem of importing a specific organisational form of militias (i.e. temporary and issue-related tribal executive in Southern and Eastern

[6] In early 2011, one of the authors was involved in facilitating a meeting between an influential former commander and community leader from Aliabad and German military officers in Kunduz on militia-related abuses and insecurity. The community leader lobbied for the formalisation of the militias under the command and authority of the district chief of police. When the German officers highlighted their distrust in the performance of the police in that district, the community leader acknowledged the problems. He replied, however, that despite the existing problems, under a formalised arrangement, communities would at least have a clearly designated person responsible for the militias to whom they could turn with their complaints and suggestions.

Afghanistan) to local societies that lack the institutional foundation of that organisation (i.e. tribal social control non-existent in Northern Afghanistan).[7]

2.2.2 ALP

The emergence of informal arbakee militias was eyed with mistrust by President Hamid Karzai and large parts of the Kabul elite (Goodhand et al. 2014, 14), while other elite factions and the US military establishment reportedly supported it (Jones 2012, 31). The formalisation of arbakees as ALP and their subordination to the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) was a compromise between these opposing views on how to ensure local security. The ALP was conceived of as a local "self-defence force" ensuring the security of communities where they had been set up and from where its members were recruited. In contrast to arbakees, members of the ALP were supposed to be vetted by local elders and Afghan government agencies, although, as our qualitative interviews show, the involvement of local elders was not always adhered to. Approved ALP members received arms, uniforms, training and salaries, and were integrated into MoIA structures, with ALP commanders reporting to the district chiefs of ANP. In spite of the implementation of the ALP programme, arbakees did not completely disappear. In many districts, ALP and arbakees continued to coexist side by side and in one district, Khanabad, the ALP programme was never implemented.

The establishment of ALP did not eliminate all human rights abuses and infighting between militias, and there is an ongoing debate whether there is any difference between the performance of arbakees and ALP. A number of authors and institutions are highly critical of ALP (AIHRC 2012, 20-36; Human Rights Watch 2011, 3-4), while a few reports found that "many authorities and communities [...] considered the deployment of ALP to be a more desirable alternative for provision of security than armed groups" [i.e. arbakees] (UNAMA 2014, 50). Our already quoted research showed that ALP evoked significantly less fear among respondents than arbakees, suggesting that they were less likely to abuse their power and commit crimes against civilians. We also noted a local social control effect regarding ALP. Within "ALP districts", villages with ALP felt minimally less fear of ALP than in non-ALP villages. However, compared to villages without ALP, they strongly felt that ALP contributed positively to security. We found no similar effects for arbakees within a village.

2.3 Sub-national governance and the development council structure

Sub-national governance in the North-East is highly complex, combining government institutions and influential civil society organisations. These different levels and forms of governance sometimes coexist, sometimes complement each other, and sometimes compete. This section provides a brief introduction to some crucial elements of the local system of governance in the study region, focusing in particular on the village level.

[7] In an interview with one of the authors in Kabul on 7 October 2013, Hanif Atmar, former Minister of Interior and Security Advisor to President Karzai, explained that – based on the specific Afghan social setting – he had been very much in favour of decentralised local community militias and against placing them under higher district-level command. He explained this in terms of decentralised tribal structures and his opposition to militias integrated under former Jihadi commanders (not mentioning the mostly non-Pashtun commanders of the former Northern Alliance by name).

In the period under investigation, there were 34 provinces in Afghanistan, each of which was headed by a provincial governor (*wali*) appointed by a government agency directly responsible to President Karzai. Provinces are subdivided into districts, the lowest functioning tier of constitutionally recognised state administration in Afghanistan. The administrative setup of districts closely resembles that of provinces. Districts are headed by the district manager (the *wolliswol*), a political appointee. Districts also have their own police department, prosecutor and district court, as well as departments of the line ministries such as education, health and agriculture.

2.3.1 Communal leadership by the CDC structure

The next unit below the level of the district is the village. As administrative units, defined by government policy papers, villages are not functional (Lamb 2012); instead, the governance vacuum at this level is filled by more or less formalised local institutions, most importantly Community Development Councils (CDCs) or traditional village shuras (councils). Some government and international officials see CDCs as mainly donor-driven bodies focusing solely on development, with little to no effective or positive governance function (cf. Nijat et al. 2016).

While this may be true of some parts of Afghanistan, in the research region CDCs emerged as the most important village-level governance institution. As the results of a five-wave panel study in North-East Afghanistan led by one of the authors, Jan Koehler,[8] show (see *Figure 3* below), the head of the (CDC) shura (council) substantially gained in perceived importance from 2007-15. By the time of the most recent survey in 2015, some 61% of respondents viewed him as the most powerful person in the village. Concurrent with the increase in importance of the head of (CDC) shura, there was a drop in the perceived importance of the main alternative contender for authority in the villages: elders. Moreover, despite a dramatic escalation in fighting from 2009 onwards, a further contender for authority in the village, former Jihadi commanders (*qomandans*), only minimally gained in importance.

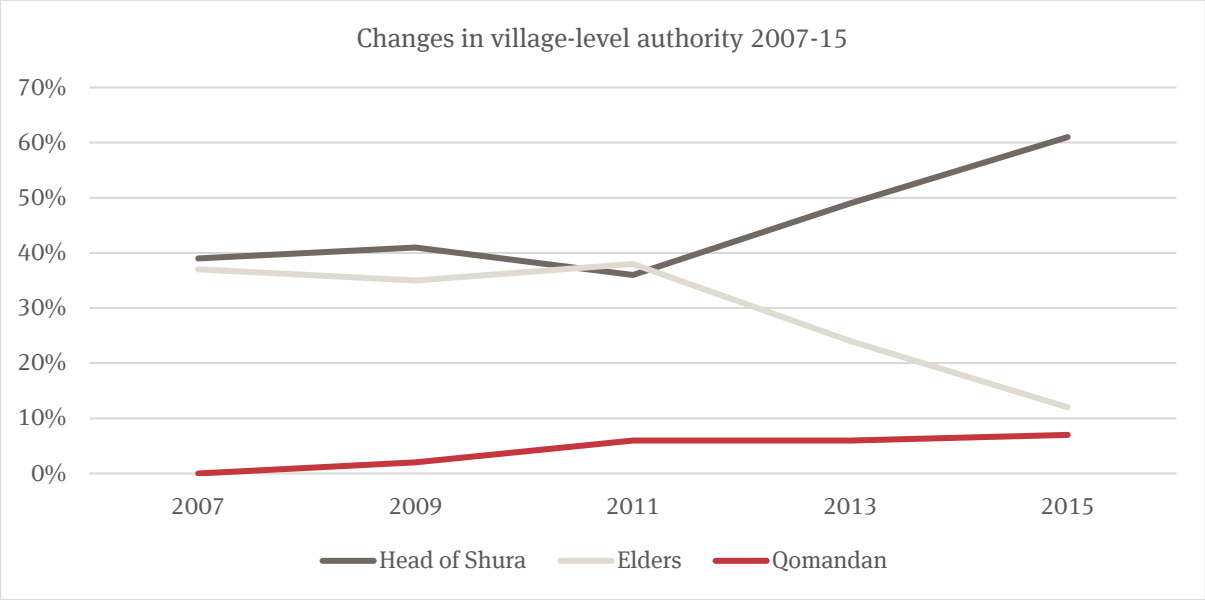

Figure 3: *Respondent perceptions regarding the most powerful person in the village. Since the mid-2000s, the head of the shura (CDC) has occupied a prominent position as an important village-level authority. Source: Five successive surveys conducted by Jan Koehler in four districts of Kunduz and Takhar provinces;*

[8] With the Afghan Organisation for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR), which implemented the surveys for SFB 700 C9 "Governance".

the survey was conducted every two years in the same villages, but did not interview the same respondents (instead, a representative random selection of households was interviewed). It is thus not a classic panel survey (Freie Universität Berlin, SFB 700 C9).[9]

CDCs are the result of a recent institutional innovation and fit into the broader category of community-driven development (CDD). They were established as part of the World Bank-funded National Solidarity Programme (NSP). CDCs represent communities comprising between 25 and 300 families.[10] The CDC representatives are elected by secret ballot by all male *and* female members of their respective communities. Unlike the nationwide elections for the presidency, *Wolesi Jirga*, or provincial councils, which are held on the same day throughout the entire country, CDC elections are a lengthy individual process preceded by extensive community mobilisation,[11] which is organised by an NGO "facilitating partner" (FP) contracted by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) to facilitate the implementation of the NSP in a given district. As a result of this extensive community involvement, CDC elections are not simultaneously held on the same day in a district, but consecutively.

The core function of CDCs is prioritising, facilitating, monitoring and partly implementing development projects in their communities. Early on, however, CDCs were intended to serve an additional goal: namely to become "effective institutions for local governance and social-economic development" (MRRD 2012, 11). Thus, in addition to their development-related tasks, CDCs resolve conflicts, organise *hashar* (communal work), and represent the community to the outside world (MRRD 2012; Nixon 2008; Koehler et al. 2011).

Past research by the authors of this report (Gosztonyi et al. 2016) investigated how the quality of leadership provided by CDCs influenced local governance perceptions. More specifically, we examined whether more active and functional CDCs were able to provide better local governance than less active and less functional ones. In particular, we found that an increase in CDC activity was associated with a very strong (and highly significant) increase in considering the head of the (CDC) shura as the most powerful person in the village. Furthermore, an increase in the activity of the CDC was found to be associated with an increase in perceiving CDC-provided conflict resolution as fair and in believing that the decisions of the CDC *shura* were in the public interest. In the present study on norms of constraints, we elaborate on these findings, assuming that more functional and active CDCs will more likely be able to restrain militias within the boundaries of their villages.

2.3.2 Communal cohesion

Community-level social cohesion refers to the capacity of communities to make collective decisions and perform collective action. "This form of social cohesion is often primarily for material welfare and public goods provision, especially in developing countries" (Gilligan et al. 2014, 605). Throughout Afghanistan, communities frequently engage in joint activities to build or maintain irrigation canals, roads and mosques, and make required community contributions to (usually foreign-funded) development works or collective violence (e.g. to fight for land, pastures, defend the community's honour, or to keep criminals,

[9] We thank the DFG-funded SFB 700 700 C9 for allowing us to use the data. The survey was conducted by OSDR under the supervision of one of the authors, Jan Koehler. This dataset is different from the one used in this study to investigate the impact of the *shura* structure on governance perceptions and described in Section 2.3 below. See also Boehnke et al. (2015).

[10] According to the NSP, a community must have at least 25 families to be eligible for a block grant. NSP does not allow for the establishment of CDCs in rural settlements or villages with less than 25 families. Given that the block grant ceiling per community is 3 million Afs, large communities with more than 300 families have the tendency to try to split into smaller communities to obtain more block grants. See MRRD (2012).

[11] CDCs can choose between two different methods of running their elections: the cluster and community-wide methods (MRRD, "National Solidarity Programme Phase Three," 29).

insurgents or the state out of the community). Some communities are significantly more successful in initiating collective action aimed at achieving common goals, while others are weaker at attaining such unity. Our assumption is that communities with stronger cohesion will also be more likely to rein in local militias or insurgents.

3 Results

Following the description of the context, in this section we turn to the presentation of our results. We will begin with our statistical analysis and will then turn to our qualitative data to interpret and explain our results.

3.1 Regression analysis: leadership, social cohesion, vetting and militia types

3.1.1 Methodology and description of variables

Turning to our statistical analysis, we developed five dependent variables as indicators and five related statistical models to test the relevant hypotheses and research questions. All five models explain dependent variables that are ordinal (i.e. they are based on a Likert-type scale survey question).[12] We use Ordered Logistic Regression in order to model the relationship between the dependent variables and the independent/explanatory variables. The inclusion of each independent variable in the equations is theoretically driven on the basis of the overall impact model (see *Figure 1*, 8).

We present regression outputs in the form of odds ratios since we believe the interpretation of the results is more intuitive compared to simple coefficients associated with a standard Ordered Logistic Regression output. In the following, we will discuss our dependent and then our independent variables.

Dependent variables

Derived from our hypotheses, we use two sets of variables to assess the impact of hypothesised communal mechanisms of restraint. One relates to fear of non-state armed actors, the other to the perceived security contribution of two types of armed actors (formal and informal militias). Our fear-related dependent variables are:

- **Fear of Arbakees** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how afraid they are of the arbakees.
- **Fear of Afghan Local Police (ALP)** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how afraid they are of the ALP.

[12] Likert-type scales are a widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research. A typical five-scale Likert-type survey question might offer respondents the following options: (1) fully agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) fully disagree.

- **Fear of Taliban** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how afraid they are of the Taliban.

We consider these fear-related questions as proxies for human rights abuses by militias or the Taliban. This indicator will likely not capture all violations of the laws of war, such as the summary execution of prisoners of war. It is, however, very likely an accurate indicator of abuses against the civilian population: extortion, theft, destruction of property, harsh punishments, sexual violence, beatings, public humiliations, murder and torture.

Our second set of dependent variables relates to security contributions by two types of militias:

- **Security contribution by Arbakees** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how they assess the contribution of arbakees to security changes in their districts.
- **Security contribution by ALP** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how they assess the contribution of ALP to security changes in their districts.

We consider these dependent variables as proxies for the locally perceived military effectiveness of militias and their capacity to protect the local population against insurgents, but occasionally also against criminals or uncontrolled militias from the outside. This indicator only relates to informal and formal militias (arbakees and ALP), as we have not asked this same question about the Taliban.

