The Insider-Outsider Paradox:
Afghan Perceptions of International Intervention
and Trust in State Institutions

Jennifer Hove
Department of Political Science, University of Toronto
j.hove@utoronto.ca

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Abstract

In recent years, calls for increased attention to local understandings and experiences of statebuilding interventions have grown ever louder. These calls for context sensitivity are all the more germane in light of shifts in statebuilding practice towards the emphasis of state legitimacy and capacity. The aim, in other words, is the establishment of states that enjoy the broad-based support of their citizens. Yet despite this focus, there remains limited knowledge of local perspectives on statebuilding, specifically the foundations of domestic state legitimacy and political support amongst local populations. Using data collected in Afghanistan in autumn 2007 from a national survey of 1500 Afghans, this paper seeks to address this gap by exploring the following question: what are the social and political determinants of trust in Afghan state institutions? Drawing on emergent research on Afghan perceptions of democratisation and prospects for peace, I first examine the effects of social factors, including ethnicity and region. Second, I explore the impact of perspectives on anti-government forces, and finally the influence of views towards the international intervention. This analysis finds the effects of social divisions on trust in the state to be relatively slim. The influence of political determinants, in contrast, is shown to be substantial. Specifically, perceptions of international statebuilders mediate the negative relationship between support for insurgents and trust in state institutions. These findings provide greater clarity into the micro-foundations of domestic political support in post-conflict settings, and the relationship between perceptions of external actors and the domestic state. More broadly, they respond to appeals within the international statebuilding literature for greater attention to political community and the underpinnings of support for statebuilding operations amongst local populations.
1 Introduction

In recent years, calls for increased attention to local understandings and experiences of statebuilding interventions have grown ever louder (Mac Ginty, 2011; Donais, 2009; Papagianni, 2008; Richmond, 2009; Call and Cousens, 2008; Donini, 2007). These calls for context sensitivity – though they originate from various normative and theoretical perspectives – are all the more germane in light of the shift towards “statebuilding 3.0” where “success is defined as a ‘host’ state that can survive effectively on its own” (Lake, 2010: 273). The aim, in other words, is broad-based political support, which is often expressed as legitimacy. This emphasis necessarily invites two questions: legitimate according to whom, and support derived from what? In posing these questions (and certainly in attempting to answer them), the role of domestic political community must be brought to the fore, as must the interconnectedness of perceived legitimacy for the intervention itself and for the supported government.

Lake (2010) speaks to precisely this connection by highlighting what he sees as a substantial blind-spot in contemporary statebuilding practice: external actors, all the while attempting to legitimize a host government through the provision of social services and security, may not be themselves seen as legitimate by local populations. To the extent that this is so, social and political divisions amongst local peoples are presumably of interest, as are “(de)legitimizing” perceptions and beliefs. Existing research on the micro-foundations of legitimacy, regime support and trust in the state provides a useful guide to investigating the sources of political support amongst citizens (see Levi et al., 2009; Gilley, 2006a/b; Mishler and Rose, 2001a/b and 2005).

Yet there is surprisingly little that attempts to take these lessons and apply them as appropriate to conflict settings and post-conflict transitions. This absence has implications for both theory and practice, particularly in the continued top-down view of statebuilding interventions. Indeed, as Lemay-Hébert (2009) argues, statebuilding faces substantial limits in fostering support when inattentive to the needs and perceptions of local populations. As he puts it: “the success of a statebuilding intervention lies in the international-local nexus, [with] the internationals being able to fully understand the local context so as to better adjust their policies to affect it” (ibid: 35).

The aim of this paper is to contribute to understandings of this “international-local nexus” by examining the determinants of trust amongst Afghans in their nascent state institutions, a sentiment closely related to perceived legitimacy, and reflective of diffuse political support (Mishler and Rose, 2005). In keeping with micro-theories of legitimacy, regime support and trust in the state, I investigate the effects of social and political determinants. However, to align these perspectives with the particular nature of a statebuilding intervention, I also consider the extent to which citizen evaluations of external actors and insurgents contribute to political trust. To do so, I analyze data from a nationwide survey of Afghan citizens conducted in 2007. As a testing ground for current approaches to statebuilding, the Afghan case is of particular interest.
The analysis begins by investigating the influence of domestic social factors – namely ethnicity and region, two salient social divisions in Afghanistan – on political trust. I then consider the role of political determinants, first by investigating the impact of support for anti-government forces on support for the state. This relationship inarguably represents a central site of domestic political contestation in Afghanistan and in conflict-affected environments more broadly. Second, I introduce the international dimension by examining the relationship between support for the intervention amongst the Afghan population and trust in state institutions. Given ambiguity about the nature of the relationship – where perceptions of external actors may influence attitudes towards the state, or vice versa – I analyze reciprocal effects to more decisively assess competing claims. I construct a structural equation model to test hypothesized effects.

The results suggest the effects of social divisions on political trust to be relatively slim, and primarily indirect via political evaluations of anti-government forces and external actors. The influence of political determinants on trust in the state, in contrast, is shown to be substantial. Specifically, perceptions of the international intervention mediate the negative relationship between support for insurgents and trust in state institutions. Moreover, in assessing the reciprocal relationship between views of the intervention and trust in the state, the findings suggest the far stronger effect to be from Afghan’s evaluations of statebuilders’ performance to support for the domestic state.

