Bad Medicine

Diagnosing the Failure of State-Building Efforts in Afghanistan

Accepted version of an article published in *Central Asian Affairs*:
Murtazashvili, Jennifer Brick. " Bad Medicine", *Central Asian Affairs* 2, 1 (2015): 10-34.

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili
Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh
jmurtaz@pitt.edu

Abstract

By all accounts, the post-2001 state-building effort in Afghanistan failed to deliver on its promise. Rather than blame politicians, insurgency, or obdurate customary authority, this article suggests the constitutional principles upon which the state was con- structed ultimately undermined the state itself. In an attempt to address the enormous human suffering in Afghanistan, the 2004 Constitution proclaimed a vast array of positive rights to be implemented by an extremely centralized state apparatus. Yet this vision, in which individuals should look to the state as a source of individual and community well-being, is dramatically out of step with a reality in which individuals neither trusts the centralized state, nor relies on it for many public goods. For many Afghans, the notion of well-being is tied to independence from the state. An alternative state-building vision, one that appreciates a constitutional order stressing negative rights and recognizes the virtues of self-governance, would have resonated much more deeply with a society that has been served by chronically weak governments. This article uses evidence from an original nationally-representative survey and field interviews to illustrate the disjuncture between a self-governing society in which individuals strive for limited government and a state-building 'antidote' that offers up a very different medicine. The essay concludes by explaining why a more limited and politically bounded state-building approach, especially in rural areas, may be an important alternative to promote citizen well-being.

Keywords

State building – Afghanistan – Institutional design

doi 10.1163/22142290-00201002

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, most policymakers believed that strengthening the state was the primary vehicle required to reduce human suffering and promote stability in Afghanistan. Despite vast resources, state-building efforts in Afghanistan have not created an effective state. More than a decade later, the government exerts a minimal presence throughout much of the country, and many Afghans are unable to access basic services such as health care, education, and personal security.[1] As early as 2001, Amitai Etzioni warned that "as the bitter experiences of huge investments by the World Bank and us foreign-aid programs have taught us in country after country—most more endowed than Afghanistan—jumping a society from the Stone Age to even a relatively modern one is a daunting task at which we are bound to fail."[2] Since that time, several hypotheses have emerged seeking to explain the attenuated state: recalcitrant customary organisation, a patrimonial regime, donor incompetence, insurgent resolve, and a desire to remain in the "stone age" without centralized authority.

Drawing on one of the largest empirical studies of governance in Afghanistan, this article provides an alternative explanation, finding that the failure of the state-building effort lies in the institutional design of the post-2001 government. The evidence indicates that efforts to build a state may have been more promising if the foundation of the state were characterized by negative rights and politically bounded interventions in local affairs, rather than centralized state authority replete with well-meaning positive rights. This is largely because at the community level, self-governing organizations have remained a primary vehicle for public goods provision. The main implication is that a state-building vision that recognized the virtues of self-organized social orders that have arisen or maintained themselves in an environment of state weakness may be one of few sources of hope for improving citizens' sense of future well-being.

The logic of efforts to build a state in Afghanistan produced an emboldened central government, tasked with providing an enormous range of public goods and services planned by a donor and government bureaucracy in Kabul with little input from the citizens it was to serve. Furthermore, the design of formal institutions did not create meaningful local constraints on government officials at the local level. Furthermore, the constitution's designation of the state as the primary source of public goods and services emerged as an impediment to harnessing the significant "social capital" at the community level that may have served as a partner rather than an adversary in development.

---

1 V. Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State-Building in Afghanistan* (Washington, dc: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).

2 A. Etzioni, "usa Can't Impose Democracy on Afghans," *usa Today*, October 11, 2001.

These findings echo recent scholarship articulating how the extension of states as an antidote to poverty and security has led individuals to exit the state3 and analyzing how such well-meaning intentions have been detrimental to human development.4 Furthermore, several recent studies of Afghanistan have illustrated the continued vibrancy and importance of local governance in Afghanistan and the challenges of implementing the status quo vision of the state.5

The conclusions in this article are drawn from one of the most comprehensive studies of democracy and governance carried out in post-2001 Afghanistan.6 This study consisted of a nationally representative survey of more than 8,500 Afghans along with dozens of interviews and focus group discussions con- ducted in November 2011. These qualitative data were gathered in three districts—Ghazni Center (Ghazni Province), Dehdadi District (Balkh Province), and Bazarak District (Panjshir Province)— selected due to their geographic and ethnic diversity as well as variation in the degree to which citizens issued complaints about formal electoral processes during the 2010 National Assembly Elections.7 The survey was supported by the United States Agency for International Development and implemented by Democracy International.8 Both the large-*n* survey and the qualitative questions were drafted in local languages.9 Unlike most other surveys conducted in

3 J. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven, ct: Yale University Press, 2009) and J. Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play* (Princeton, nj: Princeton University Press, 2012).

4 A. Deaton, *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality* (Princeton, nj: Princeton University Press, 2013); C. Coyne, *Doing Bad by Doing Good: Why Humanitarian Action Fails* (Stanford, ca: Stanford Economics and Finance, 2013).

5 N. Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town* (Stanford, ca: Stanford University Press, 2011); C. Schetter (ed.), *Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in Social Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

6 The author served as an advisor in the design of this research project.

7 Dehdadi is ethnically diverse: it includes Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Arabs. Bazarak is almost completely Tajik. Ghazni Center is mostly Pashtun, with significant Hazara and Tajik populations. Arghandab District in Kandahar was also selected, but researchers were unable to travel there due to security concerns. The nationally representative survey is representative at the provincial level and includes all 34 provinces.

8 For detailed information on the survey and its methodology, see Democracy International, "Survey on Political Institutions, Elections, and Democracy in Afghanistan," Washington, dc, Democracy International and United States Agency for International Development, 2012.