Independent variables

We subdivide our main independent variables according to our hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 investigates the effect of the formalisation of militias on the perception of these militias. We investigated the hypothesis by coding for different levels of community exposure to different types of militias. The resulting variable is constructed as follows:

- **Presence of local militia and national security forces***:* This variable relates to the permanent presence of different armed actors (militias, the Taliban or official Afghan National Security Forces) within a survey community. Our previous research has shown that the presence or absence of any of these actors can strongly influence security perceptions (be it fear or perceived security contribution by different armed actors). It is a five-category variable constructed on the basis of data from the village profiles. Each category indicates the presence of one type of formal/informal local militia or other armed groups as well as national security forces at the village level. This includes the presence of arbakees, ALP, the Afghan National Police (ANP) or Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), the Taliban and of a combined presence of arbakees *and* ALP in the village. A residual category of villages is coded as "0" for having neither form of armed actors within its boundaries.

Hypothesis 2 investigates whether more comprehensively implemented communal vetting empowered communities to more effectively control the behaviour of local militias. This hypothesis was derived from the preliminary analysis of our qualitative interviews, in which a number of interviewees emphasised the positive impact of communal vetting. Contrary to the self-assessed CDC functionality (see Hypothesis 4 below), for which we have data covering all survey communities, we do not have systematic village- or cluster-level data on communal vetting (i.e. whether elders in a survey community were involved in vetting militia recruits or not). That is, we cannot identify with certainty which of our survey communities had vetted its militia fighters and which had not. While analysing our qualitative interviews, we noted, however, that some Afghan districts had rather systematically involved communities in the vetting procedure, while others had not. Based on this observation, we built our next independent variable as follows:

- **Districts categorised by the quality of local militia vetting** is a district grouping variable which divides the full range of districts into four distinct categories, including districts where vetting of local militia groups (formal/informal) is very good, medium or (very) poor as well as districts that do not have local militia groups of any kind. The indicator was based on the 2015 series of qualitative interviews (see Section 1.3.). In this series of qualitative interviews, we explicitly asked about elders' participation in militia vetting. The three categories of militia vetting (good, medium, poor) were built by calculating the percentage of respondents who participated in or were aware of militia vetting in their district, versus those who explicitly stated that communities were not involved in the vetting of militias in their area (village or village cluster). The fourth residual category is composed of districts without militias.

Hypothesis 3 assumes that a more cohesive village community will exert stronger control over militias and will also be able to restrain the Taliban. According to Fearon et al. (2009, 288), the standard approach to measuring social cohesion involves surveying households to assess levels of trust, patterns of community activity, and the extent of associational life. We follow a similar approach and proxy communal cohesion via three indicators derived from survey questions:

- **Participation in hashar** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question asking respondents how they rate compliance with hashar (or similar to hashar, any other community-level collective obligation system/institution) in their communities. Responses ranged from full participation of the whole community to "only a few households participate".
- **Community's own contribution to development** is the product of combining seven survey questions that present respondents with a choice of Likert-type scaling to measure their own contribution to seven different development sectors (drinking water, quality of agricultural products, quality of roads, employment generation, access to electricity, improving quality of and access to medical services, and quality of schooling). We generated the variable using *Polychoric Principal Component Analysis* to reduce the seven different variables into one. Scores are derived on the basis of one rotated factor that accounts for 70% of the variation in the data.
- **Community's own contribution to security** is a three-category Likert-type scale survey question that asks respondents how they assess their own (community's) contribution to security changes in their districts.

Lastly, **Hypothesis 4** investigates the relationship between a "strong and effective communal leadership" and fear of militias or the Taliban. We proxy communal leadership via our coded indicator for CDC functionality. As discussed above, CDCs have emerged as the main village-level governance institutions in the survey region. Our past research has shown more active and functional CDCs to be associated with more positive perceptions of local governance outcomes (as compared to less active CDCs, which are associated with less positive/negative governance outcomes). The variable is constructed as follows:

- **CDC functionality** is originally a four-category variable constructed on the basis of interviews conducted with key village-level informants (head or other members of the CDC). The informants were asked to (self)-assess the degree to which they believe their CDCs were gaining/losing influencing or becoming more active/less active/functional/dysfunctional. We believe that the functionality and activity of a CDC (as self-assessed by the leadership of a CDC) is a valid proxy for communal leadership. Its benefit is that it relates to the entire community of a CDC. Self-assessments were coded on a four-category Likert-type scale ranging from fully active and gaining influence (1) to dysfunctional/defunct (4). In the regression analysis, the fourth and third categories have been collapsed due to very low count on the highest (most dysfunctional) category.

As an additional proxy for estimating communal leadership, we use the "head of the (CDC) shura" being perceived as the most powerful person in a community.

- **Head of (CDC) shura most powerful in village.** The indicator is derived from a single-choice survey question that asks respondents to indicate who is the most powerful person in their village. Respondents were offered a list of different village-level actors, such as *khan* (large landowner), a mullah, a (former) Jihadi commander or a Taliban representative, from which they had to select one actor whom they considered the most powerful. While this indicator more directly addresses the question of communal leadership, it represents individual assessments, as opposed to the previous indicator which relates to the whole community covered by a CDC.

As mentioned in *S*ection 1.2. above, in addition to our main independent variables related to our key hypotheses, we also included additional explanatory variables, which we believed could have an influence on our dependent variables. These variables are listed in brief below:

- **Ethnicity** is a survey-based question asking respondents to identify themselves with a given ethnic group. Response options include Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen, Aymaq and other. This indicator is relevant as both the insurgents and the anti-Taliban militias have clear ethnic shadings. Insurgents in the west of the research region tend to be Pashtun, while in the east they tend to be Tajik. Anti-Taliban militias tend to be non-Pashtun throughout the research region. The ethnic bias inherent in the composition of the different non-state armed groups can be expected to have an influence on how respondents from a certain ethnic group will view the different types of armed actors.
- **District security rating** is also a survey-based question asking respondents to assess the security of their district. Responses options ranged from "very secure", "rather secure" and "rather insecure" to "not secure at all".
- **Perceived most powerful person in the village (other than the head of the [CDC] shura)** is a survey question that asks respondents who/which (local) institution, in their view, is the "most powerful" in their village community.[13] The original variable has sixteen categories (including "don't know" and "refused to answer"). For regression analysis, four distinct categories, including *qomandan*, head of (CDC) shura, tribal/village elders and *malik/arbab,* were used in combination with the "other" category that combines all the rest of the given options. The four mentioned categories were selected on the basis of their count and their theoretical relevance.
- **Survey waves** related to the time/year when the survey was conducted. The three waves of the data include four cohorts, with Wave 1 corresponding to years 2010/11, Wave 2 corresponding to 2012 and Wave 3 corresponding to 2014/15. We used this variable to account for changes in the research region over time that we have not controlled for by our variables.

3.1.2 Results of the statistical analysis

In this section, we present the results of the statistical analysis. We start with the discussion of descriptive statistics relating to our dependent variables. We then present the results of the five different models on the basis of the effect of each independent variable across all the dependent variables. We group our results according to our main hypotheses.

[13] We derived our dependent variable "the head of the [CDC] shura is the most powerful person in the community" from the same survey. We use responses to this question "other than the head of the [CDC] shura" as controls.

Descriptive statistics: how the dependent variables changed from 2007-2015

Before proceeding to inferential statistics (for hypothesis testing), we present descriptive statistics to track changes/variation in our main dependent variables over the period 2007-2015. The data used in this section stems not from our main 25-district dataset[14] but from very similar, though geographically much narrower (four districts only) mixed method research conducted by the C9 project of the Collaborative Research Center 700 at Freie Universität Berlin. We use this data because of its significantly greater chronological depth – starting in 2007 with new waves conducted in 2009, 2011, 2013 and 2015. Importantly, this survey covers the time before (2007) and the emergence of militias (2009), which is not captured by our broader 25-district dataset which only begins with 2010/11. Since the general trends between the two surveys following 2010/11 are similar, we therefore use this dataset to depict the general long-term trends in the research region.

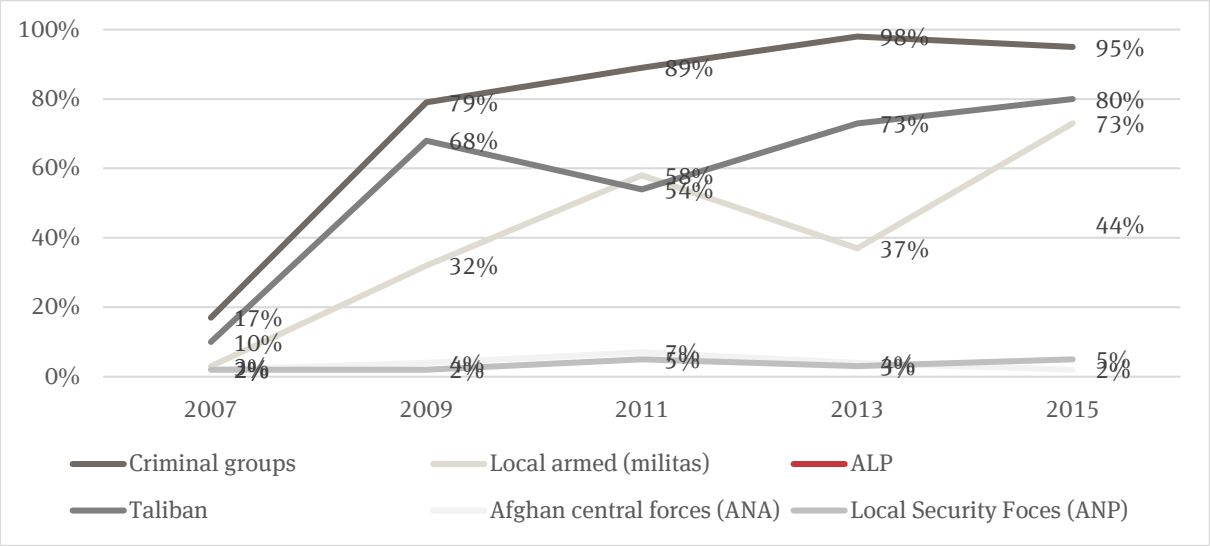

Figure 4: *Are you afraid of the following actors?*

Figure 4 shows responses to the question "Are you afraid of the following groups…" over the five survey waves. The question is phrased in an identical way to the survey question that provides our fear-related dependent variables from the 25-districts survey. However, the armed actors offered to respondents differ somewhat compared with 2007 when the survey was first defined, as the terms used for the various armed actors were different. Nonetheless, the survey question offers us a good approximation of the main developments in the North-East over the last eight years. After 2007, we see a dramatic escalation of fear related to criminal groups, the Taliban, local militias and foreign forces (the latter drops significantly in 2015 with the withdrawal of the bulk of foreign military by the end of 2014). Interestingly, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), most importantly the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP), evoke very little fear throughout the survey period – even though their actual presence on the ground changed significantly over the years. In 2010/11, they were barely visible – most fighting was done by international forces – whereas since 2012-13 the ANSF has carried the brunt of fighting the insurgency. Fear of ALP, for the first time explicitly asked about in 2015, is somewhere in the middle between criminal groups, the Taliban and arbakee militias – who all evoke great fear – and the ANSF with very little fear associated with it.

[14] Collected by AHRRAO, a Mazar-e Sharif-based Afghan research organisation.

Results for the perceived "security contribution" of armed actors (see *Figure 5* below) is the mirror image of the previous fear chart. The Taliban and (arbakee) militias are only very rarely perceived as contributing positively to security, whereas the overwhelming majority of respondents considered the ANSF, the police and the government as contributing positively to security. Once again, the ALP is between these two extremes. Even without further statistical analysis, these descriptive results appear to confirm our *Hypothesis 1*, according to which ALP will perform better than informal arbakees in the sense that they evoke less fear and their security contribution is perceived as more positive.

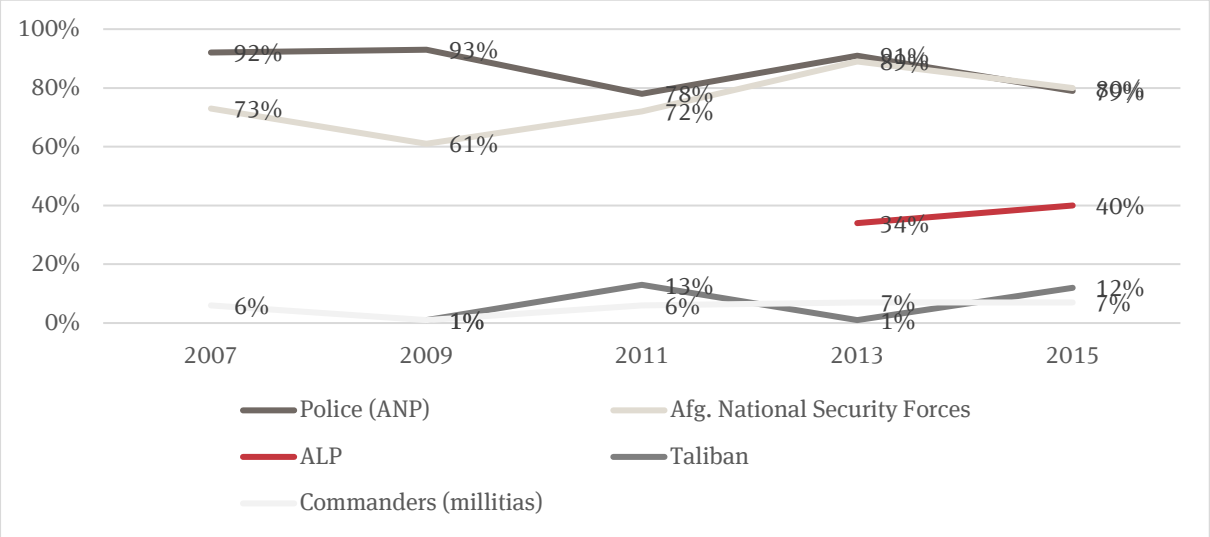

Figure 5: *Did the following actors contribute (positively) to security? The chart lists perceived positive contributions.*

Testing the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: ALP/arbakee presence in villages

Our first hypothesis (H1) examines how ALPs fare in comparison to arbakees. The general assumption is that ALP, as a vetted, trained, paid force that is integrated in regular ANSF structures, will show greater discipline and will be less threatening to the population than informal arbakees. We test this assumption by coding for the presence of these different types of militias at the village level. We then estimate, using regression analysis, how the presence of a certain type of militia correlates with our dependent variables (fear of and security contribution by militias and the Taliban). In our analysis, we do not confine ourselves to investigating only the presence of these two types of militias, but also report on results regarding the effect other armed actors identified during our surveys at the village level have on the dependent variables. We thus estimate the effect of ALP and arbakee presence on the dependent variables, controlling for the presence of all other types of armed groups. Given the large number of actors and associated dependent variables, we summarise our results in a table (see *Table 1* below).

