FIRST I AM MY TRIBE: AN INVESTIGATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF AFGHANS


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ABSTRACT

Identity centrality is important to the study of intergroup conflict because it defines identity priorities for ingroup/outgroup affiliation. A key question in understanding identity centrality, particularly for ethnic conflict, is whether resource needs such as competition for limited resources are the primary drivers of identity centrality, or if other considerations such as identity needs and degree of ethnic diversity also play a role. To investigate, three studies were conducted in Afghanistan between 2013-2015, a region of ongoing ethnic conflict, including 28,111 nationwide survey interviews and 125 in-depth interviews. Study 1 reveals a robust association between ethnic identity centrality and increased support for violent insurgent groups, and resource inequalities are significantly associated with both. In study 2, conditions of ethnic diversity are found to decrease ethnic identity centrality; as provinces grow more diverse, Afghans appear to emphasize sectarian identities less, and superordinate identities more. Finally, using in-depth interviews, study 3 finds that social identity needs as well as ideology are cited as justifications for identity centrality generally, and distinctness for ethnic identity centrality in particular. Three implications for policymakers are described in detail.
This work is the result of collaboration. Fieldwork was conducted over three years in Afghanistan with three implementing partners – ACSOR Surveys, Sayara Research, and Eureka Research – and required more than 1,000 staff. Writing up the results required patient support from colleagues, parents, siblings, and friends who encouraged me at critical points. I owe special debts of gratitude to several individuals for their support and encouragement in many forms. This includes my dissertation committee (Dr. Moghaddam, Dr. Chentsova-Dutton, Dr. Rom Harre, and Dr. Deborah Prentice of Princeton University), Basir Bita, Helen Seese, Dr. Keith Shawe, Dr. Timor Sharan, Dr. Daniel Karrell, Dr. Chris Taylor, Dr. Noah Coburn, Seamus Power, Tommy O’Brien, Sandy Feinzig, Kristin Brooks Cairns, and the Asia Foundation-Afghanistan’s Country Representative, Abdullah Ahmadzai. Further thanks is owed to Nancy Yuan and Mark Kryzer for their vision and leadership to start the Survey of the Afghan People twelve years ago.

I dedicate this work to my daughter, who has more ethnic and national identities than both of her parents, and to my adviser, Dr. Fathali M. Moghaddam, whose steady mentorship, rare expertise, and abiding friendship made this possible. I cannot fill his shoes, but I hope to follow his tracks with a lifetime of scholarship.

With deep gratitude,
ZACHARY J. WARREN
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Understanding conditions that make ethnic identity more central to a person’s self-conception (“ethnic identity centrality”) is important for policymakers who seek to build strong nation-states around ethnically diverse populations. This is especially relevant in areas that have long histories of sectarian, tribal or ethnic identity-based conflicts, such as Israel, Kenya, or Afghanistan, but also in countries with growing immigrant populations, such as Germany, Turkey, and Canada. Ethnic conflict continues to be a threat to peace and national unity in many countries. In these contexts, much remains unknown about the reasons and the conditions under which persons consider their distinct ethnic identities to be more important than their shared identities, such as their national identity.

A key question in understanding identity centrality is whether political competition and resource inequalities between ethnic groups are the only conditions under which ethnic identity centrality occurs, or if identity needs such as esteem also play a role. Materialist approaches and realistic conflict theory emphasize competition for limited resources such as land or power (Jackson, 1993; see Moghaddam, 2008, for a review), whereas social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) expands these considerations to include the need for social distinctness and positive esteem compared to other groups. Past literature has found a positive relationship between the presence of certain intergroup conditions and increased psychological importance of ethnic identity. These intergroup conditions include political competition (Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2010; see also Cikara, Botvinick & Fiske, 2011), relative deprivation between groups (Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2007), and contexts of ethnic diversity (e.g. Cederman et al., 2010;
Horowitz, 1985). The question of what predicts ethnic identity centrality is particularly important in Afghanistan, where national surveys link ethnic identity centrality with increased sympathy for violent anti-government groups including the Taliban (Warren & Hopkins, 2015).¹

To investigate, I ask three interrelated questions. First, do resource inequalities and imbalances in political power between ethnic groups predict increased ethnic identity centrality in Afghanistan? Analysis of areas with ethnic conflict often links conflict with intergroup competition for resources or power, such as over land between pastoralists and farmers in Kenya (Hornsby, 2012), over oil in Sudan (United Nations, 2010), or land and other resources in Bosnia, Pakistan, and India (Wieland, 2006; see also Esses et al., 2001). Materialists such as Thomas Picketty (2014) suggest that the primary driver of intergroup conflict is resource inequality. Following this logic, one expects that land and income inequalities between ethnic groups in Afghanistan will explain a major portion of the variance in factors associated with conflict, such as the psychological importance of ethnic identity over shared identities and support for armed anti-government groups that use violence to achieve their goals. Study 1 (n=28,111) tests this expectation using three public opinion surveys I designed and implemented for the Asia Foundation between 2013-2015, examining the role that inequalities in land ownership, income, and perceived ability to influence the government play in explaining both ethnic identity centrality and sympathy for armed opposition groups.

If resources such as these do play a role, a second research question is whether ethnic identity centrality is associated with conditions of diversity. Horowitz (1985) first proposed the

¹ In the 2013 Survey of the Afghan People data, ethnic identity centrality explains 9.9% of the variance in sympathy for armed opposition groups (r=.099, p<.0001). A significant positive association is also found in 2014 and 2015 national samples, separately.
idea that societies with moderate ethnic heterogeneity have more conflict than homogenous ones, yet other studies find that rapid diversification, such as through sudden exposure between immigrant and host populations studies (Rapp, 2015), predicts intergroup hostility. Do conditions of ethnic diversity play a role in ethnic identity centrality after controlling for resource inequalities? Do they affect sympathy for armed opposition groups? Study 2 (n=28,111) replicates the two models tested in study 1, but adds measures for ethnic heterogeneity (“fracturalization”) by province as an additional explanatory variable.\(^b\)

A third question is whether or not identity needs play a role in ethnic identity centrality, and study 3 (n=125) explores detailed qualitative justifications to the question used in studies 1 and 2. Social identity theorists emphasize psychological resources, specifically group status and esteem (Negy, Shreve, Jensen & Uddin, 2003), as important considerations for understanding intergroup conflict. In recent years, social identity theory has been used to help explain hostility toward immigrants (Pehrson, Brown & Zagefka, 2009), intergroup conflict in Northern Ireland (Livingston & Haslam, 2008) and Israel/Palestine (Roccas, Klar & Liviatan, 2004), collective mobilization that results in genocide (Moshman, 2007) and mob behavior (Stott & Drury, 2012), and patterns in global terrorism (Moghaddam, Warren & Vance-Cheng, 2012). In security studies, social identity theory has been applied to processes of radicalization and recruitment (e.g. Merari, 2010; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2010; Al Raffie, 2013), while in multiculturalism debates, social identity has been used to explain why unassimilated groups sometimes express hostility toward their host country (Moghaddam, 2006, 2008). Identity theories have also been applied to ethnic conflict in particular, such as studies of national conflict and civil war (e.g.\(^b\) The outcome variables remain ethnic identity centrality and sympathy for armed opposition groups.)
Gibson, 2004, 2008). In study 3, I code qualitative responses from 125 interviews with Afghans representing five key regions as they explain why they consider their ethnic identity to be more or less important relative to their national and religious identities.

Taken together, these three studies will present a compelling case for the complexity of ethnic identity centrality, including the role of identity needs and conditions of resource inequality and diversity. In Afghanistan, these studies find that high levels of intergroup competition and low ethnic diversity predict increased sympathy for armed opposition groups engaged in violent conflict as well as the psychological importance of one’s distinct ethnic identity relative to the psychological importance of shared national or religious identities. These dynamics carry important considerations for policymakers who seek to understand conflict or to strengthen a common identity among ethnically diverse populations. In particular, evidence to be presented here lends support to notions that diversity may reduce ethnocentrism and increase the psychological importance of shared identities, and that reducing resource inequalities may reduce ethnocentrism. Further evidence supports the idea that identity needs for esteem and positive distinction are important factors that explain identity centrality, factors that explain not only the centrality of ethnic but also the centrality of national and religious identity. Policymakers and politicians seeking to reduce sectarian identities and build cross-ethnic unity may do well to consider identity needs beyond resource inequalities alone. Political elites seeking to shore up political power often pander to sectarian identity needs. Using the same tactics, peacemakers may seek to build unity across sectarian identities by appealing to the same needs for esteem and distinctiveness using shared identities.
CHAPTER I: ABDUL NOURY AND IDENTITY CENTRALITY

The centrality of ethnic identity in a person’s self-concept is an important topic for research in social psychology. As a phenomenon that varies from person to person, and from group to group, it can help explain why some groups are united and others divided (Gibson, 2008; Bilali, 2012). It may further explain why some groups shift from unity to division, or vice-versa. An illustration of this can be found in the story of Abdul Noury (personal conversation, 2014), an Afghan academic currently living in the United Arab Emirates. When Noury left his family in Kabul to attend graduate school in Belgium during the early 1990s, he says he and his two Afghan roommates felt proud of their Afghan identity despite ethnic differences. Noury is a double-minority as a member of the Shi’a Hazaras, while his housemates were Sunnis, and ethnically Pashtun and Tajik. Each night, he says, they cooked together and talked politics. At the time, the Soviet military had recently withdrawn from Afghanistan, in 1989, in what was considered a victory for the Afghan mujahedin, or “freedom-fighters,” a group that included members from all major ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The mujahedin were engaged in what he and his roommates perceived to be a war of Afghans and Muslims against a militia of non-Muslim outsiders. By 1994, however, he says that camaraderie and unity with his housemates began to dissipate. Instead, they engaged in sectarian debates over ethnic politics.

“Until then, we were Afghans, we had defeated the Russians, we had the feeling that we could do anything,” he recalls. Two years earlier, in 1992, the Communist government of Mohammad Najibullah collapsed, and in the wake of a power vacuum, several ethno-political militant groups emerged. One group, the Taliban, formed in Kandahar city in 1994 from a group of ethnically Pashtun students (Talebs) and hardline Pashtun Sunni religious leaders. By 1996,
the Taliban defeated Hezb-e-Wahdat (The Unity Party), a group of Shia mujahedin led by ethnic Hazaras, among other political rivals, and declared Afghanistan the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.” They instituted Pashto, the language of the Pashtuns, as the official language of government and business. Meanwhile, several groups of Tajik mujahedin converged in the northern regions of Afghanistan to combat the Taliban, forming the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, otherwise known as the Northern Alliance. (The Northern Alliance would later be supported by the United States to overthrow the Taliban government in December, 2001, in the months following the September 11th, 2001, attacks).

“We fought whenever we talked politics,” Noury recalls. During their debates, the Pashtun roommate defended the actions of the Sunni Pashtun Taliban, while the Tajik roommate defended the Tajik-led Northern Alliance, and Noury advocated for Hezb-e-Wahdat, the Hazara-led coalition of Shi’a mujahedin. Noury says that his ethnic consciousness, as a Hazara, was awakened during this period. “I didn’t think about what it means to be Hazara until then.” Despite a sense of national unity in the wake of having defeated a common enemy, Afghanistan’s ethnic groups began to struggle with internal ethnic tensions, and these tensions were particularly tense between Hazaras and Pashtuns; after the defeat of Hezb-e-Wahdat, Hazaras faced many human rights abuses under the new Pashtun-led government.

In a relatively short period of time, Noury says, he self-identified increasingly as a Hazara and decreasingly as an Afghan. The feelings of esteem between Afghan roommates over their shared Afghan identity and recent victory were replaced by feelings of enmity and distrust as each roommate emphasized distinct ethnic allegiances. Those perceived differences were never fully mended, Noury says, and he never moved back to his native Afghanistan. Noury’s
story illustrates not only that identity centrality can change, with real consequences, but also the role of conditions in escalating or deescalating the importance of one identity over another.

A more recent example comes from President Hamid Karzai. When he first assumed national leadership, he suggested that Afghan national identity holds all ethnic groups together. “I think the common Afghan man…see[s] himself first as an Afghan,” he said in the Los Angeles Times (Williams, 2002). “It’s precisely because of the strength of the common Afghan’s identification with it that keeps this country together.” However, a New York Times journalist found a different narrative while interviewing Afghans just a few miles outside of Kabul. “Shiragha, the local tribal tribal chief, said he thought of himself as a Stanekzai first, then as a Pashtun. Being an Afghan is a distant third. ‘We are loyal to our tribe’ he said” (Rohde & Crossette, 2001). In a country where all persons share the same national and religious identity, why would a person consider their ethnic identity more important than a shared identity? Before exploring the conditions that may affect identity centrality, it is necessary to be clear about what identity centrality is and is not.

**Concepts**

The concept of identity centrality in psychology is defined as the degree of importance a person gives to a particular identity in that person’s self-concept (Roccas et al., 2008; Ashmore et al. 2004), either independently or in comparison to other identities in that person’s menu of identities. It represents an important part of the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner & Reynolds, 2011), and refers to the overall organization of the value and emotional significance attached to identities (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).
For Noury, being Afghan was more central to him until his identity as a Hazara became more central.

Importantly, identity centrality should not be imagined as part of a person’s group membership; group membership is based on objective inclusion and requires being recognized by others as belonging (Newcomb, 1952). Instead, identity centrality is part of *group identification*, which is a subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A person’s *social identity* refers to that individual’s “knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership” (Tajfel, 1981: 255). Within the social identity approach, Roccas et al. (2008) differentiates the concept of identity centrality, which he defines as “how much I view the group as part of who I am,” from other modes of identification, including the concepts of identity commitment (“how much I want to benefit the group”), identity superiority (“how much I view my group as superior to other groups”), and identity deference (“how much I submit to the group”). Self-categorization theorists generally distinguish between self-categorization at the collective level, which highlights similarities among group members, and the individual level, which highlights differences between group members. This dissertation is focused on psychological centrality at the collective level, concerning ethnic, national, and religious identities.

Further distinction should be made between *category salience* and *identity centrality*. Category salience refers to the level of cognitive awareness a person has of a particular group membership or social identity they may hold (Hogg & Turner, 1985), while centrality refers to the overall organization of the value and emotional significance attached to identities (Turner,
Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In simple terms, these can be imagined in the form of separate questions:

**Salience:** How aware is the person of a particular social identity?

**Centrality:** Assuming the person is aware, how important is that particular identity to the person’s self-concept, relative to other social identities he or she may have?

Whereas centrality is a part of identification processes, category salience does not require identification. As McGarty (2001) suggests, a person can decide not to identify with an identity category even if it is situationally salient. A police officer who goes to his child’s parent-teacher night wearing his police uniform may be situationally aware of his social identity as a law enforcement officer. This refers to the perceived salience or accessibility of an assigned social identity. However, the police officer may or may not consider this salient identity to be personally important. He may instead think of his identity as a parent to be more important, or perhaps he will consider his religious or national identity to be more important. Identity centrality refers directly to the perceived ordering of a person’s identity and which identities they consider to be important or unimportant, either in a particular situation or on a more global level across different domains of one’s social world. An example of a global centrality is expressed in a statement such as, “I am a Muslim first, no matter where I am, what I am doing, or who I am with.”