9 The large-n survey was implemented by the Opinion Research Center of Afghanistan, while the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted by the quantitative research group Samuel Hall, based in Kabul.

Afghanistan, this survey employed a team of independent field researchers who back-checked the deployment of the large-*n* survey as it was fielded to ensure accuracy of results.

This research contributes to important debates in the literature on Afghanistan, in which the role of "traditional" authority in local politics remains contested. Based on case study analysis in northern Afghanistan, Wilde and Mielke maintain that such authority has been co-opted by the government or local warlords and is deeply illegitimate.10 Others argue that efforts to promote customary forms of dispute resolution represented "expert knowledge seeped in orientalist frames" and that policymakers and scholars who analyzed such efforts were engaging in a "functionalist anthropology whose very premise, was to consolidate a social and political order defined by Western powers."11 Others have maintained that customary forms of dispute resolution are more legitimate than formal state-backed courts.12 By relying upon original survey evidence, carefully crafted to local understandings, this article hopes to unearth broader empirical trends.

By focusing on the design of institutions, this essay complements other explanations of state weakness. Barfield, for example, understands the stability of Afghanistan in terms of the strength of political leaders.13 Thus, centralization of the state is less a product of formal institutions than of personal skill and the power networks that leaders sustain. Other place blame in the international actors, who may have had a poor grasp of the Afghan context14 or who sought incoherent and contradictory goals.15

While both approaches are important, neither is sufficient to explain individual attitudes toward the state and preferences for governance in the

10 A. Wilde and K. Mielke, "Order, Stability, and Change in Afghanistan: From Top-down to Bottom-up State-Making," *Central Asian Survey*, 32, no. 3 (2013): 353–370.

11 T. Wimpelmann, "Nexuses of Knowledge and Power in Afghanistan: The Rise and Fall of the Informal Justice Assemblage," *Central Asian Survey*, 32, no. 3 (2013): 418–419.

12 T. Barfield, "Culture and Custom in Nation-Building: Law in Afghanistan," *Maine Law Review*, 60, no. 2 (2008): 348–373; A. Wardak, "Building a Post-War Justice System in Afghanistan," *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, 41, no. 4 (2004): 319–341; N. Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan* (Washington, dc: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2013).

13 T. Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, nj: Princeton University Press, 2010).

14 R. Paris, "Afghanistan: What Went Wrong?" *Perspectives on Politics*, 11, no. 2 (2013): 538–548.

15 A. Suhrke, When More Is Less: The International Project in Afghanistan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

country. Power relations are clearly important and so, too, are international assistance efforts. Both worked to empower the formal governmental structure, thus ensuring that formal rules had consequences. While President Hamid Karzai, for example, was a strong proponent of a centralized form of government, so too were many in the international community. For example, during the drafting of the constitution, us Ambassador to Afghanistan Robert Finn said in a diplomatic cable that "Afghanistan needed a strong President given all the vectors of power."16

This essay is organized as follows. The next section provides a theoretical framework that contrasts Weberian perspectives on state strength with alter- native visions focusing on government constraints and recognition of self- governing capacities. Section 3 contextualizes the analysis by briefly describing state policy toward autonomous, local authority over the course of modern Afghan history. After reviewing the key features of the post-Taliban constitution in Section 4, the final substantive section provides insight into the persistence of customary governance and discussion of alternative models of Afghan governance. The conclusion discusses the implications of the findings for those seeking to improve the well-being of the population of Afghanistan.

Perspectives on State Strength

Before describing the post-2001 Afghan state, it is helpful to consider three key perspectives on state strength in the state-building literature. The first, a Weberian perspective, suggests the importance of building government organizations and uniform, rational rules that extend from the capital to the countryside.17 According to this perspective, expansion of government capacity

16 "Ambassador's April 6 Meeting with French Ambassador," WikiLeaks, April 13, 2013, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/03KABUL955_a.html (accessed September 14, 2014).

17 I differentiate between the literature on state formation, which describes the formation of states as an unintended consequence of efforts to build military forces, suppress bandits, or generate revenue, to that of state building, which analyzes intentional efforts to create and strengthen states as political entities. See, respectively, C. Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–86; K. Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); D. North and R. Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Y. Barzel, *A Theory of the State: Economic Rights, Legal Rights, and the Scope of the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

resulting from uniformity and predictability drives development.18 The implication for postconflict state building is that the construction of a state characterized by a rational set of rules, embodied in a functioning bureaucracy will be the most important vehicle to alleviate poverty and rectify social injustices, leading to an improvement in citizen well-being.

A contrasting approach suggests that state capacity, in and of itself, does not guarantee a strong state or citizen well-being. Instead, institutional constraints or negative rights are just as important to facilitate in order to limit the authority of rulers. In this view, constitutions should be designed to empower the state so that it is strong enough to provide public goods, but not sufficiently empowered so that it can engage in predation.19 When rulers have their hands tied, they are more likely to respect the rights of citizens.20 According to this second view, boundaries on political authority give rise to political rights that provide a foundation for prosperity, stability, and citizen well-being.

A third perspective on state building considers the possibility of "efficient anarchy," where the costs of extending the state can outweigh benefits provided to society.21 Underlying this perspective is the logic of self-governance: that the state does not hold a monopoly on coercion or public goods provision. In many instances, self-organized groups are better equipped to provide public goods than states, due to better information about local preferences that leads to stronger monitoring and enforcement of local decisions.22 This approach illustrates how individuals and communities can govern effectively when the state is either unwilling or unable to do so23 and considers when self-organized

---

18 M. Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

19 B. Weingast, "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," *American Political Science Review*, 91, no. 2 (1997): 245–263.

20 D. North and B. Weingast, "Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutional Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (1989): 8002–8832.