Compared to the absence of local militias (either formal or informal) and national security forces at the village level, we find that the presence of the above-mentioned forces affects the relevant dependent variables as follows:

1. The presence of **arbakees** at the village level is associated with a 36% increase in the likelihood of fear of arbakees and 42% increase in the likelihood of fear of the Taliban. This means that the presence of arbakees at the village level (as opposed to their absence) increases the likelihood of fear of both arbakees and Taliban in the village communities. People living in such communities are more likely to be afraid of both these types of armed groups.

On the other hand, there is no statistically significant relationship between the presence of arbakees in a community and their perceived contribution to security. This means that having arbakees in one's community has no bearing on whether a respondent considers arbakees as contributing positively or negatively to security or, in other words, there is no (perceived) security benefit of having arbakees in one's village. Lastly, having arbakees in a village has no effect on how respondents assess ALP (no significant results on either fear or security contribution by ALP). The latter two results, i.e. the lack of security bonus of having arbakees in one's village and the lack of a correlation between arbakee presence and ALP assessment, contrasts starkly with results associated with ALP presence in a community (see next bullet point below).

2. There is no statistically significant relationship between **ALP**'s presence at the village level and fear of the Taliban, arbakees or ALP themselves. However, the presence of ALP at the village level is associated with a 350% increase in the likelihood of a more positive perception of the security contribution made by the arbakees and a 120% increase in the likelihood of a more positive perception of the security contribution made by the ALP. In simple terms, the presence of ALP in village communities contributes strongly to the likelihood of positive assessment (by people from those villages) of the security contribution of both ALP and arbakees.

3. The simultaneous presence of both **ALP and arbakees** at the village level is associated with a little more than 200% increase in the likelihood of fear of arbakees and a 150% increase in fear of the Taliban. People living in villages where both these local militia groups are present are 66% more likely to assess the security contribution of the ALP more positively. On the other hand, there is no statistically significant relationship between the presence of the mentioned militia groups in villages and fear of the ALP or of security contribution by arbakees.

4. While not explicitly formalised as a hypothesis, we also report on results relating to the presence of **Taliban** in a village community as it sheds light on the interaction between militias and insurgents. The presence of Taliban at the village level is associated with a 280% increase in the likelihood of more fear of the arbakees and a 240% in the likelihood of fear of the ALP. Moreover, people (in village communities where Taliban are present) are 61% less likely to positively assess security contribution by the arbakees and 63% less likely to positively assess security contribution by the ALP. This suggests that people in Taliban-controlled areas perceive arbakees and ALP in very similar ways: as a hostile and dangerous enemy force.
   On the other hand, there is no statistically significant relationship between Taliban presence and fear of the group. This result shows the Taliban as a similarly disciplined force as the ALP (as seen by respondents), clearly setting them apart from the more unruly and menacing arbakees.

	Fear of arbakees	Fear of ALP	Fear of Taliban	Security by ALP	Security by arb.
Arbakee in village	-		-		
ALP in village				+	+
ALP & arb. in village	-		-	+	
ANP/ANCOP in vil.					+
Taliban in village	-	-		-	-

Table 1: *Presence of different types of militias and armed actors and related dependent variables (fear and security contribution)*

Our results as summarised in *Table 1* above confirm our hypothesis: arbakees in a community make fear of arbakees as well as fear of the Taliban more likely. This twofold fear is likely the effect of mutual intimidation of each other's supporters, i.e. arbakees intimidate alleged Taliban supporters and vice versa. In contrast, the presence of ALP in a community is not associated with more fear, but positively influences the perceived security contribution of both ALP and arbakees. It is noteworthy in this respect that ALP presence appears to be similar in effect to official ANSF presence (ANP and ANCOP), thus once again suggesting a more disciplined force. The presence of Taliban in a community leads to similar results. The reason is likely the frequently cited discipline of insurgent forces, where harsh punishments are common, but arbitrary, unpredictable violence is rare. Lastly, the joint presence of ALP and arbakees in a village tends to weaken the otherwise more positive performance of ALP. It is associated with increased fear of both arbakees and the Taliban, although the perceived positive contribution of ALP to security remains.

Hypothesis 2: Effect of districts categorised on the basis of local militias' vetting quality

Our second hypothesis (H2 and H2a) examines the impact of communal vetting on the behaviour of militias and the Taliban. As mentioned above, in the course of the initial analysis of our qualitative interviews we identified vetting as a potentially very powerful mechanism restraining the behaviour of militias. In order to investigate the relationship between vetting and militia (and Taliban) behaviour, we subdivided districts according to how frequently and comprehensively district authorities included communities in the militia vetting procedure.

In the regression models, we control for the fixed vetting effects of militias in districts to account for whether or not the quality of vetting affects the specified dependent variables. We find that as opposed to those districts that do not have any local militia groups:

1. People who live in districts where vetting of local militias is comprehensive (of good quality) are 53% less likely to be afraid of arbakees and 61% less likely to be afraid of ALP as compared to those who live in districts with no militias (where no vetting had taken place). At the same time, these people are 79% more likely to more positively assess the security contribution of arbakees and 88% more likely to more positively assess the security contribution of ALP. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between the good quality of district vetting and fear of Taliban.
2. Even in districts where vetting of local militias is of a decent quality but not very good (we code this as "medium"), people are 63% more likely to positively assess security contribution by arbakees than in districts with no militia presence and thus no vetting. Medium-level vetting of local militias in districts, however, has no statistically significant effect on fear of arbakees, the Taliban or ALP or on security contribution by ALP.
3. People who live in districts where the vetting of local militias is poor are 25% less likely to be afraid of arbakees as compared to people living in districts with no militias and thus no vetting of militias. This suggests that the reputation of militias is somewhat worse than their real-life behaviour. Nonetheless, both ALP and arbakees perform significantly better in districts with comprehensive vetting than in districts with poor vetting (see bullet point 1 above).

We summarise our results related to vetting in *Table 2* below. The table clearly shows a rather strong, and from the perspective of the local population, generally positive impact of vetting on the behaviour of ALP and arbakee militias. For the most comprehensive category of vetting, then, our main hypothesis (H2) is fully confirmed. The lack of any impact of vetting on the assessment of the Taliban is also fully in line with our auxiliary Hypothesis 2a, according to which vetting will have no effect on fear of the Taliban.

Vetting in districts ↓	Fear of arbakees	Fear of ALP	Fear of Taliban	Security by ALP	Security by arb.
Comprehensive	+	+		+	+
Medium					+
Poor (min. vetting)	+				

Table 2: *Comprehensiveness and quality of district-level vetting and fear/security contribution outcomes*

Hypotheses 3 & 3a: communal cohesion (proxied by hashar, contribution to development and security)

Hypotheses 3 and 3a investigate the impact of communal cohesion on our dependent variables, fear and perceived security contribution of militias, and fear of the Taliban. In order to assess this relationship, we proxy communal cohesion through three survey questions, which all seem to address different aspects of cohesive communities: (a) participation in hashar (communal works); (b) community contribution to development (this appears to be somewhat similar to the aforementioned hashar, but refers more directly to development-related activities), and (c) community contribution to (local) security (this indicator likely indicates a capacity to mobilise for collective violence). We summarise the results of the statistical analysis regarding the above three aspects of communal cohesion as follows (for a full overview of the results of the statistical analysis, see Annex: regression results):

1. Increase in hashar compliance (from no or only minimal compliance with community-wide participation) is 11% more likely to increase fear of the arbakees. However, increase in hashar compliance is 17% less likely to increase fear of ALP. Moreover, increase in hashar compliance is 16% less likely to increase positive assessment of the security contribution by arbakees. Increase in hashar compliance hence means more fear of arbakees, as well as a more negative view of arbakees' security contribution. Increase in hashar compliance also means less fear of the ALP. Finally, hashar has no statistically significant relationship with fear of the Taliban or security contribution by ALP.
2. A one-point increase in a community's perception of its own contribution to development (across all seven sectors of development: see description of variables in the preceding section) is 11% more likely to decrease fear of the arbakees and the Taliban. It does not however, affect fear of ALP (the relationship is not statistically significant). At the same time, for every one-point increase in the score of a community's perception of their own contribution to development, there is a 26% increase in the likelihood of positive assessment of security contribution by arbakees, as well as a 25% increase in the likelihood of more positive assessment of security contribution by ALP.

3. Increase in a community's own perceived contribution to its security is associated with a 31% decrease in likelihood of fear of arbakees, 17% decrease in likelihood of fear of the Taliban and 66% decrease in likelihood of fear of ALP. Moreover, increase in a community's own contribution to its security is also associated with a 25% increase in the likelihood of more positive assessment of security contribution by arbakees. Such a relationship does not exist between this variable and security contribution by ALP (the relationship is not statistically significant).

We summarise our results in *Table 3* below, where red depicts negative outcomes from the perspective of respondents (no restraint by non-state armed actors), green signifies positive outcomes from the perspective of respondents, and no colour coding signifies no statistically significant results. This overview of outcomes shows hashar participation as the most ambivalent aspect of communal cohesion,

contradicting our hypothesis on two counts and confirming it only on one. Communities that strongly participate in communal works (hashar) do not get along well with arbakees, although they get along well with ALP.[15]

	Fear of arbakees	Fear of ALP	Fear of Taliban	Security by ALP	Security by arbakees
Hashar participation	-	+			-
Development contribution	+		+	+	+
Security contribution	+	+	+		

Table 3: *Communal cohesion proxies and fear/security contribution outcomes*

Other proxies for communal cohesion, however, behave along the lines posited by our hypotheses. A stronger sense of communal contribution to development is associated with less fear of arbakees and the Taliban and more positive perceptions of the security contribution of arbakees as well as of ALP. This proxy, i.e. the communal contribution to development, thus confirms our hypothesis. The indicator "communal contribution to development" might be more strongly linked to CDC functionality than hashar compliance – a possible connection that future research will have to clarify. As an illustration, in our debriefings,[16] we noted frequent cases in which active CDCs mobilised for local development work, canal or road construction, or collected funds for maintenance works, etc.

Lastly, the proxy community contribution to security might relate to a community's capacity to engage in collective violence as a last-resort check on non-state armed actors' behaviour (for more, see qualitative section below). This proxy indicator also confirms our hypothesis that posits a link between stronger communal cohesion and stronger restraint of non-state armed actors approaching the community. In this sense, a more cohesive community will more likely be able to credibly signal violent retaliation to outside armed actors, should they behave in an abusive way towards the community. At present, we have no explanation of why hashar participation behaves in such a counter-intuitive way in increasing negative assessments of arbakees, whereas the other indicators of communal cohesion, development and security contribution are associated with less fear of militias and the Taliban.

Hypothesis 4 & 4a: Communal leadership (as proxied by CDC functionality)

Turning to our last hypothesis, we begin with the presentation of our findings relating to our first proxy, CDC functionality. We find that an increase in CDC functionality (i.e. the CDC being coded as more active and functional) is associated with:

1. 17% decrease in the likelihood of fear of arbakees. People who live in village communities with more functional CDCs are less likely to be afraid of the arbakees.

[15] The behaviour of this indicator had already puzzled us on previous occasions. For example, while CDC functionality had a strong positive impact on most village-level governance outcomes, it showed no statistically significant results with regard to hashar participation. A higher visibility of District Development Assemblies (a district-level assembly of CDCs) even showed negative associations with hashar compliance. One possible reason is that it is not only the CDC that calls a hashar but also other village-level actors, such as a mullah or local elders. Hashar participation might thus be dependent on factors that we do not yet fully comprehend. Further research is needed to fully understand the dynamics behind hashar participation and its relationship with communal cohesion (Koehler et al. 2015; Gosztonyi et al. 2016).

[16] At the end of each survey wave, we gather the survey teams for a 6-7 day debriefing at which they systematically recount the circumstances of the research, describe their observations and help interpret the results.

2. 16.5% decrease in the likelihood of fear of the Taliban. People who live in village communities with more functional CDCs are less likely to be afraid of the Taliban.

3. There is no statistically significant relationship between CDC functionality and fear of ALP, and between CDC functionality and perceived security contribution by the arbakees and ALP.

The regression analysis thus partly confirms our Hypotheses 4 and 4a in the sense that a more functional and active CDC is more likely to be able to rein in the behaviour of local arbakees as well as that of the Taliban. Moreover, the measured effect is quite strong. The third result, the lack of a statistically significant relationship between CDC functionality and fear/security contribution by ALP, is somewhat difficult to interpret. It may be due to the generally lower levels of fear of ALP.

Turning to our second (conceptually weaker) proxy for communal leadership, we find that the head of the (CDC) shura being perceived as the most powerful person in the village is associated with:

- 37% decrease in the likelihood of fear of arbakees, 24% decrease in fear of the Taliban, and 31% decrease in fear of ALP. Thus, empowerment of heads of CDCs decreases fear of all three types of local armed groups, which is quite a significant result.
- In line with the results for CDC functionality (see above), the head of CDC being perceived as the most powerful person in the village has no statistically significant relationship with either security contribution by arbakees or ALP. This suggests that CDC members do not actively engage in the control of arbakee operations, but only restrain their behaviour towards the civilian population.