In social identity literature, significantly more has been written about identity salience than identity centrality. To understand how these two concepts are distinct but related, it is important to briefly highlight this literature. The conceptual origins of category salience are attributed to Jerome Bruner’s 1957 formula for understanding a person’s “readiness” to adopt a

By comparison, processes of identity centrality are less about categorical awareness and more about intentional subjective perception. The early concept of identity centrality was enriched by Morris Rosenberg (1979), a self-esteem theorist, who advanced the idea that some identities are more central to a person’s self-definition than others. He noted that at any given moment persons vary in the degree to which they perceive a particular social identity as central or peripheral, cardinal or secondary, major or minor to the structure of their self-identity. The self-attributed importance for each identity, he proposed, creates a hierarchy of the self. Turner and colleagues (1987) later proposed that centrality increases both the likelihood of identity salience and the likelihood that a person will follow stereotypical norms that define a particular social identity category. However, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Gibson, 2008; Bilali, 2012) little research has explored the conditions under which identity centrality is more or less likely.

Ethnic identity centrality, the focus of this thesis, refers to the psychological importance placed on a person’s ethnic identity within the menu of cognitively accessible social identities in
any given moment of time. Somer (1997) describes ethnic identity centrality in terms of *ethnification*, the process by which the social, psychological, and political importance of ethnic identities rise relative to other identities. Both identity theory (Higgins, 1996) and self-categorization theory (Tajfel, 1978) assume that when individuals consider a particular identity to be central to their self-concept, there is an increased chance that the central identity activates emotions, thoughts, and behaviors associated with the roles and loyalties of that identity’s group. Dick, Wagner, Stellmacher and Christ (2005) refer to this as a particular identity’s *activation potential*. Importantly, this thesis makes no contribution to an understanding of activation potential, nor to questions of why and when groups collectively mobilize. Instead, this thesis seeks only to understand the conditions under which ethnic identity centrality is increased or decreased.

**Conditions for Ethnic Identity Centrality**

*Me against my brother, my brother and I against our family, our family against our tribe, our tribe against other tribes, all the tribes against Somalia, and Somalia and Somalis against the world.* – Somali proverb (Peterson, 2001)

Part of the challenge – and relevance – of studying social identity is that identity is fluid, both objectively and subjectively. It is fluid not only in terms of how a group identity is defined by others, but also in terms of the psychological importance placed on one identity over another in any given moment or circumstance by each person. As Turner and Oakes (1986) illustrate:

When does a black British woman feel strongly ‘British’, as opposed to ‘black’ or ‘female’, or perhaps ‘a Londoner’ or ‘a student’? Under what conditions will each of these identities predominate in others’ perceptions of that person? When an English Catholic meets an Irish Catholic, what determines whether they interact on the basis of their shared religion, their different nationalities, or
indeed their individual personalities with no important reference to religion or nationality? (325)

One answer to Turner and Oakes’ questions are the conditions and contexts of political competition (or cooperation), resource inequality, and diversity.

In the story of Abdul Noury, the context was a historical shift from the presence of a common enemy to a power vacuum after that enemy withdrew, creating conditions of intense sectarian political competition. The context of political competition is highlighted in several other recent studies. For example, in a study of 10 African countries, Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2010) found that exposure to political competition strongly predicts ethnic identity centrality. For each month closer to a competitive presidential election, survey respondents were 1.8 percentage points more likely to identify themselves using their ethnic identity. This finding squares with other studies that link ethnic conflict with conditions of political competition, including weak democratic institutions (Fraenkel & Grofman, 2004; Saideman, 2002), power vacuums and a lack of state capacity (Fearon & Laiten, 2003), and structural changes that generate uncertainty and fear (Blagojevic, 2009).

If political competition is a condition for increased ethnic or sectarian identity centrality, conditions of cooperation are expected to reduce identity centrality. For example, Noury’s camaraderie with his countrymen was strongest when they shared an imminent common enemy, the Soviet regime. This comports with early materialist theories of intergroup conflict. Muzaffer Sherif (1966), building from theories first proposed by Gordon Allport (1954) (see Pettigrew, 1998), proposed that intergroup conflict can be reduced through superordinate goals, or goals so large that they require more than one group to achieve. In cases where intergroup cooperation,
rather than competition, is needed to acquire a resource, this materialist tradition holds that superordinate identities are emphasized.

Cooperation across ethnic lines may be over resources or political power, such as for political independence and self-determination against an outside force. In Sri Lanka and India, for example, this cooperation formed in response to the British Raj, while in Afghanistan, diverse and distinct ethnic groups cooperated during the mujahedin “Holy War” against the Russians. These struggles appear to reflect the mantra, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” a theme found across cultures (Harré & Moghaddam, 2014). In each case, distinct groups set aside their differences and emphasize their common identity, such as Muslims or Indians, while pursuing a common resource goal. When the outside threat is defeated or withdraws, sectarian and ethno-political factionalism tends to emerge.

Resource inequality is another major consideration for explaining identity centrality shifts, and these tend to appear in conjunction with conditions of political competition. Resources commonly studied in ethno-political conflicts include income (e.g. Sumich, 2010) and land (e.g. Yiftachel, 2006). Materialist considerations are emphasized in a variety of theories, chiefly Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Jackson, 1993), but also modern resource mobilization theory (Tilly & Tarrow, 2006) and relative deprivation theory (Saleh, 2013; Dambrun et al., 2006; Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2007). Group identification, under these approaches, is primarily

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\(^{c}\) Materialist theories address the role of elites in mobilizing social identities, particularly in sociology (e.g. Yue, 2015). While these are outside the scope of my research questions here, it is worth mentioning the theory of political opportunity structure (Kitschelt, 1986). In this theory, conflict is proposed to arise from opportunism created by political opportunities from the splintering of elites, as well as conditions of diversity, resources for mobilization, and feelings of political disenfranchisement. Political elites may play a role by appealing to sectarian identity needs as means of collective mobilization.
understood as a strategic tool for obtaining access to, or control of, limited resources. Resource mobilization theory stresses entrepreneurism on the part of leaders, as well as resource accumulation and collective action on the part of the followers, while relative deprivation theory stresses perceptions of entitlement to resources, relative to other groups. For both, intergroup distinctness is based on assumptions of competition, such as competition for land (e.g. Darfur, Kashmir), competition for symbolic resources (e.g. winning a sports competition, controlling a holy site), and competition for jobs or economic resources (e.g. oil profits in South Sudan, diamonds in the Congo). In turn, these may increase the salience and centrality of one identity over another. When groups are in conflict over limited resources or status, for example, ingroup bias and outgroup derogation may increase together (Saleh, 2013).

One illustration of the role that material inequalities may play is seen in Sudan, where ethnic tensions between black African farmers and mixed/Arab pastoralists became pronounced under conditions of scarcity. “To outsiders, the conflict is seen as tribal warfare,” Hoaglong (2005) writes. “At its roots, though, it is a struggle over controlling an environment that can no longer support all the people who must live on it.” The United Nations (2010) documented major demographic and agricultural stressors considered to contribute to ethnic conflict. The population of Darfur has grown almost six-fold over four decades, and over 50% of Darfur residents are under age 16 today. Darfur’s crop cultivation depends primarily on rain-fed irrigation, yet 20 of the 25 driest years on record have occurred in the past 25 years. Population pressures have contributed to over-cultivation of land and aggressive practices in agriculture (i.e., failure to rotate crops in pursuit of short-term goals that results in the destruction of land). In the five provinces of Darfur where ethnic conflict is centered, urbanization has resulted in a
mass movement to al Fasher, el Geneina, and Nyala (capital of South Darfur), areas that are arid, dry, and resource-starved. A satellite view of Sudan reveals that areas of conflict are centered along the threshold between the arid north and the comparatively greener south where vegetation is retreating [Figure 1].

Haaland (1969, 1978, 1991) suggests that resource pressures in Sudan may have motivated not only ethnic divisions, but more surprisingly, acts of tribe switching. Haaland documented a number of ethnic Fur in the city of Darfur who not only de-emphasized the importance of their ethnic identities as Fur, but actively changed their primary spoken language in the home from native Fur to Arabic, some newly self-identifying as members of the dominant Central Sudanese Arab elite. This ‘tribe switching’ secured for these families, Haaland suggests, new access to schools and other resources that were more available to Arabs than to Fur, and also their increased comparative social status relative to the low-status Fur.

Yet another condition that may explain social identity shifts and ethnic conflict is the degree of diversity or homogeneity in a group. When Donald Horowitz (1985) first proposed a relationship between proportional group size, political competition, and propensity for conflict, he defined ethnicity as an embodiment of emotional intensity that can be aroused when the group’s material or political interests are at stake, consistent with materialist assumptions. Horowitz argued that moderately plural, but not highly plural or highly homogenous, societies are most at risk for violence. Horowitz reasoned that super-minority groups gain more access more resources (power and otherwise) by integrating with the majority group, whereas sizeable minority groups can maintain their distinctness while still competing for resources politically. This explanation is now outdated as too simplistic. While the majority of recent studies have
found a positive relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and ethnic violence (e.g. Mishali-Ram, 2006; Blimes, 2006; Cederman et al., 2010; Wimmer et al., 2009; Elbadawi & Sambanis, 2001, 2002), a few rigorous studies have found no relationship, such as Collier and Hoeffler (2001) and Fearon and Laiten (2003). In their study of civil war predictors in more than 100 countries, Fearon and Laiten found no statistical association between ethnic diversity and civil war after controlling for individual differences in income.

However, conditions and contexts are only a partial answer to Turner and Oakes’ questions about identity priorities in the illustration above. Context interacts with subjective psychological needs in terms of meaning, esteem, and value assignments, as well as historical narratives. Social identity theory’s core assumption that group memberships in which people belong, such as ethnicity, function as an important source of pride and self-esteem. Needs for esteem and a sense of having a positive and distinct social identity are also considered to play a role in defining the psychological importance of one particular identity over another. When conditions challenge the positive perceptions of the group identity, individuals may experience a sense of threat that can lead to negative emotional responses. In conditions where group boundaries are impermeable, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed, individuals may collectively mobilize along the basis of that identity, whereas in conditions of permeability, a person may distance themselves from the threatened identity, such as by emphasizing other positive identities to achieve esteem, or seeking to change their social identity through strategies of social mobility.

In order to understand how these conditions and identity needs interact with ethnic identity centrality, a case study of Afghanistan is used, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Afghanistan is selected as the case study because it contains two key characteristics
for a meaningful contribution to research on social identity and ethnic identity centrality. These characteristics are, first, the presence of an ongoing ethnic conflict, where anti-government militias are organized along ethnic lines, and second, it is a non-Western social environment. Most studies on social identity have been conducted in Western contexts and cultures, and it remains unclear whether the findings that emerge in a Western context will hold true in a non-Western context. Focusing on a non-Western context thus improves the chance that results contribute original knowledge to existing theory, either in support or contradiction.

This thesis is organized into several sections that build upon each other. Chapter 2 reviews the historical context of Afghanistan, providing the background necessary for understanding the significance of findings in studies 1 and 2, particularly around conditions of resource inequality and ethnic diversity. Chapter 3 presents study 1, which tests whether resource inequality predicts ethnic identity centrality, and chapter 4 presents study 2, which tests the impact of ethnic heterogeneity on both ethnic identity centrality and sympathy for violent insurgent groups. Chapter 5 (study 3) then explores the subjective psychological dynamics involved in why a person would choose to highlight one identity over another, particularly identity needs, by presenting qualitative evidence from 125 interviews. Finally, chapter 6 discusses future directions for identity centrality research, including directions for its conceptualization and integration with other identity research.
CHAPTER II: THE CONTEXT

Accounts of Afghanistan’s social history (e.g. Vogelsang, 2008; Barfield, 2010; Allen, 2003) describe a long history of conflict in Afghanistan over resources, particularly over land, but divided along ethnic and to a lesser extent sectarian religious lines. Rival ethnic groups, as well as sub-clans within Pashtuns in particular (e.g. Durrani-lineage vs. Ghilzai-lineage clans), have historically competed with each other for both land and political influence. The ruling elites, including the lineage of kings over several centuries, are predominantly Pashtun. Today, a slight majority of the country is constituted by minority ethnic groups, including Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and more than ten other ethnic groups [Figure 7]. Ethnicity is related to many sensitive issues that act as impediments to democracy in post-Taliban Afghanistan. These issues include the challenge of developing an inclusive national identity, the challenge of clarifying the relative size of each ethnic group via a census, the equal distribution of power among the distinct communities, and the re-establishment of political authority that is perceived by a plurality of the population as legitimate. To understand the centrality of ethnic identity as it relates to these issues, this chapter will review in detail the historical background of the country, including the formation of the state, key power dynamics between major ethnic groups, ethno-political dimensions in language and voter behavior, and the intersection of religious identity with ethnicity.

General Background

Afghanistan is a mountainous and landlocked country located in south-central Asia, with a land mass is slightly smaller than Texas, at roughly 647,500 square kilometers. Afghanistan’s capital city is Kabul, its citizens are called “Afghan,” and the currency is the Afghani. It borders
Pakistan in the south and east, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. Fletcher (1982) describes it as a crossroad for empires, nations, languages, and cultures, as well as a “highway of conquest” given a long history of invasions from foreign powers dating back to the Aryan invasions 6,000 years ago. Its position also made it a key route for traders, a part of the “silk road” bridging the areas of Iran and the Arabian Sea, on one side, and India and Central Asia, on the other.

**Statehood**

According to anthropologist Nazif Shahrani (2002), the emergence of an independent Afghan state can be traced to the start of Ahmad Shah Abdali’s rule in 1722. The death of Nadir Shah Afshar, the last king of the Turkic Afshar tribe, provided the opportunity for his most trusted Pashtun commander, Ahmad Khan Abdali or Durrani, to create an independent government in Kandahar in 1747. Shahrani (1986) argues that this emergence of Afghanistan as a separate political entity in the mid-18th century was defined by the rise of national Pashtun tribal power. “Pashtun dominance over the other ethnic communities” he boldly claims, “forms the very substance of political developments and state building in Afghanistan” (25). Several authors (e.g. Shahrani, 1990, 2002; Saikal, 2006; Noelle, 2012) note that Pashtuns during the Durrani Empire were exempt from paying taxes, while other ethnic groups were levied heavy taxes. Ethnic stratification became even more intense during the reign of Abdurrahman Khan (1880-1901), who strengthened tribal and ethno-linguistic stratification as a means of exercising political power (Shahrani, 2002).

Noelle (2012) documents long tradition of Pashtun rulers who have bolstered their political power and state control of disperse territories by distributing government land among
largely Pashtun patronage networks. Sharan (2013) describes these patronage networks as “manipulating Afghanistan’s identity-based divisions, particularly along ethnic lines, in order to mobilise support and maintain legitimacy” (29), and attributes the country’s ethnic conflict as a consequence of “inter-factional and inter-elite competition” (Sharan, 2011: 297). Noelle (2012) identifies four types of patronage networks that emerge during the reign of Dost Muhammad Khan and were practiced until the mid-20th century. These were: (1) tankhayi wilayat (provincial allowance), which was given to sardars or provincial governors, (2) jagir (service grants), assigned to khans (local powerbrokers often within the monarchy’s extended family), (3) allowance called malikana given to village herdsmen, and (4) an allotment of grants and cash known as wazifa set aside for mullahs and religious elites. The largest of these allowances, in terms of absolute value, was the provincial allowance, followed by the jagir (see p. 220-222). These patronages not only incentivized Pashtuns to live in non-Pashtun regions as part of the central government power network, but also empowered them financially to maintain state control as members of the ruling class.