21 P. Leeson, "Efficient Anarchy," *Public Choice*, 130, nos. 1/2 (2007): 41–53; P. Leeson, *Anarchy Unbound: Why Self-Governance Works Better than You Think* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also J. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and D. Bromley and G. Anderson, *Vulnerable People, Vulnerable States: Redefining the Development Challenge* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

22 E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

23 J. Wunsch, "Refounding the African State and Local Self-Governance: The Neglected Foundation," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2000): 487–509; E. Ostrom,

governance is superior to state-based planning.24 If the ultimate objective of efforts to build states is to improve the well-being of citizens, then such improvements may not require the state.25 The self-governance perspective suggests that the state can improve its capacity by recognizing its own limits.

The Weberian perspective dominates state-building efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere as the extension of state authority is thought to generate legitimacy through public goods provision that ultimately strengthens the state.26 Achieving the centralized, Weberian ideal enshrined in the Afghan constitution became the goal of the international donor community including the United Nations and the United States.27

The Weberian vision in Afghanistan calls not just for a centralized state, but one that recognizes little role for informal norms of governance. The objective of state building is to replace "one type of rules with another, so that formal bureaucratic rules of a Weberian type take precedence over informal rules."28 According to this perspective, the state-building process fails when such uniform rules of the state have not displaced informal social norms of governance. As a result, both international and Afghan actors have an imperative to alter the informal norms and "create a state in which power is exercised in a progressively depersonalized and formalized way."29 Centralized control over local government, in particular, is "essential, not just for the efficient delivery of ser- vices, but also as part of the establishment of the power of the state through- out the territory."30 Here, state building is more than "winning hearts and

---

J. Walker, and R. Gardner, "Covenants With and Without a Sword: Self-Governance Is Possible," *American Political Science Review*, 86, no. 2 (1992): 404–417; S. Joireman, *Where There Is No Government: Enforcing Property Rights in Common Law Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

24 P. Boettke and C. Coyne, "Methodological Individualism, Spontaneous Order, and the Research Program of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 57 (2005): 145–158.

25 Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

26 A. Ghani and C. Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

27 Barfield, *Afghanistan*, p. 302.

28 S. Lister, "Changing the Rules? State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan," *Journal of Development Studies*, 45, no. 6 (2009): 992.

29 Ibid., p. 1001.

30 S. Lister and A. Wilder, "Strengthening Subnational Administration in Afghanistan: Technical Reform or State-Building?" *Public Administration and Development* 25, no. 1 (2005): 48.

minds" through public goods, it has evolved into an ambitious project seeking to transform underlying social norms.

Modern Afghan History: The Drive for Capacity

The vision of the state that sees the central government as the primary source of governing norms is not new. It is deeply reminiscent of how Afghans experienced states in modern history, where governments frequently abused the population through "modernization" campaigns to undermine social norms—including those mediating self-governance. With the exception of the Zahir Shah, who presided over a long peace from 1933 to 1973, most Afghan leaders, regardless of ideology—communist, Islamist, or Western-oriented—sought to undermine local norms embodied in customary authority and strengthen the state vis-à-vis society to implement its vision of development by replacing or regulating sources of nonstate governance.

In the modern era, these initial efforts came from Abdur Rahman Khan, Afghanistan's Iron Amir, who sought to redefine fundamentally political authority during a bloody reign from 1880 to 1901.31 Rahman viewed the autonomy afforded to tribes and communities as a source of weakness and tried to destroy them through the creation of a system of public administration where appointed district governors answered only to the king. He redrew local juris- dictions to weaken customary authority. This was accompanied by massive repopulation and military campaigns that led to more deaths than the three Anglo-Afghan wars combined.32

Amanullah Khan relied less on violence than the Iron Amir, but similarly had little tolerance for customary governance during his decade in power (1919–1929). With Ataturk among his models, Amanullah embarked on wide- spread economic and social reform, including compulsory female education, prescribing male attire in Kabul, and implementing a system of universal con- scription to replace the traditional system of collective levies. These efforts to alter social norms came into drastic conflict with a society that had no interest in paying for them.33 His efforts provoked a coup that briefly unseated the monarchy.

---

31 Barfield, *Afghanistan*.

32 M. Kakar, *Government and Society in Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Abd Al-Bahman Khan* (Austin, tx: University of Texas Press, 1979).

33 L. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919–1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca, ny: Cornell University Press, 1973).

The short coup produced nearly a year of instability before the monarchy was restored. Within a few years, Zahir Shah took the throne and ruled from 1933 to 1973. He did little to strengthen Afghanistan's economic position, which earned the country a reputation as a rentier state due to Soviet and American subsidies.34 Yet for the first time since before Rahman's ascension, the government provided some autonomy to communities, which were free to govern their own "microsocieties" as they saw fit.35

This equilibrium shifted in 1973 when Daud Khan overthrew his cousin Zahir Shah in a palace coup. Daud dismantled the system of benign neglect, replacing it with direct rule where his agents sought to rule villages. His eco- nomic reforms foreshadowed the more violent redistributive campaigns attempted under the communist regime. The communists, who came to power in 1978, viewed customary governance as a feudalistic residue and a vehicle of patronage. Through sweeping land and credit reforms they tried to redefine political and social norms at the village level.36 The defining feature of this period was an attempted weakening of tribal and local autonomy and the emergence of a religious-based insurgency, the *mujahedin*, a product of both the heavy-handed communist reforms and subsequent Soviet invasion in1979.37

After the expulsion of Soviet troops in 1989, the country plunged into a dev- astating civil war between a range of *mujahedin* factions representing Afghanistan's ethnic and religious groups. When the Taliban gained control of the central government in the mid-1990s, they too began a policy of direct rule characterized by a massive effort to implement their set of social norms through a network of *mullahs* who were to rule villages.38 The Taliban executed customary and tribal leaders in rural areas who they saw as sources of competing loyalty.39

---

34 B. Rubin, "Political Elites in Afghanistan: Rentier State Building, Rentier State Wrecking," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 24, no. 1 (2009): 77–99.