	Fear of arbakees	Fear of ALP	Fear of Taliban	Security by ALP	Security by arb.
CDC functionality	+		+		
CDC head powerful	+	+	+		

Table 4: *Communal leadership and fear/security contribution outcomes*

We summarise our results in *Table 4*. Results for the two proxies for communal leadership closely resemble – and thus confirm – each other.[17] A more active and functional CDC as well as the head of the (CDC) shura being perceived as the most powerful person in the village are both strongly associated with less fear of arbakees and the Taliban. However, neither variable has an impact on the perceived positive security contribution of either arbakees or ALP, confirming as was hinted above that the CDC does act to constrain potentially predatory militias, but does not get actively involved in "military" matters. The only notable difference between the two proxies for communal leadership relates to ALP. While a more active and functional CDC has no statistically significant relationship with fear of ALP, believing that the head of the (CDC) shura is the most powerful person in the village is strongly associated with less fear of the ALP. At present we have no explanation for this discrepancy.

A conceptual question: a case of reverse causality?

At this point, we need to address a serious conceptual question relating to the findings. Do the relationships suggested by the regression models confirm our hypotheses? In other words, is it justified

[17] In this context it is worth noting that the two variables are closely associated with each other. Previous research by the same team of authors has shown (Gosztonyi et al. 2016) higher CDC functionality to be strongly associated with an increased likelihood of perceiving the head of shura as the most powerful person in the village.

to speak about a causal relationship leading from our independent variables (ALP/arbakee in village, vetting, communal cohesion and communal leadership) to our dependent variables (fear and perceived security contribution)? Alternatively, can the established relationships between the independent and dependent variables be explained by reverse causality or an omitted variable bias? The first conceptual issue relates in particular to *Hypotheses 3* and *4* and could be phrased as follows: the presence of militias in a community weakens communal leadership by the CDC as well as communal cohesion. As a result, CDCs will be stronger and the head of the (CDC) shura will more likely be seen as the most powerful in villages or communities where there are fewer or no arbakees or ALP.

The second conceptual objection, the omitted variable bias, could be phrased as follows: the overall security situation influences the emergence of militias – the worse security gets, the more likely it is that militias will be set up. Simultaneously, worsening security also hampers the work of CDCs and undermines communal cohesion, leading to less functional CDCs and less cohesive communities where militias are most active: in insecure areas.

We tentatively reject both objections on technical grounds. Regarding the reverse causality objection, we observe that we control for militia presence or absence in all our models. Therefore, results relating to communal leadership and cohesion should be valid for both communities with and without militias. Regarding the omitted variable bias objection relating in particular to security, we emphasise that in our models we control for security via a survey question that asks respondents to rate the security of their district. In the past, we have found that respondent assessments of a district's security are closely correlated to incident counts in the same district, making it a good proxy for security.

In the following *qualitative* section, we will search for causal mechanisms and explanations linking our independent variables to our dependent variables. We will thus try to tackle the aforementioned conceptual objections of reverse causality and of an omitted variable bias. In the last section (3.3), we will draw on a variety of data to examine in-depth how CDC capacity evolved amidst growing insecurity to counter the objections of reverse causality and of a possible omission.

3.2 Qualitative analysis: explaining restraints on militia behaviour

The preceding section (3.1) confirmed our previous results (Gosztonyi et al., 2015) **comparing ALP with arbakees** (Hypothesis 1) over a longer time period (for a timespan of more than five years, instead of only two in our previous publication), suggesting a potentially enduring effect. It thus showed that from the perspective of the local population, ALP performed better than arbakees with regard to "fear" and "perceived contribution to security". Section 3.1 also delivered very strong results regarding the importance of proper communal vetting (Hypothesis 2) in restraining local militias (proxied by significantly lower fear of militias in districts where such vetting was carried out most comprehensively). Our statistical findings delivered somewhat ambivalent results regarding **communal cohesion** (Hypothesis 3): one measure of communal cohesion, hashar participation, increases fear of arbakees while it concurrently reduces fear of ALP. However, the other two indicators of communal cohesion, a community's own contribution to its development and its security, reduces fear of both arbakees and the Taliban, but has no effect on fear of ALP. Lastly, our quantitative analysis also delivered similarly strong results, associating more functional **communal leadership** (Hypothesis 4) with less fear of militias and of the Taliban – a possible indication that effective communal leadership can restrain both militias and the Taliban. In this section, we will attempt to explain these findings, relying on qualitative data.

3.2.1 Community-level semi-structured interviews

We begin our attempt to explain how communities can influence the behaviour of non-state armed forces via the analysis of 592 guideline interviews conducted in 26 North-East Afghan districts in late 2015. The interviews were commissioned by the C9 subproject of the Collaborative Research Center 700 at the Freie Universität Berlin and implemented by trained qualitative researchers from the Afghan Human Rights Research and Advocacy Organisation (AHRRAO), a long-time associate and partner of the team of authors. The guideline interviews contained a wide array of questions ranging from issues of local governance, development and economy through attitudes towards modernisation to issues of security. Three representatives of each surveyed community (a village cluster or village) were interviewed: one representing the traditional elite (mostly mullahs), a second representing the modern community elite (mostly representatives of the aforementioned community development council) and one representing the village intelligentsia (local teachers, agricultural extension workers or similar).

The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were carried out in local languages and then transcribed and translated by AHRRAO staff in Mazar-e Sharif. Subsequently, the interviews were cleaned and entered into NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software, by Anastasia Koehler. Within the field of security and local governance, the survey asked a number of questions about militias and the shura structure. These questions were further coded and analysed for the purposes of this report.

Our qualitative dataset does not lend itself to a neat dissection of arguments based on our four hypotheses related to (a) militia types, (b) the importance of vetting, (c) communal cohesion and (d) shura functionality. Instead, we will first present a number of topics discussed in our interviews and related to our results and then move on to put together a causal argument to explain our main findings.

We start by investigating the shura structure: how the community representatives interviewed assess its importance and how it works. We then turn to the question whether and how communal elders can influence the behaviour of militias. Subsequently, we explore whether the (self-reported) influence on militias by elders makes a difference to reported abuses by militias. In a next step, we further investigate how elders who lived in communities with militias explained whether they could or could not influence militia behaviour. We then continue by analysing how communal vetting, a key mechanism identified by elders, unfolds its impact. We then suggest ways in which influencing militias by local elders and the CDC might work. In a last step, we show how interviewed community leaders perceive the difference between informal arbakees and formalised ALP.

The CDC shura structure as assessed by community representatives

Our qualitative guideline interviews ask a number of questions regarding the shura structure. For this report, we selected Question G-A 04 to understand how interviewed community leaders perceived village-level leadership as performed either by the CDC or by alternative village-level governance actors, most notably *arbabs* (state-appointed village representatives) and commanders. As also expressed in our hypotheses, we believe that village-level leadership as exercised by the CDC can play an important role in restraining militias and probably other armed non-state actors. The question is phrased as follows:

> *"Have commanders or arbabs become more important as compared to three years ago? Or does the CDC continue to be the most important village-level institution? If so, why?"*

The coding of responses reveals that after more than six years of intense fighting and the widespread establishment of local militias in the survey region, in late 2015 CDCs still maintained their position as the most important village-level institution (see *Figure 3*, 14). An overwhelming majority (401

respondents or 68% of the total) described the CDC as the main village-level institution, usually adding that commanders and/or arbabs – the main contenders for village-level leadership – had lost their importance (explicitly stated by 398 respondents or 67% of total).

> *"Commanders and arbabs didn't become more important as compared to three years ago. Since CDCs were established, arbabs and commanders became inactive. Some of them joined the CDCs, Cluster-Level Development Councils [CLDCs] and District Development Assemblies [DDAs]. Some may have joined the security forces and others became old and retired. They don't influence the work of the CDC. The CDC is important because people elected its members. In addition, CDC members convey the problems of people to the relevant [government] bodies. They help the people of the village according to their capabilities"* (Arganj Khaw/Shiwa, Cluster 13, Cleric).

Even in violent and militia-affected districts, CDCs frequently continue to be the most important local governance body.

> *"There are arbakee commanders in our village, but they haven't gained importance as compared to the past [the period of the anti-Soviet Jihad and the civil war when commanders were the most important village-level leaders]. We also have an arbab in the village who is responsible for the tazkira [confirming the identity of ID card applicants at the district administration] and for confirming recruits who want to join the national army and national police and they represent people. We also have a CDC that was elected by the people and represents people properly. It has continued to be the most important institution of the village"* (Baghlan-i Jadid, Cluster 02, Elder).

While CDCs clearly remained the main village-level institution, 54 respondents (9%) nonetheless stated that commanders and militias had gained in importance, and a further 10 respondents (1.6%) that commanders and arbabs had done so.

> *"Yes, after the creation of arbakees, their commanders became very important, and now arbakee commanders and arbakee soldiers are the main administrators of the village. CDC only has a role regarding development issues. Other problems of the village are completely referred to the arbakee commanders"* (Kishim, Cluster 01, Cleric).

Lastly, a further 20 respondents described the Taliban as the main village-level governance actor (3%), while a further 24 respondents (4%) stated that the Taliban governed via the CDC.

> *"No, the commanders aren't important and the CDCs remain the most important body in the villages, because the Taliban and the people have agreed that the Taliban would not prevent any development projects being implemented in the village. Therefore, the Taliban does not interrupt the CDCs and their activities"* (Warduj, Cluster 01, intelligentsia).

> *"No, the commanders are not here now. CDC members and arbabs cannot work, because the Taliban does not allow it. Therefore, they are losing importance. The Taliban manage the village"* (Aliabad, Cluster 17, Cleric).

Our interviews also highlight a number of remarkable features of the CDC, which differentiates it from the other more personality-driven and thus discretionary institutions (commanders, arbabs, the Taliban): its comparative resilience, flexibility and downward accountability.

> *"No, commanders and arbabs are not important now. The CDC is the most important institution in the village because people elected the members of this council. It is an independent institution. Thus, neither government officials nor Taliban can interfere with them. In fact, both of them need the CDCs, CLDCs and the DDA to carry their messages to the people"* (Imam Sahib, Cluster 07, intelligentsia).

"Commanders and arbabs aren't important but the CDC has become more important since commanders are mostly in the CDCs. For example, I was a commander in the past, then I became the head of the DDA and now I am the head of Shahrawan Cluster. My importance is because of the CDC. There are no arbabs in our village" (Baharak [Takhar], Cluster 04, Head of CLDC).

To sum it up, our interviews do not provide a clear-cut explanation of how a more functional CDC might restrain militias. However, they do show the CDC as the dominant village-level governance and leadership body – one that enjoys significant local legitimacy and can act as an interlocutor between the local community and the outside world.

We therefore consult an additional source of qualitative information: the debriefing of our qualitative researchers. According to these debriefings, a key feature of proactive and successful CDCs is that they provide leadership. Typically, when our research teams enter a community, they introduce themselves to the leaders of the community and ask for their permission to conduct the survey. Given that the CDC is the preeminent community-level institution in the research region, the teams usually approach the head of the CDC. The permission to carry out the research is then quickly granted and the CDC head and elders present then gather the community to inform them about the survey. Successful and respected CDCs usually quickly gather the people and the team can begin with their survey interviews. Less active CDCs have much greater difficulties in communicating this to their communities. The teams found that in communities with respected and active CDCs, governance also functioned better. Such CDCs often successfully mobilised the people to carry out impressive additional works requiring communal cooperation, such as maintenance and jointly implemented development schemes (e.g. communal road construction). Here, we present two village case studies as recounted to us by our teams. One shows a village with an active and functional CDC, the other an inactive one.

Rubat-e Payin (Baharak District [Badakhshan]): "*The head of the CDC is called Chupan. He is well-respected. When we went there we started our survey, but we weren't able to interview the full required sample. There weren't enough people. We told Chupan. He shouted for the people to come and we could see: the people were coming to meet us. That's how we saw that he had a lot of authority. The village had already received a second block grant from the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and people seemed happy with it. They [the community] are extremely active in organising hashar – and it is well-attended. The mosque they built is an example [of such a hashar] and it is implemented via the CDC. Also the youth – they really respect the elders and they respond to the call of the elders. They used the first NSP block grant for electricity and the project is maintained very well. If there is any problem, the head of the CDC collects money from the community and does the maintenance*."

Bagh-e Meri Ulya (Kunduz City): "*The CDC is inactive. The head and the cashier of the CDC died. They were not killed, it was just bad luck. The CDC secretary left for Pakistan. In this village the CDC was [therefore] inactive. Nobody [in the village] knew about the CDC. We did the interviews, but we had to talk with the elders of the village for the village profile [a background interview on village demographics]. [A man called] Mohibullah was acting as the CDC head, but he only did this informally. He was a member of the CDC. Nobody was happy with the situation. The elders said: 'We do everything ourselves.' They didn't do anything to hold new CDC elections. There should have been two further members of the CDC, but nobody knew them. The community had only received NSP projects, nothing special there [i.e. the community was not able to attract additional projects to the village]. ...*

There was a powerful arbakee commander there, an aggressive local commander. He met us along the road to the village. He told our driver: 'Don't go to the CDC, I am the only person responsible for this village.' Here too, people preferred the Taliban. An [official] police checkpoint was close to where he stopped our car. The road passes through the village. He had 15 arbakee soldiers, all locals. It was not

clear to whom these arbakees belonged. 'I'm the commander,' he said, that was all. Some arbakee commanders belong to the National Directorate of Security, but we are not sure about these arbakees."

