Building Walls, Building Bridges: Border Fortification and Insurgent Influence*

Christopher W. Blair† Luwei Ying‡

April 16, 2025

Abstract

Militant groups often rely on resources and support that flow across international borders to sustain their operations. This study examines how border fortifications, which act as a significant resource shock by disrupting these flows, shape the propaganda and governance activities of these groups. We argue that when border fortifications restrict access to external resources, militants compensate by intensifying efforts to gain local support. Specifically, they engage in influence campaigns and generate propaganda aimed at mobilizing civilian cooperation and maintaining the loyalty of core members. Empirically, we employ a two-pronged research strategy that balances identification and generalizability: First, a difference-in-differences design using declassified microdata on border fortification and insurgent operations in Afghanistan provides causal evidence that such fortifications lead to increased civilian-targeted propaganda efforts by militants. Second, analyses of original data on the propaganda outputs of 38 Islamist militant groups, using natural language processing techniques, show that militant propaganda adopts more religious themes following border fortification. Our findings highlight the broader impact of resource shocks on rebel strategies, reevaluating the role of border control as a counterinsurgent tactic and shedding light on the adaptive nonviolent strategies employed by cross-border militant groups.

*Names are in alphabetical order with equal authorship implied. We kindly thank Graeme Blair, Jonathan Chu, Michael Kenwick, Beth Simmons and audiences at the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Pennsylvania for helpful comments and advice.

†Department of Politics, Princeton University, chris.blair@princeton.edu.

‡Department of Political Science, University of California, Los Angeles, ying@ss.ucla.edu.

1 Introduction

Contemporary civil wars are increasingly defined by their transnational nature, with militant groups often relying on cross-border sanctuaries and external support to sustain their operations (Gleditsch, 2007; Walter, 2017). These transnational networks provide critical resources, such as funding, weapons, and recruits, which bolster the capabilities of insurgent groups. In response, counterinsurgency strategies have emphasized the importance of border fortification as a means of cutting off these lifelines. Over recent decades, numerous border walls have been constructed in the global south. By sealing borders, counterinsurgents aim to erode transnational militants' resources, degrading the quality of rebellion.

Existing scholarly work focuses on rebels' battlefield response to border fortification and mostly considers how this strategy impacts their violent attacks. Yet, a significant gap remains in our understanding of how such counterinsurgent maneuvers influence the broader spectrum of militant activities, especially governance and propaganda, which play essential roles in mobilization and power consolidation.

In this study, we examine militants' adaptive strategies in response to border fortification—an important and common counterinsurgency policy aimed at cutting off rebel resource supplies. We argue that when external resources are severed, militants recalibrate their strategies to focus more on cultivating local support. This shift involves greater reliance on influence campaigns and propaganda to mobilize civilian cooperation and maintain the loyalty of core members. In doing so, insurgents tighten their ideological narratives, appealing to ideologically aligned adherents through more targeted messaging. For example, radical Islamic groups may adopt stronger religious rhetoric, using it to recruit individuals who share their religious identity and beliefs.

We test this theory using a two-pronged research strategy that balances identification and generalizability. First, using declassified microdata on border fortification and insurgent

influence operations in Afghanistan in a difference-in-differences design, we offer causal evidence that border fortification causes militants to engage in civilian-targeted propaganda outreach efforts.

Second, using original data on the propaganda outputs of 38 Islamic militant groups around the world, along with natural language processing techniques, we document shifts in militant propaganda rhetoric following border fortification. Estimates reveal that militant propaganda becomes more inflected with religious themes in the wake of border fortification. Qualitative case studies reveal this general pattern reflects a deliberate strategy undertaken by Islamist militant groups in the Middle East since the start of the War on Terror. As border fortifications target their transnational operations, militant groups increase their religious rhetoric in order to cultivate local support from ideologically-aligned networks of adherents. Exploratory analyses also allow us to characterize how rebel groups talk about international borders in their propaganda.

Our findings have two key implications. First, they suggest that rebel strategies are largely a reflection of the resources they can access. When external support is readily available, rebels may prioritize aggressive military tactics; however, when faced with resource shocks like border fortification, they adapt by focusing on ideological control and local influence. Second, resource shocks act as a double-edged sword. While they reduce the options available to rebels, limiting their ability to sustain conventional warfare, they also compel these groups to adopt policies that foster deeper connections with local communities. This can lead to tighter ideological control and make insurgent movements more deeply rooted in their host countries. Thus, while border fortification can weaken the immediate threat posed by cross-border militant operations, it may also inadvertently strengthen the rebels' ideological influence and local entrenchment, complicating long-term counterinsurgency efforts.

2 Rebel Resource and Transnational Support

Because wars are costly, access to resources is critical for rebel groups seeking success. Large resource endowments can directly translate into military capabilities by enabling rebels to purchase better weaponry and recruit more fighters through monetary incentives (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Lujala, 2010; Weinstein, 2005). Resources also provide long-term strategic advantages. They help rebels establish strong command and control structures through selective incentives and patronage networks, which secure loyalty and organizational cohesion (Weinstein, 2005). This ultimately explains why prolonged conflicts are more likely where rebels have sustainable access to resources (Byman, 2005; Carter, 2012; Lujala, 2010; Ross, 2004).

At the local level, the sources of rebel resources—whether from natural wealth, taxation, or illicit trade—significantly shape how rebels interact with civilians (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Weinstein, 2005). In general, when resources are scarce or difficult to exploit, insurgents must invest more effort into building local support. They often do so by providing services, promoting ideology, or offering financial incentives to secure civilian loyalty and participation (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Weinstein, 2005). In contrast, lucrative and easily accessible resources, such as mineral deposits, reduce rebels' incentives to address civilian needs, as their financial survival does not depend on local support (Florea, 2020). Oil, in particular, stands out as a highly lucrative resource. Despite its extraction costs, it often acts as a windfall for rebels, disincentivizing governance and instead encouraging opportunistic violence (Blair, Christensen and Rudkin, 2021; Ross, 1999; Dube and Vargas, 2013). While oil enriches rebels, it frequently proves a curse for local communities, exacerbating violence and instability.

Resource access is not always confined to local contexts. Many rebel groups benefit from transnational backing, receiving funding, arms, recruits, or logistical support (Gleditsch,

2007; Salehyan, 2007). Between 1946 and 2004, over one-fifth of civil conflicts involved direct troop deployments by outside states (Harbom and Wallensteen, 2005). Covert state sponsorship is even more common, as governments often support violent non-state actors to gain strategic advantages and wage proxy wars. For instance, the Venezuelan government has been accused of aiding or sheltering FARC militants, while the Sudanese government allegedly supported the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to undermine the Ugandan government.

In addition to state sponsorship, diaspora communities, ethnic kin, and religious constituencies abroad have long served as critical sources of support for insurgencies (Cederman et al., 2013; Cunningham, 2013; Gurses, 2015). Connections to co-ethnics or co-religionists anchor insurgencies in larger transnational identities, strengthening their narratives and broadening their appeal. Such support often has a greater impact than aid from foreign governments that lack these identity ties (Petrova, 2019). Radical Islamist movements exemplify this trend; since the 1980s, these movements have capitalized on their extensive religious networks and pan-Islamic discourse to mobilize fighters globally under the banner of inter-Muslim solidarity (Hegghammer, 2010; Sageman, 2004).

In many ways, external sponsorship—from state government or diaspora—is analogous to the windfall resource for rebels: it diminishes their reliance on local populations and reduces the need for domestic resource mobilization. Groups with foreign backing often prioritize the interests of their sponsors over those of local communities, shaping their strategies and objectives accordingly. For example, the Houthis in Yemen heavily depend on Iranian support, which lessens their obligation to address local grievances. Similarly, the Wagner Group's close ties to the Russian state allow them to operate with minimal accountability to local populations, prioritizing external geopolitical goals over the needs of people in Ukraine, Syria, or Libya.

The impact of external support is most pronounced when rebels and their foreign spon-

sors share borders. Shared borders, particularly unguarded ones, enable the easy movement of resources on the ground. Militant groups use these borders to extend operations, often establishing sanctuaries or bases in neighboring territories. This allows them to conduct attacks in one country while evading retaliation by retreating into another (Salehyan, 2008). Groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operated across adjacent states, complicating state efforts to capture or defeat them. Shared borders also facilitate the flow of foreign fighters responding to ideological appeals, as seen with the Afghan Taliban recruiting fighters from neighboring Pakistan (Shapiro and Fair, 2010). Consequently, conflicts leveraging international borders for resources tend to be more intense and protracted (Buhaug and Gates, 2002; Buhaug, Gates and Lujala, 2009; Bapat, 2007; Salehyan, 2007).

3 Border Fortification as a Resource Shock

To curtail insurgent capabilities rooted in transborder networks, states increasingly rely on border fortification. Since the end of the Cold War, governments worldwide have constructed hundreds of barriers—walls, fences, and heavily guarded checkpoints—to restrict the movement of people, arms, and resources across borders (Avdan and Gelpi, 2017*a*; Hassner and Wittenberg, 2015; Jones, 2012). These fortifications range from high-tech surveillance systems and drones to simpler yet imposing physical obstacles, all aimed at reducing insurgents' access to porous frontiers. By disrupting the flow of foreign recruits and cutting off access to sanctuaries, border barriers create a resource shock for rebel groups. Similar to a sudden depletion of natural resource wealth or the loss of external sponsors, these barriers diminish the resource base essential to insurgent operations.

In general, negative resource shocks force rebel groups to adapt to new economic realities, but their specific effects on violence and insurgent behavior are mixed. On one hand, reduced resources can undermine a group's ability to sustain warfare, potentially shortening conflicts and lowering their intensity (Bazzi and Blattman, 2014; Blair, Christensen and Rudkin,

2021). Without foreign funding or easy access to arms, insurgents may scale down operations or adopt less costly tactics. On the other hand, resource shocks can create perverse incentives. Rebels deprived of external support might intensify local resource extraction, escalate violence to maintain control, or turn to criminal activities (Dube and Vargas, 2013; Gawande, Kapur and Satyanath, 2017; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). These divergent outcomes reflect the complex strategic choices insurgents face: while resource loss limits their capacity for conventional warfare, it can also drive them to riskier behaviors to remain viable.

How does border fortification as a resource shock affect insurgent behavior? Existing research primarily highlights its potential to reduce violent attacks (Avdan and Gelpi, 2017*b*; Carter and Ying, 2021). The logic is straightforward: by shutting off the flow of violent attackers from abroad, border walls make it harder for foreign operatives to enter the country, thereby diminishing the frequency of violent incidents (Avdan and Gelpi, 2017*b*). For example, Türkiye's 2016 fortification of its border with northern Syria significantly reduced ISIS's access to foreign recruits, previously funneled through that route at a rate of about 60 percent (Rapoport, 2022). More broadly, barriers increase the costs of rebel operations, forcing groups to localize their tactics, plan less ambitious attacks, and limit cross-border infiltration (Blair, 2024; Byman, 2012; Frisch, 2007). As a result, border fortification is often viewed as a tool that can contain—or at least spatially constrain—insurgent violence by making external mobilization channels less accessible.

However, recent scholarship calls for a more cautious reassessment of border fortification, emphasizing its unintended consequences and the shifts it provokes in rebel strategies (Blair, 2024). Insurgents cut off from foreign recruits or supply networks may escalate attacks within their local areas to extract resources needed to sustain their campaigns (Dube and Vargas, 2013; Gawande, Kapur and Satyanath, 2017; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). While fortifications are often assumed to reduce external violence, they can intensify lo-

calized conflict, resulting in more concentrated or ideologically-driven violence. This raises important questions about the broader impacts of such interventions.

4 Theory: Audience Reorientation and Ideological Adaptation

This paper studies how negative resource shocks—exemplified by border fortification—reshape rebels' broader strategic adaptations. While limiting access to external resources may reduce a group's immediate capacity for large-scale assaults, it rarely dismantles the organization altogether. Instead, rebels retreat to local constituencies and bolster ideological appeals to compensate for the diminished ability to recruit through material incentives. Understanding these adaptations is critical for assessing the broader implications of counterinsurgency policies.

4.1 Dealing with a Different Audience

Rebels' tactical choices depend heavily on the constituencies they can reach and whose support they require to survive (Polo and Gleditsch, 2016). When border controls cut off transnational lifelines, insurgents lose a key avenue for mobilizing fighters, resources, and funding. Forced to focus on the local population, these groups often adapt by shifting toward nonviolent or more selective forms of engagement. Violence against civilians can irreparably damage a rebel group's local reputation, undermining future recruitment and community support (Cunningham, 2013). By contrast, cultivating social ties through services, governance, and mutual trust becomes essential once external sponsorship disappears (Weinstein, 2005).

This phenomenon reflects a broader logic of accountability in militant organizations. External patronage—through foreign sponsorship, diaspora funding, or kin groups—insulates rebels from local needs and permits them to align with external interests rather than domes-

tic priorities (Akcinaroglu and Tokdemir, 2018; Beardsley, Gleditsch and Lo, 2015; Rubin, 2002; Salehyan, Siroky and Wood, 2014; Stewart and Liou, 2017). Such external alignment imposes constraints that can overshadow local priorities. The Wagner Group's interventions, for instance, often mirror Russian strategic objectives instead of those of local populations in Ukraine, Syria, or Libya. Similarly, Afghan jihadist groups operating from remote bases (i.e., qarargha) largely neglected village ties, since substantial external support reduced their dependence on local communities (Rubin, 2002, p181). When such transnational resources are curtailed, rebels must reconsider how to obtain the manpower and material they need to sustain operations. Instead of relying on foreign backers, they increasingly target domestic constituencies, offer localized governance, and reduce indiscriminate violence to avoid alienating crucial supporters (Wood, 2014). In this sense, cutting off external patronage may actually help build a more robust local constituency.

In practice, this reorientation involves dedicating more effort to establishing governance structures that address everyday needs—such as basic security, dispute resolution, and essential social services like schools and rudimentary clinics. Through these undertakings, rebels reinforce their legitimacy among the local populace, portraying themselves as viable political contenders rather than mere spoilers (Arjona, 2016; Mampilly, 2012). Such governance often relies on collecting "donations" or taxes from civilians, in exchange for maintaining order and providing social benefits. Crucially, rebels also invest in communication strategies to shape public opinion and legitimize their cause, leveraging various media outlets to disseminate propaganda and bolster support (Nacos, 1996). These efforts set the stage for more extensive domestic extraction and mobilization. Hence, we put forward the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1: When border fortifications disrupt external resources, the insurgent groups impacted will intensify their domestic outreach and influence activities.

4.2 Ideological Shift

The effectiveness of rebel campaigns hinges on communication and propaganda, which are crucial for recruiting fighters and securing additional material support within the organization (Karell and Freedman, 2019*a*; Piazza and Guler, 2019; Walter, 2017). For both objectives, it is essential that propaganda content resonates with the audience (Hegghammer, 2013; Snow et al., 1986). In fact, many studies document how militant groups strategically tailor their messages to the needs and values of their intended supporters (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015; Malet, 2013; Sanín and Wood, 2014; Ugarriza and Craig, 2013; Wright, 1991; Ying, 2024).

We argue that militant organizations intensify the ideological dimension of their propaganda when border fortifications cut off external resources, forcing them to focus on local communities. Religious militant groups exemplify this phenomenon by emphasizing religious themes more strongly in their messaging. At least four factors explain this shift. First, while propaganda always matters, it becomes especially pivotal when competing for grassroots backing, since local supporters serve as the essential core a group falls back on during setbacks (Knuppe and Nanes, 2021; Ying, 2024). External sponsorship is often a top-down process, allowing militants more latitude in their narratives; in contrast, domestic constituents require a sense of cultural or ideological affinity before providing support.

Second, local and international audiences prioritize different issues. Before border fortification, insurgents devote part of their rhetoric to extralocal or foreign backers, who may hold political agendas misaligned with those of local populations (Karell and Freedman, 2019*b*).[1] Strong border control, however, narrows the audience to local communities, which care deeply about the legitimacy of rebel governance and traditional values. This environment prompts religious militants, in particular, to heighten religious content in their propaganda.

[1]This practice, whereby rebels use media to garner international support, is sometimes termed "rebel diplomacy" (Huang, 2016; Jones and Mattiacci, 2017).

Third, emphasizing ideological conviction compensates for the lack of material incentives that would otherwise come from external resources (Berman, 2011; Sanín and Wood, 2014; Weinstein, 2005; Ying, 2024). When external funding is available, militants can offer tangible benefits to recruits. Once those funds disappear, they must instead appeal to shared beliefs and identities to inspire loyalty.

Fourth, more stringent ideological messaging offers the added benefit of improving member screening and selection. By portraying themselves as ideologically "purer," groups attract individuals who are genuinely committed, while deterring opportunists. This dynamic is well-documented in conventional religious organizations, where sects with exclusive membership adhere to strict interpretations of doctrine (Berman, 2000; Carvalho, 2019; Iannaccone, 1992; Iannaccone and Berman, 2006). In our context, groups similarly tighten their ideological stance as border fortification limits and homogenizes their membership.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 2: When border fortifications disrupt external resources, the insurgent groups impacted will intensify their ideological narratives in their propaganda.