35 A. Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

36 D. Edwards, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad* (Berkeley, ca: University of California Press, 2002).

37 N. Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War, and The Future of the Region* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); O. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

38 A. Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia,* 2nd ed. (New Haven, ct: Yale University Press, 2002.

39 A. Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992*. (Washington, dc: Georgetown University Press, 2000).

Post-Taliban Constitution

Against backdrop of violent campaigns to stamp out norms embodied by customary authority, much has changed in Afghanistan in the past decade. In 2004 a *Loya Jirga*, a quasi-customary body used by generations of monarchs to legitimate policy, approved a new constitution calling for an elected president, national assembly, and a host of councils at the subnational level. Despite a democratic veneer in Kabul, however, the state maintains a centralized system of subnational governance almost identical to those under past regimes. The old vision of centralization, however, is supplemented by a new vision—driven largely by the international community—of the state as a public-goods provider. The logic of the state as a public goods provider is driven by a theory of change suggesting that an expansive state can rectify past social ills by showing the people that it can provide them with benefits that will improve their well- being, therefore outweighing any costs in lost local autonomy.

The centralized constitution was the product of bargaining between foreign players and the Karzai government, a process well documented elsewhere.40 Instead of focusing on the origins of the constitutional system, I focus on the consequences of three aspects of centralization: an expansive notion of individual rights and few negative rights; accountability solely to the political center; and emphasis on the state as the primary source of justice in society.

Positive Rights

The language of rights in the 2004 Constitution illustrates the prioritization of capacity over constraints, conjuring images of a strong, activist state with tremendous authority to intervene in the lives of its citizens. Article 6 asserts that the state is "obliged to create a prosperous society based on social justice." Article 13 says the state shall play an important role "designing and implementing effective programs for developing industries [and] expanding production." Not only is the state to provide secondary education, but it also assumes responsibility to "develop religious teachings, regulate and improve the conditions of mosques, religious schools, as well as religious centers" (Article 17).

The second section of the 2004 Constitution, on the "fundamental rights and duties of citizens," begins with a familiar litany of negative rights: the right to liberty (Article 24); innocence until proven guilty (Article 25); habeas corpus (Article 31); freedom of expression (Article 34); freedom of association (Article 35);

40 J. Thier, "The Making of a Constitution in Afghanistan," *New York Law School Law Review*, 51 (2006): 557; International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: The Constitutional Loya Jirga* (Kabul/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003).

and privacy (Articles 37 and 38). These constraints are overshadowed by a longer list of positive rights, including the right to free education up to the bachelor's level (Article 43); equality of educational opportunities for girls and women, improved education for nomads, and the elimination of illiteracy (Article 42); state development of religious curricula for schools (Article 45); development of effective programs for fostering knowledge, culture, literature, and arts (Article 47); the right to work (Article 48); free preventative healthcare and treatment of diseases (Article 52); and constitutional guarantees of financial aid to survivors of martyrs and missing persons and reintegration of handicapped persons and aid to elderly (Article 53).

Although laudable, this list of positive rights has had undesirable consequences. First, it is not feasible for the government of one of the world's poorest countries to deliver on these obligations. Unlike a World Bank strategy, these are not aspirations but state *obligations* to its citizens. By establishing the state as one of the most important instruments to generate well-being, the constitution's design almost guarantees that it will fail to deliver on its founding principles.41

Illustrative of the problems created by the emphasis on positive rights and the expansive notions of rights is the ambitious Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ands).42 The ands translated the constitution into a vast bureaucracy with enormous authority—at least on paper. International donors funded ands, which in turn filled in the boxes of government by pro- viding assistance to a wide range of ministries and their subcontractors to implement this vision. As assistance to Afghanistan wanes, this well- intentioned but massive mission to improve governance through positive rights has resulted in a significant bureaucracy, featuring overlapping ministries and centralized budget authority, which has almost no capacity to implement its meager budget. According to John Sopko, the inspector general at the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, "The bottom line: It appears we've (the international community) created a government that the Afghans simply cannot afford."43

41 Susnstein makes a very similar point about unintended consequences of similarly expansive positive rights in post-communist constitutions. See C. Sunstein, "Against Positive Rights," *East European Constitutional Review*, 2 (1993): 35.

42 The constitutional framework informs the benchmarks and targets of ands. This is discussed in the introduction of the document and is also referenced in sectoral benchmarks.

43 Craig, Tim, "Afghan Official Says the Government Has Nearly Run out of Money," *The Washington Post,* September 16, 2014. http://wapo.st/1u2648i.

Accountability to the Center

Examining the way the constitution holds subnational officials accountable to the government also illustrates the centralized vision of the state. There are around 400 district governments in Afghanistan.44 District government represents the lowest level of formal government in a country that has between 20,000 and 40,000 villages.45 Yet exactly like Zahir Shah's 1964 Constitution, the 2004 Constitution explicitly states that the government is committed to centralism (Article 137). Despite establishing subnational authority, there is, in effect, no *local* government, only administrative units that derive authority from the center.46

While the international community has provided assistance to build capacity in local government offices through myriad multi-million dollar programs, officials who serve at the subnational level are beholden to and appointed by Kabul, rather than by any local collective mechanism. The absence of local accountability is nowhere more evident than in the case of district governors, who are among the most important public officials in Afghanistan as they rep- resent government interests to citizens outside of major cities.47 As a result, the title "governor" is a misnomer in principle, because these individuals are administrators and have no formal executive authority. This centralization of government appointments ensured that the Karzai government could use local government as a system of patronage, rather than a means to ensure local accountability. This system of patronage may have worked to ensure that powerful figures such as commanders and other warlords were brought into the fold of government, but it did not further the goals of democracy.