Communal leaders and militias

We now turn to the examination of the relationship between communal elders and local militias. The term "elders" is a relatively broad category as used in North-East Afghanistan and refers to the respected notables of a community. Some elders may be in the CDC, but there may also be functionaries in the CDC, whom nobody would refer to as an "elder" (e.g. a young teacher as CDC treasurer). The section builds on the following question in the interview guidelines:

"Can elders and the community influence the behaviour of arbakees or ALP? In the ALP's case, have elders participated in the vetting of ALP fighters? If yes, what was the effect?"

Most respondents answered both questions – if they considered the question applicable to their circumstances. However, in responding to the second question, vetting of ALP fighters, respondents did not restrict themselves to vetting of ALP: in cases where arbakees were vetted, they mentioned this too. The NVIVO coding of this question revealed that out of a total 592 interviewees, almost half of our respondents (283 cases) believed that the question was not applicable to their specific circumstances, because there were no militias (neither arbakees nor ALP) in their own community or community cluster. Of those who responded to the question, a majority believed that elders could not influence militias (194 cases), while only a relative minority (131 cases) believed that they could.[18] This clearly suggests that communal leaders often find it difficult to control militias.

Subsequently, we also checked whether those who responded to our question regarding elders' influence on militias were living in communities with or without militias. It turns out that those who believed that elders had "no influence over militias" often lived in communities *without* militias (92 respondents or 47% of those who reported that they had no influence). These respondents mostly encountered militias when travelling outside of their communities, or when militias from other communities harassed their community. In a few cases, their judgement was based even less on personal experience and more on hearsay. However, a further 70 respondents (36% of those who believed elders had no influence on militias) lived in communities with militias and thus encountered them daily.[19]

In contrast, the smaller group of respondents (131) who believed that elders could influence militia behaviour tended to come from communities with militias: 76 respondents (or 58% of the total) from militia communities compared with only 36 respondents (or 27% of the total) from non-militia communities. These figures suggest a local social control effect regarding militias. In other words, elders' influence is more likely to be restricted to *local* militias, i.e. militias within their own communities, and not to outsider militias. This, however, does not mean that elders can always influence militias. If we only look at the 146 respondents who could be positively identified as living in militia communities, slightly more than half (52%) believed that elders could influence militias.

Elders' influence on militia behaviour

One question from the interview guidelines asked about abuses and human rights violations by militias:

[18] The quoted sources add up to more than 582 respondents, as some community leaders who were interviewed differentiated between militia types, e.g. elders could influence ALP but could not influence arbakees. Such responses were coded separately.
[19] For the remaining respondents, it was not possible to determine unequivocally whether they lived in militia communities.

"... What effects do militias, in particular the arbakees and ALP, have in terms of basic rights, security or abuse? In your view, are there differences between those two militias?"

The alleged abuses range from general accusations of abuse to specific allegations of extortion, public humiliation, beatings, murder and rape (of women or minors). The accusations also differentiate with regard to the alleged perpetrators (arbakees, ALPs or both). Relating allegations of abuses by militias to community leaders' self-reported control (influence) over militias leads to startling results. Elders who report control over militias report much less abuse than elders who do not have such control (see *Figure 6*).

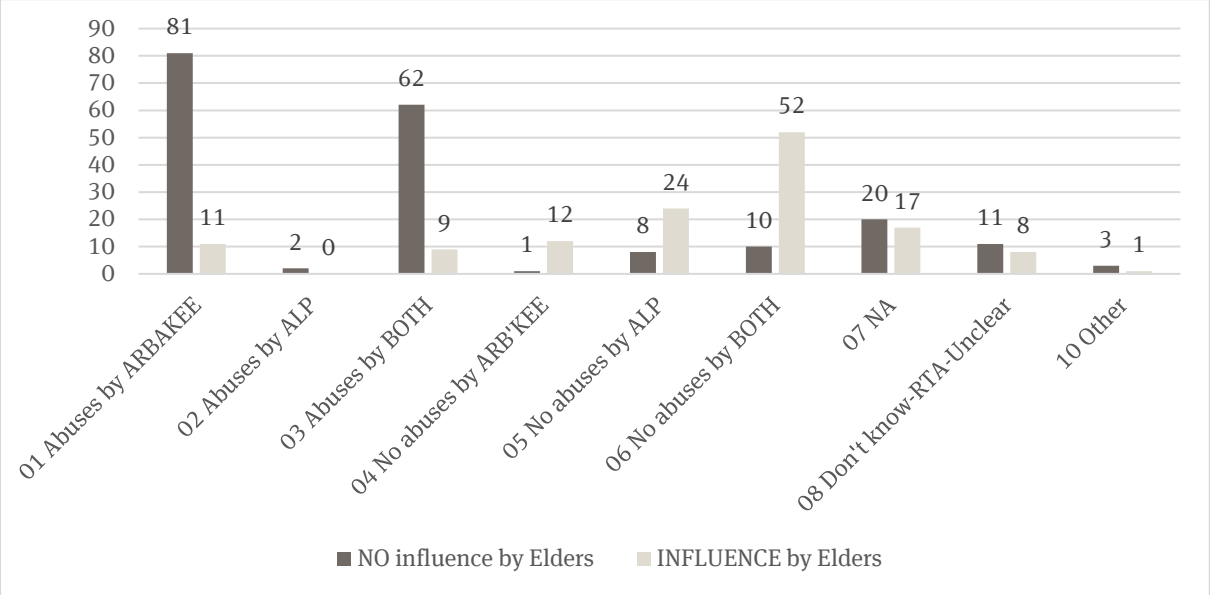

Figure 6: *Influence by elders on militias and reported abuses by militias. The chart reports the actual number of coded responses.*

Although one might argue that these reports may be based mainly on perception or be biased, the findings on reported abuses by district shows a rather distinct "militia abuse profile" in the different districts (see *Figure 7* below). Respondents in some militia districts report consistently very high levels of abuse by militias (e.g. Khanabad ⇢ KHA, Taloqan ⇢ TAL, Baharak [Takhar] ⇢ BAT), while others report generally good (non-abusive) behaviour by militias (e.g. Zebak ⇢ ZEB, Khwaja Ghar ⇢ KHO, Imam Sahib ⇢ IMA). This suggests that communal leaders' assessments of abuse (or the lack of it) by militias are to a large extent based on realities on the ground and not on favourable or unfavourable perceptions of their own influence. This also suggests that elders' control over militias may indeed be linked to fewer cases of abuse by militias or, in other words, that when community elders believe that they can control militias, they are indeed likely able to restrain them and make them less threatening to civilians.

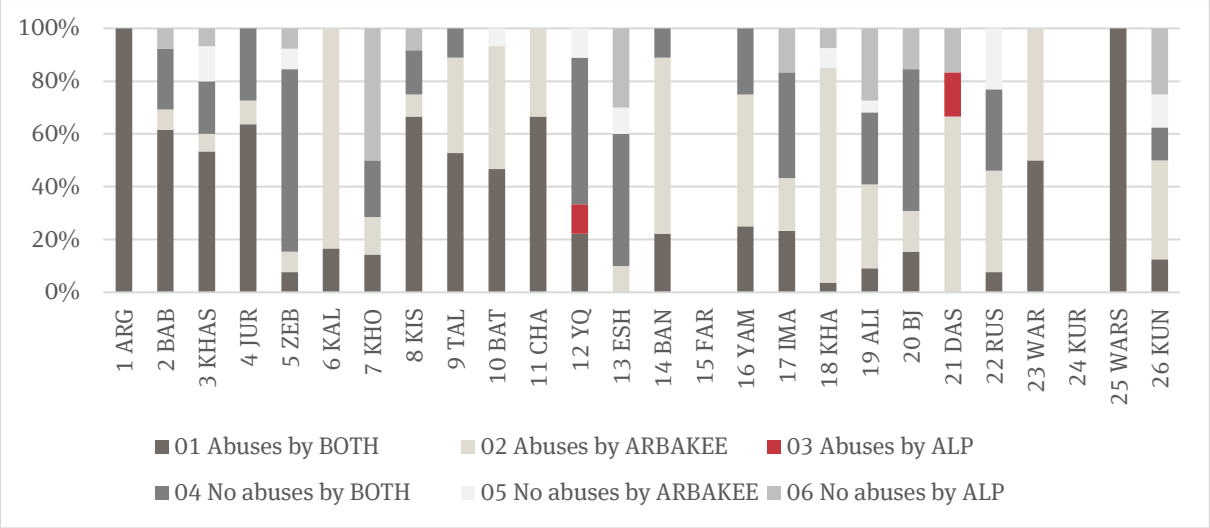

Figure 7: *Allegations of abuse vs. confirmation of no abuse by different types of militias by district*

Reasons for elders' influence or the lack of it

In a next step, we coded any possible explanations mentioned by interviewed communal leaders regarding why they *could* or *could not* influence militias in their communities. The most prominent reason offered to explain why elders *could* influence militias was participation in the vetting of militia fighters: 76% of interviewed community leaders who felt that elders could influence the behaviour of militias mentioned vetting as an important reason in explaining this influence. Conversely, only 7% of elders who participated in the vetting of militias felt that they had no influence over the militias (they had vetted). Communal vetting thus appears to be a key factor in enabling elders to exercise a certain degree of control over militias, making it much more likely that they will be able to restrain them in their communities.

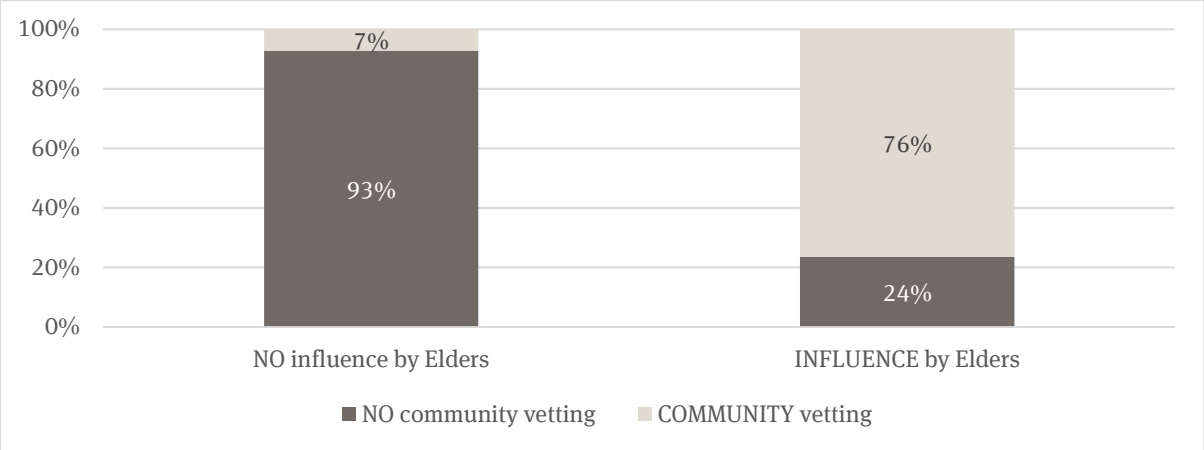

Figure 8: *Communal vetting and self-reported influence over militias by interviewed community leaders*

Given the seemingly paramount importance of vetting in determining whether community leaders can or cannot influence militias, we further investigate the issue. Looking into how elders explain the importance of vetting in helping them to control and restrain militias, we identify two mechanisms: (a) The participatory vetting procedures weed out the local thugs and criminals and select, instead, more loyal and locally embedded individuals, upon whom local social control is more likely to work. (b) The fact that local elders select the fighters gives them a degree of control over them and brings them in contact with

the militias' military superiors (district chief of police, wolliswol). Here are two quotes to illustrate these two related, but distinct mechanisms:

> *"Yes, because arbakees are from the area, elders can influence their behaviour. Moreover, elders participated in the selection of people for the ALP and the effects of their involvement were beneficial for people, since they selected well-behaved persons who love their country. This is the reason why today we don't have any problems [with militias] and they [the militias] have a good relationship with the people too"* (Zebak, Cluster 01, CDC cashier).

> *"Yes, elders and community leaders can influence the behaviour of ALP fighters. They do not allow ALPs to do anything illegal. While ALP soldiers were vetted, the district governor, elders and community leaders of the district were present. They consulted with each other and appointed the ALP fighters. As a result, ALPs listen to the elders and community leaders of the district"* (Aliabad, Cluster 02, Head of CDC).

The key role of vetting is further exemplified by the case of Madrasa-e Kalan village in Khwaja Ghar District. According to our interviews, there was widespread community participation in the vetting of militias and the feedback our interview partners gave on the process is, overall, very positive. However, additional militias were mobilised, probably as a result of a fierce Taliban offensive in the district in mid-2015. These hurriedly mobilised militias did not go through the usual lengthy participatory vetting procedure and were instead directly selected by commanders and district authorities. Accordingly, interviewed community leaders felt that they had less control over these fighters:

> *"At first elders had influence on the ALP. ALP was created according to the community's wishes and [according to the CDC] councils' selection. It had about 100 members and they were confirmed by [CDC] councils. Then 200 others [new members] entered the ALP without the confirmation of elders. Now elders have less control over the ALP" (Khwaja Ghar, Cluster 07, Head of CDC).*

A further two reasons given to explain elders' capacity to restrain militias related to the militias' local origins and to the fact that militias respected "the authority of their fathers". We present two quotes to exemplify these positions:

> *"Yes, elders and community leaders of the village have influence on the behaviour of arbakees because they are from these areas"* (Baghlan-i Jadid, Cluster 09, Cleric).

> *"In our village and cluster, arbakee forces and ALP have not been established. Only popular uprising forces [a term used for informal militias in some districts] exist here. The people are armed and fight against the Taliban and Daesh and do not let them enter the district. The popular uprising forces don't misbehave, and they listen to the elders and influential people of the village because they are from the community and they are the children of the people"* (Rustaq, Cluster 08, Cleric).