5 Research Design

To test our theory, we use a two-pronged empirical strategy that balances identification and generalizability. First, we draw on administrative microdata on conflict, border fortification, and attitudes in Afghanistan. Using a difference-in-differences design that compares insurgent propaganda efforts in fortified and unfortified districts, we offer causal evidence that in response to border control, Afghan insurgents redoubled propaganda efforts. These efforts served as a tool for deepening ties with borderland civilians, ensuring organizational resilience in the face of counterinsurgent pressure. Survey evidence reveals insurgent propaganda was locally-resonant, fostering civilian perceptions of ideological alignment with rebel

fighters. Second, we expand from the Afghan context to assess external validity. Using global, time-series cross-sectional analyses of insurgent propaganda efforts, we show that the Afghan pattern generalizes. Insurgents adapt to border fortification by increasing propaganda efforts intended to build civilian support and reassure core cadres. Text analyses of a novel corpus of jihadist propaganda outputs bolster these findings, suggesting insurgents increase locally-targeted ideological messaging in response to border control. Together, these findings suggest that endowment shocks, and particularly shocks to insurgents' foreign resources and transitional support, reshape their propaganda output and rhetoric. As fortifications interdict transnational militant networks, violent non-state actors respond by attempting to rally-the-base, building local support through ideologically-resonant messaging.

6 Evidence from Afghanistan

We first test our theory in the context of Afghanistan, where NATO, in collaboration with the Afghan government, undertook a large-scale effort to fortify the borders between 2008–2015. This effort formed a central part of the broader NATO and US-backed counterinsurgency campaign, since Afghan and US officials identified cross-border sanctuary as "the single greatest source of Afghan instability" (Jamal and Maley, 2023, p. 73) and "the single most important problem in the war" (Coll, 2018, p. 517). Indeed, border fortification was undertaken with an explicit aim to interdict transnational support flowing from abroad to insurgent factions in Afghanistan, as well as to disrupt large Taliban sanctuaries in the Pashtun-dominated tribal areas spanning Afghanistan's eastern and southern borders with Pakistan. Effectively degrading these sanctuaries was a particularly challenging task because the reach of the Afghan administrative state was notoriously weak in borderland communities, hampered by rugged terrain, bureaucratic weakness, tribal opposition, and economically-important illicit markets (Barfield, 2010; Johnson and Mason, 2008).[2]

[2]Another challenge for the counterinsurgent border security effort was the fact that Afghan policymakers

From late 2008, NATO forces collaborated with Afghan troops on the Focused Border Development (FBD) program, the aim of which was to raise and train the Afghan Border Force (ABF).[3] ABF officers were tasked with policing the Afghan borderlands, and represented an Afghan-led border security capacity (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh, 2013).[4] In particular, Afghan officials selected fort locations and led US-funded construction; moreover, ABF units took primary responsibility for counterinsurgent patrols in border communities.[5] An important aim of ABF fortification efforts was to expand legibility of border communities, improving government ties with rural civilians and improving information about cross-border insurgent activities. Consequently, from 2008 locally-recruited ABF forces co-located with NATO advisory teams to staff hundreds of Afghan-controlled forts along Afghanistan's periphery. Figure 1 plots the expansion of fortification efforts across districts over time. In total, forts were established in 52 of the 259 districts within Afghanistan's border-contiguous provinces. Fortification was concentrated in four provinces—Kandahar, Nangarhar, Nimroz, and Kunduz—along important smuggling routes to Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan.

Over the course of the war in Afghanistan, Taliban cadres relied on an extensive propaganda campaign, wielding a non-violent communication strategy to cultivate civilian support, sap counterinsurgent morale, and solidify backing from key ideologues, clerics, and patrons (Johnson, 2007*a*; Semple, 2014). Indeed, insurgent propaganda played such a central role for the Taliban that one top commander declared "[t]he media war is the real war" (quoted in Keller, 2008). Working in complement to their combat activities, the Taliban's information

---

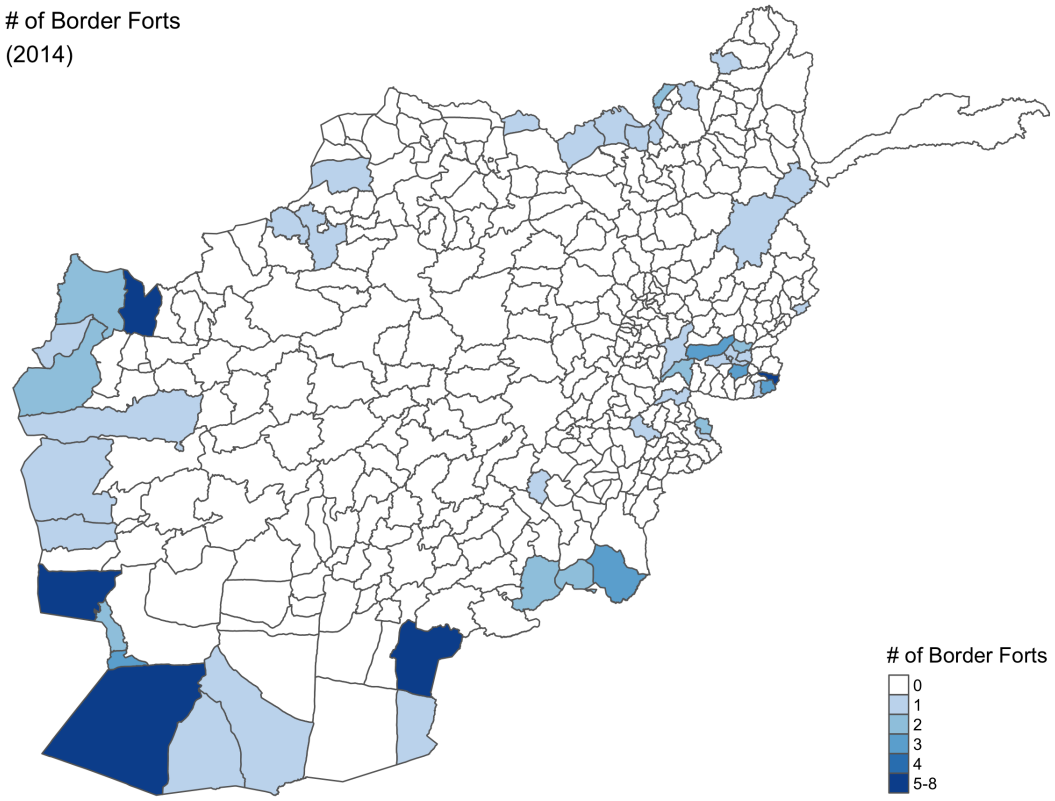
reject the legitimacy of the Durand Line, which marks the internationally-recognized border with Pakistan. Afghan leaders claim Pashtun clans are wrongly divided by the Durand Line, which was imposed by Britain and allegedly robs Afghanistan of traditional territories.

[3] Although the Afghan case is unique in many key respects, the broad parameters of the FBD program resemble border security assistance programs sponsored by the US throughout the Global South (Frowd, 2018; Blair, 2023*b*).

[4] ABF troops were advised and equipped by NATO. Whitlock (2021) details challenges facing the border advisory mission. Long-run strategic incoherence undermined tactical successes.

[5] (Blair, 2024) describes and validates the important counterinsurgency tasks ABF units conducted from 2008.

Figure 1: Border Fortification in Afghanistan



Note: The map shows the number of border forts in each Afghan districts at end of 2014.

operations concentrated on shaping local audiences' perceptions of US and NATO forces, the Afghan government, and the Taliban itself. These propaganda efforts were central for enflaming widespread mistrust of US, NATO, and Afghan government officials (Jamal and Maley, 2023), enforcing civilian compliance with Taliban prescriptions (International Crisis Group, 2008), sewing fear among local security forces (Keller, 2008), and cultivating a popular sense of the inevitability of their ultimate victory (Foxley, 2010).

In borderland communities, insurgent propaganda played a particularly important role, since civilians in these communities were most exposed to Taliban presence, shared ethnotribal linkages with Taliban forces, and were generally more receptive to ideological messages

inflected with local cultural and religious themes (Foxley, 2007; Hussaini and Morris, 2020). Insurgent influence operations also drew persistent counterinsurgent attention. Militant-operated radio towers were a key target of US and Afghan airstrikes (Child et al., 2023), and ABF units placed particular emphasis on counter-propaganda efforts (Smith, 2010; Loi, 2011; Trenkel, 2014).[6]

We examine the interplay of border fortification and insurgent information operations to understand how interdiction of transnational militant networks shaped the dynamics of rebel propaganda. Our argument implies that insurgent adaptations to border hardening—in the form of increasing, locally-targeted influence efforts—may undercut short-run benefits counterinsurgents derive from border interdiction. In this sense, our argument dovetails with broader accounts that highlight ineffective counterinsurgent border control and virulent insurgent propaganda as key components of the Taliban victory in Afghanistan (Whitlock, 2021; Malkasian, 2021; Jamal and Maley, 2023). Explaining the eventual collapse of the Afghan government is beyond the scope of this paper, but our work offers important insight into one key challenge—insurgent information operations in borderland communities—emblematic of broader strategic and tactical dynamics contributing to insurgent success.

6.1 Data

We combine three novel sources of microdata from Afghanistan. Descriptive statistics are available in Tables A-1 – A-2.

Border Fortification Information on Afghanistan's border security infrastructure comes from the US Government's GEOnet Names Server (GNS).[7] The GNS records millions of infrastructure sites worldwide, including hundreds of security installations in Afghanistan. With this data, we chart the completion of border fortifications in Afghanistan at the district-

[6] American commanders also invested millions of dollars into counter-messaging campaigns (Sonin and Wright, 2022).

[7] See Blair (2024) for further description of the data.

quarter from 2008–2015. The core independent variable takes a value of 1 in all district-quarters in which a completed border fort exists, and 0 otherwise.[8] Fortification is a bundled treatment that includes the presence of each border post and ABF forces manning.[9]

Insurgent Propaganda To capture insurgent propaganda, we study administrative data compiled by NATO and Afghan forces. For the period from 2008–2014, the US military has declassified the complete record of 430,000+ Significant Activities (SIGACTs).[10] The SIGACTs file contains granular information on two sets of events related to insurgent influence: propaganda and shaping operations. Insurgent propaganda are events in which rebel actors disseminated their worldview through text, visual, or radio media broadcasts. Most often, propaganda events involved the distribution of night letters—leaflets communicating warnings, instructions, and ideological messages—posted covertly at night in notable village locations like schools or mosques (Johnson, 2007*b*). Figure 2 offers one characteristic example. Other propaganda events include radio broadcasts and recorded chants distributed to local populations (Johnson and Waheed, 2011). We plot the distribution of propaganda events in Figure 3.

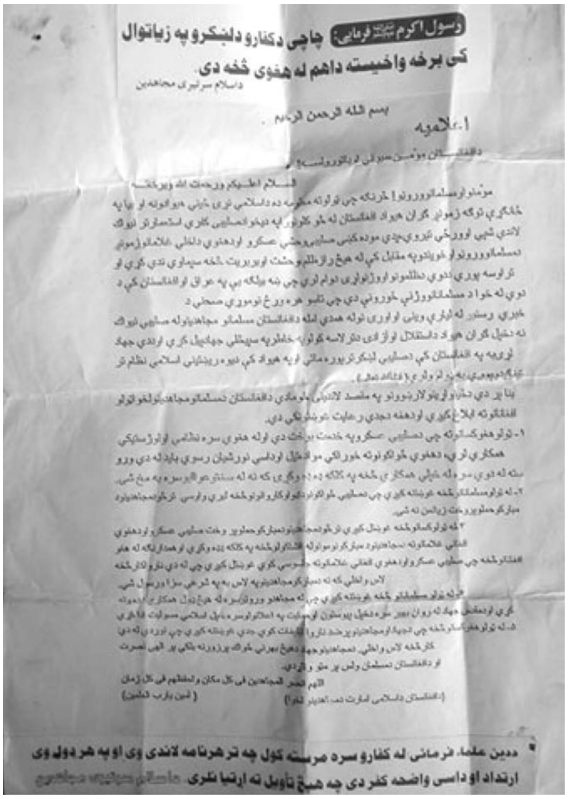
Insurgent shaping operations encompass a broader array of rebel efforts to increase receptivity of local populations to their propaganda messages. Shaping operations include instances of insurgent commanders attending community shuras to discuss local issues, and governance activities—namely tax collection—engaged in by rebel forces. We plot the dis-

[8]Treatment never reverts in the study period. By exploiting variation in the extensive margin of fortification, this approximates an intent-to-treat design. Results are substantively similar examining the intensive margin of fortification (Table A-5).

[9]We attempt to tease apart mechanisms by comparing effects of fortification to other security infrastructure (Table XXXX).

[10]Section A.1 describes the data-generating process. The systematic nature of collection helps mitigate concerns about reporting bias (Weidmann, 2016). Yet, the data are not without limitations. In particular, because SIGACTs were compiled by counterinsurgents, the capacity for event detection was greater in areas where troops deployed. We take a number of steps to mitigate concerns that border fortification merely increased observability of SIGACTs, including controlling for the presence of non-ABF counterinsurgency forces.

Figure 2: Taliban Propaganda Leaflet



The Prophet of God Mohammed (peace be upon Him) says: One who lends a hand to infidels to transgress [against Muslims] is one of them.

—By the Islamic Devoted *Mujahedin*

In the name of Allah, the most merciful and most compassionate

Statement

Pious Afghans, Brave and Courageous People! Accept our greetings;

Dear Muslim and devout brother! As you all know some countries in the Islamic world and specifically our dear country—Afghanistan—are spending day and night under the grip of the crusaders in the last few years. During this time the cruel crusaders' army and their domestic servants have committed grave atrocities, barbarity and savagery against our innocent brothers and sisters. Their cruelties have not ceased. You have watched and heard of their ongoing savagery in Afghanistan and Iraq, the two best examples that have been exposed by the international media. Therefore, the Afghan Muslim *Mujahids* have initiated their sacred *Jihad* to gain the independent of our beloved country from the crusader powers. The *Jihad* will continue until the end—until defeat of the crusaders' army, and until the establishment of a pure Islamic State. (*Inshallah*)

Therefore, the Afghan Muslim *Mujahedin* state the following related guidelines to ensure obtaining our goals, and ask earnestly all Afghans to respect them seriously:

1. All those who work and are at the service of the crusader army, cooperate military of logistically with them, and carry oil, food and similar things for them, are warned strongly to stop cooperating with them promptly; otherwise, they will face serious consequences.

2. All those who do business with the crusaders are asked to avoid doing business with them, so as not to suffer during the exalted strike of the *mujahedin* on the crusaders.

3. We seriously ask all persons not to expose the holy names of the *mujahedin* to the crusaders army and to their Afghan slaves during the exalted strike of *mujahedin* on them, and likewise, we ask those Afghans who spy for Americans and for their Afghan slaves to stop doing this evil act, otherwise, they will be punished at the hands of the holy *mujahedin* according to *Sharia*.

4. We ask all Muslims to cooperate whole-heartedly with their *mujahedin* brothers and to join their ranks and to support jihads, so as to perform their religious duty properly.

5. We ask all those who spread false allegation against *mujahedin* to stop their evil acts.

The *mujaheds'* power is not based on any foreign support, it is founded on Allah's blessing and the will of the Afghan Muslim people.

God grant success to the *mujahed* everywhere and always.

The *Mujahedin* of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

Religious Scholars say: Cooperation with infidels, under any circumstance and any reason and excuse, in any form, is an open blasphemy that needs no deliberation.

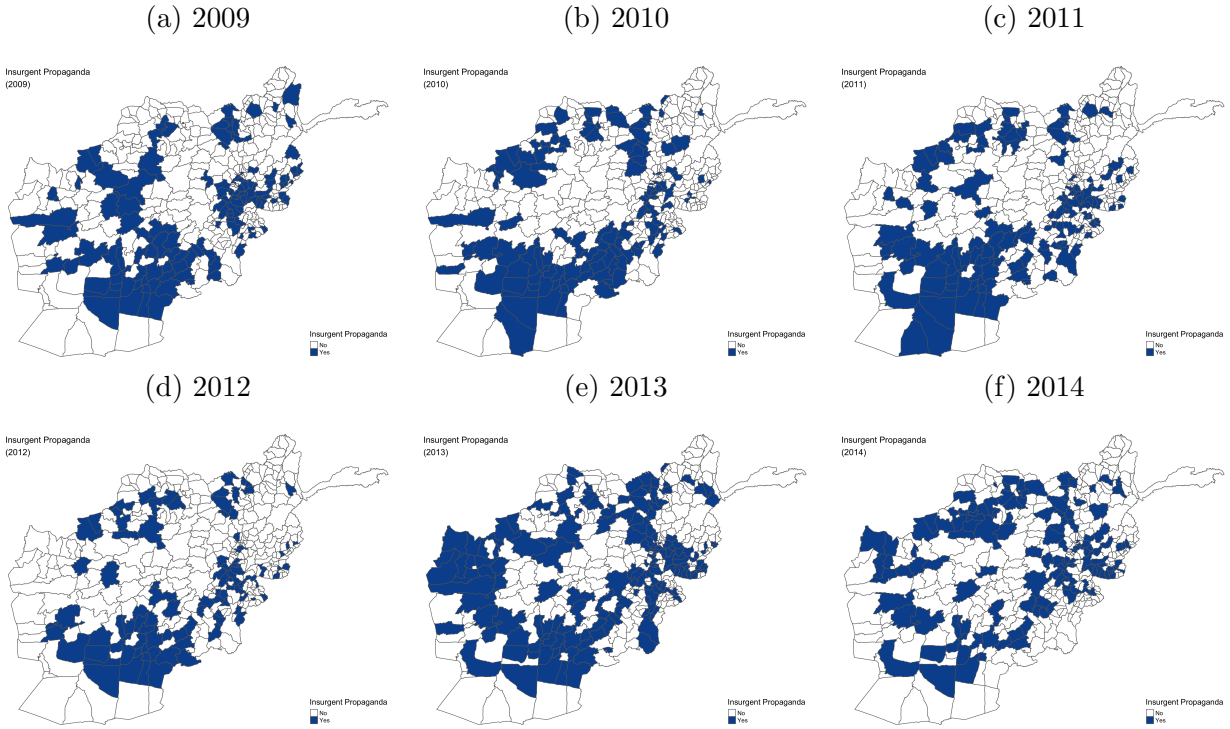
—Afghanistan's Devoted *Mujahedin*

Note: The document (left) is a night letter distributed by Taliban forces in Maydan Wardak province in 2006. The translation (right) is provided by Human Rights Watch. Source: Lessons in Terror.

tribution of these events in Figure A-2. Together, by spreading ideological messages and building social relationships, the goal of these information and shaping operations was to establish conditions for armed success by cultivating civilian support and compliance.