The implications of these results are threefold. First, in a context of political transition and ongoing insecurity, they offer a more complete picture of the effect of local “micro-level” factors on perceptions of the state. This provides an important corrective to top-down, institutional understandings of statebuilding. Second, to the extent that the international mediates the relationship between attitudes towards domestic “spoilers” and trust in state institutions, the results speak to the uncertainty felt by local populations concerning the sustainability of political transition, as well as the impacts of external imposition. Third, it does not appear that those individuals who benefit from transition (and are thus allied with current political leaders) will in turn support the intervention. Rather, evaluations of international actors – and their performance – impact citizens’ allegiance to the state. The implication is that domestic state legitimacy depends in part on the legitimacy of international actors (see Roberts, 2011; Lake 2010).

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. I next discuss micro-theories of legitimacy, regime support and trust in the state to provide a theoretical framework for the investigation. I then turn to related concerns within the statebuilding literature, before touching briefly on the context of post-2001 Afghanistan. Having laid this groundwork, I then outline my expectations, data and methodology. I next unpack the findings of this study, and conclude by discussing their relation to current research on Afghanistan and statebuilding theory more broadly.
2 Legitimacy, Regime Support and Trust in the State

Within the literature on political transition, democratization and state-society relations, questions of legitimacy, regime support and trust in the state figure highly. Indeed, to the extent that they all pertain to “how power may be used in ways that citizens consciously accept,” they form the basis for “the creation of political community” (Gilley, 2006b: 499). Although this paper is concerned primarily with trust in state institutions, it is useful to distinguish amongst related concepts, both to place the investigation within a broader context of political inquiry, and to connect it to central themes within statebuilding literature specifically.

2.1 Legitimacy

The concept of political legitimacy has re-emerged in recent years as one of particular interest (Hechter, 2009), not least because examinations of the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have centered to large extent on questions of legitimacy (Roy, 2004). Scholars and practitioners have rightly questioned the extent to which the military engagements and political transitions in both countries are seen as legitimate by local populations. As both concerns highlight, the “object” of legitimacy varies (Gilley, 2006b) from military actors to elected officials to laws. Naturally, the statebuilding literature tends to be primarily concerned with domestic state legitimacy, or the extent to which a state “is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power” (Gilley, 2006a: 48). Crucially, it is thought to provide a state with grounds for eliciting citizen support other than appeals to immediate self-interest, and to lessen its reliance on monitoring and enforcement to induce compliance with its authority (Levi et al., 2009: 355).

To the extent, therefore, that legitimacy is afforded to a state by its citizens by way of perceptions, expectations and behaviours,¹ issues of measurement and cause are important to consider. On measurement, Levi, Sacks and Taylor (2009) argue that legitimacy as “popular acceptance” of authority must be split into value-based and behavioural components, where the former represents “a sense of obligation or willingness to obey authorities” that then translates into the latter, or “actual compliance of regulations and laws” (356). Weatherford’s (1992) formulation of citizens’ legitimacy orientations also points to a micro view emphasizing citizens’ attitudes and actions, but he adds to it a macro level perspective emphasizing attitudes towards formal system properties.

Much of the research on sources or determinants of legitimacy also centres on the distinction between macro- and micro-level views, both of which can be further distinguished by socio-economic and political factors. The macro perspective has traditionally emphasized such state-level characteristics as external security, internal order, general welfare, freedom and justice – all thought to lead to states enjoying higher levels of legitimacy (Gilley, 2006a). Ethnic

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¹This understanding of legitimacy ignores, of course, external legitimacy and macro perspectives emphasizing formal system properties (see Weatherford, 1992).
homogeneity may also increase legitimacy by making it easier for a state to embody particular ethnic values. Examinations of political factors tend to focus on system performance, including governance-based indicators such as rule of law and control of corruption, as well as the extension of democratic rights (ibid).

The micro perspective takes a similar tact, while emphasizing individual-level characteristics, perceptions and experiences. Gilley’s (2006a and b) comprehensive overview of legitimacy determinants highlights socio-economic characteristics, namely education levels; socio-psychological factors including political efficacy, pro-democratic attitudes and social capital; and political determinants such as government support. Some argue for the primacy of perceptions towards political goods, including political rights, personal security and rule of law (Carter, 2011). Hechter (2009) suggests that “the key determinant of the legitimacy of a state is the perceived fairness of the decision-making process rather than its provision of resources, opportunities, or outcomes” (281). Similarly, Levi et al. (2009) posit that perceived trustworthiness of government is a critical antecedent condition of legitimacy.

2.2 Regime support & trust in the state

However, while the distinction between trust in government and perceived state legitimacy may be an empirical question in democratic states (Gilley, 2006a), their overlap may be substantial in post-conflict transitions. Indeed, to the extent that citizens associate newly elected (or appointed) political and military officials with the state, we should expect the two to correlate strongly. Said differently, the classic distinction between “regimes” and “authorities” may be fuzzy (Weatherford, 1987). The work by Mishler and Rose (2001a and 2005) on political trust is pertinent here. Specifically, they discuss theorized relationships between political trust and diffuse political support for the state (or regime support), whereby the two are held to be synonymous or reciprocal (Mishler and Rose, 2005: 3-4).