Turning to the reasons why elders felt that they could *not* influence the behaviour of militias, our previous findings are confirmed: 93% of elders who felt that they had no influence over militias had not participated in their vetting (see *Figure 8* above). Two quotes illustrate these explanations:

> *"Elders and the community cannot influence the actions of arbakees and they didn't participate in their selection. They were selected completely according to the interests of (regional political) representatives. Each one of our representatives wanted to create their own arbakee group which is under his orders and not under the control of the people, the government or elders"* (Jurm, Cluster 13, intelligentsia).

> *"Elders and community leaders did not introduce arbakee soldiers [i.e. didn't participate in their vetting]. They were armed by former Jihadi commanders. Those former Jihadi commanders support*

the arbakees and other local militias. As a result, arbakees commit different kinds of crimes. They rob, attack people and seize and destroy their property. Neither the government nor elders can influence the behaviour of arbakees" (Imam Sahib, Cluster 13, Cleric).

In the words of elders: how influencing militias works (or doesn't work)

There are very few hints in our interviews regarding how influence by communal leaders actually works. On the one hand, CDCs, as inclusive organisations, regularly invite local elders, tribal leaders, arbabs or commanders (if they are not already members of the CDC) to their various problem-solving meetings. In communities in which elders feel that they can influence militias, the CDC will likely engage with militia commanders as the need arises, for example to address problems or disagreements regarding the behaviour of militia fighters. In these cases, the CDC gathers and consults with communal elders who jointly represent the community's interests vis-à-vis militias. The full weight of all the community notables involved is expected to put pressure on militia commanders. Here a few quotes underline the consultative and inclusive nature of CDC gatherings:

"CDC members consult with elders and community leaders about everything. Then they take a decision. As a result, people are satisfied with the CDC members" (Baharak [Badakhshan], Cluster 07, Cleric).

"Commanders are always important but they don't interfere with the councils and, in some cases, the councils consult with them" (Baharak [Takhar], Cluster 07, Cleric).

"No, CDCs are still the most important institution in the village because they consult with people and commanders for everything (Chal, Cluster 07, Member of CDC).

In other rare cases, CDC members are themselves commanders or have joined the ranks of the militias. Here is one such case:

"The elders and influential people have a lot of influence on arbakees and they were also present during the process of the vetting of arbakee forces. The arbakee units that were established were based on what they said. I myself was encouraged by the people to take up arms and this had good results. The elders took part in the process of vetting" (Yamgan, Cluster 02, Head of Cluster Level Development Council, CLDC).

Lastly, one of the key roles of CDCs is conflict resolution. In cases of conflicts between militias and/or between militias and communities, CDCs and elders are likely to come together to resolve the issue. In these cases, we speak about large shura or jirga meetings where elders mediate and seek solutions to a conflict. Such efforts do not always result in success, as the following example demonstrates:

"Arbakees don't listen to anyone. There was a conflict about irrigation water. The Taliban didn't allow irrigation water to come to our village because arbakees and government security forces didn't allow food products to be brought to the districts when the Taliban were there. So the elders gathered to resolve the problem. A committee came from the province to monitor the process. An arbakee commander stood there and threatened the elders and told them to leave the meeting room. The policemen present at the meeting couldn't do anything. Consequently, the elders had to leave the room" (Baharak [Badakhshan], Cluster 11, Head of CDC).

At present, we unfortunately do not have any case studies on direct negotiations with militia commanders regarding militia behaviour. The quotes thus represent indirect evidence from CDCs' general problem-

solving approach. It will be the task of future research to gather case studies focusing specifically on interactions between CDCs and militias.

Arbakees vs. ALP

Turning to our hypothesis regarding the performance of ALP as compared to arbakees, in our qualitative interviews we asked respondents to directly compare arbakees and ALP. The question was phrased as follows:

> *"Are there differences between those two militias [arbakees/ALP], in your view?"*

Of the 270 interviewees who responded to this question, 131 believed there was no difference between the two types of militias. This was sometimes meant in a negative (82), other times in a positive (49) sense:

> *"Arbakees and the ALP are the same and they try to outdo each other in the fields of corruption and insecurity. Arbakees kill people during the day, but the ALP kill people during the night"* (Kunduz Centre, Cluster 06, Cleric).

> *"Arbakees and the ALP do not violate human rights in our village. In other areas, these forces have caused insecurity and immorality. Both good and bad persons are among them, but they do not differ from each other"* (Jurm, Cluster 05, Cleric).

The remaining 149 interview partners emphasise a number of differences between the two types of militias. Arbakees are described as informal and outside the control even of the state (89 statements). A further 49 interviewees added that arbakees received no payment and this forced them to extort food and money from local people. Thus, by design, arbakees often appear more threatening than ALP.

> *"No, we did not create arbakees or ALP in our village. Yes, arbakees differ from ALPs. Arbakees are informal armed persons. They receive no salary from the government. However, ALPs are formal forces. The Government pays them. They do not rob people like arbakees do. They serve the people honestly"* (Aliabad, Cluster 04, Cleric).

> *"Yes, arbakees and the ALP are different from each other. ALPs are working under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The Government pays ALP soldiers, they have uniforms and they receive guns from the Government. As a result, the Government can influence the behaviour of ALPs. But arbakees are informal armed persons. They sold their livestock in order to buy guns. Although the Government allows them to fight against the Taliban, it does not give them any salary. So they have to take their expenses from the people. They hit or threaten people with their guns to make them pay money"* (Imam Sahib, Cluster 01, intelligentsia).

> *"Arbakees were created in our village and cluster some two years ago, but they were eliminated when the Taliban came. This was good, since they were not pleasant for the people. Arbakees are illegal and they do everything they want, but the ALP adheres to a system and to rules"* (Dashti Archi, Cluster 110, intelligentsia).

With regard to ALP, those respondents who differentiated between the two types of militias repeatedly emphasised a number of key differences. They mentioned that the ALP was formal (79 statements), that they received a salary (52 statements), making it less likely that they would engage in extortion, that they were under the command of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (33 statements), that the ALP was "better" than arbakees (11 statements) and lastly that the ALP obeyed the law (10 statements). Here are two quotes as illustrations:

"No, militias do not violate human rights here … And yes, there is a difference between arbakees and ALPs. It is like a car without a number plate and another car with a number plate. It means that ALPs have uniforms and the Government pays and supports them. But arbakees are informal armed persons who are not paid by the Government. They have neither uniform nor modern military equipment" (Imam Sahib, Cluster 12, Head of CDC).

"There are differences between the ALP and arbakees. The ALP has uniforms and the Government pays them a salary and gives them weapons, and they act according to the rules of the Ministry of the Interior. But arbakees are just given weapons by the Government and they don't receive anything else. They do illegal work with their guns. We have 300 members of the local police and there are no arbakees [in our district]" (Khwaja Ghar, Cluster 06, member of the CLDC).

In light of these statements, the dividing line between these two militias appears to be blurred in almost half of the cases. However, there appears to be a regional aspect regarding whether respondents perceived a difference between the two types of militias or not (see *Figure 9*: Militia districts according to whether respondents differentiated between arbakees and ALP). In districts with only recently established militias (i.e. in 2015), respondents were less likely to see a difference between ALP and arbakees (e.g. Baharak [Badakhshan], Khash, Jurm, Zebak, Kalafgan, Kishim, Baharak [Takhar] and Rustaq; exceptions are Ishkamish, Bangi and Taloqan). In contrast, in districts with an older militia presence, respondents tended to assess the two militia types as distinct (Khwaja Ghar, Yamgan, Imam Sahib, Khanabad, Aliabad, Baghlan-i Jadid, Dashti Archi and Warduj; exceptions are Kunduz Centre and Yangi Qala). Whenever respondents differentiated between arbakees and ALP, they tended to prefer ALP as more disciplined and less in need of extorting funds for their own sustenance.

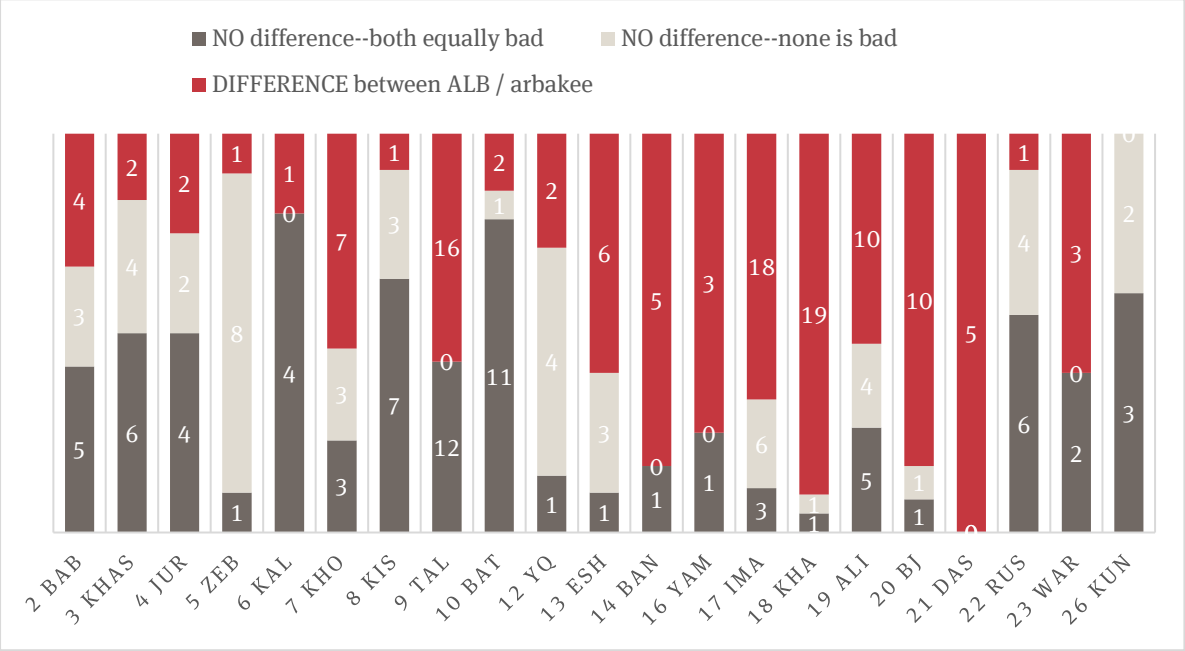

Figure 9: *Militia districts according to whether respondents differentiated between arbakees and ALP*

3.2.2 Explaining the results of statistical analysis in light of our qualitative data

In this concluding subsection, we sum up and explain our findings in light of our qualitative data. We will now proceed on the basis of our four main hypotheses to explore how (a) formalisation (ALP vs. arbakees), (b) vetting by the community, (c) more social cohesion, and, (d) a more active and functional CDC affect militia behaviour.

Hypothesis 1: Arbakees vs. ALP

Our results using the three survey waves to compare arbakee with ALP performance closely resemble those we previously published using only two survey waves (Gosztonyi et al., 2015). The fact that over three survey waves the ALP persistently outperforms arbakees (as assessed from local people's perspective) suggests the enduring nature of the differences between formal ALP and informal arbakees. This difference persists despite the fact that in practice ALP and arbakee units are often mixed and that on occasion it is difficult to differentiate between the two militias.

The explanations offered by elders regarding why arbakees are more threatening and less restrained than ALP are as follows:

- Arbakees are informal (often respondents even used the word "illegal").
- Arbakees are only loosely linked to the security structures of the state and are thus difficult to control and discipline.
- Arbakees receive no salary (only ammunition and occasionally weapons); therefore, they need to tax the population for their own sustenance.

In contrast, ALP tend to be less threatening, because:

- They are formal (official) fighters.
- They are integrated into the command hierarchy of the Ministry of Interior.
- As such, they are more likely to obey existing laws.
- They receive salaries, which makes them less dependent on illegal activities to sustain themselves.

Hypothesis 2: Communal vetting

In a case of communities' involvement in vetting, the explanation is rather straightforward. First, vetting is useful in restraining militias, because it helps separate criminal and unreliable recruits from reliable and loyal would-be fighters who are under the control of communities. Communities are good at doing this vetting, because they are face-to-face groups who know their members and their families from childhood. The fact that this vetting is not an individual affair, e.g. by a local arbab, but is a collective enterprise by community representatives, helps eliminate subjectivity and the misuse of vetting authority for personal interests. The second mechanism that makes vetting successful is the authority given to the community in the course of the vetting procedure. District authorities, who initiate the setting up of militias, request the engagement of elders, thereby giving them authority over them. This process also offers elders a direct channel for complaints to authorities, should militia members misbehave.

Hypothesis 3 and 3a: Communal cohesion

Our qualitative results suggest the existence of social control mechanisms restraining militias. Elders who believed they could influence militias explained this – apart from referring to participation in vetting – by the fact that the militia fighters were (a) local and (b) that they respected elders. Both explanations suggest underlying social control mechanisms. First, social control typically emerges in local face-to-face contexts. Elders' hints at the local origins of militia fighters as an explanation for their acceptance of elders' influence thus point to social control. The frequent assertion by elders (who felt that they had influence over militias) that fighters "respected the authority of elders" once again points to underlying strong social control mechanisms. Lacking either violence or funds to sanction noncompliance by militias, elders can – by default – only enforce respect for their authority through social control and informal social sanctions.

Lastly, the violent aspect of enforcement (proxied by the question regarding the community's own contribution to its security) was implicitly confirmed by the statement of a cleric from Kishim:

> *"Elders and local influential persons can effectively influence the behaviour of local police and arbakees because if they don't obey and [if they] disagree with them, local police and arbakees will be in trouble. Today in every home there is a weapon and [we] like Verdoje people [people in a neighbouring village] can join the Taliban and rise up against the local police and the arbakees. Elders and local influential persons have rejected establishing ALP and arbakees in our village but there are some persons in this village who benefit from them and wanted to establish arbakees in the village. Now we have about 30 ALP and arbakees in our village and they have established a camp in our village"* (Kishim, Cluster 01, Cleric).