---

44 The exact number is not clear even to government officials in the government agency responsible for administering local government. Author's interview, Independent Directorate for Local Government, Kabul, July 2012.

45 Estimates of the number of villages vary substantially. One reason is that donor funds are allocated based on the number of villages in a district; therefore officials have incentives to inflate the numbers in their district. Government officials in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, for example, claimed the number of villages increased from 20,000 to 40,000 after 2001.

46 For more background on these challenges see D. Saltmarshe and A. Medhi, *Local Governance: A View from the Ground* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2011); S. Lister and H. Nixon, *Provincial Governance Structures in Afghanistan: From Confusion to Vision?* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2006).

47 Coburn and Larson make similar observations. See N. Coburn and A. Larson, *Voting Together: Why Afghanistan's 2009 Elections Were (and Were Not) a Disaster* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009).

The preservation of the centralized system had enormous consequences. For example, the budgeting system in Afghanistan is very similar to the Soviet model upon which it was based. Budgets are drafted in Kabul, relying on input of line ministry officials, whose plans are transmitted to ministry officials at provincial and district levels. As a result, provincial and district governors have very little say into their annual budgets or public policy.48

District and provincial governors, however, are not entirely powerless. Several powerful and effective governors have been able to implement reforms, improve infrastructure, and influence policy change. Provincial governors such as Mohammad Atta in Balkh and Gul Agha Sherzai in Nangarhar have been able to improve service delivery in their communities, although this is largely due to their unofficial authority as former "warlords" and not as a result of their legal authority.49 Throughout Afghanistan, there are also examples of district governors who citizens view as legitimate, although this has less to do with the formal constitutional system than with the personal ambitions and charisma of officials.50 The centralized system of subnational governance all but ensures district governors have few incentives to respond to citizens unless they are willing to work beyond their formal mandate, thus breaking the law.

Although the constitution calls for elected provincial, district, and village councils, only elections for provincial councils have been held. Election of provincial councils has done little to improve the accountability of local officials, as these councils have no oversight authority over appointed provincial governors.51 Instead, authority of provincial council members has been reduced to a

48 There have been some efforts to introduce provincial budgeting by the United States Agency and International Development and other donors in Afghanistan. These efforts have resulted in training for ministry and local government officials but have not translated into a decentralized budgetary process. See A. Evans, N. Manning, A. Tully, Y. Osmani, and A. Wilder, *Subnational Administration in Afghanistan: Assessment and Recommendations for Action* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004).

49 D. Mukhopadhyay, *Warlords, Strongman Governors, and the State in Afghanistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

50 J. Murtazashvili, "Informal Federalism: Self-Governance and Power Sharing in Afghanistan," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 44, no. 2 (2014): 324–343. Also see J. Murtazashvili, *Survey on Political Institutions, Elections, and Democracy in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Democracy International and United States Agency for International Development, 2012).

51 T. Barfield, "Continuities and Changes in Local Politics in Northern Afghanistan," in C. Schetter (ed.), *Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in Social Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 131–145.

democratic façade; their only meaningful role is to assist donors in developing provincial development plans.52

The inability to channel local preferences into policy outcomes is one plausible explanation for the continued lack of confidence in elected bodies and government officials in general throughout rural Afghanistan. As Table 1 illustrates, only 23% of survey respondents have a lot of confidence in the president. Just 17% have a lot of confidence in the elected provincial councils. Only six percent of the rural population has a lot of confidence in the *Wolesi Jirga*, the lower house of the National Assembly, putting their popularity on par with local commanders and the Taliban. Surprisingly, the public has more faith in unelected district governors than it has in any elected official. In the survey, informal authority embodied in community-based customary leaders and organizations enjoy the highest level of support.53 These numbers should not be surprising in light of constitutional design: as public officials have no incentive to represent citizens and are not accountable to them, citizens have little confidence in them.

Despite the creation of formal democracy, the system of subnational governance is almost the same in form and in function as it existed 50 years ago, with district and provincial governors appointed by the central government, where government officials represent the *state* to the *community*. In a democracy, the accountability arrow should point in the opposite direction.

Table 1 *Confidence in public officials (rural population, in %)*

	A lot of confidence	**Some confidence**	**No confidence**
Customary leaders	39	47	11
District Governor	30	35	32
President	23	33	42
Provincial Councils	17	39	38
Supreme Court	9	25	58
Local Commanders	7	42	43
Wolesi Jirga	6	45	44
Taliban	7	12	71

52 A 2005 "Law on Provincial Councils" reduced councils to an advisory role. A few years later the Law was revised to give them "oversight" over local administration.

53 In this survey customary leaders are defined as *maliks*, *arbabs*, *qaryadars*, *nomayenda*, or *wakil*.

Strengthening the Formal Justice System

In democracies, the judiciary serves as formidable constraint on state authority. Yet courts are extremely weak in Afghanistan, both in theory and in practice. Although the constitution established three branches of government, these branches are neither separate nor equal. It is not clear whether the Supreme Court or the National Assembly have primary authority to override executive interpretation of the constitution. Local officials or com- munities have no input into the process for selecting local judges. Instead, the Supreme Court in Kabul is responsible for this task. As is the case with provincial and district governors, the system for appointing local judges is fraught with corruption and patronage. As a result, individuals in rural areas have little confidence in the state-backed justice system and its courts. According to the survey, only nine percent of the population has a lot of confidence in the Supreme Court. Less than 20% turn to formal courts when they have disputes, for reasons that include corruption, cost, and lack of accountability.

