



Decentralization, Conflict, and Development

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili
Director, Center for Governance and Markets
Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs
University of Pittsburgh



Jen Brick Murtazashvili ✓

@jmurtaashvili



Today is not forever.



[aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com)

Photos: A year of shrinking rights for Afghan women

The year 2022 saw the Taliban imposing restrictions on women's rights, bringing back the memory of its past rule.



Jon Maloy @JonMaloy · Dec 31, 2022



Replying to [@jmurtazashvili](#)

Two decades of external intervention in vain. But I am sure memories of a freer society is lingering somewhere. Next time the Afgans will take their destiny into their own hands and throw out the barbarians. Maybe in 10 years. Maybe in 40. People craving for freedom always win.

سولہ سو تالیق سرور کورے طالبان کورے تسلیم کورے

Hundreds of Afghan soldiers surrender to Taliban







Joe Lubas @JoeLubas12 · Jan 1



Replying to [@jmurtazashvili](#)

Why didn't the people of Afghanistan fight for their country? Why did they play dead for the Taliban?



Tymofiy Mylovanov ✓

@Mylovanov



The president of Ukraine (on the left) vs the president of Afghanistan (on the right) - as seen by Afghan Twitter space.



10:59 AM · Feb 26, 2022



The Russians Might Have Expected a Warm Welcome. Instead the Mayor Labeled Them 'Occupiers.'

The 33-year-old mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fyodorov, encouraged defiance. Then he was arrested, and hasn't been heard from since.



By [Marc Santora](#) and [Neil MacFarquhar](#)

March 12, 2022

LVIV, Ukraine — Ivan Fyodorov, as his name suggests, is an ethnic Russian in a southern Ukrainian city where Russian is commonly spoken and where cultural and familial ties to the motherland run deep.

That would seem to make Mr. Fyodorov, the mayor of Melitopol, just the kind of person to welcome conquering Russian soldiers with open arms and flowers.

Instead, he labeled them “occupiers.”

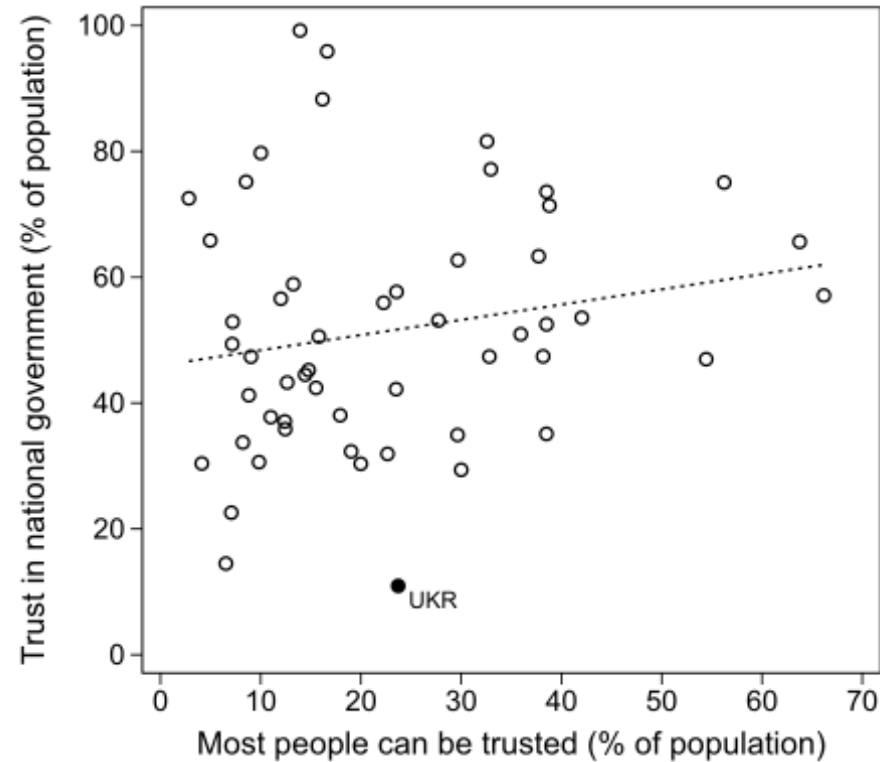


The Guardian





Figure 1: General trust and trust in government in different countries



Notes: The figure compares general trust in 2014 (share of population reporting that most people can be trusted) to trust in national government in 2018 (share of population reporting some or complete trust in national government) across 53 countries. Data are collected by *Our World in Data*, the original sources are the World Values Survey 2014 and the Wellcome Global Monitor 2018.