Survey Representative opinion data come from the Afghanistan Nationwide Quarterly Assessment Research (ANQAR) survey. ANQAR includes several pertinent items, including questions about perceptions of insurgent ideology (Figure A-3). We study five waves over 2009–2010 and 2014–2015. Section A.2 describes the data collection and sampling process. ANQAR was commissioned by NATO and administered by the Afghan Center for Socio-

Figure 3: Insurgent Propaganda in Afghanistan



Note: Each map shows the extensive margin of insurgent propaganda over the course of the respective year denoted in the title.

Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR). ACSOR fielded the survey across Afghan districts selected via probability-proportional-to-size systematic sampling. ANQAR was implemented by trained, locally-recruited, gender-matched enumerators who received permission from village elders prior to household visits. Moreover, enumerators were never accompanied by counterinsurgent forces in the field. Confidence in survey design and implementation is further bolstered by high cooperation and low refusal and non-contact rates, consistent with representative US surveys (Condra and Wright, 2019).

6.2 Estimation Strategy

Our empirical strategy exploits the staggered construction of forts across Afghan districts over time. Specifically, we leverage variation in border fortification over district-quarters,

comparing fortified and non-fortified districts in border-contiguous provinces. To mitigate concerns about different biases in the SIGACTs and survey data (Lyall, Blair and Imai, 2013; Fetzer et al., 2021), we pair objective, administrative records of propaganda with subjective, survey-based outcomes from ANQAR.

Exploiting the staggered implementation of fortification, we estimate a series of difference-in-differences models using a least-squares equation:[11]

$$Y_{d,t} = \delta(\text{Border Fortification}_{d,t-1}) + \alpha_d + \beta_t + \nu_{p\times t} + \gamma(X_{d,t-1}) + \epsilon \tag{1}$$

where d indexes districts and t indexes year-specific quarters. $Y_{d,t}$ are district-level outcomes. Border Fortification$_{d,t-1}$ denotes whether a district had a border fort in quarter $t-1$. α_d and β_t are district and year-specific quarter fixed effects. $\nu_{p\times t}$ are Pashto share-by-quarter fixed effects, which absorb broad shifts across ethnolinguistic regions. $X_{d,t-1}$ is a vector of district-level covariates, including counterinsurgent operations and deployments. ϵ are robust, district-clustered standard errors. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

In our setting, inference rests on two identifying assumptions. First, we require that in the absence of fortification, treated and untreated districts would experience common trends in outcomes. In Figure A-4 we provide graphical evidence of parallel pre-trends. Second, we require that fortification did not systematically coincide with other policy changes that could drive the focal effects. Table A-3 reveals that border fortification did not impact four potentially-confounding policies: counterinsurgent aid spending; deployment of other NATO or Afghan counterinsurgent forces; territorial control; or timing of security transitions to Afghan responsibility.

More broadly, identification in our setting is supported by idiosyncratic hurdles and delays in the process of US reconstruction financing in Afghanistan (Sexton, 2016). Although

[11] Section A.3 gives the equation for ANQAR outcomes.

the spatial allocation of border forts was strategic, fortification efforts were funded under reconstruction packages that were subject to numerous, unanticipated bureaucratic obstacles and high-level political reprogrammings (Blair, 2023*a*). Plausibly exogenous bureaucratic delays divorced the timing of project completion from district-level trends in violence. Table A-4 confirms that trends in combat do not predict fortification.

6.3 Results

Turning to the empirical results, we find robust support for our theory. We argue that by severing transnational logistical linkages, border controls prompt rebel fighters to invest in building local civilian ties through ideologically-resonant propaganda. Consistent with this argument, in Table 1 we document a large positive effect of border fortification on insurgent influence operations. In the average district-quarter, fortification increased the probability of insurgent propaganda by 6.8–9.2 percentage points (pp). On the intensive margin, this translates to increase of 0.19–0.42 standard deviations (sd).[12] In Table A-6 we also confirm that border fortification was associated with increasing insurgent propaganda and influence in levels per capita.

Robustness These effects are robust to range of alternative specifications.

[12]We z-standardize intensive margin outcomes for interpretability.

Table 1: Border Fortification and Insurgent Influence in Afghanistan

	Insurgent Propaganda									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.092**	0.075**	0.073**	0.071**	0.068**	0.424*	0.248*	0.237*	0.237*	0.192**
	(0.039)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.245)	(0.136)	(0.128)	(0.128)	(0.094)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.208	0.263	0.274	0.274	0.275	0.281	0.406	0.433	0.433	0.470
AIC	3904.381	3380.344	3300.212	3304.899	3294.642	20191.967	18952.272	18688.820	18688.820	18285.297
	Insurgent Shaping Operations									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.150***	0.149***	0.143***	0.130***	0.131***	0.377***	0.359***	0.325***	0.282***	0.259***
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.029)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.093)	(0.097)	(0.086)	(0.074)	(0.066)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.195	0.241	0.257	0.262	0.262	0.234	0.262	0.297	0.303	0.312
AIC	3441.048	2986.852	2868.297	2833.685	2835.562	16662.975	16343.342	16063.785	16017.689	15935.477
Parameters										
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates				✓	✓				✓	✓
Lagged DV					✓					✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Socioeconomic covariates are: population; travel time to the provincial center; the share of land under cultivation; and terrain ruggedness. Conflict-related covariates are: counterinsurgent kinetic operations (i.e., direct fires, indirect fires, close air support); counterinsurgent surveillance operations; key leader engagements between government and community officials; counterinsurgent discoveries of roadside bombs and weapons caches; government police actions; and hectares of opium cultivation and eradication (inverse hyperbolic sine-transformed). Security force covariates are the number of NATO/ISAF battalions deployed in a district; and indicators for the existence of Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) or Afghan Local Police (ALP) bases in a district. All socioeconomic covariates are pre-treatment, time-invariant measures interacted with year-specific quarter fixed effects. All time-varying covariates are lagged one quarter. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

Table 2: Border Fortification and Insurgent Propaganda – Additional Specifications

	Insurgent Propaganda									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.068**	0.056**	0.068**	0.063**	0.061**	0.192**	0.147*	0.191**	0.160*	0.177*
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.094)	(0.084)	(0.093)	(0.081)	(0.092)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.275	0.283	0.275	0.302	0.282	0.470	0.484	0.470	0.506	0.475
AIC	3294.642	3174.964	3296.243	3019.673	3207.067	18285.297	18080.366	18286.854	17823.738	18207.641
	Insurgent Shaping Operations									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.131***	0.132***	0.132***	0.126***	0.128***	0.259***	0.284***	0.261***	0.239***	0.254***
	(0.027)	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.066)	(0.084)	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.069)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.262	0.268	0.262	0.281	0.269	0.312	0.320	0.312	0.333	0.316
AIC	2835.562	2739.145	2832.750	2624.321	2753.009	15935.477	15822.138	15935.857	15701.904	15876.849
PARAMETERS										
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lagged DV	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Border Geography		✓					✓			
Aid Spending			✓					✓		
Development				✓					✓	
Key Terrain					✓					✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Socioeconomic covariates are: population; travel time to the provincial center; the share of land under cultivation; and terrain ruggedness. Conflict-related covariates are: counterinsurgent kinetic operations (i.e., direct fires, indirect fires, close air support); counterinsurgent surveillance operations; key leader engagements between government and community officials; counterinsurgent discoveries of roadside bombs and weapons caches; government police actions; and hectares of opium cultivation and eradication (inverse hyperbolic sine-transformed). Security force covariates are the number of NATO/ISAF battalions deployed in a district; and indicators for the existence of Afghan National Security Force or Afghan Local Police bases in a district. Border geography covariates are: the number of international border crossings and an indicator for districts with historical narcotics markets. Aid spending is spending on National Solidarity Programme aid projects per 100k residents. Development covariates are: provincial under-employment and provincial literacy. Key terrain is an indicator for NATO/ISAF-designated districts, which afford military advantages to combatants. All socioeconomic covariates are time-invariant measures interacted with year-specific quarter fixed effects. All time-varying covariates are lagged one quarter. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

Table 3: Border Fortification and Insurgent Influence – Borusyak, Jaravel and Spiess (2022) Estimator

	Insurgent Propaganda									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.043**	0.039*	0.038*	0.037*	0.036*	0.160***	0.157***	0.149***	0.139***	0.116**
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.047)	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.052)	(0.046)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
	Insurgent Shaping Operations									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.108***	0.107***	0.103***	0.102***	0.101***	0.248***	0.242***	0.224***	0.213***	0.194***
	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.052)	(0.064)	(0.060)	(0.058)	(0.052)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
PARAMETERS										
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates				✓	✓				✓	✓
Lagged DV					✓					✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Socioeconomic covariates are: population; travel time to the provincial center; the share of land under cultivation; and terrain ruggedness. Conflict-related covariates are: counterinsurgent kinetic operations (i.e., direct fires, indirect fires, close air support); counterinsurgent surveillance operations; key leader engagements between government and community officials; counterinsurgent discoveries of roadside bombs and weapons caches; government police actions; and hectares of opium cultivation and eradication (inverse hyperbolic sine-transformed). Security force covariates are the number of NATO/ISAF battalions deployed in a district; and indicators for the existence of Afghan National Security Force or Afghan Local Police bases in a district. All socioeconomic covariates are time-invariant measures interacted with year-specific quarter fixed effects. All time-varying covariates are lagged one quarter. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

Table 4: Border Fortification and Insurgent Propaganda – Drop Trend Breaks

	Insurgent Propaganda				**Insurgent Shaping Operations**			
	Extensive Margin		**Intensive Margin**		**Extensive Margin**		**Intensive Margin**	
	(1) Baseline	(2) Drop Trend Breaks	(3) Baseline	(4) Drop Trend Breaks	(5) Baseline	(6) Drop Trend Breaks	(7) Baseline	(8) Drop Trend Breaks
Border Fortification	0.068**	0.052*	0.192**	0.188*	0.131***	0.130***	0.259***	0.257***
	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.094)	(0.097)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.066)	(0.066)
Observations	5957	5904	5957	5904	5957	5941	5957	5941
Adjusted R^2	0.275	0.274	0.470	0.471	0.262	0.262	0.312	0.312
AIC	3294.642	3315.608	18285.297	18166.244	2835.562	2838.525	15935.477	15906.439
PARAMETERS								
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lagged DV	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Socioeconomic covariates are: population; travel time to the provincial center; the share of land under cultivation; and terrain ruggedness. Conflict-related covariates are: counterinsurgent kinetic operations (i.e., direct fires, indirect fires, close air support); counterinsurgent surveillance operations; key leader engagements between government and community officials; counterinsurgent discoveries of roadside bombs and weapons caches; government police actions; and hectares of opium cultivation and eradication (inverse hyperbolic sine-transformed). Security force covariates are the number of NATO/ISAF battalions deployed in a district; and indicators for the existence of Afghan National Security Force or Afghan Local Police bases in a district. All socioeconomic covariates are time-invariant measures interacted with year-specific quarter fixed effects. All time-varying covariates are lagged one quarter. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

Table 5: Disaggregating Insurgent Shaping Operations

	Insurgent Preaching									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.117***	0.106***	0.101***	0.087***	0.090***	0.426***	0.356***	0.342***	0.290***	0.266***
	(0.027)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.113)	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.105)	(0.102)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.201	0.264	0.273	0.285	0.286	0.212	0.274	0.282	0.294	0.300
AIC	-448.738	-1039.541	-1100.767	-1199.051	-1206.496	15519.859	14929.069	14871.919	14773.450	14726.316

	Insurgent Taxation									
	Extensive Margin					**Intensive Margin**				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.059*	0.073**	0.069**	0.069**	0.065**	0.128	0.169*	0.135*	0.120	0.120*
	(0.032)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.077)	(0.075)	(0.064)
Observations	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000	5957.000
Adjusted R^2	0.173	0.215	0.244	0.244	0.246	0.194	0.204	0.254	0.254	0.279
AIC	927.780	520.384	303.973	303.973	295.129	17644.379	17466.842	17092.074	17090.435	16889.287
PARAMETERS										
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates				✓	✓				✓	✓
Lagged DV					✓					✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Socioeconomic covariates are: population; travel time to the provincial center; the share of land under cultivation; and terrain ruggedness. Conflict-related covariates are: counterinsurgent kinetic operations (i.e., direct fires, indirect fires, close air support); counterinsurgent surveillance operations; key leader engagements between government and community officials; counterinsurgent discoveries of roadside bombs and weapons caches; government police actions; and hectares of opium cultivation and eradication (inverse hyperbolic sine-transformed). Security force covariates are the number of NATO/ISAF battalions deployed in a district; and indicators for the existence of Afghan National Security Force or Afghan Local Police bases in a district. All socioeconomic covariates are time-invariant measures interacted with year-specific quarter fixed effects. All time-varying covariates are lagged one quarter. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

Table 6: Border Fortification and Reported Exposure to Insurgent Propaganda

	Witnessed Insurgent Messaging (=1)			**Witnessed Insurgent Local Messaging (=1)**			**Witnessed Insurgent Broadcast Messaging (=1)**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Border Fortification	0.037**	0.032*	0.034*	0.114**	0.118*	0.114*	-0.079	-0.086	-0.081
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.056)	(0.060)	(0.061)	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.058)
Observations	69962	32500	32500	69962	32500	32500	69962	32500	32500
Adjusted R^2	0.050	0.049	0.050	0.083	0.099	0.100	0.080	0.105	0.107
AIC	15394.739	2282.624	2272.008	94692.101	43122.052	43098.778	94958.244	43255.200	43203.630
PARAMETERS									
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Ethnicity FE		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Security/Governance Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Social Desirability Controls			✓			✓			✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Demographic controls are age and its squared term, gender, and education. Ethnicity fixed effects parameterize respondents' self-identified ethnic backgrounds. Security/governance controls are measures of economic status, indices of perceived performance of the national and district governments, indicators for the reported presence of police and military officials at least weekly, and perceived territorial control. Social desirability controls are measures denoting a respondent's level of comfort and comprehension as assessed by the enumerator, along with the number of other people present during the interview. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using sampling weights.

Table 7: Border Fortification and Perceptions of Insurgent Ideology

	Insurgents Respect the Religion and Traditions of Afghans (=1)			**Insurgents Respect the Religion and Traditions of Afghans (5-Point Scale)**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Border Fortification	0.101**	0.084**	0.083**	0.313**	0.285**	0.280**
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.121)	(0.120)	(0.120)
Observations	87751	56827	56827	87751	56827	56827
Adjusted R^2	0.132	0.135	0.136	0.156	0.156	0.157
AIC	109602.702	72620.176	72575.852	302315.177	197207.785	197151.889
PARAMETERS						
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Demographic Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
Ethnicity FE		✓	✓		✓	✓
Security/Governance Controls		✓	✓		✓	✓
Social Desirability Controls			✓			✓

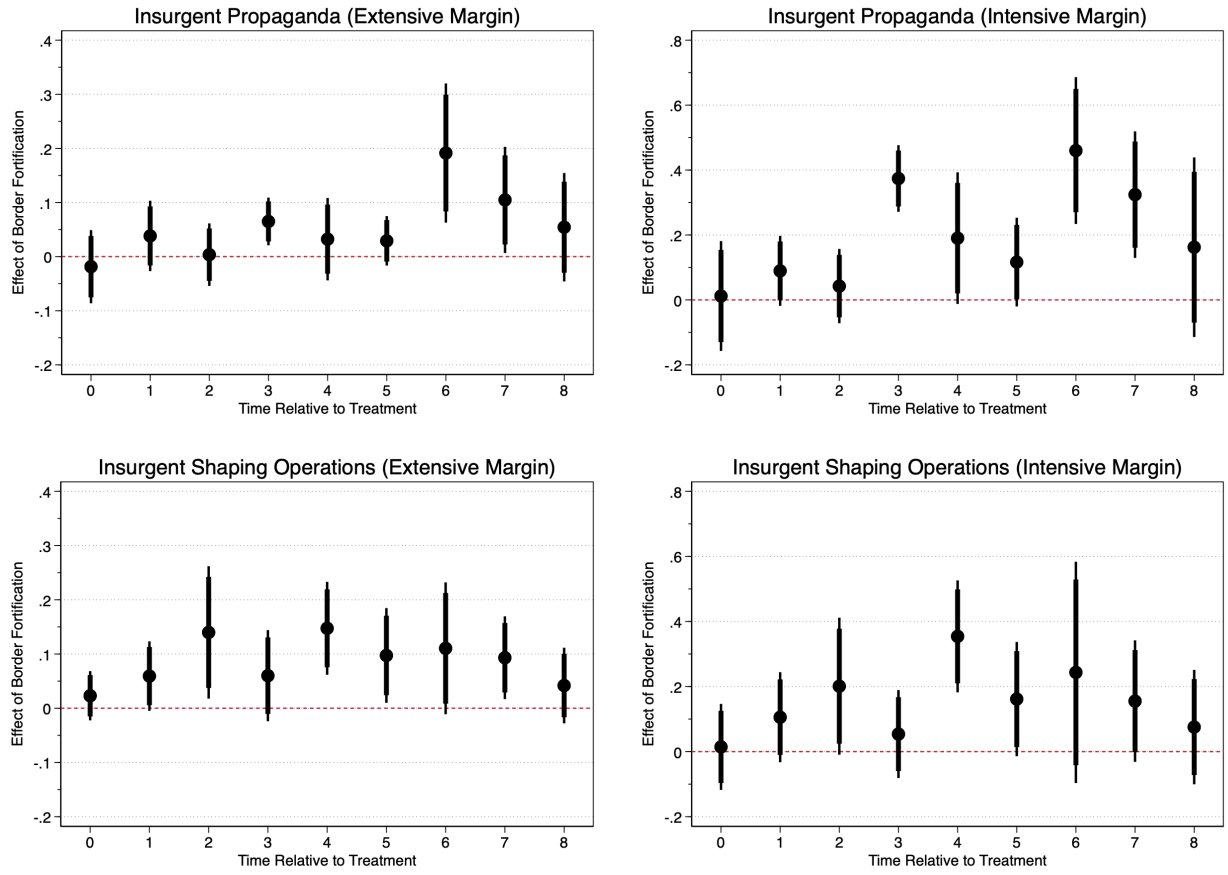
Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Demographic controls are age and its squared term, gender, and education. Ethnicity fixed effects parameterize respondents' self-identified ethnic backgrounds. Security/governance controls are measures of economic status, indices of perceived performance of the national and district governments, indicators for the reported presence of police and military officials at least weekly, and perceived territorial control. Social desirability controls are measures denoting a respondent's level of comfort and comprehension as assessed by the enumerator, along with the number of other people present during the interview. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using sampling weights.