**Constitution**

Formally the country is called the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and is based on a constitution that dictates a balance of executive, legislative, and judicial powers. The constitution was formalized in January 2004, following a 2003 Constitutional Loya Jirga (grand assembly) that included 500 delegates from all districts and all major ethnic groups in the country. Despite ultimately coming to consensus and ratifying the constitution, the

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\[d\] Most delegates were elected, with the exception of 50 delegates that Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun of Durrani lineage, hand-picked.
constitutional process nearly collapsed on January 1, 2004, when the non-Pashtun delegates, consisting of Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmens and others, boycotted the only ballot.

**Language**

Language plays a critical role in ethnic politics and the politicization of ethnicity. The most commonly spoken languages are Dari (79%), Pashto (50%), Uzbeki (11%), and English (5%), and the official national languages are Dari and Pashto [Figure 10]. Pashto is the primary language spoken by Pashtuns, while minority ethnic groups tend to speak Dari as a shared language in addition to their own languages (Uzbek, Tajik, Hazragi, Turkmen, and so on). Under King Amanullah Khan in the early 20th century, Dari was the official language of the government, even though the ruling family was Pashtun. According to Soraya, one of the king’s granddaughters (personal conversation, July, 2015), she learned to speak Dari in the home and never learned Pashto, despite being ethnically Pashtun. When Nadir Shah assumed the throne in a political coup, however, he promoted use of the Pashto language in both government and education, even in areas of the country where Dari or other languages were predominant, such in Hazarajat (Emadi, 1997). The Soviet-backed government used primarily Dari in official government communications, while the Taliban movement changed the official language of government business back to Pashto. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the new government re-established Dari as the language of official government correspondence. Efforts to nationalize both languages face challenges, as most Afghans are illiterate in both languages and most Afghans have no formal education whatsoever (Warren & Hopkins, 2015).
Religious Identity

An Islamic state, Afghanistan’s population is overwhelmingly Muslim, with estimates over 99% (United States Department of State, 2009). A majority of Afghans are Sunni. Most of the minority Shi’a are ethnic Hazaras, while most Pashtuns and Uzbeks are Sunnis, and Tajiks are primarily Sunni but more mixed than Pashtuns. Other ethnic groups, including Arabs and Nooristanis, tend to be Sunni. Among Sunnis and Shias there are a variety of sub-sects, such as Deobandi or Barelvi among Sunni Afghans, and among Shi’a Afghans, Ismailis or Twelvers. Both religious and ethnic identities intersect with interpretations of Afghan law.

In recent decades, and particularly since the rise of the Islamic mujahedin against the Soviets in the 1980s, Afghanistan’s Islamic identity has coincided with a shift toward conservative interpretations of Islam with intolerance toward other groups. These were most clearly expressed by the rules of the Taliban, but remain salient today. For example, the Mass Media Law of Afghanistan, passed in 2006 and amended in September, 2008, prohibits publicizing and promoting all religions other than Islam. Specifically, Article 45 prohibits production, reproduction, printing, and publishing of the following materials: works and materials contrary to the principles of Islam; works and materials offensive to other religions and sects; works and materials humiliating or offensive to real or legal persons;...[and] publicizing and dissemination (promotion) of religions other than Islam.”

The Afghan constitution guarantees that its citizens are “free to exercise their faith” but also declares Islam the “religion of the state” and requires that “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam” (2004). In situations where the constitution and penal code are silent, including apostasy and blasphemy, courts rely on local
interpretations of Islamic law, which are often defined by tribal customs and the interpretations of local elites. Despite emphasis on strict Islamic interpretations and the formalization of Afghanistan’s Islamic identity, the majority of ordinary Afghans are illiterate in Arabic, the language of the Qur’an. As of 2015, roughly 57% nationwide have no formal government schooling, while 46% have at least one year of Islamic madrasa education (Warren & Hopkins, 2015). Madrasa curriculum in Pakistan and Afghanistan tend to teach rote memorization of the Qur’an without skills for interpretation (see Fair, 2008; Rana, 2009; Rahman, 2004).

Over the past decade, extremist Islamic ideology has gradually gained social currency in public discourse and political life. For example, whereas many Afghans visited Sufi shrines in the past, many Sufi shrines have been recently destroyed, particularly shrines in Sunni Pashtun areas. Examples include the famous poet Rehman Baba’s mausoleum, destroyed on March 5, 2009, as well as lesser shrines for Hazrat Rehman Baba, Abdul Shakoor Malang Baba, Hazrat Abu Saeed Baba, Mian Umer Baba and Malang Baba on the Pakistan side of the contentious border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both Sunni and Shia clerics are known to have played a role in protests over perceived threats to Islam, whether films and cartoons insulting the prophet Muhammad, Qur’an burnings, or news of Muslims converting to Christianity.

At the same time, sectarian violence by Sunnis against Shias, particularly against Hazaras who are trained and educated in Iran, continues to be deadly. The list of sectarian bomb attacks on Shia processions, gatherings, and communities is too extensive to itemize here. Importantly, some sects within the Shia are persecuted more than others. Simon Biney, a French aid worker living in Bamiyan province for five years, reports having seen entire villages of Ismaili Shias, a liberal Muslim minority sect, abandoned. Most have fled to other countries, such as Canada,
Iran, and Pakistan. “[Sunni and Shia Muslims] don’t even see [Ismaili Shia Muslims] as a ‘people of the book,’” he said in personal conversation (November, 2012). ‘People of the book’ refers to the honorific ‘Ahl al-Kitāb, an Islamic term used to designate non-Muslim adherents to faiths which have a revealed scripture.

Non-Muslim minorities have largely left the country since the 1980s. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2010), before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan there were reportedly 64 gurdwaras (Sikh places of worship), 23 Hindu mandirs (temples), at least one formal Christian church and Baha’i temple, and four Jewish synagogues. Today, only 13 gurdwaras and 5 Hindu temples remain after attacks, looting, and abandonment. Baha’i and Christian gatherings have been forced to meet in secret, usually in private homes. In March, 2010, the Afghan government revoked the lease for the only Protestant church in the country. Small Hindu and Sikh populations, although allowed to practice publicly, continue to encounter problems obtaining land for cremation, face discrimination when seeking government jobs, and face harassment during major celebrations. Baha’is and Christians do not publicly state their beliefs or gather openly to worship, out of fear of discrimination, persecution, detention, or death (USCIRF, 2010). In two cases that gained international media attention, Abdul Rahman and Sayed Musa were accused of apostasy and sentenced to death by hanging after converting from Islam to Christianity. Both escaped their death sentences through international pressure, and their families sought asylum in other countries.
**Afghanistan’s Ethnic Groups**

Despite no census data since 1979, a 2001 estimate puts the Pashtun population at 42% of the total population of Afghanistan, compared to 27% Tajik, 9% Hazara, 9% Uzbek, 4% Aimaqs, 3% Turkmen, 2% Baluch, and a remaining 4% distributed among smaller groups such as the Arabs, Kyrgyz, and Qezelbash (Library of Congress, 2001). A more reliable and recent estimate comes from the Survey of the Afghan People, based on 10 national random samples (n=72,261). Here again, Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group, constituting roughly 40% of the Afghan population, followed by Tajiks (34%), Hazaras (10%), Uzbeks (9%), Turkmen (2%), Arab (1%), Baloch (1%), Aimaq (1%), and a mixture of ten other ethnic groups each constituting less than 1% of the remaining population nationwide (Nooristanis, Peshayes, Sadat, Qezelbash, Kyrgyz, and Gujar) (Warren, 2014). The Survey of the Afghan People estimate puts the Aimaq population at significantly less than reported by the U.S. Library of Congress estimate, and is based on self-report. When asked to define their ethnic identity, in some cases minority ethnic groups such as Aimaqs and Sadats self-classify as Tajik, a larger and more powerful minority group, while among Pashtuns, tribal sects often sub-differentiate as Popalzais, Kharotis, Safis, Sahaks, and so on (for illustrations, see Chapter 5).

In many cases, identity differentiation appears associated with both power and pride, but also sometimes with historical legacy. For example, Tajik Afghans living in Panjshir province sometimes self-identify as Panjshiris rather than Tajiks, or are identified using a dual-terminology as “Panjshiri-Tajiks,” highlighting their specialness among Tajiks. The area of Panjshir is famous for its military commanders, including the late Ahmad Shah Massoud, and its role in fighting the Taliban regime with the Northern Alliance. When Pashtuns sub-differentiate,
they rarely highlight their province. A Pashtun in Zabul, for example, does not self-identify as “Zabuli Pashtun,” but rather by his or her tribal family name. These tribal names typically include members who reside across multiple provinces. Meanwhile, Uzbeks and Hazaras are fairly united. Uzbeks are more concentrated in the northern provinces of Jawzjan and Faryab, while Hazaras are concentrated in Bamyan and Daykundi, but spread over a wider area of the country.

Ethnic identity is also written into the names of many places, including village, district, provincial, and national names. For example, village and district names are often either Pashto, the language spoken by Pashtuns and formalized in the government by the Taliban, while others are Dari, a language shared by most of the minority groups. In multiple interviews with Hazara elders living in Dast-e-Barchi, Kabul (personal conversations, 2013), Uruzgan province is described as historically Hazara, whereas today it is estimated to be predominantly Pashtun (97%), with only 2% of residents self-identifying as Hazara (Warren & Hopkins, 2015). Nooristan province, meanwhile, is named after the Nooristani ethnic group who live there (the term “noor,” meaning light, refers to the caucasian appearance of their skin and often colorful eyes).

The term Afghan historically refers to Pashtuns, dating back at least to Babur the Great (Barfield, 2010). “Stan” means place or land: Uzbekistan literally means land of the Uzbeks, Tajikistan means land of the Tajiks, and Turkmenistan means land of the Turkmens. Pakistan means land of the clean (pak or poc), and refers to its identity as an Islamic country. Despite Afghanistan’s modern ethnic diversity in most of its provinces, these geographic names are still sometimes used to express prejudice. For example, a widely circulated phrase during the Taliban
era, according to Zabriskie (2008), was “Tajiks to Tajikistan, Uzbeks to Uzbekistan, and Hazaras to Goristan [the graveyard].” In order to understand ethnic tensions, it is important to briefly review the three largest groups –Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Hazaras – in more detail.

Within Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, the northern provinces are more ethnically diverse than the southern provinces [Figure 2], with the exception of Panjshir (Panjshiris are a sect of Tajiks empowered after the overthrow of the Taliban), Nooristan (populated by ethnic Nooristanis), and the Hazara centers of Daikundi and Bamyan. In general terms, Pashtuns tend to be concentrated in the South West and South East regions, while Tajiks are in the North East and North West, while Hazaras are in central Afghanistan and Uzbeks are predominant in provinces next to Uzbekistan in the north [Figures 3-6].

**Current Ethnic Politics**

Today, ethnic competition for political power continues to threaten the state. During the 2014 presidential elections, ethnic alliances threatened to divide the country as non-Pashtun groups, particularly Hazaras and Tajiks, questioned the legitimacy of the election process, which favored Pashtun and Uzbek candidates. According to U.S. State Department officials (personal conversation, 2014), northern Tajik militias led by powerful strongmen in the north, particularly Noor Mohammad Atta, threatened to form a separate northern government should the Tajik candidate for president Abdullah Abdullah not be elected. United States Secretary of State John Kerry, in coordination with international partners, intervened and helped broker what became referred to as the “National Unity Government.” In this current arrangement, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, a Pashtun of Ghilzai lineage, is President, while Abdullah Abdullah is the Chief
Executive Officer, a position similar to Prime Minister. Because the position of CEO lacks any basis in the Afghan constitution, it was declared by executive decree of the President and formally subject to review by a Loya Jirga after two years. Informally, it remains unclear whether there is political will to convene a Loya Jirga, given tense ethnopolitical sensitivities around the power sharing arrangement.

Voting is largely organized by ethnic blocks rather than by specific campaign issues, such that the backing of a particular leader tends to result in block voting behavior for whichever ethnic group that leader represents. An illustration of this voting is pictured in Figures 9 and 11, for the 2014 presidential elections. In these elections, Pashtuns and Uzbeks overwhelmingly voted for the Pashtun-Uzbek ticket consisting of Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (Pashtun) and General Rashid Dostum (Uzbek). Hazaras and Tajiks, meanwhile, voted for the Tajik-Hazara ticket consisting of Abdullah Abdullah (Tajik) and Karim Halili (Hazara). Sharan (2013) observed the same pattern in the 2009 presidential election, and suggests that ethnic identity is a sub-text to the symbolic order of Afghan politics. In the 2009 election, Sharan observed, Pashtuns tended to vote for the Pashtun presidential candidate (Hamid Karzai), while Tajiks voted for the Tajik candidate (Abdullah Abdullah), and Hazaras voted for the Hazara candidate (Bashardost). He describes ethnic identity as a “card” that politicians play to strategically appeal to sectarian interests. He describes this strategy in terms of two components: (1) the selection of candidates from key ethnic groups, and (2) the strategic use of identity markers in speech and dress. For the first, Sharan cites a 2009 interview he had with Dr. Ali Cheraq, Abdullah’s second vice-president on his campaign ticket:

I was personally chosen to represent the Shia people [Hazaras are largely
...some candidates definitely used ethnicity, religion and old historical hostilities as a tool and abuse it. For instance, Abdullah in many places reminded people that his mother is Tajik and that he is a Jihadi and a close friend of [the late Tajik commander Ahmad Shah] Massoud... (140).

Here Cheraq appears to highlight Abdullah’s expectations of ethnic voting, and his ability to “play the Tajik card,” despite his biological identity as half-Pashtun, half-Tajik. For the second component, Sharan cites an illustration from multi-ethnic Kabul city, where he observed several campaign posters for Hamid Karzai featuring strategic variations in style of turban.

Hats and turbans were the two main ethnic symbols which were easily exploited. For instance, Karzai’s pictures in Dasht-e-Barchi area (predominantly Hazara) with a Hazaragi turban, in Khairkhana area (mostly Tajik) were with Karakul, the hat that he wears most often, and in the Karte Naw area (Predominantly Pashtun) were with a Pashtun turban. Similarly, Abdullah wore a Pakol hat to appeal to his ethnic-Tajik supporters, a Pashtun Turban to appeal to Pashtuns and no hat or Turban to appeal to the wider public. However, despite this superficial playing of the national card, the candidates primarily gained support from their ethno-regional basis. (140)

While these are recent examples, the role of kinship, tribe, and ethnicity in organizing loyalties, maintaining power, and competing for resources has a long history in Afghanistan. For example, despite strong egalitarian and individualistic values among Ghilzai Pashtun tribes (see Barfield, 2010), Afghan leaders traditionally patronize members of their family, tribe, and ethnic group more than others. After ascending to the throne of Afghanistan in 1929, King Nadir Shah's government was primarily administered by his three brothers and more broadly by members of the Musahiban tribe of the Pashtuns, his lineage. Similarly, after the 1978-1979 communist revolution and until his departure in 1987, President Babrak Karmal governed through a family group that included his mistress, his half-brother, his son-in-law, several cousins, and other extended-family members. More recently, President Karzai placed family and
tribe members in important positions of government, and President Ghani has appointed a disproportionate number of Ghilzai Pashtuns (his lineage) compared to other groups into senior government positions (Sharan, 2013). At the regional and local levels of government, kinship and tribe is just as relevant, if not more so (see “Complex Environments,” 2012).

Kin and family ties are intimately tied not only to maintaining power, but also to survival and protection from threats more generally. A variation of the Bedouin saying, "Me and my brothers against my cousins, me and my cousins against the world” appears in the Pashto proverb, “May you not be without a son against a brother, or without a brother against an enemy” (Tair & Edwards, 2006: 337). This proverb reveals two aspects of Afghan identity: first, that family is a source of protection from those outside the family, and second, that a son is protection against threats from within the family. The reason threats come from within the family is due to internal competition for resources: a person may be wished dead by his brother’s family, who may want his property, if he does not have a son or sons to protect him (Barth, 1973).