Hypothesis 4 and 4a: Communal leadership (as proxied by CDC functionality)

Explaining the strong effects measured for the functionality of the shura structure in restraining militias is less straightforward than has been the case regarding our previous hypotheses. Our qualitative analysis has shown that the self-assessed *influence* of elders on militias has very likely resulted in less abusive behaviour by these same militias. Is CDC functionality thus simply a proxy for elders' influence on militias? This is not likely, especially since shura functionality and elders' self-reported influence on militias do not seem to go together very often (see *Figure 10*). Moreover, "elders" as a category is broader than the CDC (although, as explained previously, key CDC members are almost definitely also elders).

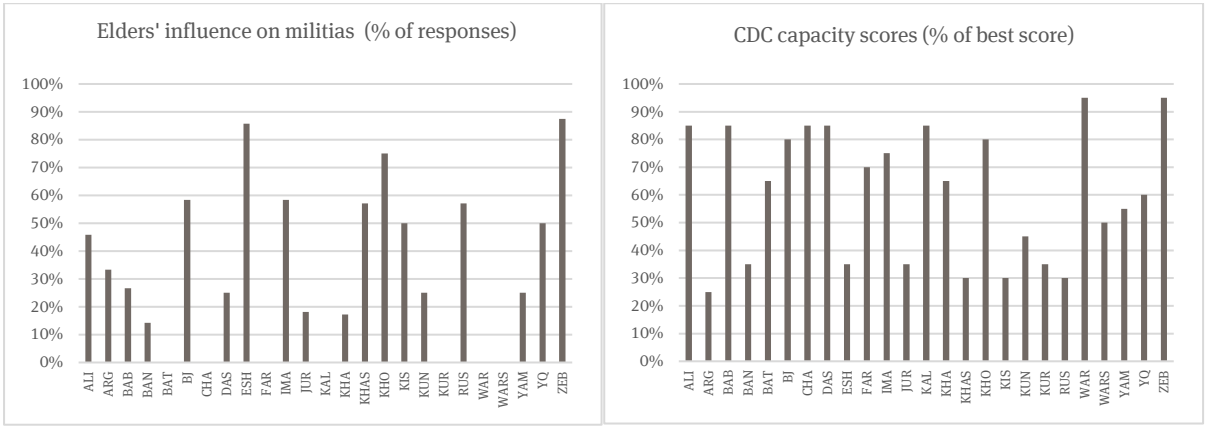

Figure 10: *Comparing elders' self-reported influence on militias with CDC capacity ratings*

One possible reason for the lack of a "smoking gun", i.e. clear statements and explanations formulated by interviewed community representatives on how CDC capacity can influence militias, is that the impact of a strong and functional leadership expresses itself through a number of distinct mechanisms. These distinct mechanisms, however, jointly add up to provide significantly increased protection for local communities against militia members. Consulting our qualitative data, we identify several possible mechanisms which might jointly explain the measured strong effect.

CDC as the main village-level governance body: One likely mechanism derives from the fact that throughout the study area, the CDC is the main and mostly uncontested village-level leadership body. As the main and (with the partial exception of "elders") only downwardly accountable governance body, the CDC will by default be the institution that will represent and try to protect its members against abuse by non-state armed groups – be they militias or the Taliban. Quite obviously, a more competent and active CDC will more likely be able to restrain such violent actors than a less active and capable one.

Bringing together all influential actors as needed: A second mechanism may relate to the CDC's capacity to bring together all respected and influential members of the community to solve problems. This capacity was alluded to in a number of interviews and appears to be significantly stronger (part of the DNA of the CDC) than of other village-level governance actors, such as former Jihadi commanders or arbabs, whose authority is more personal/individual and less collective. By involving all influential elders, commanders and clerics – as well as the CDC members themselves, of course – the community's bargaining power increases. This is especially the case if it is local militias or local Taliban whom the community has to deal with, who are by definition linked to the community.

The CDC as a useful tool for the government or the insurgents: A further mechanism may lie in the importance of the CDC as an interlocutor for the Government, but on occasion also for the insurgents. These links and contacts with the outside principals of militia fighters on the one hand, and insurgent fighters on the other, also seem to provide lines of communication that are able to restrain these armed men.

CDCs can resist setting up militias: A number of community representatives interviewed reported to us that even though they were approached by the state to set up militias, they repeatedly refused to do so.

> *"We didn't set up arbakees and ALPs in our village. Our local government requested us to introduce some men as arbakee soldiers for them. But we didn't accept. Those villages which had set up arbakees are regretful now. They cannot influence how the arbakees behave. Therefore, arbakees commit different kinds of crimes"* (Imam Sahib, Cluster 07, Elder).

CDCs might enforce communal vetting: Even though we have no case studies suggesting it, it nonetheless seems likely that communities led by strong CDCs will be more successful in demanding a say in vetting than communities characterised by weaker leadership.

3.3 Insecurity, conflict and CDC capacity: An omitted variable bias?

In this section we address the key question of a possible case of an *omitted variable bias* relating to insecurity and violence. So far, we have assumed CDC functionality to be a largely independent, externally driven variable. Should there, however, be a link between violence and insecurity on the one hand, *and* CDC functionality on the other, this assumption would fail. In other words, should we find that a history of violence and insecurity weakens CDC capacity, leading to less functional CDCs where violence and

insecurity are high and more functional ones where violence is lower and security better, this would fundamentally contradict our hypotheses presented above. In such a scenario, it would not be CDC capacity that drives militia perceptions; instead, it would be security and violence that drive both fear levels up and CDC functionality down.

We have already mentioned that in our models we controlled for security/insecurity using respondent assessments of district security as a proxy for the level of insecurity and violence in a district, offering a first clue that a reverse causality or omitted variable bias may not have to be considered. In this section, we examine further evidence of how violence and communal leadership have evolved over time. In particular, we will examine how security incidents,[20] the self-assessed capacity and functionality of CDCs and survey-based assessments of the CDC's importance relate to each other (*Figure 11* below).

Incident figures also relate to the entire research region and are based on our own incident count, cleared for double entries, georeferenced and categorised internally. The list is extracted from the same sources over time, including international organisations, NGOs, governmental development organisations and open sources. The (self-assessed) average CDC capacity is derived from so-called community profiles, which are based on a lengthy questionnaire administered to the community leaders of each survey community and detailing demographic, historical, social and political information about these communities. Among other things, this questionnaire asks community leaders to assess the capacity and degree of activity of their CDC. We counted the average self-assessments for the whole sample, as well as two subsamples of survey CDCs, one for districts without militias, the other for districts with militias. CDC capacity was visualised on a scale ranging from zero (defunct, inactive) to two (high capacity, fully active, gaining influence). This data relates to the entire research region of 25 districts. Lastly, the survey-based assessment of the head of the (CDC) shura as the most powerful person in the village is derived from the Collaborative Research Center's core research in four North-East Afghan districts. As mentioned, this survey has a significantly greater chronological depth (five waves surveyed from 2007-2015) than the three-waves/25-districts-study this paper uses for its statistical analysis (three waves from 2010/11-2014/15).

Looking at our results, we note no systematic difference between militia and non-militia districts. During Wave 1 and 2, militia districts are only marginally better in terms of CDC capacity than non-militia districts (by 0.1 point) and this difference disappears during Wave 3.

In this period, violence levels also fluctuated significantly: violence peaked during Wave 1, dropped in Wave 2, then increased and but dropped again somewhat in Wave 3. These changes in violence and the concurrent expansion of Taliban control (not depicted in *Figure 11*) apparently had little impact on CDC capacity, which remained largely constant in this period.

Lastly, violence levels also seem to have had little impact on the perception of the head of the (CDC) shura as being the most powerful person in the village. Popular perceptions of the shura head remained constant during the first three waves, when violence first dramatically escalated. They started to increase during Wave 4, when violence re-escalated, and grew further when violence (temporarily) dropped in 2014. It must be emphasised that we are not certain whether violence levels did in fact drop in 2014, as towards the autumn of that year we lost access to one important incident data source we had used until then. Instead of being related to violence, the surprising growth in influence of the shura head after 2011 appears to be linked to the disbursement of a second round of block grants for CDCs. (The first round of block grants was provided to CDCs from 2003-2011).

[20] We rely on general trends in violence as we have not yet been to integrate identified CDC- or cluster-level incidents into the statistical analysis.

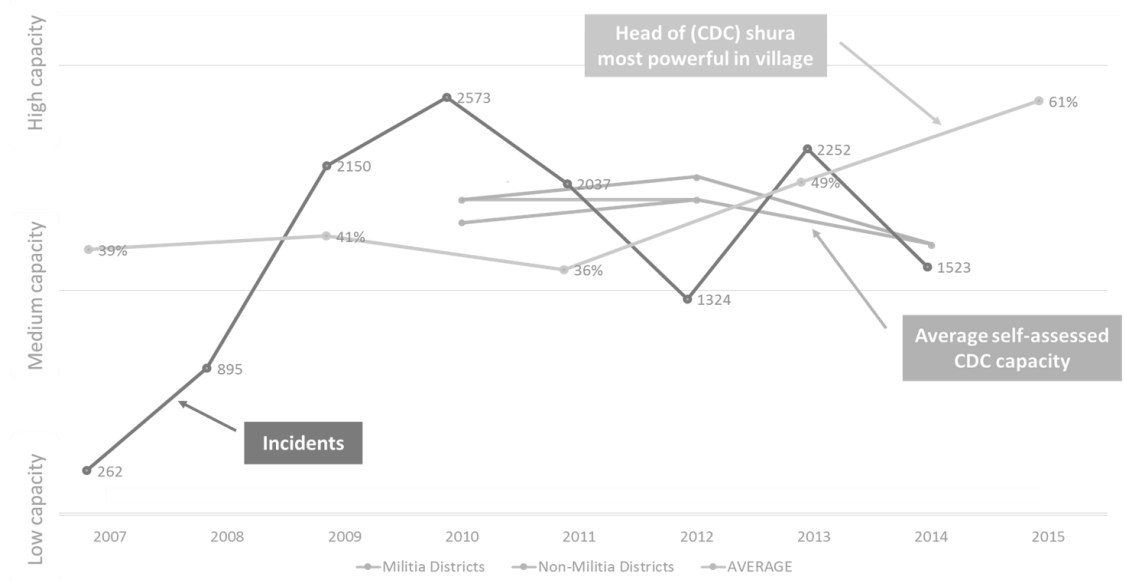

Figure 11: *Average self-assessed CDC capacity, incidents and the head of the (CDC) shura as the most powerful person in the village*

Our qualitative interviews appear to confirm the resilience of the CDC as an institution amidst a deteriorating security situation, expanding Taliban control and proliferation of formal and informal militias. As described in the above section on CDCs, the overwhelming majority of interviewed community leaders (68%) described a continued loss of importance by arbabs and commanders, formerly the main village-level authorities. Only a relative minority of respondents (9%) felt that in their communities, commanders and militias had gained in power, occasionally replacing CDCs as the most important village institution. These interviewees tended to explain the growing importance of militias and commanders as the result of the deteriorating security situation and the setting up of militias. Here is an example of an unfavourable outcome (from the perspective of the CDC):

> *"Arbakee commanders think that they are the most important persons in the village. They tyrannise the people in different ways. Arbabs and CDC members cannot serve people. Arbakees do not let them make any progress. In addition, arbakees force the CDC members to give them the budget of development projects. In fact, they embezzle funds from project budgets" (*Khanabad, Cluster 08, Cleric).

To a certain extent, CDCs are also threatened by the Taliban, who in some cases have suppressed CDC activities (reported by 3% of respondents), In other cases, however, the Taliban reportedly chose to work with CDCs, respecting their prominent village-level governance function (reported by 4% of interviewees).

In summary, as of late 2015 our results show CDCs as being to a large extent resilient to the violence levels and insecurity surrounding them. In some worst cases, militias and the Taliban reduce the effectiveness of the CDC as an institution, whereas in others, CDCs continue to function as the main village-level governance institution against all odds. Importantly, whereas during the anti-Soviet Jihad and the subsequent civil war, Jihadi commanders quickly replaced arbabs and khans as the main village-level actors, so far at least, militia commanders have not gained similar importance during the current conflict. Our analysis suggests that this is at least partly due to the resilience of the CDC as an inclusive and legitimate village-level governance institution.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Summary and conclusions

In our paper, **we investigated four mechanisms which we suspected to have a restraining influence on the abusive behaviour of militias and other non-state armed groups** and formalised them as hypotheses for our research. The four mechanisms identified for the research are:

- The potential of militia formalisation in restraining local militias,
- The potential of vetting in restraining local militias (but not insurgents),
- The capacity of strong and cohesive communities to restrain local militias and insurgents, and
- The capacity of strong communal leadership to restrain local militias and insurgents.

All four mechanisms selected for our investigation offer states or relevant international organisations mechanisms to rein in and control militias more effectively. Our **statistical analysis** largely confirmed all four hypotheses. We summarise our findings as follows:

- Formalised militias (in the Afghan case, the ALP) tend to be more disciplined and therefore less threatening than informal arbakee militias.

Based on our **qualitative research** data, we suggested the following mechanisms to explain the better performance of ALP than of arbakees from civilians' perspective:

- ALP are formal structures subordinated to the Ministry of Interior; they are thus integrated into clear command structures with clear lines of accountability.
- ALP fighters receive a salary and are not dependent on the extortion of money from the population.
- In contrast, arbakees' links to the state are only tentative, with unclear chains of command, control and very limited accountability.
- Arbakees receive no salary and are thus by design dependent on extorting money from the population they are actually supposed to protect.
- More comprehensive communal vetting in a district strongly reduces fear of militias and increases their perceived positive contribution to security, but has no effect on fear of the Taliban.