Decentralization

- Defined as any act by which a central government cedes rights of decision making over resources to actors and institutions at lower levels in a politico-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Ostrom and Agrawal 2001)
- Became a popular recommendation in transition states
- Many countries moved to decentralized power or were under pressure by international donors do to so in 1980s/1990s

Some confusion

PEACELAND

*Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics
of International Intervention*



SÉVERINE AUTESSERRE

The Local Turn in Peace Building: a critical agenda for peace

ROGER MAC GINTY & OLIVER P RICHMOND

ABSTRACT This article unpacks the renaissance of interest in 'the local' in peace building. It pays increased attention to local dimensions of peace in a wider context of increased assertiveness by local actors as well as a loss of confidence by major actors behind international peace-support actors. The article sees the 'local turn' in peace building as part of a wider critical turn in the study of peace and conflict, and focuses on the epistemological consequences of the recourse to localism in the conceptualisation and execution of peace building. The local turn has implications for the nature and location of power in peace building. This article is largely conceptual and theoretical in nature but it is worth noting that the local turn is based on reactions to real-world events.

This article aims to unpack the increasingly prominent 'local turn' in the study and practice of peace and peace building.¹ The local turn is something of a *terra nullius* for the liberal peace epistemology. It represents a dangerous and wild place where Western rationality, with its dictates of universality and modernisation, is challenged in different ways.² The 'local turn' is connected to the critical approach to peace and conflict studies and has been heavily influenced by critical and post-structural theory, postcolonial scholarship and practice, inter-disciplinarity, as well as a range of alternative ethnographic, sociological and action-related methodologies. Scholars and practitioners from the global South have played a particularly important role in the emergence of the local turn, as well as involving a broader range of states in international peace building.

The practice of key state representatives and international policy makers gathering in New York, London or Washington to decide what is to be done about a specific conflict without significant local representation continues unabated. UN and other international documents and policies encompassing *Agenda for Peace* (1992) to *Responsibility to Protect* (2001), are indicative of this approach. Various attempts at making peace agreements around the world are normally negotiated in Western bubbles (geographically in the West or within a 'green zone' in the conflict environment), according to Northern rationalities, with a few local

Confusion between decentralization and federalism – especially by international relations literature

The Local Turn in Peace-Building has not been led by local actors

- Decentralization is not donor interventions at the local level (e.g., Autesserre 2010; 2014)

Community-Driven Development is not decentralized governance despite claims to the contrary (see Platteau 2004; Platteau and Gaspart 2003)

Disciplined in our Biases

- Bias in what is studied in states affected by conflict
 - International relations
 - International Security
 - International Organizations
 - Conflict and Peace Studies
- Easy for outsiders to study things mediated by outsiders.
 - International aid and military
 - Local institutions get relatively little attention; local voices ignored.

Decentralization and Conflict

Decentralization is an antidote to conflict (Liphart 1981; 19996)

It may unintentionally exacerbate conflict because stronger parties have no incentive to decentralize power, giving weaker groups a reason to engage in more violence in order to obtain more autonomy (Lake and Rothchild 2005)

Decentralized systems enhance peace; it is regional parties that are the problem (Brancati 2006; 2009).

Dangers of Decentralization

Decentralization reinforces ethnic identities by formally acknowledging particular ethnic groups within a country, thus imbuing them with a sense of legitimacy (Kymlicka 2007)

Devolution allows local governments to create laws that discriminate against others (Horowitz 1991; Bunce 1999)

Allows restive regions an independent resource base upon which they can foment further rebellion or secession

Politics Matters

Studies of decentralization are often problematic because they pay scant attention to why states attempt decentralization (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001).