Power Distribution Between Afghan Ethnic Groups

Today, some evidence suggests that Afghanistan may fall back into civil war along tribal and ethnic lines, this time between a Tajik-led Northern Alliance and Pashtuns, as rival ethnic leaders compete for access to political power. In the 2014 presidential election, Atta Mohammad Nur, a billionaire and former commander of the Northern Alliance, organized an independent government and threatened northern secession should the Pashtun candidate, Ashraf Ghani, win the democratic presidential election over Tajik candidate Abdullah Abdullah. The Tajiks
maintain powerful positions in police, army, and intelligence branches of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior. The threat of civil war was deemed serious enough that U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, intervened to broker a power sharing agreement. This agreement resulted in what is now referred to as the National Unity Government: Afghanistan’s president is Ashraf Ghani, while the Northern Alliance-affiliated Abdullah Abdullah is CEO.

The current government continues to reveal patronage politics along ethnic lines, however, that reveals a fragile and fractured state. In unpublished correspondence, Sharan (2015) conducted an analysis of the administrative appointments of the President’s Office of Administrative Affairs (OAA), as well as the CEO’s office, during the first few months of power. What he found was Ghani nominated a disproportionate number of Pashtun technocrats [Figure 12]:

[Among Ghani’s OAA staff] 75 percent (or 21 appointees) are Pashtun against 14 percent (or four appointees) Tajik. His list of advisors, are also mostly people of eastern Pashtun origin: 69 percent (or 22 appointees) Pashtun against 19 percent (or six appointees) Tajik. The ethnic-Hazara and Uzbeks are less than 3 per cent.

In particular, Ghani favored a disproportionate number from the Ghilzai clan (Ghani’s lineage), who are primarily from eastern regions of the country. In the process, he alienated not only minorities but also Durrani Pashtuns, who are the most common rulers and who include former President Hamid Karzai (see Barfield, 2010, for a review of the competition between Ghilzai Pashtuns and Durrani Pashtuns). The CEO, Abdullah Abdullah, meanwhile, appears to have appointed primarily Tajik and Hazara staff [Figure 13], in keeping with his ethnic patronage networks.
Despite a rubric of unity in the namesake of the new government, these ethnopolitical patronage networks reveal a weak Afghan state precariously balanced on a set of fractured identities competing for limited political space. They further emphasize an urgent need to understand the conditions that lead to ethnic identity centrality and to national violence, including violence against the central government. Chapters 3 and 4 will address two of these conditions, resource inequalities and ethnic diversity.
CHAPTER III: STUDY 1

As foreign troops withdraw and international aid and military spending in Afghanistan draws down, the country now faces an environment of heightened uncertainty over the economic, political, and security changes ahead (Warren & Hopkins, 2015). What is of further concern is that the psychological centrality of ethnic identity appears to have increased [Figure 14] and the importance of shared identities has decreased. Based on data from the 2013 and 2015 Survey of the Afghan People, Afghans across ethnic groups, particularly in northern provinces such as Balkh and Kunduz, and southern provinces such as Khost and Paktika, increasingly cite the importance of their ethnic identity, rather than their national or religious identities.

A key imperative for policymakers engaged in countries with ethnic conflict is to understand the conditions that make ethnic conflict more likely, and ultimately to mitigate or avoid those conditions. One approach is to study individual political elites involved in mobilizing or rallying ethnic groups, particularly the internal and external factors that make these individuals successful or unsuccessful. This approach is consistent with elite mobilization theory and is popular in political science, but also sociology and anthropology (see Yue, 2015, for a review of literature). Using this approach one may study Afghan ethnic conflict in terms of the factors enabling or constricting the power of ethno-regional leaders such as General Dostum (Uzbek), Atta Mohammad Noor (Tajik), Haji Zahir Qadir (Pashtun), and Mohaqeq Mohaqeq (Hazara), who appeal to constituents on the basis of ethnic identity as a means to form coalitions and achieve sectarian political gains.
A different approach, used here, is to examine macro-level intergroup demographic factors that make the importance of ethnic identity more likely. Specifically, do conditions of resource and power inequalities between ethnic groups at the regional or national levels predict increased ethnic identity centrality? Second, does ethnic diversity increase the psychological importance placed on having a distinct ethnic identity, or does it decrease it? Study 1 will address the first question, while study 2 (Chapter 4) will address the second question.

Understanding the conditions of ethnic identity centrality may carry important implications for the policy question of how to create conditions for common identity in the presence of simultaneous disparate identities. As noted earlier, analysis of areas with ethnic conflict often links many conflicts with intergroup competition for resources or power, such as over land between pastoralists and farmers in Kenya (Hornsby, 2012), over oil in Sudan (United Nations, 2010), or land and other resources in Bosnia, Pakistan, and India (Wieland, 2006; Esses et al., 2001). In Afghanistan, a number of international assessments have found significant conflict over land use and land rights issues [Table 6]. Materialists such as Thomas Picketty (2014) argue that resource inequality is not just a component driver, but rather the primary driver of intergroup conflict. Following this logic, one expects that land and income inequalities between ethnic groups in Afghanistan will explain a major portion of the variance in factors associated with conflict, including support for armed anti-government groups (AOGs) that use violence to achieve their goals. Because ethnic identity salience appears to predict support for AOGs, one wonders if ethnic identity salience provides additional explanatory power beyond indicators for resource inequality.
Study 1 will test two core assumptions. The first assumption is that ethnic identity centrality is relevant to intergroup conflict because it is associated with support for violence. If ethnic identity centrality is related to violence, then it carries appeal as a research topic to understand violence, with the ultimate goal of reducing violence. The second assumption is that demographic and situational factors, such as the gender of the respondent or the ethnicity of the interviewer who asks questions about the respondent’s social identity, are meaningful controls. Models tested will include both situational and demographic controls.

Methods

Participants

Participants are from three national samples of the annual Survey of the Afghan People (2013, 2014, 2015), conducted each June. A total of 28,111 Afghans (49.4% female and 50.6% male) were interviewed by same-sex Afghan researchers using face-to-face interviews in 34 provinces, with a respondent age range of 18-96 (Mean=34.8 years, SD=12.5). The sample includes 39.2% Pashtuns, 34.6% Tajiks, 10.5% Hazaras, 8.2% Uzbeks, 2.2% Turkmens, 1.6% Baloch, 1.3% Arab, 0.6% Nooristani, 0.6% Aimak, 0.6% Sadat, 0.5% Peshaye, 0.1% Qezelbash, less than 0.1% Gujar or other minority groups.

Procedure

Three national surveys were conducted in Afghanistan between 2013-2015 by 1,421 trained same-sex Afghan researchers, covering 395 districts in 34 provinces. All interviewers were residents of the provinces where they conducted research, and interviews were conducted

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*c Interviews were conducted by ACSOR-Surveys for The Asia Foundation’s Survey of the Afghan People.
orally and face-to-face. For quality control, third-party monitors directly observed and back-checked survey fieldwork. Prior to fieldwork, all questions were translated from English to Dari and Pashto, backtranslated to check validity, then were piloted in a sample of Afghans in Kabul prior to nationwide fieldwork. Respondents were selected using a random household selection in randomly assigned sampling points. Household selection was determined using the Kish grid method. Random selection of sampling points was used for secure, semi-secure, and accessible areas, while in highly insecure and inaccessible areas, a technique called “intercept interviews” was used. Respondents identified by random selection represent 92.4% of the sample, and the remaining 7.6% were intercept interviewees.

Respondents were asked to participate in a 40-minute public opinion poll on a wide range of topics, ranging from security to women’s issues. Respondents were asked the following key question to measure identity centrality: “Which of the following three options do you identify with most at the moment: (1) Being a citizen of your country, (2) being a member of your ethnic group, or (3) being a follower of your religion?” Respondents were then asked to list a second choice, creating a rank order of each identity in terms of self-definition. Ethnic identity centrality (EIC), is calculated as a variable with three levels representing the importance placed on ethnic identity (0=not mentioned; 1= second choice; 2=first choice). Response options include two common and general identities (Afghan, Muslim) that are shared across ethnic groups, and one distinct or sectarian identity (ethnic group). This question was an adaptation of the measure used by Stryker and Serpe (1994): “which [of the following identities] is more

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f Sayara Research, http://www.sayararesearch.com/

8 Intercept interviews are a convenience sampling technique where surveyors “intercept” respondents who are traveling to and from insecure sampling points.
important to the way you think of yourself?” (21). Other variant measures of identity centrality are featured in Pfeifer et al. (2007), Bilali (2012), and Gordon (2012). Some are open-ended questions, while others use a Likert-type scale; the present study uses a rank-order measure in order to directly contrast the importance of distinct ethnic identity with two cross-ethnic identities.

Sympathy for violent non-state groups was measured using the following question: “Thinking about the reasons the armed opposition used violence during the past year, would you say that you in general have a lot of sympathy, a little sympathy, or no sympathy at all for these armed opposition groups?” Intergroup violence depends in part on whether or not a person is sympathetic toward the political ends for which violence is being used (Henry, Sidanius, Levin & Pratto, 2005). As discussed, AOGs in Afghanistan often represent tribal and ethnic interests, and tend not to ethnically heterogeneous. The most commonly known AOG group is the Taliban, a group led and populated by Pashtuns. A small number of Afghans may also associate the term AOG with non-Taliban local militias outside the government, such as Hezb-i-Islami, Hezb-e-Wahdat, or Tajik commanders in the north. However, previous surveys suggest that the term is primarily associated with the Taliban (Warren & Hopkins, 2015). This terminological association may change as the presence of another AOG, Daesh/ISIS, increases.

Study 1 is divided into two parts. In part A, univariate and multivariate analysis are used to test the assumption that EIC is positively associated with AOG sympathy. If EIC is a risk factor for ethnic violence, then it is expected to increase sympathy with AOGs who use violence to achieve their goals. These models are tested first among all respondents, then separately tested for Pashtun respondents only because the most commonly associated AOG (the Taliban) is
predominantly Pashtun. For each model in part A, EIC is regressed on sympathy with AOGs, and controls for possible moderating demographic and situational variables are added. Demographic controls include age, gender, geographic location (urban or rural area), education level, and ethnicity of the respondent, while situational controls include whether or not observers were present in the room at the time of the interview, and the interviewer’s ethnicity as an ingroup or outgroup member. These controls were chosen because in other published data they appear to explain variations along a significant number of attitudes and public opinions, including topics of security (Warren & Hopkins, 2015). Ordered logistic regression is used with the assumption of proportional odds because the outcome variables are ordinal (Greene, 2003). Robust standard errors are used to improve reliability of the coefficients, considering that the risk of Type I errors (“false positives”) from correlation analysis increases as sample sizes increase.

Study 1-Part B tests whether the conditions of resource and power inequalities predict increased EIC, specifically whether inequalities in terms of income, land ownership, and perceived power to influence local politics are positively associated with EIC, after controlling for demographic and situational considerations. This study again uses ordered logistic regressions, under the same assumptions for the structure of the outcome variables. Income inequality is measured using constructed social comparison: each respondent is assigned the natural log of the difference, in Afghanis (Afghan currency), between their personal household income and the mean household income of the richest ethnic group in their region. This assumes that Afghans compare themselves to other groups, a key assumption of social identity theory. Descriptive data shows that intergroup income inequality varies widely by region. For example, Figure 15 shows that the greatest inequalities appear within the South West, where Pashtuns and
Hazaras compete for the highest average household incomes, while Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other minorities have comparatively low average household incomes.

Inequality in land ownership is measured using a similar method as income inequality: each respondent is assigned the difference (in hectares) between their reported household ownership and the mean number of hectares owned by the richest ethnic group in their region.\(^h\) Because not all land carries the same value (one hectare in an urban area is usually worth more than the same in a rural area), the demographic control for whether the sampling point is urban or rural becomes critical to include. No measure of land quality or value is contained in the data. Finally, inequality in terms of local political power is constructed using the question, “How much influence do you think someone like you can have over local (district/provincial) government decisions – a lot, some, very little, or none at all?” The variable is left as an ordinal measure of individual differences with the assumption that individual responses will reveal group-level patterns in combination with controls for ethnicity of respondent.

Results

Part A

Overall, 15.7% of all participants chose ethnicity as the most important identity, 28.5% chose it as the second most important identity, and a remaining 55.9% did not mention it. Results from univariate and multivariate regression analysis reveal a significant positive relationship between ethnic identity centrality and reported sympathy for AOGs using violence against the Afghan government [Table 1]. This positive relationship holds true even after

\(^h\) For alternative measures, Table 6 lists several studies on land and land-based conflict in Afghanistan.
controlling for demographic variables, including age, gender, ethnicity, urban/rural status, and education level. In addition to ethnic identity centrality, a situational factor that robustly increases sympathy is the presence of observers in the interview. Factors that decrease sympathy, ceterus paribus, include being female, having more education, and most significantly, living in a city.

Broken down by ethnic group, the relationship between ethnic identity centrality and sympathy for insurgent groups is significant and positive among all three of the largest ethnic groups, including the Pashtuns ($r=.04, p<.001$), Tajiks ($r=.10, p<.0001$), and Hazaras ($r=.14, p<.0001$). By contrast, the relationship between sympathy and both of the two alternative options to ethnic identity, national identity (NIC, 0-2) and religious identity (RIC, 0-2), show significantly negative coefficients. These associations are robust across three national survey samples.

When considering Pashtun respondents only [Table 2], ethnic identity centrality again predicts an increase in sympathy, ceterus paribus. Unlike other ethnic groups, however, the presence of observers in the interview does not significantly increase sympathy, while the ethnicity of the interviewer plays a significant role. When the interviewer is a non-Pashtun, stated sympathy decreases significantly.

Among demographic variables, respondents from urban areas are significantly less likely to report high EIC, and among situational factors, respondents who were interviewed in the company of spectators of their age or older were significantly more likely to report higher EIC. Results support the hypothesis that EIC may be related to sympathy with armed non-state groups, and that situational and demographic factors also play a role.
**Part B**

Ordered logit models show that coefficients for all three resource variables (land, income, and political influence) are significant at the p<.0001 level after controlling for the same demographic and situational variables in Part A [Table 3]. However, the magnitude of impact for land differences (in hectares) is negligible. Given the historical importance of land disputes, the lack of magnitude may reflect a limitation in the question. Specifically, the measure lacks sensitivity to the quality of the land owned, a key historical consideration in the context of land patronage among ruling Pashtuns.

Meanwhile, as the income gap between ethnic groups widens, respondents place more emphasis on the importance of their ethnic identity, and a one level increase in the perceived ability to influence local government decisions substantially decreases ethnic identity centrality, ceterus paribus. Among demographic and situations variables, the statistical power gender to explain ethnic identity centrality is relatively weak (p<.05) given the final model’s sample size (n=23,589), while being from a city significantly reduces ethnic identity centrality. Respondents who have more education are significantly less likely to emphasize their ethnic identity, but the variance for this variable is skewed, as more than half of Afghans have no formal schooling at all.

**Discussion & Limitations**

Findings in study 1 support the association between ethnic identity centrality and support for violent AOGs. They also reject the null hypothesis that ethnic identity centrality resource factors play no role in ethnic identity centrality. Specifically, income inequality increases ethnic identity centrality, and Afghans who feel less personal political power are significantly more
likely to highlight the importance of their ethnic identity. Possibly, those who prioritize their ethnic identity do so as a strategy to obtain power or access resources. However, if true, this reduces that political elites are responsible for manufacturing ethnic politics, as political elites take advantage of existing psychological dispositions when they appeal to ethnic identities and interests.