Derived from our qualitative research data, we suggested two mechanisms through which vetting might contribute to less threatening behaviour by militias. First, if communities are involved in vetting, they are more likely to successfully weed out criminal and unreliable elements and instead include fighters who are more reliable and more likely subject to social control. Second, involving communal elders in the vetting of militia fighters puts them in a position of authority vis-à-vis the fighters and formally links them up with their superiors (district chief of police).

- More cohesive communities (as compared to less cohesive ones) – proxied through three survey questions about participation in communal works and a community's own contribution to development and security – tended to reduce fear of both militias and the Taliban and increase the perceived positive contribution of militias to security.

Based on our qualitative research data, we tentatively explained the results in terms of underlying strong social control in these communities. This social control, we suggested, ensured norm conformity among

local militia fighters (respect for communal elders, no abusive behaviour towards community members). It possibly also facilitated the process of overcoming collective action problems by threatening violent or other sanctions against militias or the Taliban. In other words, a cohesive community can more credibly threaten and more likely implement a joint violent response against armed actors, because it can eliminate non-participation (freeriding) by community members through social sanctions.

- A strong communal leadership (as compared to weaker communal leadership) – proxied by a more active and functional Community Development Council (CDC) – reduces fear of militias and increases their perceived contribution to security. Stronger communal leadership also decreases fear of the Taliban. As previously, we interpret a reduction of fear of either local militias or the Taliban as signs that these non-state armed forces are behaving with more restraint towards the local population.

Based on our qualitative analysis, we suggested that a strong and proactive leadership might restrain local militias and Taliban fighters through a number of different mechanisms, which jointly add to up a rather strong effect. These include:

- Having a competent and legitimate village-level body that can negotiate on behalf of the community and represent its interests,
- Overcoming collective action problems when organising resistance, protest or possibly counter-violence (however, at present we still lack relevant case studies),
- Inclusive and collective nature of CDC leadership that gathers all relevant actors to influence threatening non-state armed groups, and
- Ensuring more effective communal vetting.

4.2 Practical implications of the research

While this is primarily an academic report, our results have clear implications for states and international organisations interested in protecting the civilian population from abuses by militias. Here we would like to point out the main practical implications of our study.

4.2.1 Implications for the formalisation of militias

Our results contribute to the mounting evidence that formalised and regulated pro-government militias perform better in terms of human rights abuses and abuses against the population than informal unregulated militias (Carey et al. 2017; Mitchell et al. 2014). They also further reinforce and add additional detail to our previous analysis (Gosztonyi et al. 2015) which found that the formalisation of previously informal militias has made them less threatening and more effective in providing security as perceived by the civilian population. This would suggest that the effect is relatively stable and lasting – one that withstands a significant escalation in violence and a proliferation of militias throughout the research region. It apparently also withstood the emergence of mixed units of paid and salaried ALP units together with informal arbakee fighters when several ALP commanders felt that the Taliban pressure was so strong that they could not manage solely with the formal ALP forces allotted to them. We tentatively concluded that the effect of formalisation actually becomes more visible with time.

The implications for practitioners are clear. The formalisation of pro-government counter-insurgency militias offers a way to increase their discipline, thus reducing risks to the civilian population and increasing their effectiveness in providing local security.

4.2.2 Implications regarding community involvement in vetting

Our results are strong and unequivocal: communities' involvement in vetting strongly increases the discipline and loyalty of local militias. Moreover, it appears that vetting positively influences not only the formalised militias (such as ALP who are integrated into government security forces' command structures) but also the less integrated informal militias (arbakees) (which are much less expensive for the state).

The practical implications are, once again, fairly obvious: wherever CDD-type structures exist, they should be involved in the vetting structure. Where no such structures exist, alternative, participatory structures should be sought out for conducting vetting. Such participatory structures might include traditional village councils – such as the *usos y costumbres* structures in large areas of Latin America (Magaloni et al. 2014) or tribal jirgas that exist in Eastern and South-Eastern Afghanistan. Our results for elders and arbabs also suggest a preference for more inclusive, broader-based approaches, although the more discretionary vetting process led by government-appointed notables, such as an arbab in the Afghan context, might also deliver some positive results if more participatory and broader-based structures do not exist.

4.2.3 Implications regarding community cohesion and social control

Recommendations are more difficult to derive from our results for social cohesion and social control. There are two reasons for this. First, our results for communal cohesion are somewhat ambivalent. One indicator of cohesion, participation in collective works, is associated with more fear and a more negative evaluation of informal arbakees. In contrast, the other two indicators of communal cohesion – community contribution to development and to security – are associated with generally positive outcomes regarding fear.

Second, externally increasing social cohesion and social control within a community requires significant social engineering which might not work out as expected and might even backfire. Nonetheless, some externally driven interventions do aim to increase internal cohesion. CDD schemes in particular may have an impact on communal cohesion, although our preliminary results from North-East Afghanistan are ambiguous in this respect. So far, we have identified *no* clear link between CDC functionality and communal cohesion (at least as measured by participation in hashar). However, a systematic investigation of the link between CDC functionality and social cohesion (particularly regarding community contribution to development and security) is not yet available. It is therefore possible that a more active and functional CDC can improve at least some indicators of communal cohesion. In this case, supporting CDD-type structures would likely work through at least two somewhat distinct mechanisms: one offering leadership to the community, the other increasing social cohesion and social control, thereby imposing more restraint on local armed actors.

The main practical implications of our findings concerning the impact of social cohesion relate, however, less to active measures aimed at strengthening social cohesion, and more to identifying the conditions under which local (pro-government) militias are likely to perform better from the point of view of the local population. In other words, the main implications of these results relate to the conditions,

such as the presence of cohesive communities, under which local pro-government counter-insurgency militias will likely be less abusive towards the population and provide better local security.

4.2.4 Implications regarding the CDC shura structure (and more broadly CDD structures)

The CDC structure in Afghanistan falls into the broader category of CDD schemes (Bebbington 2004; Hickey/Mohan 2005; Dongier et al. 2002). CDD approaches use participatory, community-based mechanisms to deliver development projects and provide local governance. CDD-type approaches to development are meant to remedy the shortcomings of discredited top-down development strategies (Alatas et al. 2002). Since the mid-1980s, CDD approaches have become increasingly popular with development organisations and governments. As of 2012, the World Bank reportedly supported some "400 CDD projects in 94 countries valued at almost $30 billion" (Wong 2012, 7).

Since then, a growing body of literature has been investigating whether and under what circumstances CDD approaches deliver impacts regarding the issues outlined above. The relatively recent meta-evaluation by Susan Wong (2012) of 17 robustly evaluated World Bank-funded CDD schemes (using an experimental or quasi-experimental research design based on significantly large samples) confirmed many and questioned some expectations associated with CDD. Among other things, it found mostly positive impacts on socioeconomic welfare, poverty and the utilisation of services. It found mixed, although generally positive impacts on governance, and no or only mixed impacts on social capital (ibid., v-vi). One topic that was largely overlooked in this respect is the impact of CDD schemes on security. This study of the Afghan case shows that a CDD-inspired structure can have a significant impact here, mainly by increasing the security of the civilian non-combatant population. The implications for practitioners, states or international organisations relate to the support for CDD schemes in internal conflict contexts and their suitability as a means to increase the security of the civilian population. Wherever possible, these structures should also involve the vetting of potential militia recruits.

4.3 A research agenda for the future

In this concluding section of our report, we identify a number of unanswered questions which future research will need to address. For one, our understanding of the relationship between communal leadership (as proxied through self-assessed CDC functionality) and the different measures of cohesion within a community (such as participation in hashar and community contribution to development and security) is still incomplete. Future research will need to further investigate the link between these factors and, in particular, how CDC functionality and our indicators of social cohesion combine (if at all) to influence militia behaviour. This is a task for qualitative and quantitative research. In a similar vein, we also need more case studies describing how social cohesion actually works to restrain militias.

We also need to gather further, mostly qualitative, information on the differences in how informal arbakees and formal ALPs operate: when and how they feud with each other, how discipline is maintained in the different types of militias (including mixed arbakee-ALP units) and generally how they function. Given the strong impact of communal vetting on militia behaviour, it would also be important to isolate the impact of the various measures (communal vetting, salaries, integration into official command structures) applied to impose more discipline on militias. Since communal vetting was not applied consistently when setting up ALP militias, we were able to investigate the difference – as perceived by

respondents – between communally vetted and unvetted ALP, providing us with a measure of the effectiveness of vetting as compared to other features characterising the ALP such as salaries, training and integration into an official command structure.

Lastly, regarding the technical development of our statistical models, we have not yet included incident data in our models. The inclusion of this data could fine-tune our models and make our results more accurate and realistic.

5 Literature

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6 Annex: regression results

VARIABLES	VARIABLES	Model 1 arbakee_fear	Model 2 taliban_fear	Model 3 alp_fear	Model 4 arbakee_sec_contrib	Model 5 alp_sec_contrib
arbakee_fear	arbakee_fear					
revcdc_active	CDC functionality	0.828***	0.835***	0.941	1.084	1.038
		-0.0468	-0.0394	-0.0649	-0.0768	-0.0681
Arbakee	militia_presence==arbakee	1.368*	1.432***	0.787	1.243	1.12
		-0.248	-0.184	-0.163	-0.286	-0.258
ALP	militia_presence==alp	1.013	1.275*	1.208	4.517***	2.282***
		-0.196	-0.184	-0.296	-0.905	-0.469
ANP_ANCOP	militia_presence==ANP/ANCOP	0.704	0.806	0.994	2.214***	1.676
		-0.197	-0.131	-0.231	-0.456	-0.543
Taliban	militia_presence==taliban	3.833***	0.677	3.426***	0.392**	0.369**
		-1.003	-0.324	-1.372	-0.181	-0.159
alp_arbakee	militia_presence==alp & arbakee	3.096***	2.470***	1.393	1.266	1.660**
		-0.592	-0.616	-0.47	-0.536	-0.393
1.district_vetting	categorization of districts on the basis of militia vetting = 1, comprehensive vetting districts	0.427***	0.833*	0.393***	1.796***	1.878***
		-0.0609	-0.0835	-0.0656	-0.268	-0.326
2.district_vetting	categorization of districts on the basis of militia vetting = 2, medium vetting districts	0.929	0.947	0.942	1.632***	1.196
		-0.124	-0.108	-0.148	-0.255	-0.284

3.district_vetting	categorization of districts on the basis of militia vetting = 3, worst vetting districts	0.751**	0.828*	0.76	1.212	0.938
		-0.108	-0.0904	-0.137	-0.24	-0.167
hashar	hashar	1.111**	1.059	0.827***	0.840***	1.046
		-0.0587	-0.0424	-0.0458	-0.0448	-0.0566
community_contrib_dev	Scores for factor 1	0.889**	0.894***	1.068	1.261***	1.250***
		-0.048	-0.035	-0.0518	-0.0721	-0.0806
community_sec_contrib	community_sec_contrib	0.690***	0.827***	0.439***	1.250***	0.999
		-0.0443	-0.0538	-0.0331	-0.105	-0.0845
2.ethnicity	ethnicity = 2, tajik	0.420***	1.013	0.537***	1.734***	1.112
		-0.056	-0.096	-0.0779	-0.234	-0.16
3.ethnicity	ethnicity = 3, hazara	0.577**	1.625***	0.792	1.184	1.378*
		-0.127	-0.242	-0.175	-0.253	-0.235
4.ethnicity	ethnicity = 4, uzbak	0.490***	1.284***	0.510***	1.951***	1.322*
		-0.0673	-0.119	-0.0734	-0.254	-0.199
8.ethnicity	ethnicity = 8, other	0.624**	1.497***	0.570***	1.642**	0.973
		-0.132	-0.224	-0.11	-0.357	-0.184
revdistrict_security	revdistrict_security	0.883**	1.113**	0.678***	1.333***	1.270***
		-0.0484	-0.0504	-0.0419	-0.0977	-0.078
1.powerful_village	powerful_village = 1, mullah/imam/sayed	0.384***	1.209	0.329***	1.39	3.161***
		-0.0791	-0.217	-0.0908	-0.395	-0.89
6.powerful_village	powerful_village = 6, qomandan	0.992	0.852	1.196	1.748**	1.127
		-0.198	-0.13	-0.22	-0.484	-0.233
7.powerful_village	powerful_village = 7, malek/arbab	0.626**	1.01	0.859	1.642**	1.38
		-0.122	-0.196	-0.166	-0.39	-0.317
8.powerful_village	powerful_village = 8, head of shura	0.634***	0.759**	0.691***	1.295	0.967
		-0.0723	-0.101	-0.088	-0.232	-0.174

10.powerful_village	powerful_village = 10, tribal/village elders	0.486***	0.86	0.574***	1.458*	1.947***
		-0.0651	-0.119	-0.0898	-0.292	-0.37
2.wave	wave = 2	0.146***	0.156***		1.699***	
		-0.0198	-0.0194		-0.294	
3.wave	wave = 3	0.317***	0.576***		2.150***	
		-0.0405	-0.0648		-0.346	
taliban_fear	taliban_fear					
alp_fear	alp_fear					
3.wave_2_3	wave_2_3 = 3			1.106		3.174***
				-0.137		-0.4
arbakee_sec_contrib	arbakee_sec_contrib					
alp_sec_contrib	alp_sec_contrib					
Constant cut1		0.0261***	0.0733***	0.0251***	9.223***	2.203*
		-0.00912	-0.0243	-0.00952	-4.096	-0.899
Constant cut2		0.0777***	0.185***	0.0835***	42.09***	9.598***
		-0.0265	-0.0598	-0.0305	-18.67	-3.917
Observations		10,129	11,170	8,007	6,168	5,780

Robust seeform in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1