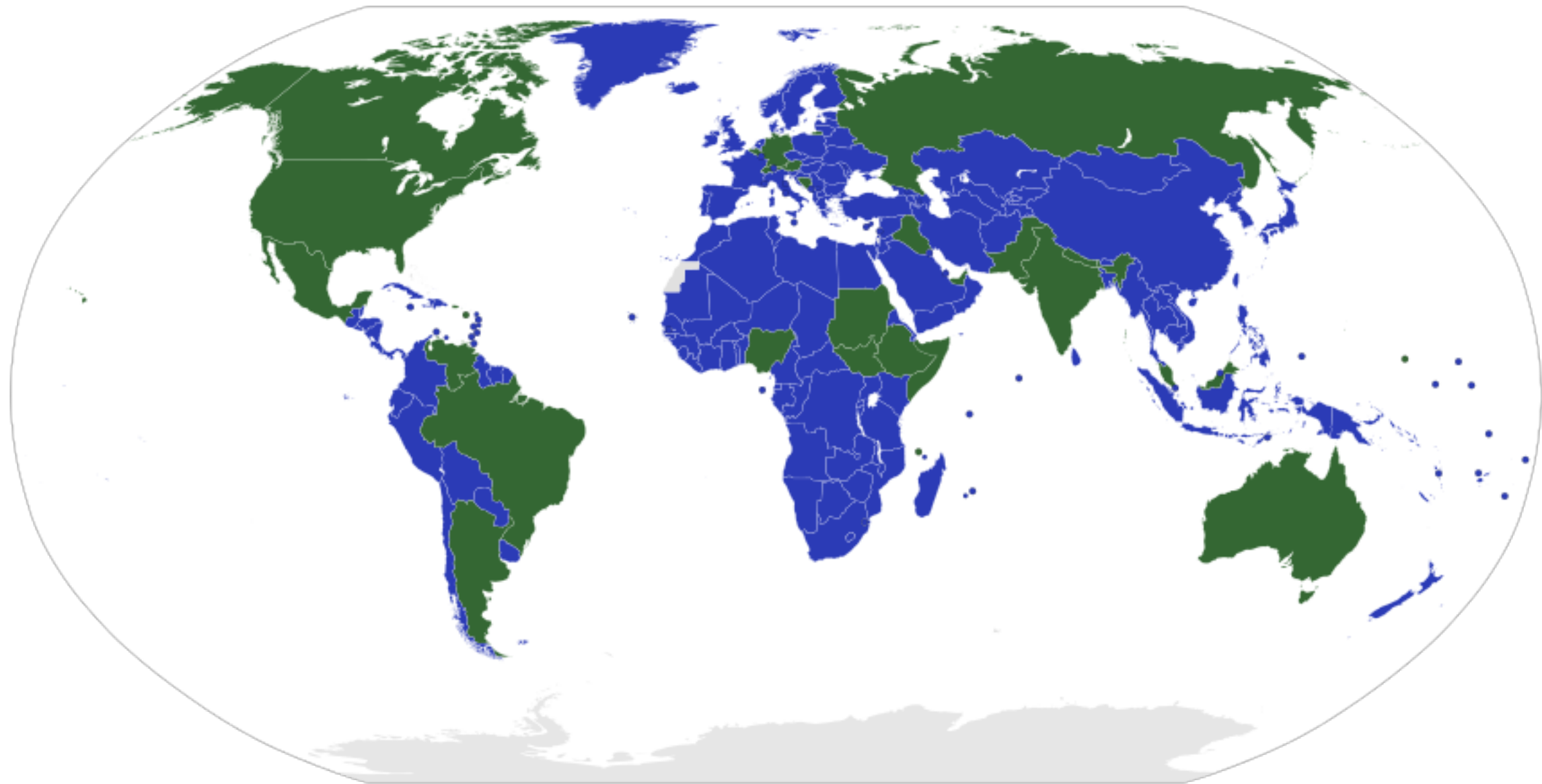
Measurement Matters

Unit homogeneity (King, Koehane, Verba 1995)

Institutional details matter and attempts to estimate the effects of federalism using a simple dummy variable neglect potentially important institutional details (Voigt and Blume 2010)

- Federal systems are not always decentralized
- Decentralization is not the same as federal systems

Literature on conflict and decentralization focuses overwhelmingly on ethno-federalism with almost no attention on fiscal federalism



Democratic Decentralization Doesn't Deliver Everything

Trade offs and Imperfect Alternatives

- Service Delivery
- Equity
- Trust and Legitimacy

Missing: Polycentric Approaches

Elinor Ostrom Critique of Decentralization (2001)

Polycentric systems allow citizens the opportunity to organize multiple governing authorities at different levels.

The idea that decentralization assumes one form that is unified across an entire political landscape may undermine existing rules-in-use that are effective

Missing: Polycentric Approaches

Polycentric systems allow experimentation, but also ensure that there are overlapping, multi-tiered systems that can support other systems when they fail.

In such a system no one system dominates.

Decentralization struggles because rules governing this often came from above. it is one thing to self-organize to create your own rules of association yet another thing entirely to be told by the government to manage something it can no longer handle itself (Ostrom 2001, p. 252)