These models may be limited by missing variable bias, however. Specifically, the survey data lacked any measure of land quality, and the income variable is based on self-report. Self-report measures for income may be unreliable. Future studies will do well to correct both. One possible solution is to coordinate global positioning system (GPS) locations with estimates of land quality using geospatial mapping. Currently, however, only 70% of the sampling points in the survey use GPS, and reliability of the GPS coordinates is sometimes poor. A second solution would be to estimate income using a household inventory of items owned, including land. In many parts of Afghanistan, the economy is based on bartering and trade of goods rather than cash transactions.
CHAPTER IV: STUDY 2

In addition to the conditions of resource inequality and political power, a macro-level consideration for identity-based conflict is the degree of diversity or homogeneity in a particular area, a factor first proposed by Horowitz (1985) and still debated in theories of ethnic conflict (Fearon & Laiten, 2003). Ethnic heterogeneity has not been directly studied in relationship to ethnic identity centrality, but it has been linked to ethnic identity salience, as well as intergroup prejudice. McGuire, McGuire, Child, and Fujioka (1978) found that when children are an ethnic minority in their classroom, they are more likely to describe themselves in terms of their ethnicity, compared to children of the majority ethnic group. This was the first of several studies they conducted that linked the context of diversity with the salience of an identity (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; McGuire, McGuire, & Cheever, 1986). Diversity dynamics are suspected to play a role in increasing or decreasing the cognitive accessibility of an identity category, though it remains unclear whether this is sufficient to affect the evaluative importance placed on a particular identity category (centrality). The difference between salience and centrality, as illustrated earlier, is that centrality ascribes importance, a step beyond whatever is psychologically apparent.

Heterogeneity is here referred to as ethnic fractionalization (EF), a measure of the likelihood that two people chosen at random will be from different ethnic groups in a given area. Measures for ethnic fractionalization are currently available in at least 129 countries (Posner, 2004), most based on the Geo-referencing of Ethnic Groups Dataset (GREG) from the Soviet Atlas Narodov Mira (Weidmann, Rod, & Cederman, 2010). Ethnic fractionalization is calculated in Study 2 using self-reported ethnicity over ten years of the Survey of the Afghan People (2006-
Ethnic fracturalization is usually calculated as one minus the Herfindahl concentration index, which is the sum of the squared proportions of ethnic groups in each province. To the author’s knowledge, ethnic fracturalization has been calculated for Afghanistan two times before. The first calculation was by Alesina et al. (2003) using 1979 Russian census data, followed by Oliphant (2012), who used three data sources from the Naval Postgraduate School, Afghanistan Information Management Services, and the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Oliphant’s mean ethnic fracturalization, as an average across provinces, is 0.43 with a range of 0.02-0.75 and a standard deviation of 0.23. In simple terms, this means that Afghan provinces vary widely, from extremely homogenous to moderately heterogeneous. The current study will use more complete and current data. Using Survey of the Afghan People data, the mean is slightly lower, 0.39, with a range of 0.01-0.76, and a standard deviation of 0.25. EF is calculated by province and year-over-year estimates for the majority of provinces are stable.

The relationship between ethnic diversity and ethnic identity centrality is unclear. The assumption in social identity theory is that individuals seek a positive and distinct identity relative to other groups. In cases where everyone in a particular context shares the same ethnic identity, this logic leads one to assume that individuals will seek out opportunities to be positive and distinct, such as by emphasizing a sub-ethnic clan identity. For example, a Pashtun living in a Pashtun province may seek to emphasize his identity as a Popalzai, an Alokozai, a Zazai or some other familial lineage that is distinct and positive within the Pashtun umbrella identity. Alternatively, he may emphasize a different identity, such as his occupational identity, that achieves positive distinctness from his neighbors. However, another line of reasoning suggests
that identities are strategic tools to access resources. For example, a person who is half-Pashtun, half-Tajik and living in a Pashtun-majority area may emphasize his Pashtun identity among Pashtuns, and his Tajik identity among Tajiks. In each case, he might emphasize the identity that provides a common bond, and in turn, access to each ethnic group’s patronage network.

Methods

Using the same participants and assumptions as Study 1, an additional set of correlations and ordered logistic models are conducted to test whether ethnic diversity increases, decreases, or has no significant effect on two different outcome variables, (A) ethnic identity centrality and (B) sympathy for AOGs. The same demographic and situational variables are included in the full model as controls. EIC is added as an explanatory variable in the models that use sympathy for AOGs as the outcome variable. This is to determine if EIC plays a role in sympathy for AOGs above and beyond all conditions measured (resource and power inequalities, EF). In addition to EF, separate measures are added.

Results

Simple correlation analysis suggests that as the ethnic diversity of a province increases, the likelihood that respondents say they can influence local government decisions decreases ($r = -0.08$, $p<0.001$). Those who are more educated are also significantly less likely to say they can influence local government decisions ($r = -0.08$, $p<0.001$). In a multivariate space, the direction of these associations hold true. In Table 4, ordered logistic regressions show the effect of ethnic fracturalization on ethnic identity centrality, as well as the effect of added controls for resource inequalities, demographics, and situational factors. EF appears to significantly decrease ethnic
Final ordered logistic regressions show a robust inverse relationship between ethnic fracturalization and sympathy for violent armed opposition groups [Table 5]. As provinces become more diverse, sympathy for AOGs decreases dramatically. The significance of the coefficients for ethnic identity centrality, as well as resource inequalities, are weakened due to multicollinearity with EF. Respondents who say they can influence local government decisions are significantly less sympathetic with AOGs, ceteris paribus.

**Discussion & Limitations**

The null hypothesis that EF has no association with either ethnic identity centrality or sympathy with violent AOGs is rejected with a very high degree of confidence. While multivariate models are functionally associative and cannot establish causality, it is nonetheless considerable that across multiple models, Afghans living in ethnically diverse areas are significantly less likely to place importance on their ethnic identity than those in homogenous areas. These findings counter the proposition that increased ethnic diversity creates a need for distinctness, and instead lend support to the idea that in situations of diversity, persons highlight the identities they share in common with their immediate neighbors. In some cases, this behavior may be an identity strategy. In Chapter 1’s illustrations of “tribe switching,” groups sometimes change their identities, to access or associate with more powerful groups. It may be the case among some Afghans that they shift importance from one social identity to another that provides more access to power or resources. In support of this supposition, it appears that in
more diverse provinces, the perceived ability to influence local government decisions substantially decreases. Presumably this decrease is because there are more ethnic groups competing for influence. When multiple ethnic groups compete for political space, the relative power of each is diminished. In this situation, emphasizing superordinate identities, such as being Muslim and being Afghan, may increase access to power by building a common unity and mutual alliance across ethnic differences.

Afghans living in ethnically diverse provinces are also significantly less likely to express sympathy with violent AOGs. Part of this association may be explained by Pashtun / non-Pashtun dynamics. Specifically, Pashtun-majority provinces tend to be more homogenous than non-Pashtun majority provinces and at the same time Pashtuns tend to report higher levels of sympathy with AOGs overall [Figure 16].

While the ethnicity of the respondent was added as a control variable, future models are advised to include a binary variable for whether the respondent is Pashtun or other ethnicities. Future models may also benefit from EF calculations that integrate measures of political relevance, such as proportional electoral representation. Models for such integration can be found in Roeder (2001) and Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat and Wacziarg (2003).
CHAPTER V: STUDY 3

In order to better understand how social identity needs interact with ethnic identity centrality, a third study was conducted to explore how Afghans talk through their identity priorities using the same measure for ethnic identity centrality featured in the previous studies. Are macro-level conditions (e.g. ethnic diversity) and group-level resource conditions (e.g. intergroup income inequality) the primary explanations for identity centrality and intergroup conflict, or do social identity needs also play a role?

Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979) proposed that the fundamental urge to achieve a positive and distinct identity explains many of the collective actions involved in intergroup conflict. “When a group’s action for positive distinctiveness is frustrated, impeded, or in any way actively prevented by an out-group,” they wrote, “this will promote overt conflict and hostility between the groups” (46). Despite limited critiques (e.g. Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010), Tajfel and Turner’s social identity theory (SIT) continues to be a popular explanation intergroup conflict. It is unclear, however, whether the explanations of SIT match the subjective narratives of Afghans themselves.

SIT and the identity needs it describes can be briefly illustrated in a review of the theory’s basic assumptions. When conditions challenge positive perceptions of a person’s group identity, SIT holds, the person may experience a feeling of being threatened that can lead to negative emotional responses. Conditions of existential insecurity or inadequacy of group identity may lead to many courses of action organized into three strategies to restore identity security. These strategies are mapped in Figure 17 as a decision tree. Considerations said to play a role in determining how persons respond to a threatened identity include the perceived
legitimacy of group inequalities (if legitimate, no action is taken), the perceived permeability of
group boundaries, and the perception of cognitive alternatives.

If group boundaries are permeable, Tajfel and Turner explained, individuals may distance
themselves from the threatened identity, such as by emphasizing other positive identities to
achieve esteem (including a shift in identity centrality), or seeking to change their social identity
through strategies of social mobility. When group boundaries are not permeable, however,
individuals may collectively mobilize along the basis of the threatened identity. Because ethnic
identity is relatively impermeable, perceived existential threats are associated with social
mobilization, rather than strategies of social creativity or social mobility, to achieve positive and
distinct group identity.

Another central assumption in SIT is the importance of intergroup comparisons. “The
aim of differentiation,” Tajfel and Turner (1979) wrote, “is to maintain or achieve superiority
over an out-group on some dimensions. Any such act, therefore, is essentially competitive” (41).
This competition involves “favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and
some relevant out-groups” (38). Recent literature continues to maintain the idea that intergroup
competition is what manufactures the salience of a social identity (e.g. Cikara, Botvinick &
Fiske, 2011).

Differentiation based on social comparison with an outgroup is complicated, however, by
overlapping and simultaneous identities when there are multiple ingroups. Indeed, several scales
and theories have developed in response to the challenge of multiple overlapping group identities
(e.g. Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Phinney, 1992). Distinct social groups in conflict often share
common social identities. For example, Shi’as and Sunnis are theologically distinct yet both
share a religious identity as Muslim. Hutus and Tutsis are distinct ethnically, but share an identity as Rwandans. What complicates the explanations of intergroup hostility as ‘ethnic conflict’ is the fact that ingroups and outgroups are fluid based on which group identities are salient and meaningful in a particular context.

In the context of fluid and overlapping identities, in-depth interviews are needed to understanding complex meanings associated with identity centrality. Specifically, study 3 asks Afghans to explain how they interpret the meaning of being Muslim, being Afghan, and being a member of their ethnic group, followed by an explanation of their identity priorities. These narrative justifications may provide insight into the psychological processes by which distinct identities are prioritized over superordinate identities, and vice-verse.

**Methods**

**Participants**

A total of 130 Afghans (64 female, 66 male) were interviewed in five provinces between June-August, 2014, using same-sex Afghan researchers in a non-randomized sample. These included 26 respondents per each of five provinces (Ghor, Helmand, Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Wardak), with a gender balance in each province. Most respondents (69%) were Pashtun, followed by Tajiks (29%) and several minority ethnic groups (Uzbek, Aimaq, Sadat, Arab). Village and respondent selection was based on a convenience sample through local interviewer networks. As a result, the sample is not intended to be nationally representative: Pashtuns are over-represented and Hazaras are not represented in the sample. Respondent socioeconomic status was estimated by the interviewers. Most respondents (58%) were recorded as having a
middle socioeconomic status (SES), while 30% reported poor SES, and 12% reported having high SES. All interviewers and respondents were native residents of the district where the interview was conducted.

Five provinces were selected on the basis of having diverse ethnic representation as well as diverse regional representation. Kunduz has the highest level of ethnic fracturalization among all 34 Afghan provinces, and is also currently one of the most violent provinces, where Taliban and Afghan government forces are locked in a battle for control. Meanwhile, Ghor is populated primarily by Tajiks, while Uruzgan and Helmand are overwhelmingly Pashtun.

Respondents were asked to participate in a structured interview about topics of public interest. Upon consent, surveys were conducted inside their homes and lasted approximately an hour. Respondents were told which ethnic groups they were going to be asked about, so that they were provided time to reflect. They were asked, “Which one of the following three options do you identify with most: (1) Being Afghan, (2) Being a member of your ethnic group (qawm), or (3) Being Muslim?” They were then asked to select a second option, revealing a rank-order of the three identities from most important to least important/unmentioned. Possible order effects were considered and believed to be negligible. Respondents were further asked to explain the meaning of each of those identities to them, in their own stories, and why they selected their first choice identity. Interviews were recorded and transcribed from Dari and Pashto into English for analysis. Transcripts are labeled by province (W=Wardak, U=Uruzgan, etc.) and numbered #1-26 for each provincial set.
Results

Subjective Definitions of Each Identity

All respondents were able to answer the question of what each identity – national, ethnic, and religious – means to them without apparent difficulty. *Being Afghan* was associated with citizenship, but also sometimes with a sense of shared destiny and positive cultural stereotypes. “Afghan means ‘a shared house’” one man said (#W-9). “We are living in a shared house which is called Afghanistan.” Others, all female respondents, defined it in terms of honor or positive attributes: “…being afghan means braveness and honor” (#W-17); “the real meaning of afghan [is] braveness, honor, and excellence” (#W-18); “Being afghan means braveness and this name has a lot of praises like hospitable [and] kind” (#W-14). However, the term “Afghan” is complicated by an older, historical meaning as a term used for the ethnic Pashtuns, an association that appeared in several interviews with male respondents: “Being Afghan means unity and being Pashtun to me” (#W-8); “Afghani means being a Pashtun” (#W-13). In one case, a male interviewer even listed a respondent’s ethnic identity as “Afghani (Pashtun)” (#W-12). Some Afghans attribute the use of the term Afghan for Pashtuns to a lack of education, however. A female respondent said, “Being afghan… is the only way of identification of afghan people, but unfortunately due to low levels of education this name has been used for only Pashtun people” (#W-24). Importantly, when respondents were presented with several back-to-back identity options, including Afghan identity versus ethnic identity, all respondents appeared to understand that Afghan was a broader and more inclusive term despite these connotations.

Respondents interpret ethnic identity as tribe, and associate it largely with connotations of distinctness, community, and power. “Ethnicity is a word which separates each tribe or
community from the others” (#W-2), one explained. On the one hand, it is sometimes defined as a source of community (“Ethnicity means a community to me, because we are living in it” (#W-7). On the other, it is defined as source of distinction from other communities: “Ethnicity means knowing different people and recognizing them from each other…Naturally ethnicity means color, skin and nature, it shows color and skin of different people” (#W-15). Another defined the paradox in these terms: “ethnicity is having special culture and custom [distinct from other groups], [and] having blooding relation with some ethnic group” (W-18). Importantly, most respondents agreed that ethnicity is practically important for local distinctions and social differentiation. As one Pashtun explained it: “Ethnicity means how to know or how to introduce yourself to somebody else. For instance I am Amar Khail, and you may belong to any other tribe or ethnicity like Awal Khail, Payends Khail, Ismael Khail, Andar Khail, or something else” (#W-14). Another added, “everyone is identified through their ethnicity in the community” (#W-3); “Ethnicity helps someone [to] know me in our community; I mean we know each other in the area through the ethnicity” (#W-6).