Importantly, Mishler and Rose (2001a) measure political trust not simply as trust in government but as trust in state institutions, namely parliament, the prime minister/president, courts, military and police. This more expansive measure should better reflect citizens’ orientations towards the state, and thus be closer conceptually to diffuse political support. Moreover, to capture the “realities facing citizens in new democracies or in transitional regimes moving from an undemocratic past to an uncertain future,” they compare political trust against two related measures of regime support: one a kind of “idealist” measure of citizens’ commitment to democracy, and the other a “realist” measure of citizens’ evaluation of regimes (past and present) with which they have first-hand experience (Mishler and Rose, 2001b: 303). The authors conclude that trust in state institutions is a hybrid measure of political support: it is realist in that

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2 Gilley (2006a) also makes the point that the overlap would be tautological in the case where a government of the day has “captured” the state.

3 In particular, Rose and Mishler argue that in “incomplete democracies” an idealist approach evoking democracy is problematic since it assumes that citizens view their current regime as a democracy, which they in fact may not (2001b: 306).
it measures attitudes towards institutions with which most citizens have some experience, but also contains an idealist ambiguity susceptible to different interpretations and levels of understanding (ibid: 314).

As far as the sources of political trust are concerned, they follow a similar pattern as the determinants of legitimacy discussed above. Again, there exist macro- and micro-theories, though in this case they tend to be distinguished along cultural and institutional lines (Mishler and Rose 2001a; Rose, Mishler and Munro, 2011). The cultural theories emphasize the importance of national/civic culture in explaining variations in trust, with macro views focusing on national tradition, and micro approaches exploring differences in individual socialization stemming from gender, family background, education and the like. Institutional theories, in contrast, emphasize government performance. Macro-institutional approaches focus “on aggregate performance of institutions in such matters as promoting growth, governing effectively, and avoiding corruption” (Mishler and Rose, 2001a: 32). Micro-institutional theories, expectedly, emphasize citizen evaluations of performance, recognizing that these may also depend on individual circumstances and values, including social background or political allegiance (ibid: 36).

What we can take from this discussion is threefold. First, the conceptual distinction between legitimacy, regime support and political trust is still subject to some debate, and the precise nature of this distinction may differ based on context and regime type. Although political trust does not explicitly capture the extent to which citizens accept state officials’ “right to govern,” it has been shown to reflect diffuse political support.4 Second, setting measurement issues aside, the three appear to share common causes, namely socio-economic, political and institutional/performance-based factors. Third – and perhaps more importantly from the standpoint of establishing a theoretical connection to statebuilding literature – research on legitimacy, regime support and political trust share a common interest in how citizens evaluate political authority (Weatherford, 1992: 149).

3 Statebuilding 3.0

Indeed, questions of political authority sit the centre of contemporary peace operations, which now focus explicitly on (re)building state institutions with the aim of strengthening a state’s internal legitimacy and its capacity to delivery basic security and services (Paris and Sisk, 2007). One of the main criticisms levelled against the approach is that it measures success against an “OECD-type western state, regarded as the model stable state” (Boege et al., 2009: 18). While it is argued that the priorities of democratization and liberalization – which once held pride of

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4 I therefore use “trust” and “support” interchangeably in the following discussions when referring to citizens’ perceptions of the state and state institutions.
place – have been repositioned under those of state legitimacy and capacity, international statebuilders are nonetheless interested in a particular kind of state: a liberal, democratic polity.

Two points are important with respect to the investigation at hand. First, the concept of legitimacy tends to be used rather loosely, particularly by donors and practitioners. An international report on state legitimacy in fragile contexts takes this view: “a political order, institution or actor is legitimate to the extent that people regard it as satisfactory and believe that no available alternative would be vastly superior” (OECD, 2010: 7). Domestic state legitimacy is thus largely equated with broad-based support for the state. Second, there is growing recognition that successful statebuilding “lies not only in the creation of effective state institutions, or in the legitimacy of actors promoting the process, but also in the ability of external actors to generate support for the operation amongst the local population” (Lemay-Hébert, 2009: 35). Importantly, this process involves input and perceptions of citizens, and hinges both on “the interface of state institutions with society” (Call, 2008: 11) and that of external actors and local populations.

As mentioned above, the sources of internal legitimacy in this context are seen principally in the capacity of a state to deliver social services and security. Lake (2010) links this view to a social contract theory of the state, and known predictors of state failure, namely the inability of weak states to deliver services (276). Roberts (2008) invokes the notion of a positive peace to argue that in lieu of “inserting modern institutions,” statebuilding operations should place greater emphasis on fulfilling basic welfare needs, as a way of supporting social justice and strengthening state legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. This same thinking, however, in addition to its connections to building viable states and providing for the welfare of citizens, is attractive to militaries as a means of “force protection” since the provision of services and infrastructure is thought to reduce opportunities for insurgents (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012).

Current approaches also give rise a series of tensions. First, statebuilding relies on “outside intervention to foster self-government,” and in doing so, “foreigners are involved in defining ‘legitimate’ local leaders” (Paris and Sisk, 2007: 4). As a consequence, external actors and the local leaders they sanction are presumably viewed by local populations as closely linked. Moreover, external actors are often themselves involved in delivering social services as a means of solidifying their own legitimacy, which may undermine support for the state (Lake, 2010). Second, previously existing state-society relations, namely “weak states characterized by patrimonial politics and skewed development” (Barnett and Zürcher, 2009) may be reinforced by statebuilding strategies. Specifically, external statebuilders often strike implicit contracts with local, subnational elites, as a means of implementing reforms and delivering services and

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5 Indeed, in the shift to “statebuilding 3.0” there tends to be greater emphasis on output/performance-based sources of legitimacy, than on input/process-based sources, emphasizing liberal democratic representation, which characterized earlier statebuilding practice.