The Reform Index

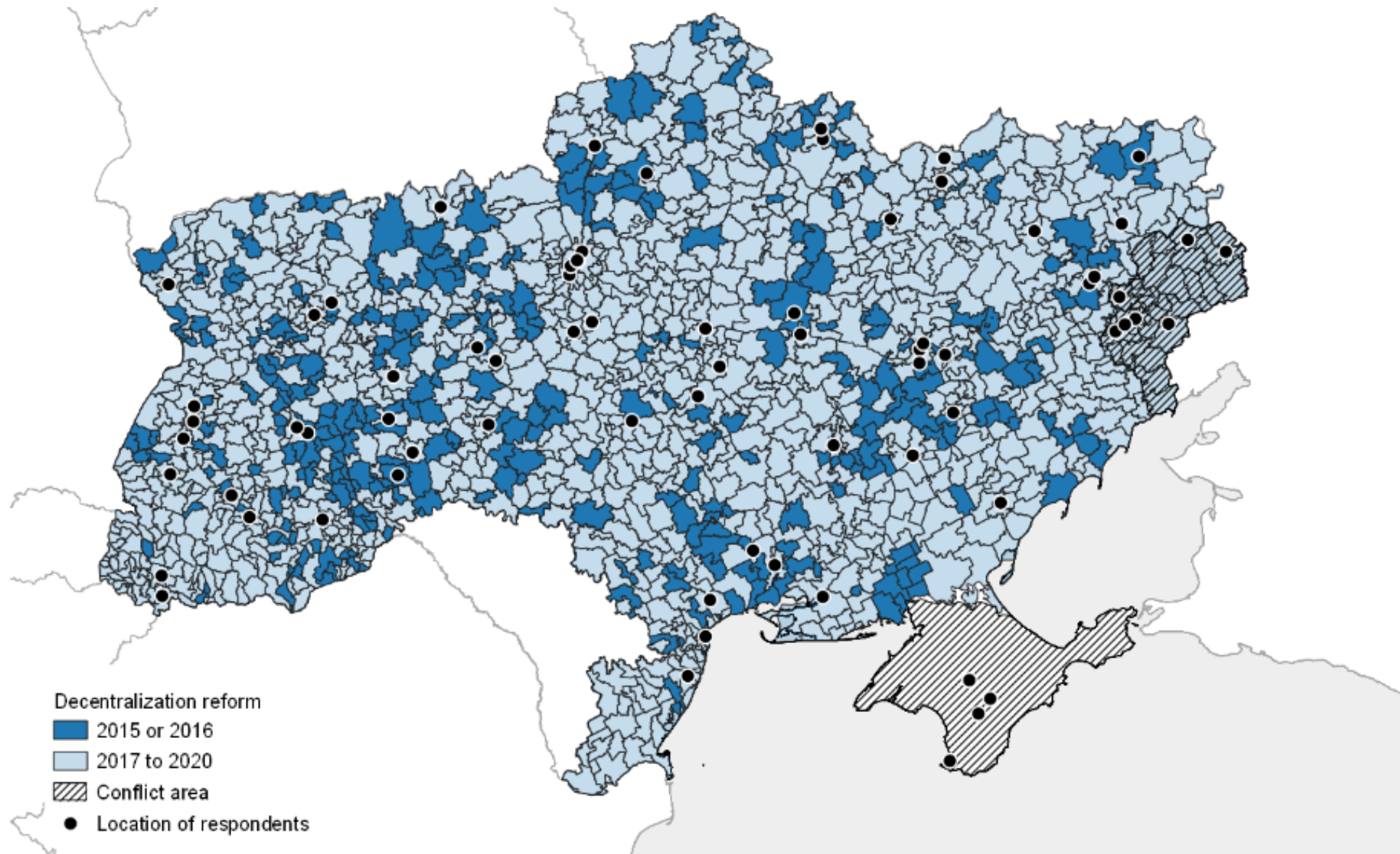
We estimate the progress of changes in terms of their quantity. This allows comparing promotion of the reforms in various directions, attempts of the governments and deputies aimed at modernization of Ukraine. Every two weeks more than 40 Ukrainian experts estimate reformist legislative acts in terms of their impact on economy and society. The acceptable tempo is the index exceeding 2.

[ALL INDEX RELEASES](#)

How to use the Reform Index?

#1. To monitor

Please read about major changes of the “game rules” in the releases of the index every two weeks. After you find a law or decree in the table, you can open a release that contains summary of the subject document and expert comment to it.





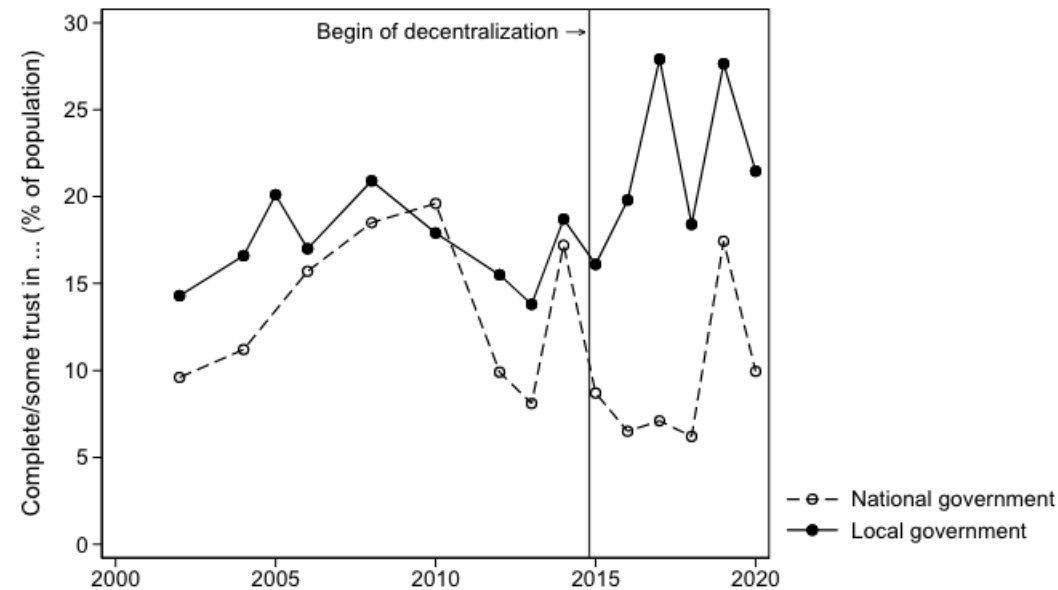
Я-ГРОМАДА!