There are also bureaucratic issues limiting judicial sources of restraint. Although donors rushed to build courthouses throughout rural Afghanistan, there remains a dearth of judges and lawyers to fill these halls. It is unclear whether better training for judges and lawyers would do much to improve public attitudes toward the judiciary.54 Late in the game there were efforts by donors to work more closely with "traditional justice systems," although such efforts were not agreed upon with the state.55

These centralized characteristics of the post-Taliban constitution—prioritizing positive rights over negative ones, local officials accountable to the center and not citizens, and prioritization of state judicial institutions—illustrate how the constitution elevated a Weberian vision of state capacity in order to facilitate citizen well-being over a vision centered on government constraint and accountability to citizens. An alternative model, summarized in Table 2, recognizes negative rights, establishes local accountability, and provides for legal pluralism, including customary adjudication. Which model might be more appropriate to improve prospects for well-being? Answering this question requires us to consider the data.

54 Barfield, "Culture and Custom in Nation-Building."

55 Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*; Wimpelmann, "Nexuses of Knowledge and Power in Afghanistan."

Table 2 *Visions of the State to Promote Citizen Well-Being*

	Vision of the state	
Dimension	**Centralized**	**Decentralized**
Rights	Positive rights with expansive welfare state enshrined in the constitution	Negative rights with public goods provided through informal and customary channels, not enshrined in the constitution
Accountability	Lower levels of government accountable to the political center in Kabul	Accountability of lower levels of government to citizens
Judicial institutions	Judges appointed in Kabul; Formal courts and constructionof a formal judicial bureaucracy	Informal mediation and recognition of *de facto* legal pluralism

Who Governs Rural Afghanistan?

After the fall of the Taliban, several scholars and policymakers seemed believe that Afghanistan was a *tabula rasa* to build from scratch.56 This was embodied in a belief that customary authority had disappeared during the ravages of war. Even before decades of war, anthropologists recognized changes in the structure of customary governance. Before the Soviet invasion, Jon Anderson observed transformation of the traditional *khan* system of rural governance.57 During the war, Barnett Rubin described political "fragmentation" that resulted from the demise of traditional authority, contributing to a power vacuum that was filled by religious entrepreneurs.58 Some have argued that as

56 See, for example, M. Weinbaum, "Rebuilding Afghanistan: Impediments, Lessons, and Prospects," in F. Fukuyama (ed.), *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 125–144.

57 J. Anderson, "There Are No Khāns Anymore: Economic Development and Social Change in Tribal Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal*, 32, no. 2 (1978): 167–183.

58 B. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*.

a result of "social change … customary norms no longer have their former weight."59

While customary authority may have evolved or even weakened in some respects during the past several decades, it remains an important ordering aspect of life in communities outside of Kabul.60 The survey and interviews provide additional evidence of this notion. Although *khans* or large-scale tribal leaders may have declined in significance, at the community level customary governance appears to be alive and well, where governance consists of power sharing among three customary organizations: deliberative organizations (*shuras*, *jirgas*), customary representatives such as *maliks*, and religious figures such as *mullahs*. Shuras or jirgas (or often just "elders"61 or "meetings"62) are self-organized deliberative bodies convening when matters arise to discuss issues of collective importance.63 Maliks are village representatives, usually selected through popular consent or by descent to represent the community to outsiders and the state.64 *Mullahs* are local religious leaders present in nearly every community. As Table 3 illustrates, such organizations are ubiquitous.

Interviews and focus group discussions help explain the quantitative results. Customary authority is not only pervasive; it plays an important role in local governance. A *malik* in Ghazni described his role in the community:

> My responsibility is to try to understand the people's problems, to find a solution, and to help people in *qaumi*65 councils or meetings. For 10 years, I have been in touch with the people. In recent years, the most common problem[s] facing people in our community are [a] lack of clean drinking

59 Saltmarshe and Medhi, *Local Governance*, 46.

60 N. Nojumi, D. Mazurana, and E. Stites, *Afghanistan's Systems of Justice: Formal, Traditional, and Customary* (Medford, ma: Tufts University, Feinstein International Famine Center, Youth and Community Program, 2004).

61 *Rish-e safidan*, *mu-ye safidan*, *spingeri*, or *oq soqol*, in local languages.

62 *Majlis* or *Jalasa* in local languages.

63 *Shuras* and *jirgas* do not take the same form and are usually characterized by different internal processes. Yet they share a deliberative nature that allows community members to discuss issues of local concern and for that reason are grouped together here. See Coburn, *Informal Justice and the International Community in Afghanistan*.

64 Individuals who represent community interests to the outside world and serve to mediate local disputes are known by several other titles in rural Afghanistan including *arbab*, *qaryadar*, *nomayenda*, or *wakil*. Unlike other parts of the developing world where such individuals are "headmen" or "chiefs," maliks typically rule as *primus inter pares*.

65 *Qaum* translates as solidary group, usually tribe, clan, or ethnic group.

Table 3 *Percentage of rural Afghans reporting presence of customary organizations in village*

Do you have this organization in your village?	Yes	No
Customary leader	99	1
Shura/Jirga	81	14
Mullah	99	1

> water, lack of reconstruction in this region, lack of power, mosques that have been destroyed, lack of schools, and many other issues. When there are problems, the responsible people in government don't listen to us. They say "yes," but do nothing about [the problems]. They do not care. We have a proverb that says, "How can someone with a full stomach know about the problems of the hungry?"66

Although maliks have no formal state authority, they carry out administrative tasks that help to link communities to the state and are typically selected and paid by members of communities they serve. A farmer in Bazarak district said that his malik plays an important role linking the government to the state and advocated a more formal role for such individuals in local government: "The stamp of our traditional village leader (malik) is registered in our province. This is the malik's service to us. He certifies and guarantees the documents of the people. The leader should have an official position to be like a bridge between the village and government."67 The malik serves both citizens and the state, despite the fact that there is no formal law that empowers him with such responsibility. Similarly, a male shopkeeper in Ghazi Center described how both the government and citizens trust the malik (called *wakil*) in this area:

> Our leader (wakil) helps us in affairs like validating a signature or other documents. If we appeal to the government for some reason, the government turns to the wakil to confirm our residency. The wakil is a reliable person whom the government trusts. The leader confirms our address without asking for money from us. Not everyone can do this job.68

66 Malik (wakil), age 72, Ghazni Center: Interview #31.

67 Male Farmer, age 18, Bazarak: Interview #15.

68 Male Shopkeeper, age 32, Ghazni Center: Interview #13.

Instead of working with formally elected provincial or district councils, individuals frequently turn to their community representatives to act on their behalf. A female homemaker in Ghazi Center described such a process:

> If we face a problem we have an agent who goes to the district council or provincial council and solves our problem. … We call our leader "*nomayenda"* [representative], but in the past we called them *arbabs*. Our nomayenda should have an official role in the government and they must have an official stamp. When a person sells his house, the nomayenda must stamp the documents so we don't face any problems [with the government] in the future.69

Finally, a male shopkeeper in Dehdadi described the role of the role of the local council ("elders") in the community, arguing that both representatives and religious leaders should receive salaries from the government to facilitate their work:

> The elders are doing a great job in our community. They solve all of our community problems. If there is any problem, we always go directly to the community elders. We call our village elders the "holders of the village" (*qaryadar*). This person needs to have an official position in the Afghan government so that he can have a proper salary so that he does not have to worry about the food for his family and instead have the time to spend on solving people's problems. The religious leaders should also have an official position so that they can too have a proper salary so that they can teach our children religious classes and be at peace and have a quiet mind when they teach.70

According to a shopkeeper in the local bazaar, the legitimacy and effectiveness of customary leaders have made them a threatening alternative to the Taliban and the government. As a result, they have become a target of theinsurgency:

> Our malik ... has been told by the Taliban that if he brings governmental assistance or things that foreign organizations provide, he won't stay alive. The Taliban have told us, "Don't work with the government." … Our

69 Female Homemaker, age 55, Ghazni Center: Interview #17.

70 Male Shopkeeper, age 30, Dehdadi: Interview #17.

> village leader solves people's problem[s]. First he tries, and if he is unable then he goes to the district government [to try to find] a solution. In my view if village and religious leaders [had] official roles in the government, it would be better [than the current situation]. That way people's problems [would] be solved directly by the government.71

Customary organizations are not simply a relic of the past or an obstacle to the state; rather, they are a source of governance that enjoys legitimacy in rural areas, where 80% of Afghans still reside.72 Coburn eloquently describes life in a village north of Kabul, where politics is characterized by delicate compromises between these informal actors and even with the state that can keep communities out of the throes of violence. In his depiction, customary authorities navigate relations with the state and outside actors in an effort to preserve stability. Relations between the state and society are not zero-sum, but bring benefits for all—when the state recognizes local authority outside the state.73 Despite evidence of effective systems of self-governance, state building has proceeded as if these organizations do not exist. The most important example is the National Solidarity Program; a billion-dollar project funded by the World Bank and Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development, which since 2003 has sought to establish more than 30,000 community development councils in rural Afghanistan as a solution to a local governance "deficit." This ethos is presented on the ministry's own website:

> The single most important achievement to date is the creation of mechanisms for local governance and decision making. … The broad-based introduction of an alternative decision making process at the lowest community level represents a form of government at its most basic form; one that the central government and the international community have envisioned for Afghanistan. The introduction of democratically elected community decision-making bodies as a viable alternative to the traditional local governance structure has provided a vehicle to re-build the social fabric and relationships at grassroots level.74

---

71 Male Shopkeeper, age 40, Ghazni Center: Interview #25.

72 2010–2011 Central Statistics Office of Afghanistan data estimates 77% of the population resides in rural areas.

73 Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town*.

74 Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, National Solidarity Program: http://www.nspafghanistan.org/default.aspx?sel=103.

Instead of seeing customary governance as a source of capacity that might be harnessed to the state, this statement illustrates how powerful players in the state and the international community view it as an obstacle to state consolidation and individual well-being. To many Afghans, efforts to replace these social norms and reconstruct the "social fabric" are a continuation of previous policies where the state sought to displace customary governance.

The survey and field interviews provide insight into beliefs about democracy. Although democracy can be an important constraint on formal government authority, the survey indicates that most Afghans are deeply disillusioned with democracy, effectively nullifying its effect as a constraint on the state. As Table 4 shows, support for elections was only slightly more popular than having strong leaders selected without elections. Respondents believed that having elders and qaumi leaders rule as the most optimal form of governance, followed by experts and then religious leaders.

Lack of support for elections does not mean that Afghans do not support democratic principles. Instead, the qualitative data reveal bitter experiences with democracy in the past decade. To understand individual attitudes toward democracy and elections at the local level, informants in qualitative interviews were asked if they would support holding elections for the village councils called for in the constitution. If they supported the creation of such councils, they were then asked how these elections should be administered.

Table 4 *Public opinion of potential models used to govern Afghanistan (rural subpopulation, in %)*

How would you assess the following ways of governing Afghanistan?			
	Very good or good	Neither good nor bad	Very bad or bad
Through elders and *qaumi* leaders	66	19	11
Through experts	65	21	8
Through religious leaders	61	25	10
Through elections	49	32	12
Strong leaders without elections	47	17	30

Most informants said they supported elections but would not support holding formal elections that required the use of state-sponsored ballot boxes. This is because bringing formal elections to villages would further extend the corrupt tentacles of the state into their communities, displacing trusted means of governing. For example, a religious scholar argued that traditional forms of governance serve as a constraint on government predation and that local forms of consensus—and not the secret ballot—should be used to select local representatives: "Democracy means the government of the people for the people. Therefore, there should be elections for the people to choose their candidates. The elections should be held in a traditional manner because there will be no fraud or cheating. If the people choose the candidates [in such a manner], no fraud and cheating will take place."75