6 Galtung (1996) defines a positive peace as one that reflects not simply the absence of armed conflict, but also economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society.
assistance (*ibid*). In contexts where the state is historically defined by limited reach, this can further weaken it vis-à-vis well-entrenched subnational power-holders.

These tensions underscore two of the main contractions of statebuilding operations. First, they are destabilizing political processes to the extent that they redistribute power and resources, thus creating “winners and losers” amongst the local population (Menocal, 2009). In addition to the role of subnational elites, this brings the antagonism of anti-government forces or “spoilers” into sharp relief. Secondly, attempts to foster domestic state legitimacy may run headlong into traditional forms of political legitimacy, including customary institutions and authorities (*ibid*). This reality has led many to call for “hybrid” forms of statebuilding, which recognize local, bottom-up perspectives (Mac Ginty, 2011; Schmeidl, 2009). Both contradictions speak to reasons why the sustainability of statebuilding reforms—and thus political allegiance—may be very much in question in the eyes of local populations.

4 Afghanistan

The tensions described above are particularly acute in Afghanistan, due in part to the uniqueness of a statebuilding enterprise taking place in a post-invasion context. In the wake of the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the Bonn Conference was held under the auspices of the UN to lay out plans for stabilization and the rebuilding of government institutions. Aimed at “the establishment of a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative democracy,” the resulting Bonn Agreement was influenced heavily by international actors and advocated “a strong model of centralized governance” (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007: 28). Seen as “a victors’ peace” that handed power to “factional leaders who were on the ‘right side’ of the war on terror” (Goodhand and Sedra, 2007: 41), the Bonn statebuilding project has caused friction between Kabul political elites and their international partners, on one hand, and regional power-holders, on the other (Nixon and Ponzio, 2007). Given the importance of local leadership, ethnicity and tribe in defining political allegiance in Afghanistan, these tensions are very likely felt by the local population when evaluating the emerging state.

In the years since Bonn, the international conferences and agreements that have followed have been increasingly Afghan-led, but outcomes are “littered with a mix of successes, failures and grey areas for governance and statebuilding” (Rubin and Hamidzada, 2007: 8). Among the advancements is a constitution that recognizes human rights including the legal equality of women, the conduct of regular elections, the formation of an independent human rights commission, and increases in school enrolment (*ibid*). These arguable successes, however, are tempered by the real and growing problems of violence and corruption, slow economic growth, the failure of the central government to expand its hold beyond the capital, and increasing discontent among citizens (Suhrke, 2009).
These challenges potentially underscore a more deeply rooted one, as articulated by those who question the extent to which current statebuilding efforts parallel past “modernization” enterprises in Afghanistan. As Suhrke (2006) argues, past modernizers sought to strengthen the central state, rebuild the army and advance two fundamental symbols of modernity – universal education and women’s rights. In following a similar agenda, contemporary statebuilding may leave Afghans with frustrated expectations of peace, and be seen negatively as overly “foreign” (Suhrke, 2006: 28-9). Moreover, two sites of contestation are pivotal in determining how Afghans perceive and experience the international engagement in their country. First, the social framework of statebuilding, as often expressed around women’s rights, continues to be a sensitive issue, with Afghans “deeply divided on the direction, scope and speed of proceeding in these areas” (30). Second, ongoing tensions over the reach of the central government fuel opposition to the state and its dependence on international backers (31).

This last point is particularly salient in the context of deteriorating security, which has marked a worsening problem since 2006, particularly in the South and East of Afghanistan (Senlis, 2007). Although many argue that insurgents and low-level Taliban fighters are driven by unemployment and poverty, others trace the mounting insurgency to three political factors: “a predatory political system that has excluded some ethnic groups; abuse of power by government officials; and a perception that the international forces are overly aggressive” (Waldman as cited in IRIN, 2010). However, as much as anti-government forces specifically attack the Western foreign presence and development model as illegitimate, views critical of the Karzai government and international statebuilders resonate far beyond those who support the insurgents: “they are powerful tools for focusing and justifying criticism of the government and its foreign supporters” (Suhrke, 2009: 243).

Therefore, more than being the centre-piece of the international intervention in Afghanistan, state legitimacy represents a key site of contestation between the domestic political actors aligned with the international community, and those that challenge the current system. As evidenced by increasing levels of conflict and violence, and the recent assassinations of high-profile political elites, this division remains a deep one. Moreover, in an environment of ongoing insecurity, Afghan citizens are often caught between the competing demands of three forces: international, government, and insurgent/anti-government (Larson, 2011). Although the Karzai government is seen to be closely allied with international actors, so too is a broader “insider-outsider” distinction at play in the ways that Afghans perceive and experience statebuilding.

Moreover, in turning the analytical lens towards the perspectives of local actors, there are a number of complexities that demand serious consideration. First, it is a mistake to assume

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8 These anti-government domestic forces are often referred to as “spoilers” in the broader literature on conflict resolution. Here, they refer to insurgent groups as represented by the Taliban and others.
coherence or commonality amongst Afghans with regard to their approval of political leaders and the international community, or their views towards peace and reconstruction. As many commentators have argued, there is no single Afghan “opinion” on these matters, and perceptions can vary based on a range of factors, including ethnicity, proximity to Kabul and political allegiance. Second, Afghans may hold views that appear contradictory to outside observers, but are perfectly consistent from an internal perspective. As Roger Mac Ginty (2011) suggests, “a farmer might be politically supportive of the Kabul government but subsidise the Taliban through his economic activity” (94). Rather than representing incongruous behaviour, this example underscores the difficulties faced by many Afghans when navigating the political environment, and the extent to which survival guides decision-making. Likewise, it points to a third complexity that no doubt influences Afghans’ outlooks towards statebuilding: the dual face of the intervention, characterized by an international community that at once seeks to rebuild the state and promote peace, while also engaging in combat.