Table 8: Border Fortification and Insurgent Ideology – Two-Stage Model

Second Stage:	**Insurgents Respect the Religion and Traditions of Afghans (=1)**			**Insurgents Respect the Religion and Traditions of Afghans (5-Point Scale)**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Witnessed Insurgent Local Messaging	0.525***	0.574***	0.578***	1.578***	1.757***	1.762***
	(0.196)	(0.203)	(0.209)	(0.581)	(0.607)	(0.625)
First Stage:	**Witnessed Insurgent Local Messaging (=1)**					
Border Fortification	0.114***	0.118***	0.115***	0.114***	0.118***	0.115***
	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.019)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Observations	69,962	32,502	32,502	69,962	32,502	32,502
Log-Pseudolikelihood	-80716.777	-37763.379	-37747.441	-146468.68	-70629.372	-70610.383
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year-Specific Quarter FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Ethnicity FE		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Security/Governance Controls		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Social Desirability Controls			Yes			Yes

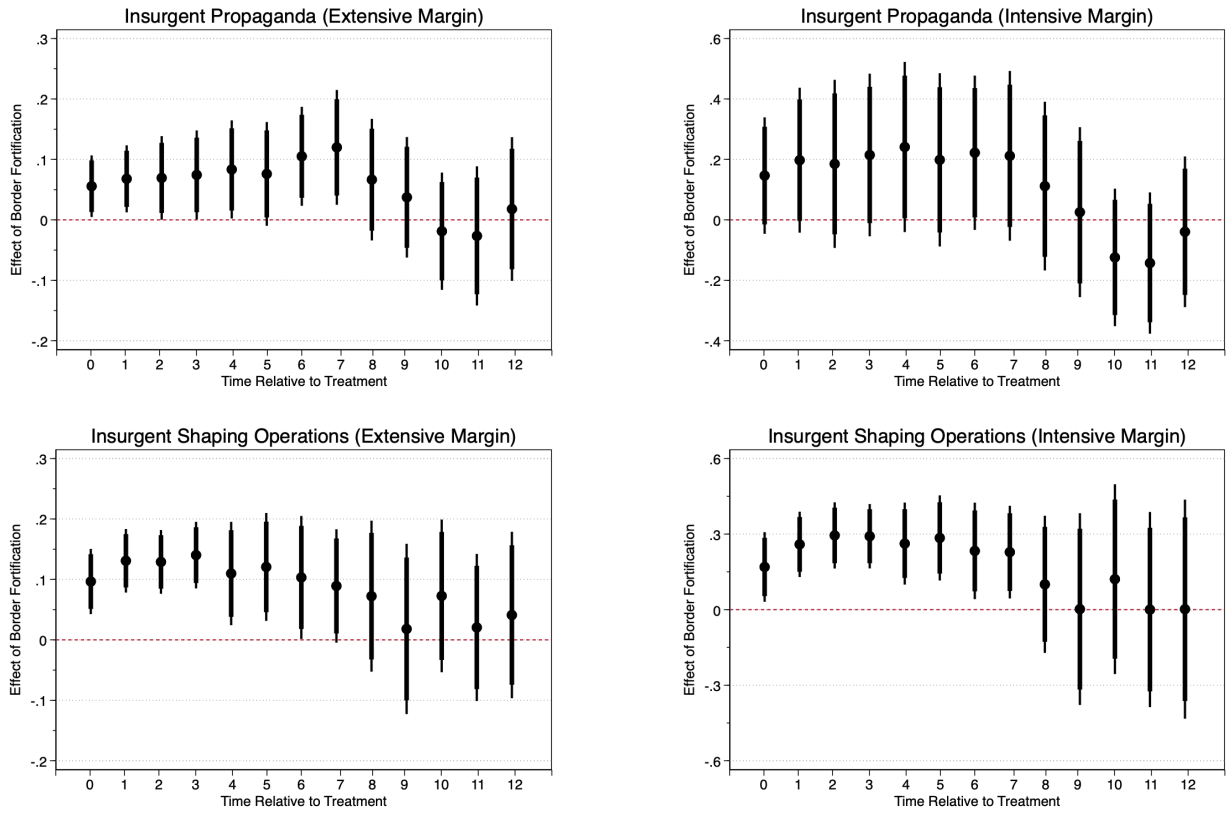
Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border fort in a district-quarter. Witnessed in a insurgent local messaging is an indicator for respondents who self-report having seen local insurgent propaganda. Demographic controls are age and its squared term, gender, and education. Ethnicity fixed effects parameterize respondents' self-identified ethnic backgrounds. Security/governance controls are measures of economic status, indices of perceived performance of the national and district governments, indicators for the reported presence of police and military officials at least weekly, and perceived territorial control. Social desirability controls are measures denoting a respondent's level of comfort and comprehension as assessed by the enumerator, along with the number of other people present during the interview. The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using sampling weights.

Figure 4: Dynamic Event Study Estimates of Insurgent Propaganda



Note: In the top panel bars are 95% confidence intervals. Plots depict event study estimates of the focal outcomes using the method introduced by Borusyak, Jaravel and Spiess (2022). Gray markers are pre-trend estimates. Black markers are treatment effect estimates. The x-axis indicates time relative to treatment. The horizontal red line denotes 0. In the bottom panel bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals. Plots depict event study estimates of the focal outcomes using the method introduced by Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021). Black markers are treatment effect estimates. The x-axis indicates time relative to treatment. The horizontal red line denotes 0.

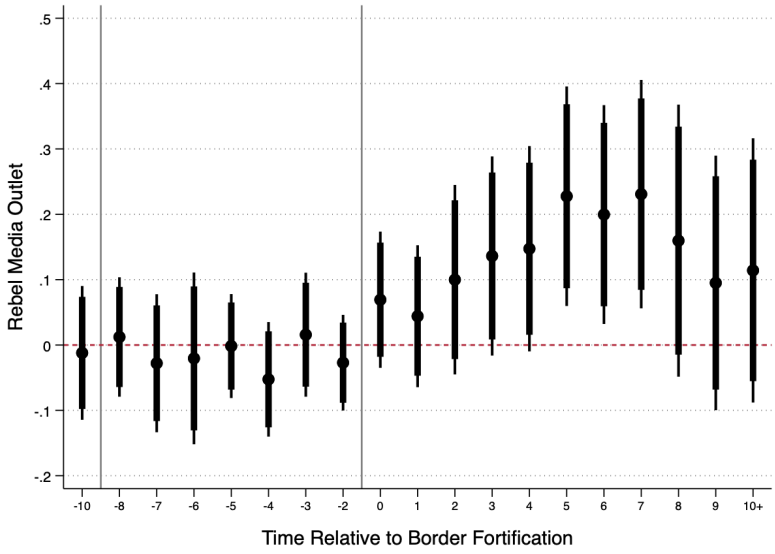
Figure 5: Temporal Dynamism in the Effect of Border Fortification on Focal Outcomes in Afghanistan



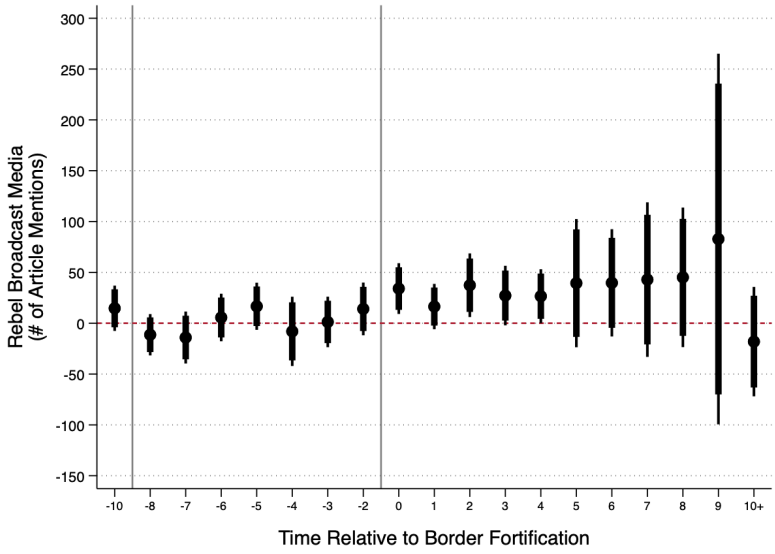
Note: Bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals. Plots depict pre-treatment trends in the focal outcomes. The x-axis indicates time relative to treatment. The horizontal red line denotes 0.

Figure 6: Border Fortification and the Formation of Rebel Media Outlets

(a) Rebel Media Outlets (Albert, 2022)



(b) Rebel Broadcast Media (Wagstaff and Jung, 2020)



Note: Plots depict event study estimates of the effect of border fortification on the creation of rebel media outlets (top panel) and mentions of rebel broadcast media (bottom panel). Black markers are treatment effect estimates. The x-axis indicates time relative to treatment. The horizontal red line denotes 0. Vertical gray lines indicate omitted base periods. We omit two pre-periods following the method introduced in (Sun and Abraham, 2021). Bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals.

Table 9: Border Fortification and Rebel Media Institutions from Wagstaff and Jung (2020)

	# of Mentions of Rebel Media Institutions (IHS)					
	News Media			Radio Broadcast Media		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Border Fortification	0.252**	0.230**	0.231**	0.236*	0.238*	0.239*
	(0.110)	(0.108)	(0.109)	(0.139)	(0.140)	(0.140)
Observations	5515	5515	5515	5515	5515	5515
Adjusted R^2	0.802	0.802	0.803	0.750	0.750	0.750
AIC	15824.796	15807.497	15791.831	16089.917	16091.654	16089.164
Parameters						
Group FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Count of Articles	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Militant Competition		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Other Forms of Rebel Governance			Yes			Yes

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, rebel group-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border barrier in a militant group's base country. Count of articles represents the number of articles about a rebel group mentioning the respective media institution in a given year. Militant competition denotes the number of rival rebel groups with which a focal group is openly hostile. Other forms of rebel governance denotes the number of other rebel governance institutions a rebel group maintains in a given year. All dependent variables are transformed by the inverse hyperbolic sine (IHS).

7 Evidence from Global Jihad

To generalize the findings from the Afghan context, we turn to the global jihad movement, one of the most prominent non-state militant phenomena in modern politics. Jihadist groups have demonstrated the capacity to recruit worldwide, leveraging fluid cross-border networks to secure funds, fighters, and sanctuaries. This makes them a useful case for examining how militants adapt their propaganda strategies when fortified boundaries disrupt transnational resource flows.

7.1 Data

We assembled a global dataset of 87 magazines, spanning 11 languages and published between 1984 and 2019 by 35 different jihadist organizations.[13] These magazines, which are relatively inexpensive to produce, have become the dominant medium for jihadist propa-

[13]The Appendix provides a full list of the groups, magazines, and collection procedures.

ganda, much like insurgent media in other contexts. They serve to recruit fighters, rally financial and material support, and shape the political discourse among both local and transnational audiences.

7.2 Estimation Strategy

To measure ideological intensity in these propaganda outputs, we first translated all text into English using *Google Cloud Translation*, a standard approach for multi-language text analysis.[14] We then employed a straightforward dictionary method, customizing a set of keywords to detect radical religious or jihadi ideology—referencing theological terms, discussions of Islamic governance, and notions of martyrdom and apostasy—and a parallel set of keywords that detect secular ideology—referencing human institutions, individual freedoms, or material benefits. Each page received a *Religiosity Score*, derived by subtracting the count of secular keywords from the count of religious keywords.

We then aggregated these page-level scores into "militant group–year" observations and merged them with data on border fortification in each group's base country. This time-series cross-sectional setup enables us to estimate whether and how border barriers alter jihadist rhetoric. We further distinguish local from international audiences based on publication language. Magazines released in a locally spoken language (e.g., Urdu in Pakistan) are classified as targeting domestic audiences, while those in a non-local language (e.g., English in Yemen) are coded as transnational. This distinction allows us to compare propaganda strategies for different audiences in the context of border fortification.

7.3 Results

Table 10 presents the results. Columns (1)–(3) show that border fortification consistently predicts higher levels of religious rhetoric across all propaganda materials, with the effect growing in magnitude and significance once we account for publication length, valence

[14] Automated translation may not capture every nuance, but it suffices under a "bag-of-words" approach (**??**).

of propaganda, and measures of militant competition and cooperation. Disaggregating by audience in columns (4)–(6) reveals that this effect is driven by propaganda aimed at local populations: the coefficient on border fortification remains positive and significant (p ¡ 0.05). By contrast, columns (7)–(9) indicate no statistically discernible relationship for transnational audiences, suggesting that border fortification shifts insurgents' focus away from these external constituencies.

Substantively, these findings imply that when jihadist groups lose foreign backers and recruits, they compensate by intensifying ideological rhetoric in materials aimed at nearby civilians. This approach helps maintain local loyalty and reassure core cadres of the group's viability, offsetting the loss of material support. Throughout the analysis, we use militant group-clustered standard errors; further robustness checks with country-level clustering and Wild Cluster Bootstrap yield similar results. A "leave-one-out" analysis—where we exclude each group in turn—also confirms the robustness of the estimates.

Taken together, this evidence aligns with our broader argument that insurgents respond to border fortification by amplifying propaganda efforts designed to consolidate civilian support and boost internal morale. As states enforce barriers to disrupt transnational networks, militant organizations reposition themselves as protectors of local identity and faith, bolstering their appeals through ideologically resonant narratives. While border fortification can hinder external operations, it may also spur militant groups to invest more heavily in local outreach, potentially entrenching them further in domestic communities.

Table 10: Border Fortification and Religious Rhetoric in Militant Propaganda

	Religiosity of Militant Propaganda								
	All Audiences			**Local Audiences**			**Transnational Audiences**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Border Fortification	0.571*	0.631**	0.741***	0.632**	0.673**	0.788***	-0.028	0.047	-0.043
	(0.285)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.273)	(0.247)	(0.185)	(0.397)	(0.380)	(0.092)
Observations	210	210	165	210	210	165	210	210	165
Adjusted R^2	0.218	0.292	0.421	0.217	0.268	0.388	0.040	0.102	0.298
AIC	471.312	451.653	243.461	472.555	459.783	258.048	420.389	407.530	234.199
PARAMETERS									
Group FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pages of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Valence of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Militant Competition			Yes			Yes			Yes
Militant Cooperation			Yes			Yes			Yes
State Sponsorship			Yes			Yes			Yes

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, militant group-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border barrier in a militant group's base country. Pages of propaganda represents the number of pages of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Valence of propaganda represents the z-standardized, average positive-negative valence of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Militant competition denotes the number of rival militant groups with which a focal group is openly hostile. Militant cooperation denotes the number of other militant groups with which a focal group is allied. State sponsorship denotes the number of states from which a focal group receives support. All dependent variables are z-standardized. Militant propaganda is classified as targeting local audiences if that propaganda was released in a locally-spoken language (e.g., Urdu in Pakistan). Militant propaganda is classified as targeting transnational audiences if that propaganda was released in a non-locally-spoken language (e.g., English in Yemen).