The term used for ethnicity, qawm, is a general term for one’s tribe or group without specification. Some respondents associated this with their broader ethnic group (e.g. Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek), while many Pashtuns associate it with sub-tribes within the Pashtun ethnic group, such as being Noorzai, Popalzai, or Zazai. Non-Pashtun minority ethnic groups did not define their ethnicity in terms of subtribes. In a few interviews the term qawm also carried associations with the term nation, as in tribal nation. One male respondent said, “Nation means to me … a special racial group. As Allah Almighty says, ‘I created you in different groups for you to introduce [yourselves to each other]’” (W-9). The same respondent added, “[But] It is not good
for us to be known by race or nation, because there are too many races and nations in Afghanistan like Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek and etc. So it won’t last well for us.”

Notably, several members of the Aimak ethnic group demonstrated “tribe-switching” by describing their primary ethnic identity as Tajik instead of Aimak (#s G-16, G-20, G-25 in Ghor). They were not asked why they made this choice. However, it is clear that Aimaks are a very small minority, while Pashtuns are Afghanistan’s largest ethnic group. Tajiks, meanwhile, are Afghanistan’s second largest ethnic group and have gained considerable political power since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. Whereas a Pashtun’s affiliation with a Pashtun subtribe may demonstrate a preference for tribal distinctness from other Pashtuns, an Aimak’s affiliation with Tajik ethnic identity may demonstrate a preference for shared identity with a broader or more powerful group.

Against the backdrop of intergroup distinctness associated with ethnicity, many Afghans defined being Muslim as a source of unity. “Islam means sisterhood, brotherhood, peace” said one female (#W-18); it means “unity and brotherhood,” said another (W-14). The most common definition of religious identity used the language of obedience to Islamic rules and law, or following the rules of religion: “To me, Islam means to submit” (#W-10); “Being Muslim means accepting almighty Allah’s commandments (#W-8); “Islam means that we should Allah’s way, and we should worship to Allah, and Islam has five pillars so accept … them and lead our life according to Islam” (#W-25). Importantly, while an emphasis on following the rules of the group was predominantly associated with religious identity, this understanding occasionally appeared in other identity definitions. For example, ethnic identity was sometimes defined as
following the rules of the tribe, while being Afghan was sometimes associated with “accepting [the] constitution of the country” (W-21).

**Identity Priorities**

The mode of respondents (45%) said that Muslim identity is most important to them, among the three identities presented, while being Afghan was the most common second identity mentioned [Figure 18]. Significant variation in identity centrality appears across provinces. Respondents in the most ethnically diverse province, Kunduz, are most likely to cite Muslim identity as most important, while respondents in Helmand are most likely to cite ethnic or tribal identity as important, and respondents in Ghor are most likely to cite Afghan identity as most important [Figure 19]. High socioeconomic status (SES) respondents cited ethnic identity more than low and middle-SES respondents, and more females than males emphasized ethnic identity [Figure 20].

**Reasons Why Being Muslim Is Important**

When asked why being Muslim is an important identity, Afghans cited reasons of esteem and pride, but also more complex reasons of Islam unity and social cohesion, positive distinctness from non-Muslims and the avoidance of hell, and connection to ancestors. For others, the act of *being* Muslim was cited as important primarily out of a sense of obedience and obligation. In practical terms, the boundary between being Muslim and belonging to any other religious group is impermeable because conversion out of Islam may be punishable by death according to Afghan interpretations of Shari’ah law, while obedience is associated with the reward of paradise. Each of these reasons will be addressed in tandem.
A. Unity with a Group

Some respondents described the importance of being Muslim as a vehicle for unity, while others emphasized it as a vehicle for global unity, and still others emphasized both goals at once:

Being the followers of Islam shows the unity and solidarity [with my] countrymen. (#U-8)

Islam gathers all Muslim people and makes them allied. (#W-20)

As almighty Allah says that whole Muslims around the world are brothers with each other. (#H-21)

In some cases, the theme of unity appeared alongside an emphasis on Muslim identity as distinct from other groups, and positive:

Being Muslim makes me separated from all countries around the world except Islamic countries, and makes me close to Almighty Allah. (#K-13)

However, many respondents emphasized unity without any mention of distinctness from an outgroup, and instead emphasized the duties of membership. For example, some highlighted expectations of kindness toward in-group members, particularly among respondents who report having migrated from one province to another within Afghanistan. A man who moved his family from Wardak to Helmand illustrates the pattern:

All Muslims around the world follow the religion of Islam and they should treat [each other] kindly and like brothers. If someone describes their identity through their ethnicity or nationality, it means he is acting against Islam. Almighty Allah also says in holy Quran that all Muslims are like brothers with each other, so first all we should say that we are Muslims. Secondly we are afghan and eventually we should describe ourselves by our ethnicity. (#H-7)

It may be in the man’s best interest to emphasize Muslim identity because while he is ethnically Pashtun like others in Helmand province, he is an ethnic minority in the sense that his Pashtun clan is a minority one (Wardakis are strongest in Wardak province). As a minority, he highlights that Islamic identity requires favorable treatment of other Muslims, without distinction on the basis of ethnicity, and implicitly, one’s ethnic clan.
B. Positive Distinctness

While some emphasize in-group unity and duties toward in-group members, others highlight Muslim identity as derived from distinctness from (and superiority over) other religious groups:

*Being Muslim means superiority [over] pagans [and] Jews. (#K-17)*

*Being Muslim differentiates me from pagans, Jews and Christians. And being Muslim makes me superior [to] all other non-Muslims. (#K-24)*

*All Muslims must be proud ... because it is the most complete religion in all the world. (#K-17)*

*Islam is the best religion all around the world. (#W-25)*

While distinctiveness occasionally appears as the only reason for Muslim identity centrality, in most cases, distinctiveness is paired with some other factor or dynamic involved in identity centrality, such as a sense of connection to history or access to divine rewards. Connection to history appears in references to ancestors, where Afghan culture often requires duty and respect toward ones elders and past:

*Islam is the best religion among others, and holy religion of Islam is the inheritance of our ancestors. (#K-8)*

*Islam is the best and complete religion, as our ancestors were Muslims and we also thanks to God that we are Muslims. (#K-24)*

*Because ... our BIBIs (grandmas) were the followers of [the] Islamic religion. (#K-23) (Female)*

More common than connection to ancestors was the pairing of positive distinctness with ideological beliefs about heaven, hell, and divine law. Being Muslim was associated with the
promise of paradise, deliverance from hell, and receiving preferred status or luck from God.

This was true across ethnic groups.

Being Afghan will benefit you only in Afghanistan or at the most in this world, but being Muslim will benefit you both in this world and hereafter. Being Muslim gives me superiority... and offers me paradise. (#K-22)

I am really proud of being Muslim. Almighty Allah has promised with Muslims that he would place them in paradise. (#K-15)

Being Muslim makes me lucky in this world and the hereafter. (#K-12)

In many but not all cases, access to ideological rewards are described in competitive intergroup terms between an ingroup vs. an outgroup (Muslims vs. non-Muslims):

Because ... almighty Allah promised paradise for Muslims. Being Muslim [differentiates] us from pagans, and ...God will bless Muslims in this world and hereafter. (#K-21)

Being a Muslim is good for me in this world and [in the] hereafter. If someone dies as a non-Muslim then Allah (S.W.T) sends him to hell and if someone dies as a Muslim then our beloved Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) intercedes ...and sends him/her to Jannah or Paradise so, it is clear that the holy religion of Islam is better and a complete religion compared to other religions in the world. (#K-14)

However, some do not focus on rewards, but rather on the avoidance of punishment, and the comparative advantage that being Muslim would convey within their worldview:

Being Muslim saves me from hellfire and distinguishes me from infidels, since it is the only difference [between] us [and them]. (#K-11)

I mostly describe my identity being Muslim. Because the first thing we are asked on doomsday [the Day of Judgment] is whether or not we are Muslim. (#U-8)

Islam is our religion and it is the most important thing for us then everything else, because life is only a test and being Muslim makes us pass this exam. (#H-17)

Being Muslim gives me respect in the eyes of Allah and his Messenger and separates me from Non-Muslims. If someone dies without believing [in] Islam then he/she will counted
among people who will go to hell….everybody who insults this religion will be punished as Namrood and Firawn was punished. (#K-9) (Female)

C. Obedience to Norms

In addition to reasons of achieving a positive and distinct status, many emphasized the importance of being Muslim in terms of obedience to Islamic law and social requirements. These respondents framed Islam as a way of life that dictates their social choices and determines rules of their social world, and in turn, important to them:

It is better to tell you that Islam is the law of Muslims because it can arrange all affairs in every part of my life … so it is important for us. (#H-22)

Because Islam is our region and we believe and trust it, and we do whatever the Islam holy religion orders. (#H-19)

[To be Muslim] means we follow the rules and regulations of Islam and we live according to the rules and not only in Afghanistan [but elsewhere also]. We have Muslims but in other countries too and it shows that we are all the followers of a same religion. (#H-15)

Notably, being Muslim in Afghanistan is an impermeable group identity in much the same way that being born Afghan or being born into an ethnic group are impermeable identities. Conversion out of Islam is still punishable by death in many areas, under conservative Shariah (Islamic) legal interpretations, and the Afghan constitution requires that no constitutional law protecting freedom of religion shall violate or contravene Shari’ah law.

Personal aspects of being Muslim, such as achieving personal or inward peace, were not cited as part of the relative importance of being Muslim. However, two respondents did describe the importance of being Muslim using metaphors of lightness and darkness, metaphors sometimes associated with personal, inward aspects of religious experience:

…it guides us in the right path, under light of Islam religion we are able to differentiate wellness and badness. (#H-21)
Fourteen hundred years ago there was too much oppression and darkness around the world, and when the Prophet Mohammad (P.B.U.H) came he determined each individual’s limitations. (#U-9)

In a few rare cases, a respondent described Islam as compulsory, when asked to rank-order being Muslim beside ethnic and national identity, cited it as least important. One respondent, a young female from Helmand, described Islam as “our law and our guide… we arrange all our affairs according to [it], so it is very important to us” (#H-21), yet when pushed to rank it, listed Muslim identity last. This pattern was more common among females than males. On average, more male respondents cited being Muslim as the most important identity than female respondents, while female respondents were more likely to favor ethnic identity than males. One possible reason for the discrepancy are cultural factors and social norms: males in Afghan society have more access to mosques, making being Muslim a public act, while females are more often required to demonstrate their Islamic identity in private. Due to security and travel restrictions placed on females, females are also less likely to interact with ethnic groups other than their own. Sustained interaction with other ethnic groups is expected to decrease ethnic identity centrality.

**Reasons Why Being Afghan Is Important**

Themes of unity, distinctness, and history were the most common justifications for the importance of Afghan identity, comparable to themes for the importance of Muslim identity. One man, who chose Afghan identity as the most important identity for himself, commented, “This word [itself] is a sign of unity for us” (#W-2). Another man suggested that it should replace ethnic identity as a source of togetherness:
I request all Afghans to introduce themselves for other people an afghan. They must do like this to eliminate the Nationalism in our country and be united with each other. (#W-9)

Yet again the theme of positive distinctiveness was salient. Being Afghan was described as being positive and distinct relative to other national identities, and respondents frequently described the importance of being Afghan as an identity that increases in situational centrality when in other countries. “If I go to any country across the world,” one Tajik who chose Afghan identity first, explained, “I am called Afghan there as well” (#K-20). (By contrast, the situational importance of ethnic identity, was described as decreasing when in other countries.)

...my nationality is important to me ...for instance if someone comes from abroad or I go to foreign country, when I am asked about my identity I would answer that I am an Afghan, but if I answer them that I am a Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, they would make fun of me and they wouldn’t know me.... being an Afghan is an identity that differentiates me from the residents of other countries. (#K-14)

Islam and ethnic [identity] exist in other countries too, but Afghan [identity] only depends to us.... Afghanistan is an independent and well-known country in the world. (#U-5)

I am an afghan and if I go to any country across the world, I am called afghan there as well. Secondly, I am Muslim. Because all people [already] know that Afghans are Muslims. (#K-20)

Afghan identity was also said to be important with justifications of honor and pride. These were not explicitly comparative; no other countries were mentioned as sources of contrast:

...because we Afghan people are very hospitable and if we have guests we respect and honor them a lot. (#W-7)

History, and a connection to it, also appeared as an emergent theme in the centrality of national identity. This included a connection to ancestors, as well as a connection to the struggles and sacrifices of ancestors:
I prioritized my nationality because [there are] Muslims in every country but we can only call a person an Afghan [if he or she is] from Afghanistan and has been brought up there. To me being an afghan means that our grand fathers and fathers have sacrificed their lives for this country and they were born here, therefore we are also Muslims and we will also sacrifice everything to defend this country. (#U-12)

Afghanistan is a country which has incredible history. So Afghans must proud of it. [#U-4]

Being Afghan has left us heritage from our ancestors, and being Afghan means bravery. (#K-15)

Notably, justifications for the importance of Afghan identity featured positive associations that painted Afghanistan as an active protagonist. No descriptions painted being Afghan as being a passive victim of outside invaders, or as important because Afghanistan is under attack or threat from outsiders.

**Reasons Why Ethnic Identity is Important**

Justifications for ethnic identity centrality included themes of positive distinction, but also local recognition, respect, and social support. In many cases, the importance of ethnic identity was associated with access to a social support network, even including a structure for dispute resolution:

* it is very important to know about our ethnicity because everyone is helped [with their] problems and troubles by people of their tribe. (#H-2)

...ethnicity is more important than being an afghan to me because ... tribe is like a big family and we all know that family is more important than anything else... for instance if you encounter any problem then it is your own tribe and people who come to you first to help you. Your nationality gets you nothing at the time of need and cannot help you either. (#H-9)

... it is your own tribe who help you at the time of need because no one in the community complete which means whenever someone needs a support or help then it is his/her tribe who help them and tribe is very important at the time of identity confirmation and if someone doesn’t have a tribe then the community won’t pay him any respect and no one will trust him either. (#H-15)
Notably, whereas statements about how Muslim behavior toward other Muslims involved “should” wording (i.e., Muslims should treat each other with kindness), statements about ethnic group involved more present tense “will” and “can” terms, consistent with the assumption that tribal and kinship social structures are instrumentally functional and associated with survival. Several described their ethnic identity as important because they “depend” on the tribe or clan in times of need (e.g. #H-26).

In many cases, the value and importance of ethnic identity was described in terms of obtaining respect from other tribes. Tribal and family honor are generally considered important in Afghanistan, and important sources of respect (or shame) from other Afghans. In many cases, favors for other tribes or families are performed out of a sense of duty and respect.

...if someone’s ethnicity is known, he is respected by people of his own and other tribes in the community and they would help him at the time of troubles and problems. (#H-13)

Ethnicity is important to know each other inside the country, and if a person do not know about his/her ethnicity or tribe then the local people will not respect them or wouldn’t consider them as honorable people. (#H-8)

...if someone’s ethnicity is unknown in a community, he is not respected by people and they have negative perceptions about him (#H-2)

If a person do not know about his/her tribe or don’t have any tribe then people will see him/her distrustfully and no one will respect him. (#H-17)

If someone says that I do not know my ancestors, then people will not consider him a good person in the society. (#H-21)

The importance of ethnic identity was often described in terms of distinctness, and distinctness was much more commonly cited as a justification for ethnic identity centrality than
for being Muslim or being Afghan. “If I don’t have ethnic group [then] no one will identify me” (#W-25) one man explained. “As you know” a woman in Uruzgan said, “everyone is introduced by his/her ethnicity” (#U-22). Others made bolder statements about identity as a mechanism for recognition: “Ethnicity is the only way of knowing each other” (#W-20) ; “Ethnicity is the main way to recognize the nature or character of someone” (#U-12).