ВСЕУКРАЇНСЬКА ІНФОРМАЦІЙНА КАМПАНІЯ

Я-ГРОМАДА!

Hromadas Built Trust

Figure 2: Trust in local and national governments in Ukraine, 2002–2020



Notes: The graph shows the share of respondents reporting some or complete trust into local governments (solid line) and national governments (dashed line) in Ukraine. Data are from the IS NANU Monitoring which includes cross-sections of 1800 respondents on average per year. The survey question to be answered on a five-point scale was: ‘How much confidence do you have into the local/national government?’.

The Source of Ukraine's Resilience

How Decentralized Government Brought the Country Together

By [Tymofii Brik](#) and [Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili](#) June 28, 2022



Volunteering in Chernihiv, Ukraine, April 2022

Zohra Bensemra / Reuters

NATIONAL MOOD: DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

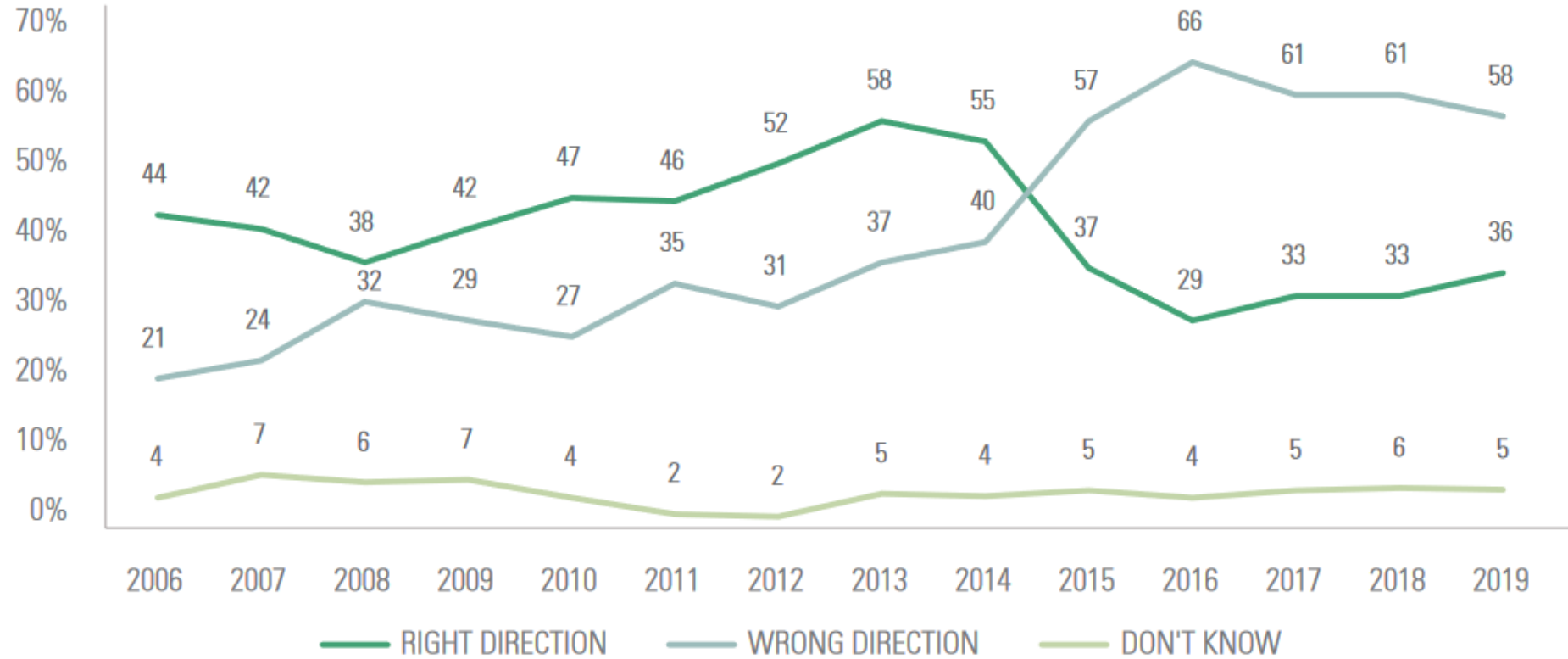


FIG. 1.1: Q-1. Overall, based on your own experience, do you think things in Afghanistan today are going in the right direction, or do you think they are going in the wrong direction?







Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili



CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ECONOMICS,
CHOICE, AND SOCIETY



LAND, THE STATE, AND WAR

*Property Institutions and
Political Order in Afghanistan*

JENNIFER BRICK MURTAZASHVILI
AND ILIA MURTAZASHVILI

Village Councils

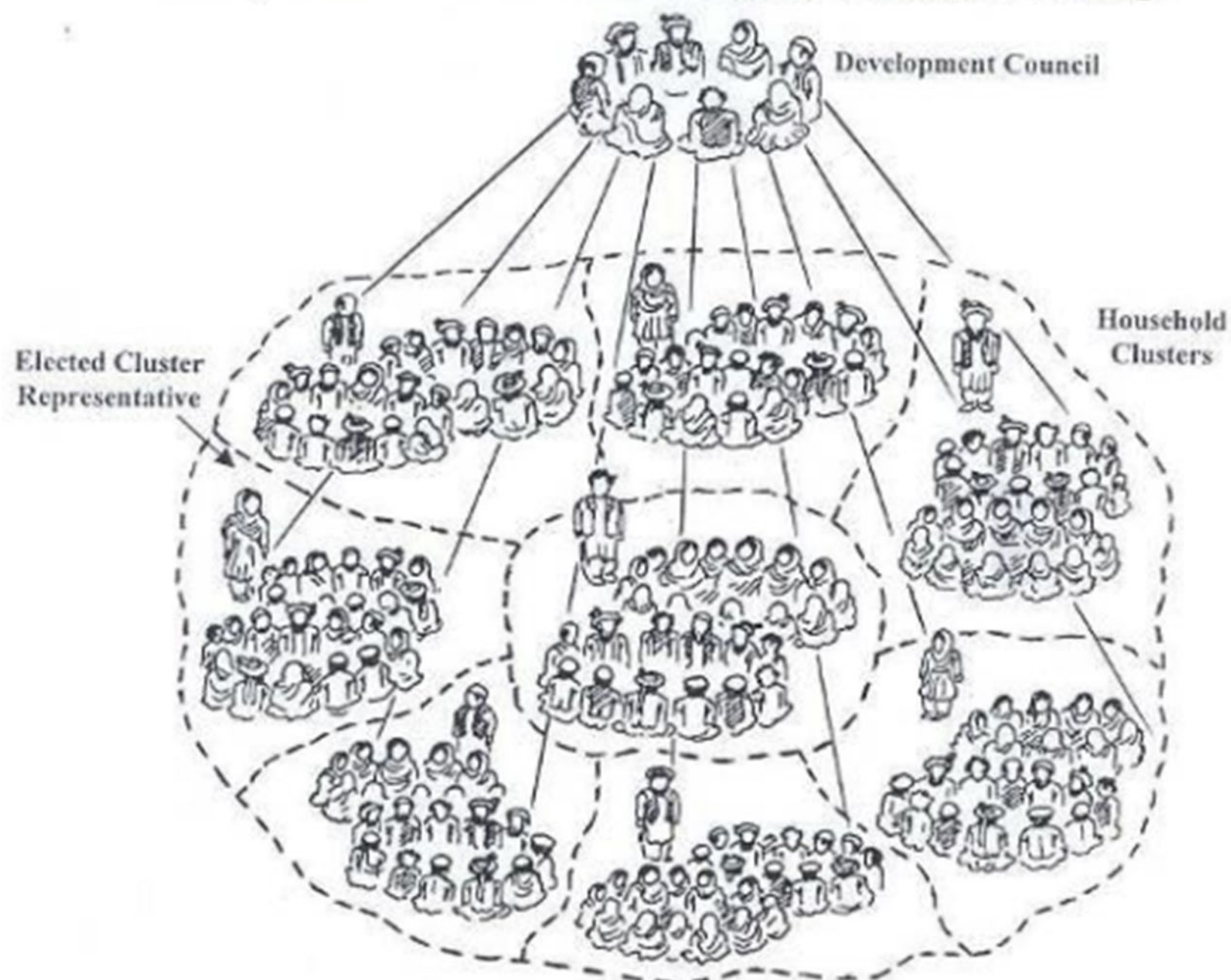


**Village
Representatives**



**Religious
Leaders**

Development Council Elections and Regular Community Meetings



WHAT COULD THE GOVERNMENT DO TO MAKE YOU STAY? BY YEAR

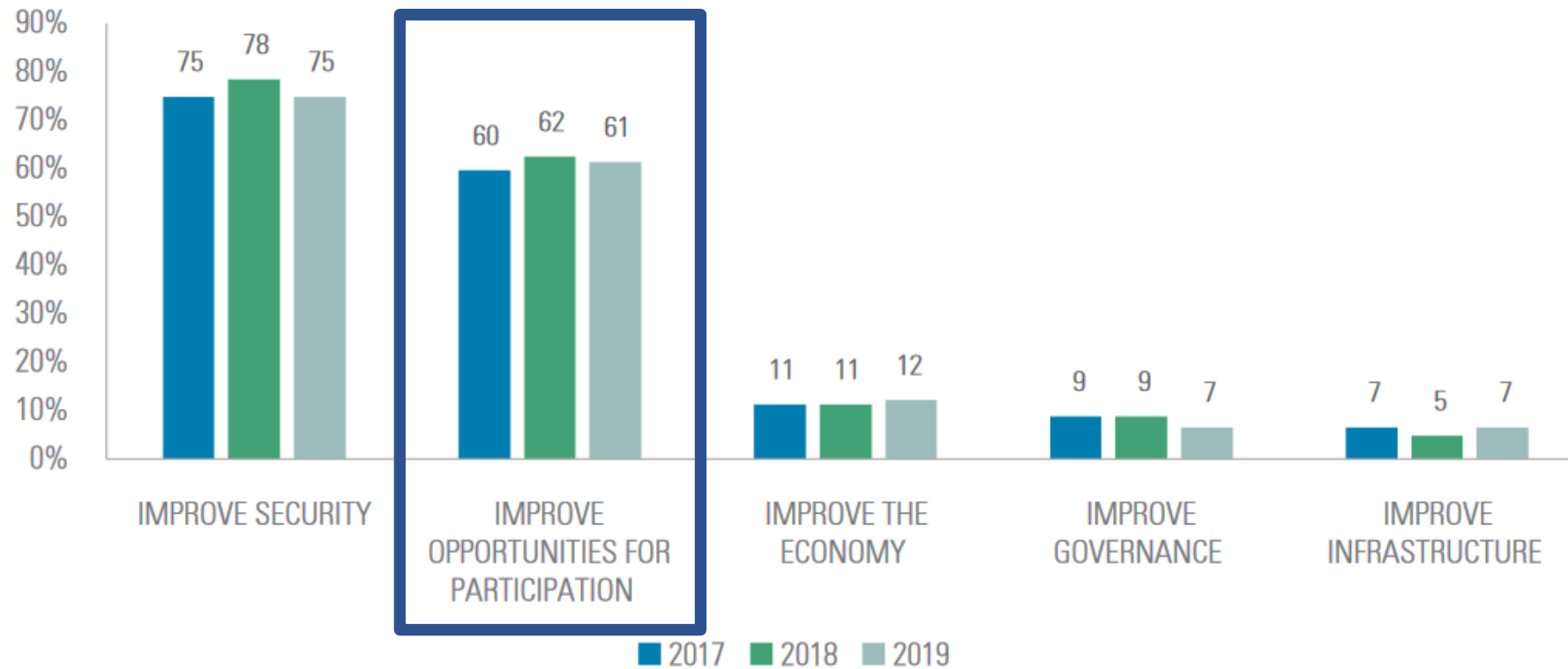


FIG. 9.14: Q-97. (If Q-96a answer is yes) What, if anything, could the government do to make you stay in Afghanistan.





Afghans Fought Hard

~100,000

Afghan security personnel killed since 2001

Washington Post

~70,000

civilians killed

Costs of War Project

By 2021 people and the military lost hope

Can Economic Assistance Shape Combatant Support in Wartime? Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan

JASON LYALL *Dartmouth College*
YANG-YANG ZHOU *University of British Columbia*
KOSUKE IMAI *Harvard University*

Empowering Women through Development Aid: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan

ANDREW BEATH *World Bank*
FOTINI CHRISTIA *Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)*
RUBEN ENIKOLOPOV *New Economic School*



Direct democracy and resource allocation: Experimental evidence from Afghanistan[☆]



Andrew Beath^a, Fotini Christia^b, Ruben Enikolopov^{c,d,*}