Table 11: Border Fortification and Religious Rhetoric in Militant Propaganda with Country Clusters

	Religiosity of Militant Propaganda								
	All Audiences			Local Audiences			Transnational Audiences		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Border Fortification	0.571**	0.631**	0.741***	0.632**	0.673**	0.788***	-0.028	0.047	-0.043
	(0.256)	(0.221)	(0.157)	(0.245)	(0.229)	(0.166)	(0.446)	(0.448)	(0.089)
Observations	210	210	165	210	210	165	210	210	165
Adjusted R^2	0.218	0.292	0.421	0.217	0.268	0.388	0.040	0.102	0.298
AIC	471.312	451.653	243.461	472.555	459.783	258.048	420.389	407.530	234.199
Parameters									
Group FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pages of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Valence of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Militant Competition			Yes			Yes			Yes
Militant Cooperation			Yes			Yes			Yes
State Sponsorship			Yes			Yes			Yes

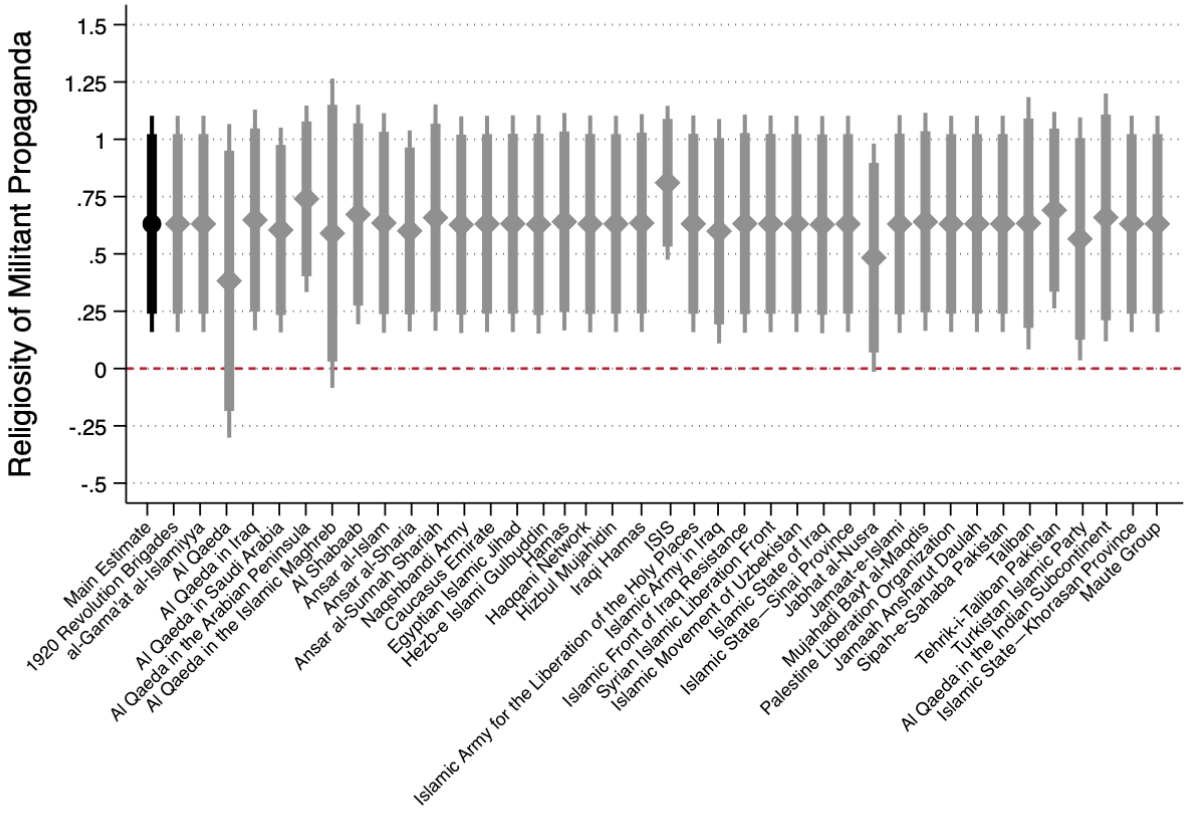
Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, country-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border barrier in a militant group's base country. Pages of propaganda represents the number of pages of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Valence of propaganda represents the z-standardized, average positive-negative valence of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Militant competition denotes the number of rival militant groups with which a focal group is openly hostile. Militant cooperation denotes the number of other militant groups with which a focal group is allied. State sponsorship denotes the number of states from which a focal group receives support. All dependent variables are z-standardized. Militant propaganda is classified as targeting local audiences if that propaganda was released in a locally-spoken language (e.g., Urdu in Pakistan). Militant propaganda is classified as targeting transnational audiences if that propaganda was released in a non-locally-spoken language (e.g., English in Yemen).

Table 12: Border Fortification and Religious Rhetoric in Militant Propaganda with Wild Cluster Bootstrap

	Religiosity of Militant Propaganda								
	All Audiences			Local Audiences			Transnational Audiences		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Border Fortification	0.571**	0.631**	0.741*	0.632*	0.673**	0.788*	-0.028	0.047	-0.043
	[0.220, 1.063]	[0.321, 1.128]	[0.582, 4.812]	[0.200, 0.995]	[0.262, 1.114]	[0.576, 1.238]	[?0.577, 1.825]	[?0.535, 1.992]	[?0.257, 0.116]
Observations	210	210	165	210	210	165	210	210	165
Adjusted R^2	0.218	0.292	0.421	0.217	0.268	0.388	0.040	0.102	0.298
AIC	489.312	465.653	251.461	494.555	473.783	266.048	438.389	425.530	242.199
Parameters									
Group FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pages of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Valence of Propaganda		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Militant Competition			Yes			Yes			Yes
Militant Cooperation			Yes			Yes			Yes
State Sponsorship			Yes			Yes			Yes

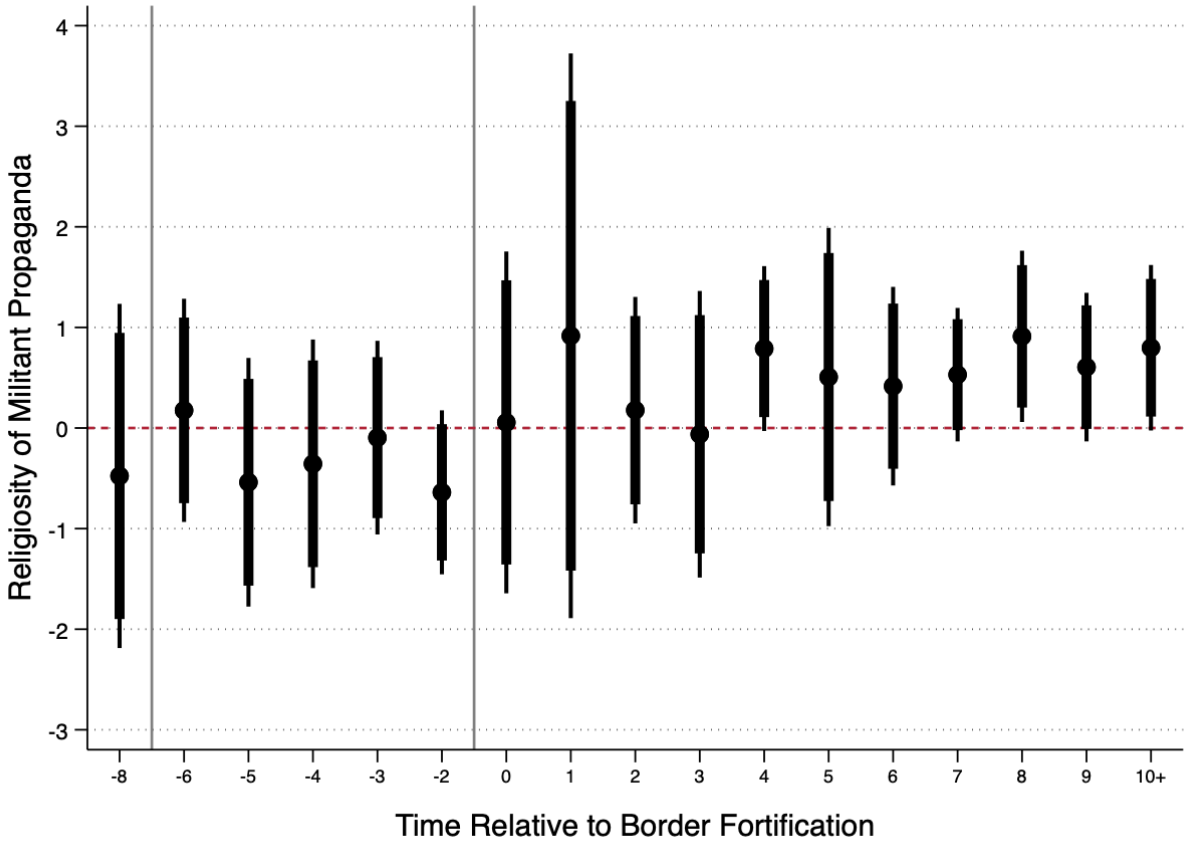
Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Wild, country-clustered, bootstrapped 90% confidence intervals are in brackets. Border fortification is an indicator for the existence of a border barrier in a militant group's base country. Pages of propaganda represents the number of pages of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Valence of propaganda represents the z-standardized, average positive-negative valence of propaganda outputs by a militant group in a given year. Militant competition denotes the number of rival militant groups with which a focal group is openly hostile. Militant cooperation denotes the number of other militant groups with which a focal group is allied. State sponsorship denotes the number of states from which a focal group receives support. All dependent variables are z-standardized. Militant propaganda is classified as targeting local audiences if that propaganda was released in a locally-spoken language (e.g., Urdu in Pakistan). Militant propaganda is classified as targeting transnational audiences if that propaganda was released in a non-locally-spoken language (e.g., English in Yemen).

Figure 7: Border Fortification and Religious Rhetoric in Militant Propaganda Dropping Individual Groups



Note: Plots depict estimates of the effect of border fortification on religiosity of rhetoric in militant propaganda outputs. Black markers represent the main estimate and gray markers represent estimates of treatment effects while dropping the respective group denoted in the x-axis from the sample. The horizontal red line denotes 0. Bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 8: Border Fortification and Religious Rhetoric in Militant Propaganda Event Study



Note: The plot depicts event study estimates of the effect of border fortification on the religiosity of rhetoric in militant propaganda outputs. Black markers are treatment effect estimates. The x-axis indicates time relative to treatment. The horizontal red line denotes 0. Vertical gray lines indicate omitted base periods. We omit two pre-periods following the method introduced in (Sun and Abraham, 2021). Bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals.

8 Conclusion

This paper examines the ramifications of resource shocks—using border fortification as an example—on the local activities of militant groups. We have theorized and empirically illustrated that the erection of border walls prompts militants to intensify efforts to garner local support, often resorting to influence campaigns. Moreover, border fortifications appear to catalyze the sharpening of ideological messages in propaganda, resulting in the endorsement of more radical positions that resonate with a smaller, yet more fervent, support base. This dynamic underscores the adaptability of militant organizations in response to geostrategic countermeasures, signaling a shift in the landscape of insurgent strategy from transnational to localized operations.

The scholarly contributions of this research are manifold, offering a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between insurgents' violent and non-violent undertakings. By shedding light on the often-overlooked aspect of rebels' local governance, this study fills a critical gap in the existing literature. Our investigation delves into the determinants of militants' non-violent activities, which is pivotal for developing a comprehensive perspective on the operations of such organizations. This enhanced perspective is crucial for scholars and policymakers alike as it expands the analytical lens beyond the battlefield to include the strategic communications and community relations that underpin insurgency and counterinsurgency.

From a policy standpoint, our findings highlight the necessity for counterinsurgency strategies to go beyond physical barriers and military might. As border fortification drives insurgents to consolidate power locally, counterinsurgent forces must concurrently engage in an ideological contest, seeking to influence the narrative through media and other means to win the hearts and minds of the people. Failing to address the ideological dimension of insurgencies risks allowing militants to regenerate their strength from domestic sources,

effectively neutralizing the benefits of international containment efforts. Therefore, an integrated approach that couples border security with strategic communication initiatives is essential for a holistic and effective counterinsurgency policy.

References

Akcinaroglu, Seden and Efe Tokdemir. 2018. "To Instill Fear or Love: Terrorist Groups and the Strategy of Building Reputation." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35(4):355–377.

Albert, Karen E. 2022. "What is rebel governance? Introducing a new dataset on rebel institutions, 1945–2012." *Journal of Peace Research* 59(4):622–630.

Arjona, Ana. 2016. *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.

Avdan, Nazli and Christopher F. Gelpi. 2017*a*. "Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? Border Barriers and the Transnational Flow of Terrorist Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 61(1):14–27.

Avdan, Nazli and Christopher F. Gelpi. 2017*b*. "Do Good Fences Make Good Neighbors? Border Barriers and the Transnational Flow of Terrorist Violence." *International Studies Quarterly* 61(1):14–27.

Bapat, Navin A. 2007. "The Internationalization of Terrorist Campaigns." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24(4):265–280.

Barfield, Thomas. 2010. *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton University Press.

Bazzi, Samuel and Christopher Blattman. 2014. "Economic Shocks and Conflict: Evidence from Commodity Prices." *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 6(4):1–38.

Beardsley, Kyle, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Nigel Lo. 2015. "Roving Bandits? The Geographical Evolution of African Armed Conflicts." *International Studies Quarterly* 59(3):503–516.

Berman, Eli. 2000. "Sect, Subsidy, and Sacrifice: An Economist's View of Ultra-Orthodox Jews." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 115(3):905–953.

Berman, Eli. 2011. *Radical, Religious, and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism*. MIT press.

Blair, Christopher W. 2023*a*. "The Fortification Dilemma: Border Control and Rebel Violence." *American Journal of Political Science* .

Blair, Christopher W. 2023*b*. "The Logic of Border Fortification in the Global South." https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4178260.

Blair, Christopher W. 2024. "Border Fortification and Legibility: Evidence from Afghanistan." *American Journal of Political Science* .

Blair, Graeme, Darin Christensen and Aaron Rudkin. 2021. "Do Commodity Price Shocks Cause Armed Conflict? A Meta-Analysis of Natural Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 115(2):709–716.

Borusyak, Kirill, Xavier Jaravel and Jann Spiess. 2022. "Revisiting Event Study Designs: Robust and Efficient Estimation." University College London.

Buhaug, Halvard and Scott Gates. 2002. "The Geography of Civil War." *Journal of peace research* 39(4):417–433.

Buhaug, Halvard, Scott Gates and Päivi Lujala. 2009. "Geography, Rebel Capability, and the Duration of Civil Conflict." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(4):544–569.

Byman, Daniel. 2005. *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.

Byman, Daniel. 2012. "Curious Victory: Explaining Israel's Suppression of the Second Intifada." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24(5):825–852.

Callaway, Brantly and Pedro H.C. Sant'Anna. 2021. "Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods." *Journal of Econometrics* 225(2):200–230.

Carter, David B. 2012. "A Blessing or a Curse? State Support for Terrorist Groups." *International Organization* 66(1):129–151.

Carter, David B. and Luwei Ying. 2021. "The Gravity of Transnational Terrorism." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 65(4):813–849.

Carvalho, Jean-Paul. 2019. Religious Clubs: The Strategic Role of Religious Identity. In *Advances in the Economics of Religion*. Springer pp. 25–41.

Cederman, Lars-Erik, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, Idean Salehyan and Julian Wucherpfennig. 2013. "Transborder Ethnic Kin and Civil War." *International Organization* 67(2):389–410.

Child, Travers Barclay, Kai Gehring, Sarah Langlotz, Austin L. Wright and Rossella De Sabbata. 2023. "Terrorist Propaganda." China Europe International Business School.

Coll, Steve. 2018. *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001–2016*. Penguin Books.

Collier, Paul and Anke Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford economic papers* 56(4):563–595.

Condra, Luke N. and Austin L. Wright. 2019. "Civilians, Control, and Collaboration during Civil Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 63(4):897–907.

Costalli, Stefano and Andrea Ruggeri. 2015. "Indignation, Ideologies, and Armed Mobilization: Civil War in Italy, 1943–45." *International Security* 40(2):119–157.

Cunningham, Kathleen Gallagher. 2013. "Understanding Strategic Choice: The Determinants of Civil War and Nonviolent Campaign in Self-Determination Disputes." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(3):291–304.

Dube, Oeindrila and Juan F. Vargas. 2013. "Commodity Price Shocks and Civil Conflict: Evidence from Colombia." *Review of Economic studies* 80(4):1384–1421.

Fetzer, Thiemo, Pedro C.L. Souza, Oliver Vanden Eynde and Austin L. Wright. 2021. "Security Transitions." *American Economic Review* 111(7):2275–2308.

Florea, Adrian. 2020. "Rebel Governance in de Facto States." *European Journal of International Relations* 26(4):1004–1031.

Foxley, Tim. 2007. "The Taliban's propaganda activities: how well is the Afghan insurgency communicating and what is it saying?" *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* pp. 1–19.

Foxley, Tim. 2010. "Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan." *PRISM* 1(4):79–94.

Frisch, Hillel. 2007. "(The) Fence or Offense? Testing the Effectiveness of "The Fence" in Judea and Samaria." *Democracy and Security* 3(1):1–19.

Frowd, Philippe M. 2018. *Security at the Borders: Transnational Practices and Technologies in West Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Gawande, Kishore, Devesh Kapur and Shanker Satyanath. 2017. "Renewable Natural Resource Shocks and Conflict Intensity: Findings from India's Ongoing Maoist Insurgency." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61(1):140–172.

Giustozzi, Antonio and Mohammed Isaqzadeh. 2013. *Policing Afghanistan: The Politics of the Lame Leviathan*. Oxford University Press.