A female homemaker in Ghazni Center also said that future local government officials should be selected through "traditional" means or through consensus, as these individuals are generally trusted to represent the voices of communities to the state:

> In my opinion, district and village councils should be elected through traditional means, so that people's voices and problems from the village can be relayed to the government; only then can all their problems be solved by the government. Elections would give this person a sense of responsibility; he should be a good Muslim and sincere.76

Similarly, a male refugee in Ghazni Center, the epicenter of electoral fraud in the 2010 National Assembly election said, "[Local elections] will have positive results. … If these elections are done with ballot boxes as the official way is currently carried out, then there will be cheating."77 Finally, another female in Dehdadi supported holding elections using consensus-based mechanisms or the "traditional" way to prevent corruption:

> [The village council] should be elected in traditional way to prevent fraud; they should not be selected like we currently select members of the Wolesi Jirga (using formal ballot boxes). The candidates should be good people, good Muslims, experienced, be from this province, have experience and be aware of the problems of people. It is not important

75 Maulawi, age 30, Bazarak: Focus Group Discussion #5.

76 Female Homemaker, age 38, Ghazni Center: Focus Group Discussion #11.

77 Male Refugee, age 33, Ghazni Center: Focus Group Discussion #2.

> that he is Tajik, Arab, or Pashtun. It is just important that they work forthe people.78

Although informants desired local representation, most viewed formal state-sponsored elections as undermining prospects for well-being by bringing the corrupt government practices into the village domain. In other words, engagement with the state for many Afghans here becomes an obstacle to improving well-being. Not only will the creation of state-mandated village councils undermine the legitimacy of local leaders, but it will also bring government predation and malfeasance into every community in the country.

The evidence above suggests a decentralized state-building approach is both feasible—based on existing local capacity—and desirable to many. Historically, a problem with the state has been the lack of constraints on its predation. For this reason, greater emphasis on negative rights—showing individuals how they can engage with the state but ensure protection from it—may serve some promise to help individuals overcome past or current injustices perpetrated by an unconstrained state. These findings also suggest that state-building efforts may benefit from a sequencing that prioritizes the solidification of negative rights before governments embark on massive expansion into positive rights. Implementation of positive rights may be more appropriate once the state has credibly committed to tie its own hands. On the dimension of accountability, decentralization can provide a space in the system of government for customary organizations or other organizations that already enjoy substantial accountability. Finally, the effectiveness of customary order in resolving conflict, illustrated by individual willingness to turn to customary order rather than courts, suggests the possibility of a system of legal pluralism.

Conclusion

Historically, efforts to build state capacity translated into violence in rural Afghanistan. The past ten years have seen more of the same. This does not mean that Afghanistan is somehow determined to be stateless; rather, it means that efforts to consolidate state authority must take into account how history has shaped preferences concerning the state and the expansion of state authority. The post-2001 period provided an opportunity to reverse course and intro- duce a state characterized by constraints while providing some local autonomy.

78 Female Homemaker, age 41, Dehdadi: Focus Group Discussion #7.

Yet, what citizens received was oddly familiar—an overreaching state that was unable to capitalize on the informal practices that are so important in the day- to-day lives of citizens in rural parts of the country. The institutional foundation of the state allowed President Karzai to forge a system of patronage because he had the power to appoint all officials. It also left a hierarchical order that the donors could overwhelm with resources. Although the central government policies saw customary governance as an adversary, many district and provincial governors rely upon them informally as partners in governance(in contradiction to the law).

Melissa Thomas argued that instead of trying to reproduce the best elements of European welfare states in poor countries, donors and local governments should understand that a fiscally sustainable state based on domestic resources must be limited in "function, scope, and the number of government- enforced rights. This is not a question of ideology; it is a question of pragma- tism."79 A limited state does not mean Afghans must reduce expectations of their future well-being. On the contrary, it means the state can be sustainable in the long-term based on norms negotiated within society. Anthropologists have recognized that efforts to "stabilize" Afghanistan without considering the realities of local politics and the history of the country will not succeed.80 International postconflict reconstruction efforts are tasked help societies to turn a "vision of a good life into responsive, robust, and resilient institutions."81 Too often, this call has led postconflict constitutions to be aspirational rather than realistic. The evidence here illustrates that the state-building vision exemplified by the international community and some in the Afghan government seeking to bring well-being to citizens through increased state capacity that extends the state to communities may not be a vision all Afghans share.

Some argue that if left to their own devices, customary governance or other forms of "efficient anarchy" may further disenfranchise women, youth, or other marginalized groups. Yet the norms embodied in such structures, although not perfectly representative, are adaptive and serve as an "imperfect" alternative to governance by a weak state, especially in the short term.82 Legacies of

79 M. Thomas, "Great Expectations: Rich Donors and Poor Country Governments," *ssrn eLi-brary* (January 2009): 14–15 http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1333618.

80 Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town*.

81 S. Chesterman, "Whose Strategies, Whose Peace? The Role of International Institutions in Strategic Peacebuilding," in D. Philpott and G. Powers (eds), *Strategies of Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 137.

82 N. Komesar, *Imperfect Alternatives: Choosing Institutions in Law, Economics, and Public Policy* (Chicago, il: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

exclusionary norms must be considered alongside recognition of the vital role self-governance plays in rural Afghanistan.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jed Ober, Glenn Cowan, Daniel Murphy, M. Hasan Wafaey, Fauzia Rahimi, Sabawoon Ahmadzai, and Terry Hoverter at Democracy International for support of this research project and for allowing me to use the data for this paper. Min Zaw Oo deserves special mention for the extraordinarily creative efforts he employed to ensure the quality of the survey data. David Montgomery provided extraordinarily useful comments on the manuscript at several stages. I am enormously grateful for his support of this project. Finally, Ilia Murtazashvili and the anonymous readers provided constructive advice that helped improve the quality of the manuscript.