^a World Bank, United States

^b Department of Political Science, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, United States

^c ICREA, IPEG, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona GSE, Spain

^d New Economic School, Russia

Why Do Defaults Affect Behavior? Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan[†]

By JOSHUA BLUMENSTOCK, MICHAEL CALLEN, AND TAREK GHANI*



Sanctioning and trustworthiness across ethnic groups: Experimental evidence from Afghanistan[☆]

Vojtěch Bartoš^{a,*}, Ian Lively^b

^a Department of Economics, University of Munich, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, D-80539 Munich, Germany

^b Department of Political Economy, King's College London, Bush House NE, 30 Aldwych, London WC2B 4BG, UK



An experiment with community health funds in Afghanistan

Krishna D Rao,^{1,*} Hugh Waters,² Laura Steinhardt,² Sahibullah Alam,³ Peter Hansen² and Ahmad Jan Naem⁴

Journal of Global Security Studies, 5(3), 2020, 443–462
doi: 10.1093/jogss/ogz020
Research Article

OXFORD

Can the Design of Electoral Institutions Improve Perceptions of Democracy in Fragile States? Evidence from Afghanistan

Torsten Jochem¹, Ilia Murtazashvili², and Jennifer Murtazashvili²

¹University of Amsterdam and ²University of Pittsburgh

Journal of Experimental Political Science 2 (2015) 47–62
doi:[10.1017/XPS.2014.28](https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2014.28)