Gleditsch, Kristian Skrede. 2007. "Transnational Dimensions of Civil War." *Journal of peace research* 44(3):293–309.

Gurses, Mehmet. 2015. "Transnational Ethnic Kin and Civil War Outcomes." *Political Research Quarterly* 68(1):142–153.

Harbom, Lotta and Peter Wallensteen. 2005. "Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions, 1946-2004." *Journal of Peace Research* 42(5):623–635.

Hassner, Ron E. and Jason Wittenberg. 2015. "Barriers to Entry: Who Builds Fortified Boundaries and Why?" *International Security* 40(1):157–190.

Hegghammer, Thomas. 2010. "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad." *International Security* 35(3):53–94.

Hegghammer, Thomas. 2013. "The Recruiter's Dilemma: Signalling and Rebel Recruitment Tactics." *Journal of Peace Research* 50(1):3–16.

Huang, Reyko. 2016. "Rebel Diplomacy in Civil War." *International Security* 40(4):89–126.

Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy M. Weinstein. 2008. "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War." *American Journal of Political Science* 52(2):436–455.

Hussaini, S. and T. Morris. 2020. "The Taliban's Information War." *Journal of Information Warfare* 19(4):89–109.

Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1992. "Sacrifice and Stigma: Reducing Free-Riding in Cults, Communes, and Other Collectives." *Journal of political economy* 100(2):271–291.

Iannaccone, Laurence R. and Eli Berman. 2006. "Religious Extremism: The Good, the Bad, and the Deadly." *Public choice* 128(1-2):109–129.

International Crisis Group. 2008. "Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?" *Asia Report* 158:1–41.

Jamal, Ahmad Shuja and William Maley. 2023. *The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan*. Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Thomas. 2007*a*. *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict*. Oxford University Press.

Johnson, Thomas H. 2007*b*. "The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of Shabnamah (Night Letters)." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18(3):317–344.

Johnson, Thomas H. and Ahmad Waheed. 2011. "Analyzing Taliban taranas (chants): an effective Afghan propaganda artifact." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 22(1):3–31.

Johnson, Thomas H. and M. Chris Mason. 2008. "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier." *International Security* 32(4):41–77.

Jones, Benjamin T. and Eleonora Mattiacci. 2017. "A Manifesto, in 140 Characters or Fewer: Social Media as a Tool of Rebel Diplomacy." *British Journal of Political Science* pp. 1–23.

Jones, Reece. 2012. *Border Walls: Security and the War on Terror in the United States, India, and Israel*. Zed Books.

Karell, Daniel and Michael Freedman. 2019*a*. "Rhetorics of Radicalism." *American Sociological Review* 84(4):726–753.

Karell, Daniel and Michael Freedman. 2019*b*. "Rhetorics of Radicalism." *American Sociological Review* 84(4):726–753.

Keller, Arthur. 2008. "Propaganda and Peace Deals: The Taliban's Information War in Pakistan." *CTC Sentinel* 1(8):1–3.

Knuppe, Austin and Matthew Nanes. 2021. "The Public Relations of Armed Groups: Competition and Emulation in Multifaceted Conflicts." Utah State University.

Loi, Marc. 2011. "Afghan Border Police trains on literacy, gender equality." *319th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment* .
URL: *https://www.dvidshub.net/news/76048/aghan-border-police-trains-literacy-gender-equality*

Lujala, Päivi. 2010. "The Spoils of Nature: Armed Civil Conflict and Rebel Access to Natural Resources." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(1):15–28.

Lyall, Jason, Graeme Blair and Kosuke Imai. 2013. "Explaining Support for Combatants during Wartime: A Survey Experiment in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 107(4):679–705.

Malet, David. 2013. *Foreign Fighters: Transnational Identity in Civic Conflicts*. Oxford University Press.

Malkasian, Carter. 2021. *The American War in Afghanistan: A History*. Oxford University Press.

Mampilly, Zachariah Cherian. 2012. *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life during War*. Cornell University Press.

Nacos, Brigitte L. 1996. *Terrorism and the Media: From the Iran Hostage Crisis to the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Columbia University Press.

Petrova, Marina G. 2019. "What Matters Is Who Supports You: Diaspora and Foreign States as External Supporters and Militants' Adoption of Nonviolence." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63(9):2155–2179.

Piazza, James A. and Ahmet Guler. 2019. "The Online Caliphate: Internet Usage and ISIS Support in the Arab World." *Terrorism and Political Violence* .

Polo, Sara MT and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. 2016. "Twisting Arms and Sending Messages: Terrorist Tactics in Civil War." *Journal of Peace Research* 53(6):815–829.

Rapoport, David C. 2022. *Waves of Global Terrorism: From 1879 to the Present*. Columbia University Press.

Ross, Michael L. 1999. "The Political Economy of the Resource Curse." *World Politics* 51(2):297–322.

Ross, Michael L. 2004. "What Do We Know about Natural Resources and Civil War?" *Journal of Peace Research* 41(3):337–356.

Rubin, Barnett R. 2002. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System*. Yale University Press.

Sageman, Marc. 2004. *Understanding Terror Networks*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Salehyan, Idean. 2007. "Transnational Rebels: Neighboring States as Sanctuary for Rebel Groups." *World Politics* 59(2):217–242.

Salehyan, Idean. 2008. "No Shelter Here: Rebel Sanctuaries and International Conflict." *The Journal of Politics* 70(1):54–66.

Salehyan, Idean, David Siroky and Reed M. Wood. 2014. "External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities." *International Organization* 68(3):633–661.

Sanín, Francisco Gutiérrez and Elisabeth Jean Wood. 2014. "Ideology in Civil War: Instrumental Adoption and Beyond." *Journal of Peace Research* 51(2):213–226.

Semple, Michael. 2014. "Rhetoric, Ideology, and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement." *Peaceworks* 102:1–32.

Sexton, Renard. 2016. "Aid as a Tool against Insurgency: Evidence from Contested and Controlled Territory in Afghanistan." *American Political Science Review* 110(4):731–749.

Shapiro, Jacob N. and C. Christine Fair. 2010. "Understanding Support for Islamist Militancy in Pakistan." *International Security* 34(3):79–118.

Smith, Tracy. 2010. "Georgia Guardsmen set up radio stations for Afghan villagers." *CJTF-82 PAO* .
URL: *https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article-View/Article/576576/georgia-guardsmen-set-up-radio-stations-for-afghan-villagers/*

Snow, David A., E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51(4):464–481.

Sonin, Konstantin and Austin L. Wright. 2022. "Information Operations Increase Civilian Security Cooperation." *The Economic Journal* 132(643):1179–1199.

Stewart, Megan A. and Yu-Ming Liou. 2017. "Do Good Borders Make Good Rebels? Territorial Control and Civilian Casualties." *The Journal of Politics* 79(1):284–301.

Sun, Liyang and Sarah Abraham. 2021. "Estimating dynamic treatment effects in event studies with heterogeneous treatment effects." *Journal of Econometrics* 225(2):175–199.

Trenkel, Vance. 2014. "Nangrahar public affairs shura includes ANSF pillars and provincial government." *3rd Cavalry Regiment Public Affairs Office* .
URL: *https://www.dvidshub.net/news/148006/nangahar-public-affairs-shura-includes-ansf-pillars-and-provincial-government*

Ugarriza, Juan E. and Matthew J. Craig. 2013. "The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57(3):445–477.

Wagstaff, William A. and Danielle F. Jung. 2020. "Competing for Constituents: Trends in Terrorist Service Provision." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32(2):293–324.

Walter, Barbara F. 2017. "The New New Civil Wars." *Annual Review of Political Science* 20:469–486.

Weidmann, Nils B. 2016. "A Closer Look at Reporting Bias in Conflict Event Data." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(1):206–218.

Weinstein, Jeremy M. 2005. "Resources and the Information Problem in Rebel Recruitment." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49(4):598–624.

Whitlock, Craig. 2021. *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War*. Simon & Schuster.

Wood, Reed M. 2014. "From Loss to Looting? Battlefield Costs and Rebel Incentives for Violence." *International Organization* 68(4):979–999.

Wright, Joanne. 1991. *Terrorist Propaganda: The Red Army Faction and the Provisional IRA, 1968–86*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ying, Luwei. 2024. "Military Power and Ideological Appeals of Religious Extremists." *The Journal of Politics* .

Supplementary Materials for Border Fortification and Militant Propaganda

Christopher W. Blair and Luwei Ying

April 16, 2025

Contents

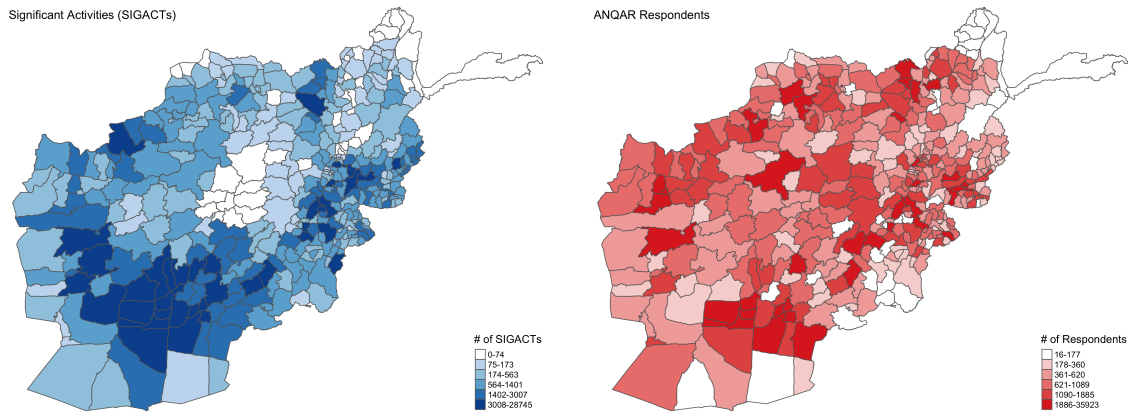
A Afghanistan Appendix

In this brief empirical appendix, we introduce supplemental results for the Afghanistan analyses.

A.1 Significant Activities (SIGACTs)

Administrative records in the main analyses come from the Significant Activities (SIGACTs) dataset declassified and released by U.S. Central Command. The SIGACTs records cover the period from 2008–2014, and form the most comprehensive account of insurgent and counterinsurgent operations during the War in Afghanistan, totalling more than 430,000+ individual events (Shaver and Wright, 2017). The SIGACTs data draw from a secure, classified platform populated using highly-detailed combat reports logged by NATO and Afghan troops and police, including ABF, ANSF, and ALP forces. Equipped with satellite-linked GPS equipment in the field, these forces recorded the geolocation of every reported event at a highly-granular level, and the time-stamp of every reported event down to the minute in time. While most extant work studies a subset of the SIGACTs data covering insurgent engagements against counterinsurgent forces (e.g. Fetzer et al., 2021; Blair, 2023*a*), the rich SIGACTs reports also cover a range of insurgent influence operations, counterinsurgent-initiated actions, and other notable community events (e.g. Sonin and Wright, 2023). Because records were gathered by soldiers in the field, data collection was not subject to access constraints like insurgent territorial control, which plague survey- and media-based event trackers (Weidmann, 2016).

Figure A-1: Total SIGACTs and ANQAR Respondents in Afghanistan



Note: The left panel depicts the number of SIGACTs (2008–2014) across districts in Afghanistan. The right panel depicts the number of ANQAR respondents (2008–2016) across districts in Afghanistan.

Although these records do not suffer reporting bias inherent in media-based conflict event data, they do have several relevant weaknesses (Berman, Shapiro and Felter, 2011, p. 790, 808-809). First, incidents are only detected when NATO or Afghan forces are present, and so undercount the total volume of events other than insurgenct attacks against counterinsurgent forces. Second, counterinsurgent units may differ in their propensity for reporting any given event. We address both concerns in the manuscript.

The first concern raises the risk that border fortification is mechanically positively correlated with SIGACTs, since deployment of ABF forces could increase observability of events. We take several steps to address this concern, including controlling for presence of non-ABF forces (Table **??**). Moreover, in Tables **??** we compare the effects of border fortification on key outcomes to the effects of non-fort security presence. If it is the case that border fortification *merely* increases the observability of violence, the effect of fortification should be indistinguishable from the effect of NATO, ANSF, or ALP deployments, which also increase counterinsurgent presence and capacity for event detection. Encouragingly, we find mostly unique effects of border fortification. The second concern raises the risk that changes in unit-level ABF leadership lead to shifts in reporting policies. We are sanguine because (Berman, Shapiro and Felter, 2011, p. 790) investigate this concern in the Iraqi context and find no evidence that errors from unit-level differences in reporting threshholds are nonrandom with respect to the variables of interest. Moreover, documentary evidence from Afghanistan suggests NATO advisory teams pushed ABF forces to standardize information and reporting guidelines (Baer, 2023), reducing concern about heterogeneous reporting standards.

We use the SIGACTs data to code our two focal dependent variables in the Afghanistan analyses: **insurgent propaganda** and **insurgent shaping operations**. Broadly, these two event categories capture influence efforts by insurgent forces, which aim to "create advantage within [operational] environments by changing military [and social] relationships" with local civilians, elites, and other belligerent parties (Wolfley, 2021). The key goal of these information operations was to establish conditions for armed success by cultivating civilian support and compliance. Insurgent propaganda includes all events in which rebel actors disseminated their message and worldview, including through text, visual, or radio media broadcasts. Most often, insurgent propaganda events represent distributions of night letters—leaflets communicating warnings, instructions, or ideological messages–which were distributed clandestinely in cities and villages. Figure 2 offers one example. Other insurgent propaganda events included sermons given by insurgent clerics at local mosques, taranas (chants) recorded and distributed to local populations, and radio broadcasts. We plot the distribution of these events in Figure 3. Similarly, insurgent shaping operations encompass a broader array of rebel efforts to induce receptivity of local populations to their messages. Shaping operations include instances of insurgent commanders attending community shuras, and governance activities engaged in by rebel forces—namely tax collection. We plot the distribution of these events in Figure A-2

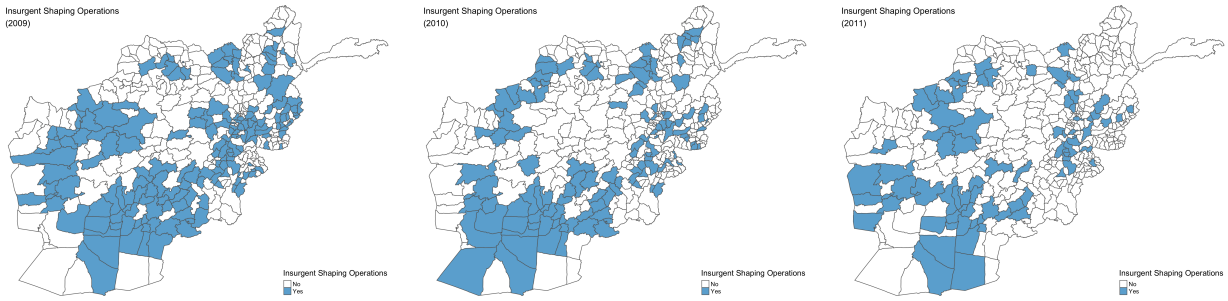
A.2 ANQAR Survey

We supplement analyses of administrative records with analyses of 32,000+ individual-level survey responses from the nationally-representative Afghanistan Nationwide Quarterly Assessment Research (ANQAR) survey (Figure A-1). We specifically study data from waves 6–7 and 25–27 of ANQAR, covering the 4^{th} quarter of 2009 – the 1^{st} quarter of 2010 and the 3^{rd} quarter of 2014 – the 1^{st} quarter of 2015. ANQAR data were gathered by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR), an Afghan subsidiary of the international research firm D3 Systems, which NATO contracted to design and field various atmospherics surveys. ACSOR was contracted in part because NATO viewed it as a high-fidelity implementing partner: it was led by survey methodologists, and its chairman held a social science Ph.D.

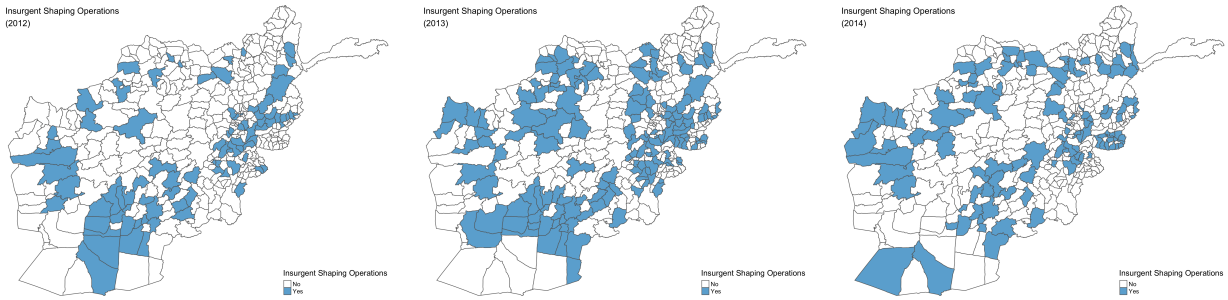
The administrative district was the primary sampling unit in ANQAR, and districts were selected via a probability-proportional-to-size systematic sampling approach. After districts were sampled, secondary sampling units composed of villages were randomly selected. A random walk method was used to identify target households, and a Kish grid was used to randomize respondents within each selected household. Sampled respondents were gender-matched to enumerators, in keeping with local gender norms. Where weather-induced transportation issues (e.g., flooding) or threats to enumerator safety meant ACSOR could not conduct random selection interviewing, intercept interviews were used to capture responses. Intercept interviews were conducted by male enumerators with male residents of inaccessible districts as they traveled through neighboring, accessible areas of the province.