Consistent with the assumptions of social identity theory, most respondents described their ethnic distinctiveness as positive or special, using terminology of pride or honor:

I am a Pashtun so we have a special culture. (#W-24)

We are proud of our tribes. (#H-8)

Everyone should be proud of their tribe or ethnicity. (#H-2)

In many cases, as for other identities, this was comparative, and involved feelings of superiority relative to other ethnic groups.

My ethnicity makes me superior and differentiates me among the other tribes of Afghanistan. (#K-11)

My ethnicity makes me superior to the other existing ethnic groups. (#K-22)

My ethnicity is the best one amongst all tribes in Afghanistan. (#K-12)

However, not all described the importance of ethnic identity in competitive terms, and sometimes described it as distinguishing one person from another without assigning relative value.

I am just separated from other tribes through my ethnicity and I don’t mean that my ethnicity is better than others, but I just want to say that all people of Afghans are related to different tribes for their better identification, but they don’t have any superiority than each other. (#K-8)
Ethnic distinctiveness was sometimes differentiated at the sub-ethnic or clan level. Respondents who belong to Afghanistan’s largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, tended to describe their ethnic identity on the level of kinship structures or clans called *khels*, such as family or tribal names (Noorzai, Karzai, Ahmadzai, and so on), rather than using the general term *Pashtun*. Respondents who belong to minority ethnic groups (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Aimaks, or Sadats) did not make such sub-distinctions on the basis of kinship of family structures. Among Pashtuns, ethnic pride was predominantly associated with pride in subtribes or clans rather than as pride in Pashtuns as a whole.

...when you say ALIZAI that means you belong to ALIZAI tribe and you share all the prides and achievements and customs of this tribe. (#H-9)

Noorzai nation means that it is a big nation and it had important leaders in the past and right now we have them too. We have a council in Helmand province and we have a big council in Kabul too. The decision which is taken in these councils is acceptable for all Noorzai nation. So every nation has achievements, we proud of our nation. (#H-22)

Barikzai means me that I depend on this nation, and All Barikzais who live in different parts of the world are like a family member, I mean a nation is similar to a family. (#H-22)

Others described ethnic identity as distinctive but negative. These respondents usually ranked ethnic identity as least important, and Muslim identity as most important, and described ethnic identity as being in competition with Muslim identity. Muslim identity requires Muslim unity, they suggest, while ethnicity is divisive among Muslims.

Differentiating among the Muslims according to ethnicity is an act against the orders of ALLAH (S.W.T) and his messenger Muhammad (P.B.U.H) which shouldn’t be done as Muslims. (#U-6)

According to Islam no one should proud on nationality and ethnicity. We should be proud of being Muslim, then afghan and then through ethnicity, because Islam is real religion. We are Muslim first then afghan. (#W-17)
Islam does not consider Nationality an important idea and instead we should have other positive ways for introduction. (#U-1)

Not all respondents agreed with this interpretation, however. Those who ranked ethnic identity as most important suggested that Islam makes no comment on the importance of ethnic identity, either to advocate or prohibit it. “Being a Muslim and follower of Islam doesn’t have anything to do with ethnicity,” one explained (#U-12). In a few cases, respondents considered Muslim and ethnic identities to be complementary, and cited their ethnic group’s religious identity (as Muslim) to be further justification or reason to be proud of their ethnic group.

Ethnicity is very important in Islam holy religion, if we do not know our originality (tribe) the community people will have worse thoughts or views regarding us. (#H-18)

In a few rare cases, respondents described ethnic identity centrality as a problem without reference to Islam:

It is my feeling. Nowadays humanity is more important than ethnicity, because it is very important to have good behavior with people, I mean instead of ethnicity humanity is more valuable, tribalism has been destroying our country and we should remove tribalism. (#W-17)

Discussion & Limitations

Resources do appear to explain some aspects of ethnic identity centrality, but are matched by a long list of other justifications such as a need for a positive and distinct identity, consistent with Tajfel and Turner’s early assumptions. If competition for resources underlie ethnic conflict, it is possible that behavior is oriented by ethnicity without being reflected in responses to a verbal instrument for measuring identity centrality. But it nonetheless appears that identity needs are involved, some of which are not explicitly tied to resource inequalities [Table 7].
There also appeared to be considerable variation from province to province in which identity was considered more important. Why would identity priorities vary by province? Clues from respondent answers are difficult to find. One possible hypothesis is that Afghans emphasize identities that are locally acceptable and uncontroversial, and that these are defined at the provincial level based on the identity of the local population. Ethnic identity appears more commonly emphasized in provinces with relatively little ethnic diversity. In such provinces, emphasizing whatever identity is shared with the most people is expected to be strategic, and affords the largest social network. The logic is illustrated in Table 8. However, this data is based on a very limited sample size, and generalizations cannot be made.
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Together, studies 1, 2, and 3 highlight several conditions that may influence identity centrality in a context of active ethnic conflict. Study 1 highlights the possible role of resource inequalities, while study 2 points to macro-level factors, specifically the role of regional ethnic diversity, which may correspond with varying levels of intergroup contact and increased power sharing. Moving into detail to understand person-to-person factors, study 3 demonstrates that identity needs play a role beyond resources, particularly the need for positive distinctiveness but also considerations such as religious ideology. This chapter will review three policy implications of these findings, followed by a discussion of limitations and several future directions for research on identity centrality.

Implications for Policy

There are several implications for policymakers that can be derived from these findings. First, ethnic identity centrality appears to play a role in explaining public support for violent anti-government groups. Study 1 shows a robust relationship between ethnic identity centrality and sympathy for AOGs, a pattern that holds after repeated controls and in repeated models across three separate national samples within Afghanistan. This finding is an important contribution to ongoing discourse over the factors that affect support for armed combatants in Afghanistan. Past studies have examined the role of unemployment, which is proposed to increase support for insurgency (Berman, Callen, Felter & Shapiro, 2011), while various other studies explore the hypothesis that international development decreases support for insurgency (Beath, Christia & Enikolopov, 2012; Böhnke & Zürcher, 2013; Fishstein & Wilder, 2012). Several studies suggest that development conditions alone provide insufficient explanatory power for such
support (Child, 2014; Crost, Felter, & Johnston, 2014). In some cases, support for insurgents appears to increase as aid increases (Risen, 2015). The explanatory gap is partially addressed by in-depth studies of local politics and patronage networks (e.g. Martin, 2014; Wilde, 2013; Coburn, 2009), but no known studies have included metrics of identity centrality in Afghanistan. Notably, one addresses identity in the form of ingroup/outgroup bias: in a study of public perception, Lyall, Blair and Imai (2013) found that civilian casualties caused by outgroup members (foreign troops) provoked a more negative reaction than civilian casualties caused by the Taliban. However, ingroup-outgroup boundaries are fluid and can shape-shift as the context and ideology changes. For example, before they became outgroup enemies, in the late 1980s the United States and Afghanistan’s anti-government jihadists were allies in the struggle against the Soviet-backed government. As study 3 demonstrates, shifts in identity centrality can gerrymander the boundaries of ingroup-outgroup distinctions. While an Afghan Muslim is an ingroup member, a person who emphasizes his or her ethnic identity may render all other Afghan Muslims who do not share that ethnic identity as outgroup members. Identity centrality may therefore be a more sensitive and variable measure compared to simple ingroup-outgroup distinctions.

Second, evidence in study 1 encourages policymakers to consider resource inequalities in models and metrics used to understand the conditions leading to ethnic conflict. Recent impact evaluations of USAID stabilization programs on public attitudes toward democracy and the Afghan government have not included measures of resource inequality in their explanatory models (see Risen, 2015). The model presented in study 1 included metrics for income and land inequalities, as well as a measure for perceived ability to influence local political decisions.
Unequal perception of the ability to influence government decisions appears particularly important, a finding in support of the popular idea that inclusive government is associated with peace and stability between groups. Other studies in political science and anthropology have included metrics for resource inequalities in the form of political power and electoral distributions (e.g. Sharan, 2013, for Afghanistan, or Hornsby, 2012, for Kenya). To the extent that resource inequalities predict ethnic conflict, policymakers may wish to explore policies that reduce inequalities between groups.

A third implication, of particular interest to those studying diversity policies and contact theory, is the robust associative link in study 2 between conditions of homogeneity and both ethnic identity centrality and support for violent AOGs. Dovidio and colleagues (2008) found that intergroup contact between diverse groups decreases intergroup prejudice over time (Everett, 2013, provides an excellent review of Intergroup Contact Theory). They suggest that this may be related to the tendency for individuals in contact with one another to think and act more similarly to each other over time. In contrast, a tradition of political science research beginning with Horowitz (1985) suggests that diversity can sometimes increase the likelihood of intergroup conflict, such as when minority groups obtain a critical threshold in proportionality to the majority group. While some recent evidence supports the idea that heterogeneity itself increases the chance of national conflict (e.g. Fearon & Laitin, 1999), other studies have found heterogeneity to be a weak predictor, and favor instead measures such as strength of democratic institutions. (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Fraenkel & Grofman, 2004; Saideman, 2002).

Additional research is needed to explore these dynamics in Afghanistan. Specifically, future models should include measures of ethnic population change and the speed of contact
between ethnic groups. In a study of host populations and immigrant groups, for example, Rapp (2015) found that rapid contact with outgroup members increased prejudice against outgroup members. Identity data can be triangulated with migration data or other metrics for speed of intergroup contact in Afghanistan. This may be particularly relevant using a district-level analysis of areas with active seasonal conflict, such as Behsud, where there are reported tensions between nomadic herdsmen (largely Pashtun kuchis) and farmers (of various ethnic groups, primarily Hazara).

A third implication for policymakers, highlighted in study 3, is to consider the role of identity needs and ideology in understanding why some groups focus on sectarian identities while others emphasize shared or superordinate identities. Some politicians in Afghanistan, including leadership of the National Unity Government, seek to promote unity through the importance of superordinate identities, such as national and Islamic identity. In support of these policy goals are the assumptions of the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gartner & Dovidio, 2000), which posits that incorporating members of different groups within a common and inclusive identity can extend the cognitive and affective benefits of ingroup categorization to those formerly seen as members of an outgroup. Previous research on interventions designed to increase the salience of a common group identity suggests that these can immediately improve intergroup attitudes and relations (Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew, 1998; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). The qualitative evidence presented here reveals little in terms of resource justifications as to why Afghans prioritize one identity over another. Instead, the narrative explanations emphasize positive feelings of superiority and pride, a sense of recognition, ideology, and the comparative distinctness of their prioritized identity relative to
other groups. Resource differences between groups may nonetheless provide an explanatory backdrop, but these were either not psychologically salient or not normatively appropriate to share in the forum of these interviews. Interventions to promote the importance of superordinate identities in Afghanistan, including outreach and communication campaigns to construct public identity narratives, might be more effective when taking into account these identity needs.

**Directions for Future Research**

There are several exciting directions for future research on identity centrality. These include research on identity shifts and within-person changes, an understudied topic in psychology (Moghaddam, 2002; Moghaddam, Warren & Cheng, 2012), and on the relationship between identity threats and identity centrality.

**Identity Centrality Shifts**

The present research did not examine within-person shifts in identity, but there are reasons to expect that within-person identity centrality shifts help explain important social behaviors and social change. Examples of meaningful shifts in identity centrality can be seen in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Many Americans responded to the attacks by elevating their national identity, showing solidarity and pride through national identity markers. According to the Flag Manufacturers Association of America (n.d.), gross annual sales for United States flags rose from $750,000 in 2000 to $51.7 million in 2001, with most 2001 sales occurring in the months following 9/11. In the wake of increased anti-Muslim rhetoric in the public sphere, some Muslim Americans responded by highlighting the importance of their
Muslim identity. For example, Muslim men responded by growing beards and women by wearing head coverings, in some cases for the first time.

As Noury’s story and Turner and Oakes (1986) highlight, identity centrality is a fluid rather than static individual characteristic. Identity priorities can and do shift, and while the studies presented here did not document these shifts, this is an opportune area for future research, particularly research on social change and intergroup relations. Toward this research, I propose that shifts may occur in two temporal types: (1) situational shifts, when identity centrality is highly responsive to short-term situational factors, such as the particular makeup of a social group or the positioning of the interlocutors (see Davies & Harre, 1990), and (2) general shifts, such as when a person fundamentally changes the way he or she views the importance or unimportance of a particular identity relative to other identities.

General shifts in identity centrality refer to long-term, cross-situational changes in a person’s identity priorities, and may be affected by strong experiences tied to a particular identity (including experiences that result in grievances) and sustained changes in a person’s social environment (e.g. moving to a new community, or the introduction of a sustained, long-term threat such as an occupying foreign military force). The example of Abdul Noury’s change in identity centrality, in which identified increasingly as a Hazara and decreasingly as an Afghan, reflects a general shift under this conceptualization because the change in his identity priorities was sustained over a long period of time. Situational shifts, by contrast, may involve situational factors such as those highlighted in studies 1 and 2, including the presence of observers, the ethnic identity of the interviewer, and so on. Relative to situational shifts, general shifts in
identity priorities are more enduring and refer to an overall architecture in which identities held to be important are held to be important across a variety of situations.

Situational shifts are proposed to reflect short-term behavioral displays of identity centrality. For example, in the context of a job interview, an applicant may decide to display behavior that highlights the importance of an identity he or she shares with the employer, or otherwise hopes will increase the chances of being hired. (“You like the Red Sox? I’m a big fan too”). In keeping with the assumptions of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the highlighted identity is a source of pride. Positive and distinct identities and their behavioral markers tend to carry social currency, and the value of this social currency fluctuates from situation to situation. As a result, situational shifts may be more immediately strategic than general shifts. For example, a person who is a racial minority may be rewarded for highlighting his or her racial identity on a college admissions application, if that college holds an Affirmative Action policy that values minority identities. In other situations, a distinct racial identity may not have value. At a July 4th parade, for example, a person may feel more pride by highlighting the importance of an American identity.

Where situational and general shifts in identity centrality are strategic, they may reflect short-term versus long-term goals. One way to visualize identity centrality as inherently strategic is to compare it to a card game. Imagine that each person has available to them a menu of social identities [Figure 22]. Each player must decide which identity card to play based on a variety of factors, some situational and some general. Situational considerations include what cards other players have, what card the last person played, and these vary from one turn to another. General considerations include the game being played, which determines the relative
value of the cards themselves, and the overall strategy for which are more valuable. From one turn to another, and from one game to another, some cards may be more valuable or utilitarian than others to achieve identity needs such as feelings of pride, or access to resources.

One advantage to this conceptualization is its accommodation of social identity complexity, the condition of having multiple overlapping identities (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Identity complexity refers to the extent to which group memberships are diverse and separate, such as when a person identifies with various social affiliations that span across national, ethnic, or religious boundaries. Often, conflicting parties maintain a menu of identities that include some distinct and some superordinate identities, yet distinct identities are emphasized to a more significant degree than superordinate identities. For instance, Sunnis and Shias are both Muslims, Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics are both Christian, and Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis share the same national identity, yet each of these groups emphasize their distinct identities over superordinate identities within the context of geographic conflicts. This complexity is particularly prominent within Afghanistan, where many ingroups simultaneously contain outgroups, and outgroups simultaneously contain ingroups [Figure 23].