5 Expectations

From the preceding discussions, a number of hypothesized linkages can be derived involving socio-economic factors, perceptions of anti-government forces, support for the intervention and trust in state institutions. Broadly, as an examination of the micro-foundations of trust in the state, the following posits that trust will vary based on differences in socialization, political experiences or individual perceptions and evaluations (Mishler and Rose, 2001a). To make relevant to the dynamics of statebuilding in the midst of ongoing conflict – and the particular realities of post-2001 Afghanistan – this study privileges perceptions towards insurgents and the performance of external actors as key determinants of trust in state institutions.

5.1 Direct effects of socio-economic factors
Thinking first about the influence of social background on trust in the state, the socio-economic factors central to the investigation are: the urban/rural divide, region, ethnicity, gender, education and age. In particular, in line with the limited reach of the central government into rural areas, I expect rural dwellers to be less trustful of the state than their urban counterparts. Similarly, I expect Afghans living in the South-East, an area that has experienced high levels of conflict relative to others and is considered more conservative, to find state institutions less trustworthy than Afghans living elsewhere in the country. The influence of ethnicity is less clear. On one hand, the ethnic character of the Karzai government is largely Pashtun, which could conceivably lead to greater support among co-ethnics. On the other, certain Pashtun tribes seen to be allied

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9 Age is treated primarily as a control variable, and thus its hypothesized relationship with trust in the state will not be discussed here.
with the Taliban were largely excluded from the post-2001 political settlement, which would presumably lead to less support for the state.\footnote{I am unable to control for tribal divisions in the following analysis.}

Furthermore, I expect women to be more trusting than men, and more highly educated Afghans to be more supportive of the state than their less educated counterparts. The gender difference is expected for two reasons: first, the aim of upholding a gender-sensitive democracy, however imperfect in its design and execution (Abirafeh, 2009), is likely viewed more favourably on the whole by women than by men. Moreover, Afghan women may be more likely to see the state as the best hope of ending ongoing conflict, which is often felt most acutely by women and children. The influence of education is linked to its role in leading to greater understanding of legitimating beliefs (Mishler and Rose, 2001a).

5.2 Mediation of views towards anti-government forces & external actors
The direct effects of socio-economic factors on trust in state institutions, however, should be largely mediated by support for anti-government forces, and perceptions of the intervention.\footnote{A mediator is a third variable that links cause and effect. Testing for mediation is typically conducted to try to understand the mechanism through which an initial variable affects an outcome (Kenny, 2012).}

This should occur for two reasons. First, differences in social background should also determine political outlooks on “spoilers” and external statebuilders. Second, the more important theoretical claim is that anti-government forces and external actors both act as intermediaries of the relationship between local populations and the state. In the first case, support for anti-government forces should naturally depress political support for the state, though as mentioned above, this relationship is not necessarily as straightforward as it appears at first blush, since Afghans are often caught between the competing demands of insurgents and government elites. In the second case, those Afghans more favourable in their views of the international intervention should likewise hold the state to be more deserving of their trust, though this relationship may be attenuated somewhat to the extent that attempts by statebuilders to foster their own legitimacy undermines the state’s. Still, in taking an output/performance-based view, we should expect the intervention to “do well by doing good”: positive views towards its ability to provide security and reconstruction should lead to greater levels of support for state institutions.

5.3 Reciprocal relationship between support for the intervention and support for the state
Although most statebuilding theory sees the linkage between perceptions of international statebuilders and political support for the state in the terms outlined above, the relationship could conceivably work in the opposite direction. Specifically, those among the local population allied with the political leaders advantaged by statebuilding’s political settlement could come to view the intervention in a more favourable light. In Afghanistan, for instance, President Karzai was
chosen to lead the interim administration implemented by the Bonn process, and was subsequently elected to office in 2004. Afghans supportive of Karzai or other factional leaders at the time of transition (i.e. the ‘winners’ in the lingo used above) may consequently hold more positive perceptions of the international intervention, at least initially. The power asymmetries involved in statebuilding – between Western donors and militaries, on one hand and an emerging state, on the other – accord with the view that the stronger relationship should be from perceptions of external actors to trust in state institutions. Nevertheless, in confirming this theoretical claim, it is important to test for reciprocal effects, as I do below.

6 Data and Methodology

In order to estimate the hypothesized linkages discussed above, I use structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS20, a program that employs full information maximum likelihood estimation. Importantly, SEM measures not only direct, unidirectional effects (as do single equation techniques) but also indirect and reciprocal effects of the kind central to this investigation. Moreover, SEM allows for the measurement of latent variables or underlying concepts, which cannot be directly observed but must be constructed of multiple indicators.