Figure A-2: Insurgent Shaping Operations in Afghanistan

(a) 2009 (b) 2010 (c) 2011



(d) 2012 (e) 2013 (f) 2014



Note: Each map shows the extensive margin of insurgent shaping operations over the course of the respective year denoted in the title.

To better understand how ANQAR was administered, we held several conversations with current or former employees of the contracting agency (NATO) and the implementing partner (ACSOR/D3 Systems). All individuals we spoke with had direct knowledge of ANQAR from time working on the project. Conversation partners included a chairman at ACSOR, a managing director at ACSOR, a project manager at ACSOR, and an operational analyst at NATO's Afghanistan Assessment Group. In all of these conversations, ANQAR staffers highlighted several best-practices they used in survey administration:

- ACSOR teams hired and trained enumerators in every province of Afghanistan. Training covered household and respondent selection, how to correctly record responses, culturally-sensitive interview methods, and secure storage of contact information. Once trained by provincial-level teams from ACSOR, enumerators were assigned to enumerate districts in their province of origin. Consequently, all enumerators spoke local languages in local dialects, and were knowledgeable of important local customs.

- After the sampling set was identified and before fielding each wave, ACSOR entered negotiations with elders in selected villages to secure permission for enumerators to operate. This locally-sensitive approach enabled enumerators to safely conduct fieldwork in areas of weak state reach.

- Under no circumstances were ACSOR enumeration teams accompanied by counterinsurgent or government personnel, including members of NATO, ANSF, ABF, ALP, or other security agencies.

- Field supervisors made note of political, social, or other newsworthy events that occurred during

fielding and may have affected the survey. Where interviews may have been impacted, supervisors back-checked responses for quality assurance.

- After fielding, data were screened for keypunching errors. ACSOR randomly selected 10% of survey responses for duplicate entry. Double-punched questionnaires were compared to original questionnaires, and discrepancies were rectified.

- During the data processing phase, D3 examined all responses using a proprietary program called Hunter, which was built to search for patterns or anomalies in the data that may indicate an interview was not properly conducted by an interviewer. Hunter specifically conducted: (1) equality tests to compare interviews for similarities, grouped by interviewer, within sampling point and/or province; (2) "Don't Know" tests of the percentage of "Don't Know" responses for each enumerator; and (3) duplicate tests comparing cases across all interviewers and respondents to check for similarity rates. Across waves on average, fewer than 2.6% of all responses were removed by Hunter.

On behalf of NATO, ACSOR tracked rates of contact, cooperation, and refusal for all waves from 16–38. Using these data and following Condra and Wright (2019), we conduct diagnostic tests. Encouragingly, the rate of non-contact is low (mean = 3% across waves), the rate of cooperation is high (mean = 96% across waves), and the rate of refusal is low (mean = 3.5% across waves). These rates of non-contact, cooperation, and refusal are comparable to rates from well-known surveys like the General Social Survey (GSS) fielded in the US.

A.3 ANQAR Estimation Strategy

We study several relevant questions asked across waves of ANQAR. To assess exposure to insurgent propaganda we rely on the following question: "Where do you see or hear most of the messaging from Anti-Government elements?" We code exposure to insurgent propaganda if respondents indicate exporsure to rebel messaging through any format (e.g., radio, leaflets, mullahs). We code exposure to local propaganda if respondents self-report exposure to insurgent propaganda via writings (i.e., newspapers, leaflets) or local contacts (i.e., village elders, friends, neighbors, insurgent fighters, mullahs, teachers). We code exposure to broadcast propaganda if respondents self-report exposure to insurgent propaganda via telecommunications (i.e., radio, television, Internet).

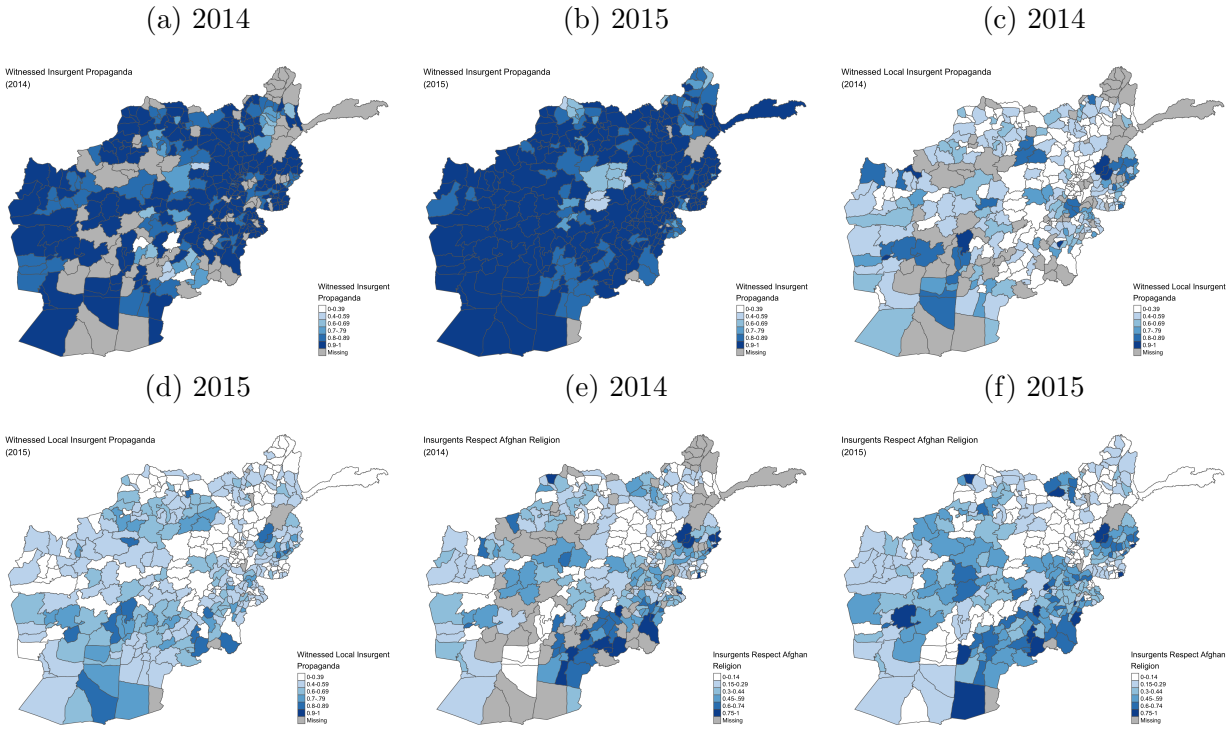
To assess perceptions of insurgent ideology we use the following question: "Do Anti-Government Elements respect the religion and traditions of Afghans? Do they completely respect, somewhat respect, don't respect very much or don't respect it at all?" We code positive perceptions if respondents report that insurgents "completely" or "somewhat" respect the religion and traditions of Afghans. We plot attitudes in Figure A-3.

For estimations studying ANQAR survey data as opposed to administrative data, the analogous estimating equation is:

$$Y_{i,d,t} = \delta(\text{Border Fortification}_{d,t-1}) + \alpha_d + \beta_t + \gamma(X_{i,d,t}) + \epsilon \tag{A1}$$

where i indexes respondents, d indexes districts, and t indexes year-specific quarters. $Y_{i,d,t}$ are ANQAR outcomes of interest, including perceptions of security and corruption. Border Fortification$_{d,t-1}$ denotes whether a district had a border fort in quarter $t-1$. δ is the coefficient of interest, and captures whether fortification induced a differential shift in attitudes in fortified versus unfortified districts. α_d and β_t are district and year-specific quarter (i.e., survey wave) fixed effects. $X_{i,d,t}$ is a vector of individual-level covariates that varies across specifications, but includes controls like age, gender, and ethnicity. ϵ are robust, district-clustered standard errors. Estimates are scaled using sampling weights.

Figure A-3: Respondent Perceptions of Insurgent Propaganda and Ideology



Note: Each map shows the share of ANQAR respondents holding the opinion denoted in the title over the course of the respective year.

A.4 Summary Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the main analyses are available in Tables A-1 and A-2.

Table A-1: Summary Statistics – District Analyses

	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Insurgent Propaganda (=1)	5957	0.182	0.386	0.000	1.000
Insurgent Propaganda (Std. #)	5957	0.232	1.581	-0.272	28.591
Insurgent Shaping Operations (=1)	5957	0.159	0.366	0.000	1.000
Insurgent Shaping Operations (Std. #)	5957	0.102	1.141	-0.276	21.804
Independent Variables					
Border Fortification	5957	0.136	0.342	0.000	1.000
District-Level Control Variables					
Pashto-Speaking Share	5957	0.496	0.415	0.000	1.000
Counterinsurgent Kinetic Operations (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	3.465	12.064	0.000	436.078
Counterinsurgent Surveillance Operations (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	0.194	1.755	0.000	51.566
Key Leader Engagements (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	1.106	2.849	0.000	69.573
Roadside Bombs Found/Cleared (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	9.590	27.591	0.000	434.465
Weapons Caches Found/Cleared (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	2.732	11.020	0.000	215.293
Government Police Actions (Per 100k Pop.)	5957	0.062	0.452	0.000	12.799
Hectares of Opium Cultivation (IHS)	5957	2.160	3.276	0.000	10.713
Hectares of Opium Eradication (IHS)	5957	1.071	2.133	0.000	8.544
NATO Presence	5957	1.576	7.254	0.000	68.000
ANSF Presence	5957	0.194	0.396	0.000	1.000
ALP Presence	5957	0.141	0.348	0.000	1.000
Population (in 100k)	5957	1.214	1.244	0.022	5.402
Travel Time to Provincial Center (in Minutes)	5957	95.897	183.789	0.000	1477.900
Ruggedness (Std. Dev. of Elevation)	5957	286.814	234.615	4.933	1030.219
% of Land Under Cultivation	5957	28.166	26.959	0.000	100.000

Note: The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using analytic population weights.

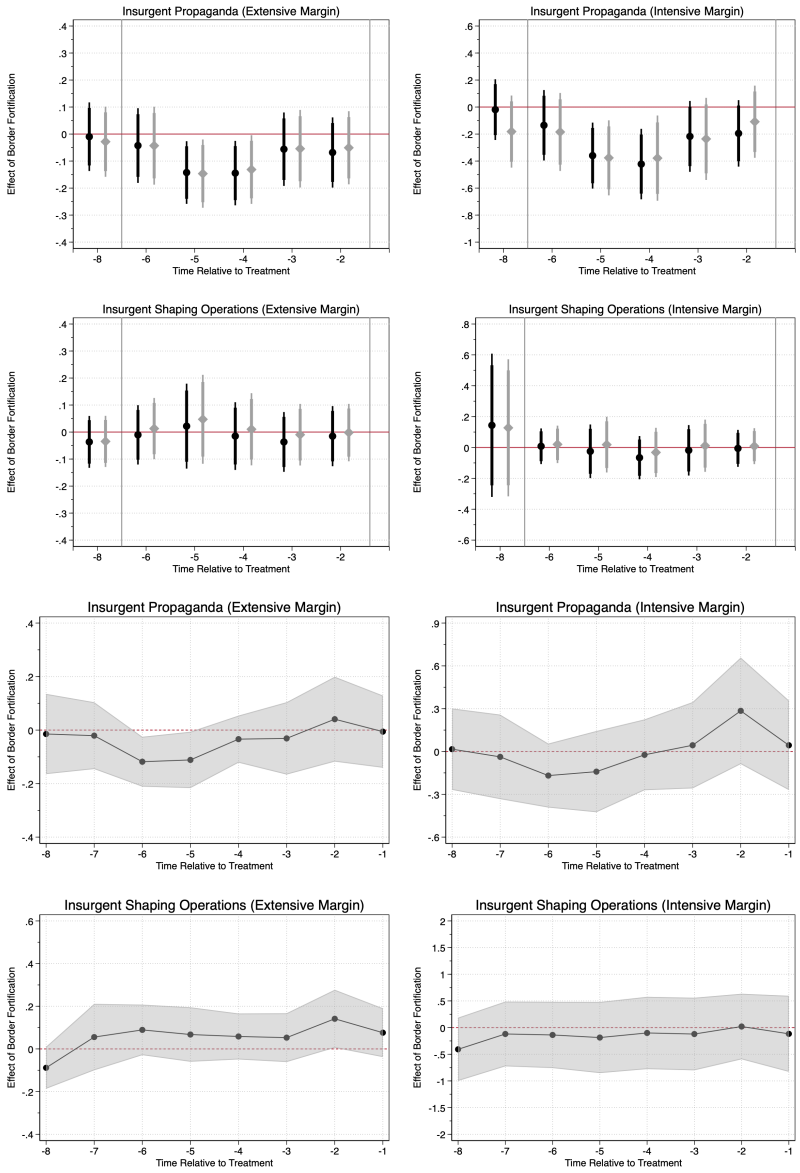
Table A-2: Summary Statistics – Individual Analyses

	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Witnessed Insurgent Messaging (=1)	32500	0.928	0.258	0.000	1.000
Witnessed Insurgent Local Messaging (=1)	32500	0.445	0.497	0.000	1.000
Witnessed Insurgent Broadcast Messaging (=1)	32500	0.482	0.500	0.000	1.000
Insurgents Respect Afghan Religion and Traditions (=1)	32446	0.352	0.478	0.000	1.000
Insurgents Respect Afghan Religion and Traditions (5-Point Scale)	32446	1.465	1.451	0.000	4.000
Independent Variables					
Border Fortification	32500	0.152	0.359	0.000	1.000
Individual-Level Control Variables					
Age	32500	34.589	12.351	18.000	95.000
Age^2	32500	1348.928	994.002	324.000	9025.000
Female	32500	0.421	0.494	0.000	1.000
Schooling: None	32500	0.645	0.478	0.000	1.000
Schooling: 1st to 6th Grade	32500	0.126	0.332	0.000	1.000
Schooling: 7th to 9th Grade	32500	0.087	0.281	0.000	1.000
Schooling: 10th to 12th Grade	32500	0.117	0.321	0.000	1.000
Schooling: University	32500	0.025	0.157	0.000	1.000
Schooling: Other	32500	0.000	0.019	0.000	1.000
Economic Situation Improving in Past Year	32500	0.279	0.449	0.000	1.000
National Government Performance Index	32500	0.114	1.037	-1.084	2.444
District Government Performance Index	32500	0.078	1.022	-1.415	2.449
Army Present At Least Weekly	32500	0.395	0.489	0.000	1.000
Police Present At Least Weekly	32500	0.523	0.499	0.000	1.000
Perceived Insurgent Control	32500	0.151	0.358	0.000	1.000
Perceived Contested Control	32500	0.079	0.270	0.000	1.000
# of People Present for Interview	32500	3.130	1.150	2.000	9.000
Respondent Comprehension	32500	1.543	0.687	1.000	4.000
Respondent Comfortability	32500	1.518	0.665	1.000	4.000

Note: The sample includes districts in border provinces. Estimates are scaled using sampling weights.

A.5 Pre-Trends

Figure A-4: Parallel Pre-Trends Across Focal Outcomes



Note: Plots depict pre-treatment trends in the focal outcomes. The dashed red line marks 0. In the top two rows we plot estimates based on our focal specifications. Bars are 90 and 95% confidence intervals. Black markers are estimates from a baseline model with district and year-specific quarter fixed effects. Gray markers are estimates from a saturated model with parameters described in Table **??**. Two pre-treatment periods (t-7 and t-1), denoted by vertical gray dashed lines, are omitted. In the bottom two rows we plot estimates based on the estimator proposed by Borusyak, Jaravel and Spiess (2022). Gray shaded bands are 95% confidence intervals.

A.6 Border Fortification Did Not Cause Other Policy Changes

In columns 1-2 I find no evidence that fortification increased spending under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), a large community development program (Beath, Christia and Enikolopov, 2015). Columns 3-6 show no evidence of shifting security force deployments (Bate, 2023). Column 7 considers territorial control as assessed by ACSOR field staff (Wright, 2023), and finds no effect of fortification. Finally, using data from Fetzer et al. (2021), I find no distinguishable relationship between fortification and each district's assigned security transition (column 8) or the time to each district's actual hand-over ceremony (column 9).

Table A-3: Fortification Did Not Cause Other Policy Changes

	NSP Aid Spending		NATO/ISAF Battalions		ANSF Presence	ALP Presence	Territorial Control	Security Transitions	
	(1) Extensive Margin (=1)	(2) Per 100k Pop.	(3) Extensive Margin (=1)	(4) Intensive Margin (#)	(5) Extensive Margin (=1)	(6) Extensive Margin (=1)	(7) 5-Point Scale	(8) Assigned Tranche	(9) Hand-Over Ceremony
Border Fortification	0.003	27911.505	0.019	-0.087	0.005	-0.048	0.010	0.190	0.248
	(0.049)	(59602.608)	(0.023)	(0.180)	(0.045)	(0.051)	(0.131)	(0.144)	(0.185)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5180	3875	4311
Adjusted R^2	0.567	0.301	0.594	0.725	0.761	0.640	0.888		
Pseudo R^2								0.001	0.001
AIC	2381.520	163613.823	-7038.340	24616.378	-4095.742	-892.959	6564.759	2368.645	2283.233
Parameters									
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	No
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	No
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	No	No
Estimator	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	Cox PH	Cox PH

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Columns 1-4 report OLS coefficients. Columns 5 and 6 report standardized coefficients from Cox proportional hazards models. The sample includes districts in border provinces.