Social Identity and Voting in Afghanistan: Evidence from a Survey Experiment

Torsten Jochem[†], Ilia Murtazashvili[‡] and Jennifer Murtazashvili[§]



www.elsevier.com/locate/worlddev



CrossMark

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.08.025>

World Development Vol. 77, pp. 293–310, 2016
0305-750X/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Establishing Local Government in Fragile States: Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan

TORSTEN JOCHEM^a, ILIA MURTAZASHVILI^b and JENNIFER MURTAZASHVILI^{b,*}

^a University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

^b University of Pittsburgh, USA

De Jure—De Facto Gap

Growing gap between de jure and de facto rules across the world

- When the gap is big, we see corruption and rule of law break down
- When gap is enormous, we state failure

Shrinking that gap is the challenge of development

Decentralization can be one way; but seems unlikely if society has no role in crafting rules of the game

There Are No Panaceas

Decentralization can be one way to shrink the gap

- It may not always be polycentric

Cross-national comparisons of decentralization are challenging

Decentralization may struggle because rules governing local government are not determined by communities but come from above.

30th Anniversary Essay

Two Roads to Nowhere: Appraising 30 Years of Public Administration Research

B. Guy Peters, Jon Pierre

One approach is populated by scholars with only very marginal attention to empirical detail, values, or institutional complexities. Instead, this approach builds on deductive rational choice or public choice theory where public institutions are seen as arenas for utility-maximizing public servants and managers. Much of this literature reads as if the author had never visited a public organization, other than perhaps to get a driver's license, and certainly had not spent any time observing closely what happens in those organizations and how real-world public administrators practice their craft.

CONTENT ARTICLES IN ECONOMICS
Symposium: Teaching Undergraduate Econometrics



What quantitative methods should we teach to graduate students? A comment on Swann’s “Is precise econometrics an illusion?”

Deirdre Nansen McCloskey^a and Stephen T. Ziliak^b 

^aEmerita, Departments of History, Economics, English, and Communication, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA; ^bDepartment of Economics, Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL, USA

Our answer to Professor Swann’s question is “yes,” with a big, big amendment. It is not Swann’s conventional notion of “precision” that is the illusion—not the biggest one—but the notion embodied in the present practice of quantitative methods in economics that researchers should grind away at theoretical econometrics, despite its evident and sharply diminishing returns. Econometrics, understood as regression analysis with null hypothesis significance testing in the absence of a substantive loss function, has yielded no major economic finding since its invention in the 1940s. By contrast, other quantitative methods, such as crude or not so crude simulations (such as Harberger triangles), historical inquiries (such as *The Monetary History of the United States*), massive experiments (such as episodes of hyperinflation in Israel or Argentina), or the scatter plots Professor Swann uses (such as the Phillips Curve when first articulated) have changed scientific opinions repeatedly and, in another sense, significantly.

McCloskey and Ziliak (2019)

- Let us list the quantitative methods in which a serious empirical economist should be instructed ...**Introspection of a serious sort**—not “how I feel about the law of demand this afternoon,” but “what really would I do if the price of gasoline doubled?” The seriousness would entail philosophy on a level beyond the simpleton’s version economists rely on.
- **Interviewing**, of the sort that anthropologists use, evoking answers that matter scientifically. You don’t have to believe everything that comes out of an informant’s mouth (“Witchcraft made me ill”; “Marginal cost doesn’t matter to our business”) to learn from well-crafted interviews.

McCloskey and Ziliak (2019)

- **Intelligent listening**, of the sort that guided Ronald Coase's career.
- **Fieldwork** inside actual economic entities, such as business firms, nonprofits, and governmental offices, or indeed households such as we all live in.
- **Walkabout economics**, as the Irish economist and TV personality David McWilliams calls it, the acute observation of economic behavior in ordinary life, of the sort Armen Alchian did.

Ways Forward

Understanding bureaucracy and local governance is vital.

We critique size of government—whether it is big or small but without understanding of how it works from the inside out.

Makes it hard to understand why it fails

If we want to study conflict, war and peace – go to societies affected by it. *Reality is a harsh mistress.*

→ Need to understand more than form.

→ Need to understand function and how rules-in-use play out IRL

It's Not Easy

Hard to do this from behind your desk

More than incorporating qualitative methods

Field methods matter – they give us humility and bring in local voices both as informants and research partners

- Survey instruments
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Participant observation



A Confluence of Ideas

Cutting-edge research, real-world applications & public engagement

[Edit](#)



Analyzing Institutional Diversity and Performance around the World

Our mission is to understand the diverse institutions and governance arrangements that affect social order and human well-being in the United States and around the world. We generate knowledge of ways in which individuals and communities overcome challenges to living free, prosperous, and peaceful lives. The Center is a hub of a global network of researchers and practitioners in the areas of governance and institutional analysis.