The analysis draws from a public opinion survey of 1500 Afghans conducted in September 2007 at the initiative of Environics, a Canadian research and polling firm. The survey was conducted in partnership with the Munk Centre for International Studies and the Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (CERES) at the University of Toronto, along with three national media sponsors – The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, The Globe and Mail, and La Presse (Environics, 2007). Interviews were carried out in person, in Dari or Pashto, by trained interviewers working with an Afghan partner organization that routinely conducts surveying for INGOs and donors. Male respondents were interviewed by male interviewers exclusively, and female respondents by female interviewers. The survey was conducted in all of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces using stratified random sampling. It had a contact rate of 91 percent and a cooperation rate of 85 percent (ibid).

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12 A latent variable is measured by at least two observed variables, each assumed to be an indicator of an underlying construct. A measurement model analyzes the relationship among the observed indicators and estimates an empirical measure of the latent variable based on the commonality of indicators (Mishler and Rose, 2001a).

13 As outlined by Environics, a total of 177 sampling points were distributed proportional to population size in each province, stratified by urban/non-urban status to yield a national sample of 1,278, with an additional 25 sampling points representing 100 boosted interviews in Kabul and 200 boosted interviews in Kandahar. Sampling points were then distributed to randomly selected districts within provinces, also proportionate to population size; and lastly to randomly selected villages or neighborhoods within those districts, by simple random sampling. Sources for population parameters were United Nations population estimates and population projections from the Afghan Central Statistical Office. Only the national sample of 1,278 respondents is used in this analysis.
The use of survey data from post-conflict and conflict-affected settings is not without its criticisms. Some point to the difficulty of conducting random sampling in situations of ongoing insecurity. In this case, the organizations involved did not report the need to engage in replacement sampling, which occurs when interviewers are physically unable to reach their sampling points due to safety concerns or other impediments. Another concern pertains to social desirability bias, which arises when respondents modify their answers to accord with social norms or with what they believe the interviewer expects. In conflict zones, there is no doubt a high cost to information, and respondents may understandably mistrust outsiders. Questions of bias are likewise at play in qualitative studies. In all cases, they point to the care that must be taken when interpreting data, and the importance of cross-checking the veracity of findings alongside research conducted by other means.

7 Results and Analysis

For clarity of presentation and explanation, this section will address the analysis in three steps: first considering the direct effects of socio-economic factors on trust in state institutions; next the mediating effect of support for anti-government forces; and lastly the mediating and reciprocal effect of favourable views towards the performance of the international intervention.\(^\text{14}\)

Turning first to Figure 1, the direct effects of social background, including gender, ethnicity and education, are presented.\(^\text{15}\) Of note first is the fit of the model, which can be judged as good, as measured by correspondence between the parameters estimated by the model and those produced by the data as a whole. The two measures of model fit used here are chi-square and root mean square error approximation (rmsea).\(^\text{16}\) Next of interest is the measurement of trust in state institutions, depicted on the right of the diagram. In line with well-established approaches (see Mishler and Rose, 2001a), trust in the state is measured using three indicators: support for the Karzai government, trust in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and trust in the Afghan National Police (ANP) (see Appendix A for question wording).\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^{14}\) In the figures presented, rectangles represent observed variables while circles represent latent variables constructed of multiple observed indicators which are shown as squares. Effects are shown as coefficients on the arrows and can be interpreted as standardized regression weights, or as factor loadings in the case of indicators for the latent variables. Standardized coefficients are used to facilitate comparisons within the models. To reduce clutter, error terms have been eliminated from the figures.

\(^{15}\) The influence of income was tested in all three models presented. In each case, its effects were insignificant, and its addition did not alter the effects of any other variables.

\(^{16}\) The significance of chi-square (p=.000) indicates that there is significant difference between the model and the data. However, the rmsea value shows that the imprecision of the coefficients shown in the model is near zero with a confidence interval extending to .051. Current interpretative standards suggest that values less than .06 indicate a good fit while values up to .08 suggest an adequate fit (see Byrne, 2010: 80).

\(^{17}\) The parameter estimates of >.65 confirm that the three indicators share a high degree of commonality and measure an underlying construct.
On the left side of Figure 1, correlations among the various socio-economic factors are presented. As would be expected, for example, women, rural inhabitants and older Afghans report lower levels of education, as shown by their respective coefficients (-.31, -.30 and -.19). A very high correlation exists between Pashtun ethnicity and residence in the South and East of Afghanistan (.65). This is not surprising as these provinces are predominantly Pashtun. Of greater concern is whether this presents an issue of collinearity, which poses problems for estimating parameters. Diagnostic testing suggests this not to be the case.\(^\text{18}\)

Considering next the direct effects of socio-economic factors on trust in state institutions, their influence is limited. Afghans with higher levels of education are more likely to trust the state, as are women. Those living in rural areas are less likely to find state institutions trustworthy. However, these effects are relatively slim as evidenced by standardized coefficients ranging in

\(^{18}\text{In all three models presented, testing was conducted by eliminating either ethnicity or region, and rerunning the model to compare parameter estimates. In this first model, the elimination of region does not significantly alter ethnicity’s effect on trust; it remains insignificant (p=.128). The elimination of ethnicity, on the other hand, does bring region’s effect on trust into significance, thought it remains weak (coefficient=−.07; p=.0310). Substantively, therefore, the effect does not change greatly. Moreover, the elimination of either variable does not significantly alter the other’s estimates in subsequent models, and doing significantly worsens model fit.}\)
absolute value from .11 to .14. The effects of region, ethnicity and age are not significant (as depicted by their italicized coefficients). Together, variables representing social background account for only 5% of the variation in the latent measure of trust in state institutions.