A.7 Violence Trends and Border Fortification

Columns 1-4 show that insurgent-initiated violence is not distinguishably correlated with treatment onset. Columns 5-8 give a temporal placebo check, confirming contemporary border fortification does not predict past violence.

Table A-4: Violence Trends and Border Fortification

	Panel A: Violence Does Not Predict Treatment Onset				Panel B: Fortification Does Not Predict Past Violence			
	DV: Onset of Border Fortification				DV: Trend in Lagged, Insurgent-Initiated SIGACTs			
	(1) 3 Month MA	(2) 6 Month MA	(3) 9 Month MA	(4) 12 Month MA	(5) 3 Month MA	(6) 6 Month MA	(7) 9 Month MA	(8) 12 Month MA
Trend in Insurgent-Initiated SIGACTs	-0.00034	-0.00002	-0.00002	-0.00000				
	(0.00073)	(0.00001)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)				
Border Fortification					0.04765	0.02889	0.04368	0.13264
					(0.06939)	(0.08068)	(0.09080)	(0.13914)
Observations	4942	4184	3443	2723	5439	4662	3885	3108
Adjusted R^2	0.135	0.271	0.188	0.270	0.794	0.876	0.933	0.968
AIC	-12608.729	-11048.479	-10206.083	-10073.082	8695.202	5032.671	1748.167	-922.781
Parameters								
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Population	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. Columns 1-4 study the probability of treatment (fortification) onset. MA = lagged moving average. Violence trends reflect per-capita trends in the respective header variable. The sample includes districts in border provinces.

A.8 Intensity of Border Fortification

Whereas the main estimates study the extensive margin of border fortification, in Table A-5 we estimate the effect of the number of border fortifications in a district-quarter. The main results are robust.

Table A-5: The Intensity of Border Fortification and Insurgent Influence

	Insurgent Propaganda				Insurgent Shaping Operations			
	Extensive Margin		Intensive Margin		Extensive Margin		Intensive Margin	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
# of Border Fortifications	0.054**	0.042**	0.277*	0.136**	0.099***	0.089***	0.249***	0.179***
	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.156)	(0.058)	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.069)	(0.054)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.208	0.275	0.281	0.470	0.195	0.262	0.235	0.313
AIC	3904.939	3294.576	20189.436	18283.912	3435.213	2829.479	16658.901	15932.331
Parameters								
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates		✓		✓		✓		✓
Conflict-Related Covariates		✓		✓		✓		✓
Security Force Covariates		✓		✓		✓		✓
Lagged DV		✓		✓		✓		✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. # of border fortifications is the count of border forts in a district-quarter. See table notes from 1.

A.9 Insurgent Influence per 100k Population

Whereas the main estimates study the extensive and intensive margins of insurgent influence, in Table A-6 we calculate levels of insurgent influence per 100k of district population, and z-standardize this measure for consistency with the intensive margin results from Table 1. The main results are robust.

Table A-6: Border Fortification and Insurgent Influence per Capita

	Per 100k Population									
	Insurgent Propaganda					Insurgent Shaping Operations				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Border Fortification	0.150***	0.149**	0.138**	0.131**	0.113**	0.137**	0.142**	0.124**	0.110**	0.103**
	(0.054)	(0.058)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.047)	(0.053)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.054)	(0.051)
Observations	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957	5957
Adjusted R^2	0.190	0.189	0.209	0.209	0.226	0.165	0.164	0.186	0.188	0.195
AIC	12863.935	12769.622	12632.528	12630.451	12501.839	12255.163	12163.985	12008.170	12000.671	11950.001
Parameters										
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-Specific Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pashto x Quarter FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socioeconomic Covariates		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict-Related Covariates			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Security Force Covariates				✓	✓				✓	✓
Lagged DV					✓					✓

Note: * p <.10, ** p <.05, *** p <.01. Robust, district-clustered standard errors are in parentheses. See table notes from 1.

A Global Jihad Appendix

In this brief empirical appendix, we introduce supplemental results for the global jihad analyses.

A.1 Jihadi Magazines

In examining the propaganda strategies of jihadi groups, we compiled a comprehensive database of 87 magazines issued by 35 different organizations. The publications span 1986 to 2019 and cover a variety of languages, including Arabic, Bengali, English, French, German, Indonesian, Malay, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, Uighur, and Urdu. Figure A-5 provides examples of both covers and inner pages from these magazines, which illustrate the careful design efforts employed by the militant groups.

Figure A-5: Examples of Jihadist Magazines

Table A-7 details the magazines associated with each group, listing key information such as publication years, language(s), and the gender focus of the intended audience. By drawing on these diverse sources, we capture a broad spectrum of jihadi messaging and outreach strategies.

Table A-7: Summary of Magazines by Groups

Group	Periodicals
al Qaeda	al-Haqiqah (2017-2018, en, m), al-Risalah (2017-2018, ar, m), Beituki (2017-2019, ar, w), Fadhakar (2016-2017, ar, m), Hitin (2007-2014, ur, m), One Ummah (2019-2019, en, m), Ummah-Wahidah (2019-2019, ar, m)
al Qaeda in Iraq	Dhurwat al-Sanam (2005-2005, ar, m)
al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia	Mu'askar al-Battar (2003-2004, ar, m), Sawt al-Jihad (2003-2007, ar, m)
al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula	Al-Shamikha (2011-2013, ar, w), Al-Waqi' al-Jihadiyya (2010-2015, ar, m), Hidayyah (2016-2016, ar, m), Ibnat al-Islam (2017-2019, ar, m), Inspire (2010-2017, en, m), Sada al-Malahim (2008-2011, ar, m)
al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	Al-Balagh (2016-2019, bn, m), Hitin (2017-2017, ur, m), Nawai Afghan Jihad (2010-2019, ur, m), Resurgence (2014-2015, en, m)
al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	al-Huda (2016-2016, ar, m), al-Jama'a (2004-2006, ar, m), Sada al-Qital (2000-2003, ar, m)

al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya al-Musallaha	Al-Ansar (1993-1997, ar, m)
al-Muhajirun in East Africa	Al-Ghuraba (2015-2016, sw, m)
al-Shabaab	amka (2015-2015, en, m), Gaidi Mtaani (2012-2017, sw, m)
Ansar al-Islam	Al-Ansar (2010-2012, ar, m), Hasad al-Mujahidin (2005-2010, ar, m)
Ansar al-Sunna	Ansar al-Sunna (2003-2006, ar, m)
Ansar Ghazwat ul-Hind / Foundation of New Movement of Jihad in Kashmir	The Indus (2018-2018, ur, m)
Hamas of Iraq	Ruwwad al-Ma'ali (2007-2008, ar, m)
Haqqani network	Manba' al-Jihad (1990-1992, ar, m)
Harakat Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyyah	Rabi' al-Sham (2015-2016, ar, m)
Hayyat Tahrir al-Sham	Al-Balagh (2019-2019, ar, m), Sahevh aaba (2018-2018, ar, m)
Islamic Army in Iraq	Al-Fursan (2004-2012, ar, m)
Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	Al-Somood (2006-2019, ar, m), Shari'at (2012-2018, ur, m)
Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance	Jami' (2005-2010, ar, m)
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan	Ghazwa-e-Hind (2011-2011, ur, m)
Islamic State of Iraq and Syria	Al-Malhamah (2017-2017, ar, m), Al Mustaqba (2013-2014, ms, m), al-Waqar (2016-2016, ar, m), Dabiq (2016-2016, de, m), Dabiq (2014-2016, en, m), Dar al-Islam (2015-2016, fr, m), al Fatihin/Fatihin (2016-2016, ms, m), Islamic State Report (2014-2014, en, m), Istok (2015-2016, ru, m), Konstaniniyye (2015-2016, tr, m), Mediaction (2018-2018, fr, m), Rumiyah (2017-2017, de, m), Rumiyah (2016-2017, en, m), Rumiyah (2017-2017, fr, m), Rumiyah (2016-2017, id, m), Rumiyah (2016-2017, ru, m), Rumiyah (2017-2017, ug, m), Sawt al-Sham (2013-2013, ar, m), Uvewivai (2018-2018, ru, m)
Islamic State Indonesia	Baqiyyah (2017-2017, id, m), Generasi (2017-2017, id, m)
Islamic State of Jammu and Kashmir	Al Risalah (2019-2019, en, m), the Voice (2019-2019, en, m)
Jabhat Fateh al-Sham	Al-Risalah (2015-2017, en, m), Iyyaha'at Jihadiyyah (2016-2016, ar, m)
Jamiat-e-Islami	Al-Mujahidun (1986-1992, ar, m)
Jaysh al-Islam	Nida al-Masra (2018-2019, ar, m)
Kata'ib Thawrat al-'Ashirin	al-Kata'ib (2005-2015, ar, m)
Lajnat al-Difa' 'an Aqidat Ahl al-Sunna in Palestine	Al-Haqiqa (2007-2016, ar, m)
Minbar Suriya al-Islami	Risalat al-Mujahidin (2005-2005, ar, m)
Naqsbandi Army	Al-Naqshbandiyya (2007-2015, ar, m)
Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan	al Rashideen (2013-2013, en, m)
Tanzim Huras al-Din	Al-Falah (2019-2019, ar, m)
Tehreek-e-Taliban Islami Pakistan	Azan (2013-2014, en, m), Ihya-e-Khilafat (2011-2017, ur, m), Ihyae Khilafat (2014-2014, en, m), In Fight (2010-2014, en, m), Sunnat-e-Khaula (2017-2017, en, w), Taliban (2016-2018, ur, m)
Tora Bora Front	Tora Bora (2004-2005, ar, m)
Turkistan Islamic Party	Turkistan al-Islamiyya (2008-2019, ar, m)

Note: Publishing time range, language, and the gender of the target audience are noted in the parentheses. ar=Arabic, bn=Bengali, en=English, fr=French, de=German, id=Indonesian, ms=Malay, ru=Russian, sw=Swahili, tr=Turkish, ug=Uighur, ur=Urdu; m=target men, w=target women.

A.2 Measuring Ideological Intensity and Validation

A key objective of our research is to quantify the ideological appeals of jihadi groups along a "religious vs. secular" spectrum. As explained in the main manuscript, we developed a customized dictionary centered on three fundamental questions that delineate "religiosity" versus "secularism": (1) What is the ideal social order? (2) How should individuals behave? and (3) Why should people participate in jihad? Table A-8 lays out several dimensions of each question, along with illustrative keywords in parentheses.

Table A-8: Codebook

Religiosity	**Secularism**
(1) What is the ideal social order?	
divine power (god, prophet, companions, etc.)	positive man-made law (congress, court, judiciary, etc.)
religious leaders and their titles (imam, khatib, mawlawi, etc.)	secular leadership positions (president, mayor, administrations, etc.)
in-groups or out-groups defined by religious beliefs (christian, infidel, heresy, etc.)	in-groups or out-groups defined by secular identities (foreigners, allies, diplomats, etc.)
the transnational Islamic caliphate and its constitutional base (caliphate, umayyad, sharia, etc.)	any secular political institutions (government, democracy, dictatorship, etc.)
the Muslim community not defined by territory (ummah)	territory or territorial ambition (territory, borders, autonomy, etc.)
ideology or philosophy defined by religion (monotheism, paganism, polytheism, etc.)	ideology or philosophy not defined by religion (imperialism, globalism, marxism, etc.)
different sectors of Islam (shafi, hanafi, maliki, hanbali, shia, etc.)	different components of secular nation-states, particularly Western nation-states (citizenship, election, referendum, etc.)
	icons of capitalism (bankruptcy, commercial, industry, marketing, etc.)
religious classics (quran, hadith, fatwa, etc.)	modern education (college, university, faculty, etc.)
religious taboos and punishment (apostasy, taghut, takfir, etc.)	social regulations and control over individuals (tax, censorship, surveillance, etc.)
(2) How should individuals behave?	
religious practices (asceticism, pray, fasting, etc.)	political obligations and rights of the public (vote, ballot, disenfranchised, etc.)
Islamic conventions and cultural rituals (halal, hijri, fasting, etc.)	secular activities (funding, payments, experiment, etc.)
objects conveying a strong religious meaning (taj, hijab, burqa, etc.)	objects exclusively in secular life, particularly those associated with modern technology (technology, internet, bitcoin, etc.)
fundamentalist requirements for women and regulations on family life (chastity, womb, talaq, etc.)	reference to human rights, particularly women rights (feminist, rights, humanitarian)
values showing respect to god (loyalty, obedience, taqwa, takbir, etc.)	values attached to human welfare and individual happiness (equality, freedom, liberal, independence, etc.)
(3) Why should people participate in jihad?	
benefits in the afterlife (paradise, immortal, shaheed, martyrdom, etc.)	benefits in the current life (salary, compensation, oil, cash, etc.)

individuals' spiritual pursuits (soul, blessings, fulfillment, etc.)	groups' organizational needs (mobilization, recruitment, budget, etc.)
existing violation of religious rules (adultery, forbidden, etc.)	social problems in secular societies (bribe, crisis, racism, etc.)
names of major religious sites (jerusalem, mecca, etc.)	names of major secular countries (america, britain, etc.)
ultimate religious goals (pilgrimage, caliphate, etc.)	strategic statements and reasonings (analyze, plan, spy, strategy, etc.)

Note: Different forms and alternative spellings have been taken into consideration. I manually went through each word that appears more than 30 times in the entire textual corpus and decided whether it can be used to distinguish rhetoric.

With this codebook in hand, we meticulously categorized each word occurring more than 30 times[15] into "religious," "secular," or "neither"—the last being the largest category. For instance, terms such as "childbirth" and "breastfeeding" appear in both religious and secular contexts and are therefore excluded from the dictionary. Some words fit multiple categories (e.g., "paradise" can reference both ultimate religious goals and afterlife benefits). In categorizing keywords, we accounted for variations in spelling (e.g., "hadith" and "hadeeth") but excluded ambiguous forms when their usage could misrepresent their meaning (e.g., "fasting" is coded as religious, but the adjective "fast" is not). We then computed a *Religiosity Score* for each magazine page, subtracting the count of secular keywords from the count of religious keywords. This approach allows us to observe how "religious" or "secular" the content is, page by page.

To validate the *Religiosity Score* as an accurate representation of jihadi groups' ideological messaging, we compare these scores to human expert coding. To compare, we converted these continuous scores into three categories: "more religious" (score ≥ 10), "more secular" (score ≤ -10), and "neutral/mixed" ($-10 <$ score < 10). We then created a Qualtrics-based validation system, where a research assistant fluent in English and Arabic was shown randomly selected magazine pages (one at a time) and asked to classify each as more religious, more secular, or neutral/mixed. In total, the research assistant manually categorized 250 randomly chosen pages. The results demonstrate a 92.8% alignment (232 out of 250) between the machine-classified and human-coded categories. Most discrepancies involved pages near the cutoffs for "neutral/mixed," where the human coder might classify a page with a score of -9 as more secular, while the machine model deemed it neutral. Even in such cases, the two assessments were close to each other in terms of content. These findings give us substantial confidence in the validity of the *Religiosity Score* for measuring the ideological strategies present in jihadi propaganda.

[15]This threshold yields approximately 26,000 words. Words appearing fewer than 30 times are too sparse for meaningful dictionary inclusion.

References for Supplementary Materials

Baer, Andrew J. 2023. "Developing Insight: Personal Anecdotes from OEF XIII." *Military Review* pp. 1–8.

Bate, Jonathan D. 2023. *Does International Security Assistance Make an Impact? Evaluating the Strategic Effectiveness of Military Aid*. Stanford University.

Beath, Andrew, Fotini Christia and Ruben Enikolopov. 2015. "The National Solidarity Programme: Assessing the Effects of Community-Driven Development in Afghanistan." *International Peacekeeping* 22(4):302–320.

Berman, Eli, Jacob N. Shapiro and Joseph H. Felter. 2011. "Can Hearts and Minds Be Bought? The Economics of Counterinsurgency in Iraq." *Journal of Political Economy* 119(4):766–819.

Blair, Christopher W. 2023. "The Fortification Dilemma: Border Control and Rebel Violence." *American Journal of Political Science* .

Borusyak, Kirill, Xavier Jaravel and Jann Spiess. 2022. "Revisiting Event Study Designs: Robust and Efficient Estimation." University College London.

Condra, Luke N. and Austin L. Wright. 2019. "Civilians, Control, and Collaboration during Civil Conflict." *International Studies Quarterly* 63(4):897–907.

Fetzer, Thiemo, Pedro C.L. Souza, Oliver Vanden Eynde and Austin L. Wright. 2021. "Security Transitions." *American Economic Review* 111(7):2275–2308.

Shaver, Andrew and Austin L. Wright. 2017. "Data on Combatant Activity during Afghanistan War Advance Scientific Investigation of Insurgency.".

Sonin, Konstantin and Austin L. Wright. 2023. "Rebel Capacity, Intelligence Gathering, and Combat Tactics." *American Journal of Political Science* .

Weidmann, Nils B. 2016. "A Closer Look at Reporting Bias in Conflict Event Data." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(1):206–218.

Wolfley, Kyle J. 2021. "Military Power Reimagined: The Rise and Future of Shaping." *Joint Forces Quarterly* 102(3):20–28.

Wright, Austin L. 2023. "The Origins and Consequences of Territorial Control.".
URL: *https://www.austinlwright.com/territorial-control*