Figure 2 adds a critical political dimension to the analysis: support for anti-government forces operating in Afghanistan.20

Figure 2: The Mediating Effect of Support for Anti-Government Forces on Trust in State Institutions

As expected, this variable mediates the relationship between many of the social factors and trust in state institutions.21 Specifically, it fully mediates the effects of region, ethnicity and age, and partially mediates the effect of gender on support for the state. In other words, Afghans living in the South and East of the country are more likely to lend some support to insurgent forces, which in turn dampens trust in the state. The same holds for Pashtuns, relative to other ethnic groups; to a lesser extent, age also leads to higher levels of support for anti-government forces. Where these

19 The effects of education, gender and rural residence are significant at p<.01.
20 As shown in Appendix A, the question asks about the Taliban in particular. It thus does not capture distinctions in perceptions towards other insurgent groups in Afghanistan.
21 Model fit remains good, as shown by the rmsea value of .034, with a confidence interval ranging up to .045.
social factors were insignificant in the previous model, their indirect effects on trust in the state are significant, though weak, as shown in Table 1. Women, on the other hand, are less likely to support the Taliban, and there remains a direct, positive effect of gender on trust in the state.22

Table 1: Indirect Effects of Region, Ethnicity, Age and Gender on Trust in State Institutions (via Support for Anti-Government Forces)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South-East</td>
<td>-.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashtun</td>
<td>-.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: derived from Figure 2

On its own, support for anti-government forces has a relatively strong, negative effect on support for the state, as hypothesized. That this effect is not stronger speaks to the uncertainty of political allegiance in conflict zones. If the outcome of a conflict is unclear, people may find it necessary to hedge their bets, so to speak. Moreover, some Afghans may recognize that within the ranks of insurgent forces are community or family members, a perspective that would conceivably lead to differences in perceptions towards low-level fighters versus the groups as a whole. Even still, the addition of this dimension to the model increases the explained variance in trust in the state by roughly 9%.

Turning now to the estimated effect of support for the intervention, Figure 3 shows the extent to which it mediates the influence of domestic social and political determinants on trust in the state. Again, the fit of the model is good as measured by the rmsea value.23 Importantly, support for the intervention is an output-based measure consisting of three indicators: Afghans’ judgements towards statebuilders’ performance in fighting the Taliban, training the ANA and ANP, and providing reconstruction assistance.

These views of the intervention fully mediate the influence of gender and rural residence on trust in state institutions, and partially mediate that of region.24 For instance, women are more likely to judge the performance of statebuilders positively, which in turn increases support for the state. Rural residents and Afghans living in the South-East, by contrast, are more critical of the

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22 All parameters shown in Model 2 are significant at p ≤.01.
23 As in previous models, however, the significance of chi-square (p=.000) again suggests a significant difference between the model and the data.
24 The total effects of region are multi-faceted, composed of the indirect effect on trust via support for anti-government forces, the indirect effect via support for the intervention, and a direct effect which becomes significant with the addition of the latter measure of perceptions of external actors.
outcomes of the intervention. Crucially, perceptions of the intervention also mediate the negative effect of support for anti-government forces on support for the Afghan state. This finding suggests, in other words, that the process through which support for insurgents undercuts trust in the state is via Afghans’ attitudes towards external actors and their performance (this indirect path can be estimated as -.45 x .67=-.30).25

Figure 3: The Mediating and Reciprocal Effects of Support for the International Intervention on Trust in State Institutions

Looking now to the reciprocal effects26 between support for the intervention and support for the state, by far the strongest effect in the model is that from perceptions of statebuilders’ performance to trust in state institutions (as shown by the standardized coefficient of .67). If Afghans judge the intervention satisfactorily, in other words, they are far more likely to support

25 All parameters shown in Model 3 are significant at p ≤ .01, except for that from trust in state institutions to support for the intervention discussed below.
26 When reciprocal effects are introduced, the identification of the model is determined by rank and order conditions (Kline, 2005). On both conditions, this model is identified.
the state; it bears saying that if they do not view the intervention in favourable terms, the reverse is true. The relationship running in the opposite direction is far weaker and just misses marginal significance (p=.126). This finding supports the view of external actors as critical sources of support for the emerging state. The extent to which perceptions of the domestic state in turn influence how citizens see the intervention appears limited. The addition of the international dimension to the model of political trust increases explained variance by roughly 37%. Its importance to the model is further demonstrated through a comparison of total effects, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Total Effects of Social and Political Determinants on Trust in State Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Standardized Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East</td>
<td>-.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashtun</td>
<td>-.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Anti-Govt Forces</td>
<td>-.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Intl Intervention</td>
<td>.731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: derived from Figure 3

8 Discussion

These findings shed light on the nature of Afghans’ perceptions of their state, and the intervention taking place in their country. They show, first, that the determinants of political trust are complex in post-conflict and conflict-prone environments. Take residence in the South-East of the country, for example. Its total effects on trust in the state are relatively slim, since the two

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27 It should be noted that the estimation of a feedback loop with cross-sectional data assumes equilibrium, since these data give only a “snapshot” of an ongoing process (Kline, 2005: 239). Specifically, the equilibrium assumption is that “any changes in the system underlying a presumed feedback relation have already manifested their effects and that the system is in a steady state” (ibid). To assess model stability, AMOS20 provides a stability index for non-recursive models. Standard interpretation is that values ranging between -1.0 and 1.0 indicate a stable model. The stability index produced for Model 3 is .0814.

28 Model 3 also includes a direct path from region to trust, which also accounts for the increase in explained variance.

29 Total effects are the sum of all direct and indirect effects of one variable on another. As described by Kline (2005) “variables in feedback loops have indirect effects (and thus total effects) on themselves” (251). The indirect effect of trust in state institutions on itself (.089) is not shown in Table 2.
negative indirect effects and one positive direct effect essentially cancel each other out. Moreover, although this pattern may appear incongruous – in that Afghans in the South-East are shown as more likely to look favourably on anti-government forces and the state – these views are likely not inconsistent at all, as explained by Mac Ginty (2011) and others. They are likely products of a challenging political environment, high levels of insecurity, and an uncertain future, among other factors.

The results also underscore the importance of political sources of support for the state, namely the influence of perceptions towards anti-government forces, and views of external actors. The conclusions that can be drawn from these findings sit comfortably alongside research on Afghan perspectives towards democracy, peace, aid and security. In her examination of perceptions of democratization, for instance, Larson (2011) highlights three factors as being central to understanding the current political context in Afghanistan: hostility towards foreign imposition, uncertainty around political competition, and conflicting opinions about political representation (which may vary across the rural-urban divide) (see also Larson, 2009). Both she and Coburn (2009) find that Afghans understandably prioritize security above political participation. As Coburn explains, “for most voters, the greatest concern [is] security, and they [tend] to voice support for any government that can provide it, regardless of the flaws in the democratic process” (3).

In line with the emphasis in this study on perceptions towards the performance of the intervention, Nixon (2011) finds that Afghans’ understandings of the drivers of conflict centre in part on the presence and behaviour of NATO troops. Perspectives on peace are also shaped by an increasingly ethnic “negative-sum situation in which leaders of all ethnicities believe they are deprived” (ibid: 12) and a perceived “lack of political space between the government and its constituent factions and the Taliban” (30). Fishstein and Wilder (2012) express a similar view, namely that the root causes of conflict are often perceived to be political in nature (rather than socio-economic). For example, the growing insurgency is reported to stem “not so much [from] its appeal, but rather [from] the disillusionment and alienation resulting from government officials’ cruelty and avariciousness (ibid: 39). As shown above, perceptions towards international actors likely mediate this relationship.

These findings also respond to calls within the broader statebuilding literature for greater attention to political community (Paris and Sisk, 2009), civic culture (Barnett and Zürcher, 2009; Spiekermann, 2009) and the underpinnings of support for statebuilding operations amongst local populations (Lemay-Hébert, 2009; Donini, 2007). Specifically, the results allow for greater clarity around the relationship between domestic state legitimacy and the legitimacy of international intervention from the standpoint of local populations. More broadly, they speak to concerns pertaining to local ownership (Futamura and Notaras, 2011; Donais, 2009), perceptions gaps between domestic communities and foreign actors (Donini, 2007) and the imposition-ownership divide (Chanaa, 2002).
This research also faces limitations. It examines a particular moment in time in what is surely a quickly shifting political process. Levels of insecurity have worsened from 2007 to present day, for example, and the exit plans of international forces are more fixed. These changes may well influence the relationships described above. Moreover, given the complexity of local perspectives towards statebuilding, any piece of research can only hope to contribute to part of the story. Nevertheless, the political relevance of the findings presented here is made clear by the complexities of forging a lasting peace in Afghanistan, and a stable state that enjoys the broad-based support of its citizens.
Appendix A: Question Wording & Coding of Variables

Trust in State Institutions
Karzai: How would you rate your overall opinion of the current Afghan government, led by President Hamid Karzai?

1=very negative; 2=somewhat negative; 3=neither negative nor positive; 4=somewhat positive; 5=very positive

ANA: Do you currently have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following: The Afghan National Army?

1=no confidence; 2=little confidence; 3=some confidence; 4=a lot of confidence

ANP: Do you currently have a lot of confidence, some confidence, little confidence or no confidence at all in each of the following: The Afghan National Police?

Support Intl Intervention
Fighting Taliban: Thinking about the foreign countries overall, do you think they are doing a good job or a bad job of: Fighting the Taliban and other local groups?

Training ANA/ANP: Thinking about the foreign countries overall, do you think they are doing a good job or a bad job of: Helping to train the Afghan National Army and Police?

Reconstruction: Thinking about the foreign countries overall, do you think they are doing a good job or a bad job of: Providing reconstruction assistance?

1=bad job; 2=equally good and bad; 3=good job

Support Anti-Govt Forces
What is your overall opinion of the Taliban?

1=very negative; 2=somewhat negative; neither negative nor positive; 4=somewhat positive; 5=very positive

Education
1=illiterate/never went to school; 2=up to and including 5 yrs; 3=6-8 yrs; 4=9-10 yrs; 5=11-12 yrs; 6=some college/university; 7=college/university graduate; 8=post-graduate

South-East
1= Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Paktika, Ghazni, Khost, Paktya, Wardak, Kunar, Nangarhar, Logar, Uruzgan; 0=other provinces
Pashtun 1=Pashtun; 0=Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara, Turkmen, Baloch, Nuristani, Aimak, Arab, Pashaye, Other

Age 18-75

Female 1=female; 0=male

Rural 1=villages; 0=towns, cities, metros

References