Assuming that each person has multiple “identity cards” to play, identity centrality may help determine which ingroup and outgroup differentiations are most meaningful to the person. This assumes that in situations of conflict, this menu of identities and the identity priorities that organize them define commonalities and differences between groups. Against this assumption is the reality that some ingroup-outgroup boundaries are rigidly defined by institutions and context, and less by individuals. For example, a prison guard who believes his identity as a human being
is more important than his identity as a prison guard is nonetheless accountable to the rules of his institution.

As a component of social identity theory, the concept of identity centrality may benefit from further integration with existing literature on identification processes. Whereas centrality refers to the psychological importance placed on a particular identity or identity hierarchy, social identity literature addresses questions of how persons categorize or label themselves and others, how feelings of belonging are generated and maintained, how groups discriminate against outsiders, how group boundaries between groups are determined, and how institutions define and organize identities (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). For example, can the needs described in Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991) be met through shifts in identity centrality? Brewer (1991) proposed that individuals have two fundamental and competing human needs—the need for inclusion and the need for differentiation—that are strategically met by membership in moderately inclusive (optimally distinct) groups. It is plausible that centrality is a strategy to achieve both. In situations where distinctness is needed, a person may place importance on his or her distinct identity; in situations where inclusion is needed, he or she may place importance on broader, more inclusive identity categories.

**Threat and Identity Centrality: A Cycle?**

Another important body of theory that has not been adequately studied in tandem with identity centrality is the perception of identity threats. In Ethier and Deaux (1994), when an identity was threatened, identification with the threatened identity was found to increase. Some evidence suggests that persons may respond to a perceived threat by increasing the centrality of the threatened identity, particularly when that identity is perceived to have rigid or impermeable
boundaries, such as race or ethnicity (Tausch et al., 2007; Ethier & Deaux, 1994). In these cases, a cycle appears: perceived threats increase centrality, and in turn, centrality can heighten sensitivity to future threats and discrimination [Figure 21].

If this observation is supported by future studies, it may help explain why some sectarian ethnic and religious conflicts appear “intractable”: as threats increase identity centrality, identity centrality heightens sensitivity to intergroup threats and grievances. Preliminary evidence supports this model. In a study of black South Africans, Gibson (2008) found that those who self-identify first using their ethnic group (e.g. Zulu, Xhosa) are far less likely, compared to those who identify first as South African, to report that justice has been adequately performed when reacting to a vignette in which a black squatter is legally evicted from land on which she is squatting. In other words, ethnic identity centrality among black South Africans predicted heightened skepticism of procedural justice, when compared to black South Africans with a superordinate (national) identity centrality.

Identity threats, including the threat of persecution on the basis of a group identity, are sometimes linked with intergroup grievances from conditions of relative deprivation (Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2007). These, in turn, appear to affect identification processes. For example, in a study of American high school students, Huo et al. (2010) found that strength of national identification is positively correlated with perceptions of how well one’s subgroup is treated within the broader society: when participants rated the treatment of their subgroup by other groups as poor, they were less likely to identify with their (shared) national identity, and more likely to identify with their (distinct) subidentity. In a study of ethnic conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Blagojevic (2009) concluded that the conflict was explained by the convergence of
multiple factors, including historical group grievances and the denial of rights for different groups, beyond intergroup competition for resources. Against this conclusion, however, Fearon and Laiton (2003) found that grievance-based differentiation may not be sufficient to explain civil war (the pairing of intergroup differentiation with outgroup violence): in a review of civil wars between 1945-1999, they found that state discrimination against minority religions and languages did not significantly predict an increased chance for civil war, after controlling for differences in per capita income.

**The Role of Ideology**

The relationship between ideology and identity centrality is another rich area for further investigation. Although Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed ingroup-outgroup comparisons are based on “similarity, proximity, and situational salience” (41), i in some cases these can also be based on ideology that may be neither situational nor proximate in terms of physical distance. Someone may believe that an ingroup is distinct from a real or imagined outgroup without having proximate access to that outgroup. For example, some radical Muslims in Afghanistan may hold a strong sense that they are not Jews, yet have not met a Jewish person, nor know enough to judge whether or how a Jewish person is similar or different from a Muslim or a Christian. Evidence presented in Study 3 suggests that ideology may interact with materialist theories through the role of imagined material rewards (i.e., the promise of rewards in an afterlife), and it may also involve moral distinctiveness (e.g. moral superiority) or the

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i Proximity and situational salience is increasingly complicated by technology, which has enabled the phenomena of “homegrown jihadists” for example, where individuals can achieve a sense of positive distinctness through virtual association with radical groups, even from remote and dissimilar regions of the world (see Sageman, 2008).
achievement of a positive and distinct status, such as in the eyes of a third party (e.g. a divine authority). For example, an ideology may dictate that one group is superior to another group by virtue of heavenly rewards, or by chosenness or specialness.

**Tribe Switching**

Another area where identity centrality may play a role is the question of why some groups “switch tribes,” a topic of growing interest in the social sciences. In some cases, members may switch from membership in a smaller, distinct group into larger one, while in other cases, members may switch from a larger group into a smaller, more distinct group. This behavior can result in significant longitudinal changes to group identity dynamics. For example, in Puerto Rico, Dominguez (1998) reported that the majority of the population changed their racial identification from “negro” to “mulatto” to “white” over a period of fifty years, while in Brazil, Daniel (2006) noted that the opposite took place: many who identified themselves as “white” or “black” switched to describing themselves as “brown,” creating a non-white majority. In Sri Lanka, Rajasingham (1999) found that many who once called themselves “Kandyan” and “Low Country” abandoned their regional distinctiveness in favor of a cohesive “Sinhala” identity. In Afghanistan, many ethnic Aimaks in northern provinces – including three in the current study’s sample – describe themselves as ethnically Tajik instead of Aimak.

**Other Factors Related to Ethnic Conflict**

Several other conditions are associated with ethnic conflict in previous literature and were not part of the current study of identity centrality. Briefly noted, these include the depth of cultural and ideological differences between groups, the presence of major structural change that
creates uncertainty and fear (Blagojevic, 2009), and historical grievances (Murshed & Tadoeddin, 2007). Huntington (1996), Ignatieff (1993), and Smith (1986) highlight the importance of deep, long-standing cultural differences between groups, such as those rooted in distinct collective ideologies, historical narratives, languages, cultural traditions, and blood-based lineages, as drivers of intergroup conflict. On the one hand, these approaches acknowledge important historical factors that explain variation in language and culture. On the other, these approaches may exaggerate the extent to which intergroup distinctions are fixed or a priori social realities, rather than a fluid process resulting from groups seeking resources and/or positive distinctness.

The most commonly measured resources in political theory are economic, cultural, spacial (e.g. land), and political power (Esses et al., 2001). To these measures social identity theorists add psychological resources, specifically group status and esteem (Negy, Shreve, Jensen & Uddin, 2003), as factors for consideration. Here lies another gap in the literature, however: whereas intergroup resource differences have been widely studied in relation to political and ethnic identities (e.g. land conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis, in Yiftachel (2006), or income inequalities in Mozambique, in Sumich (2010), the relationship between resource inequalities and psychological components of identification, such as those as defined by Roccas et al. (2008), is understudied. One exception is a study by de la Sablonnière, Tougas, and Lortie-Lussier (2009), who found that that the psychological act of comparing the status of one’s national group to the present and future status of other national groups can affect the strength of identification with a national identity. They do not, however, isolate the direction of influence, “whether the cognitive component of social identity…acts as a predictor or as a consequence of
collective relative deprivation” (344). Likewise, in study 1, higher levels of resource inequality predicted more emphasis on ethnic identity and more support for violent AOGs, yet the relationship is essentially associative rather than causal. A closer approximation of causal influence is difficult to achieve without a more controlled experimental design.
APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1: Three ordered logistic regression models predicting sympathy for violent armed opposition groups. Factors that increase sympathy are the presence of observers in the interview and ethnic identity centrality. Factors that decrease sympathy, ceterus paribus, include being female, having more education, and most significantly, living in a city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLE: SYMPATHY FOR AOGs</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>.227***</td>
<td></td>
<td>.227***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URBAN/RURAL</td>
<td>-.418***</td>
<td>-.347***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>-.014***</td>
<td>-.013***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>-.467***</td>
<td>-.490***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHNIC GROUP</td>
<td>-.054***</td>
<td>-.053***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF OBSERVERS</td>
<td>.572***</td>
<td>.576***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER ETHNICITY</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut1 _cons</td>
<td>.499***</td>
<td>-6.41***</td>
<td>-6.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut2 _cons</td>
<td>2.15***</td>
<td>-4.72***</td>
<td>-4.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27411</td>
<td>27063</td>
<td>27063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Table 2: Three ordered logit models to predict sympathy for violent armed opposition groups among Pashtun respondents only. Ethnic identity centrality again predicts an increase in sympathy, ceterus paribus. Unlike other ethnic groups, however, the presence of observers in the interview does not significantly increase sympathy, while the ethnicity of the interviewer plays a significant role. When the interviewer is a non-Pashtun, stated sympathy decreases significantly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLE: SYMPATHY FOR AOGs (PASHTUNS ONLY)</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIC</td>
<td>.081**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.077**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URBAN/RURAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.475***</td>
<td>-.466***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.020***</td>
<td>-.019***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.441***</td>
<td>-.449***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.000</td>
<td>-.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF OBSERVERS</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.043</td>
<td>-.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER ETHNICITY</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.590***</td>
<td>-.587***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut1 _cons</td>
<td>.175***</td>
<td>-2.38***</td>
<td>-2.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut2 _cons</td>
<td>1.838***</td>
<td>-0.650</td>
<td>-0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>7948</td>
<td>7769</td>
<td>7769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Table 3: Effect of resource inequalities on ethnic identity centrality. While the coefficients for all three resource variables are significant, the magnitude of impact for land (in hectares) is negligible. Instead, a one unit increase in the perceived ability to influence local government decisions substantially decreases ethnic identity centrality, ceterus paribus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLE: ETHNIC IDENTITY CENTRALITY</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LAND GAP</td>
<td>.003**</td>
<td>.003**</td>
<td>.003**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME GAP</td>
<td>.048**</td>
<td>.048*</td>
<td>.067***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL POLITICAL POWER</td>
<td>-.466***</td>
<td>-.403***</td>
<td>-.404***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URBAN/RURAL</td>
<td>-.372***</td>
<td>-.362***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>-.015***</td>
<td>-.015***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>.061*</td>
<td>.063*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONDENT ETHNICITY</td>
<td>.020**</td>
<td>.024***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF OBSERVERS</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER ETHNICITY</td>
<td>-.052</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| cut1 _cons                                  | -1.00***| -0.40   | -.023   |
| cut2 _cons                                  | .498*** | 1.105   | 1.483*  |

Statistics
N                      23828  23589  23589

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Table 4: Ordered logistic regressions show the effect of ethnic fracturalization on ethnic identity centrality, including controls for resource inequalities, demographics, and situational factors. EF appears to significantly decrease ethnic identity centrality in models 1, 2, and 4. The magnitude and significance of the coefficient are reduced in model 3 due to multicollinearity between EF and urban/rural status (cities are more diverse).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLE: ETHNIC IDENTITY CENTRALITY</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EF (DIVERSITY OF PROVINCE)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.358***</td>
<td>-.337***</td>
<td>-.232***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAND GAP</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME GAP</td>
<td>.050**</td>
<td>.065***</td>
<td>.067***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL POLITICAL POWER</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.305***</td>
<td>-.258***</td>
<td>-.275***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URBAN/RURAL</td>
<td>-.244***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>.015***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.016***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>.089*</td>
<td>.083*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td>.003*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF OBSERVERS</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER ETHNICITY</td>
<td></td>
<td>.145***</td>
<td>-.147***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>-.478*</td>
<td>1.60***</td>
<td>-1.75***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>1.49***</td>
<td>.967***</td>
<td>-.154</td>
<td>-0.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>28111</td>
<td>23589</td>
<td>23589</td>
<td>23589</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Table 5: Final ordered logistic regressions show a robust effect of ethnic fracturalization on sympathy for violent armed opposition groups. As provinces become more diverse, sympathy for AOGs decreases dramatically. The significance of the coefficients for ethnic identity centrality, as well as resource inequalities, are weakened due to multicollinearity with EF. Respondents who say they can influence local government decisions are significantly less sympathetic with AOGs, ceterus paribus. (The simple correlation between the two is the opposite, counter to intuition: overall, those who say they can influence local government are also more likely to report sympathy for AOGs (r=.14, p<.0001), but the direction of this relationship flips in the context of other relevant variables)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLE: SYMPATHY FOR AOGS</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EF (DIVERSITY OF PROVINCE)</td>
<td>-1.10***</td>
<td>-.644***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETHNIC IDENTITY CENTRALITY</td>
<td>.052*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAND GAP</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME GAP</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL POLITICAL POWER</td>
<td>-2.36***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>-.020***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>-.490***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>-.004*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF OBSERVERS</td>
<td>-.125</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER ETHNICITY</td>
<td>-.194***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>.133***</td>
<td>-8.41***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_cons</td>
<td>1.89***</td>
<td>-6.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27411</td>
<td>13508</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001
Table 6: List of original studies and assessments on land issues and land-based disputes in Afghanistan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Title of Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>Land Governance Assessment Framework (LGAF)</td>
<td>The LGAF is a diagnostic tool created by the WB that aims, through a participatory benchmarking, monitoring and dialog process, assess the level governance in different areas of the land sector. The assessment is done through panel discussions with local experts in the different areas of the land sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordaid and Van Vollenhoven Institute</td>
<td>Primary Justice in Afghanistan</td>
<td>Research regarding people’s justice concerns and conceptions, and to which extent, how and how successful people (with special focus on women) engage with the available state and non-state justice mechanisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)</td>
<td>Secure Livelihoods Research - Afghanistan</td>
<td>It is a six year global research programme exploring livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict-affected situations, which has been implemented in 8 countries. The aim of the research is to strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Asia Foundation</td>
<td>Survey of the Afghan People</td>
<td>TAF’s annual surveys provide a longitudinal overview of the country along the years, including also some specific questions about land tenure, housing, and land disputes and its typology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Habitat</td>
<td>State of Afghan Cities Programme</td>
<td>The Report will present a well-informed and action-oriented analysis of the state of urbanization across Afghanistan, including quantitative and qualitative city-based data as well as analyses of key national, provincial and municipal urban development issues in all 33 Provincial Municipalities of Afghanistan and Kabul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMA Rule of Law Unit</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>UNAMA has been providing technical support for the development of land-related policies to the PAGL, other coordination groups and ministerial stakeholders. UNAMA also has been writing and publishing studies regarding specific land related topics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Reasons for identity centrality by type of identity (Source: primary interviews, Kabul, June, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Religious Identity</th>
<th>Afghan Identity</th>
<th>Ethnic Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access social support network</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive identity, reason to be proud</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct identity, different from others</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct identity, superior to others</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain social respect</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be part of a powerful group</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity within the group important</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obedience to Norms</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kunduz</td>
<td>Helmand</td>
<td>Ghor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sunni/Shia Distribution</strong>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Sunni 94%, Shia 6%</td>
<td>Sunni 75%, Shia 25%</td>
<td>Sunni 70%, Shia 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Fracturalization/Diversity Coefficient</strong></td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Ethnic Group</strong></td>
<td>Pashtuns (33%)</td>
<td>Pashtuns (97%)</td>
<td>Tajiks (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most important identity</strong></td>
<td>Muslim (73%)</td>
<td>Ethnicity (62%)</td>
<td>Afghan (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Least Divisive or Controversial Identity</strong></td>
<td>Muslim (Sunnis are a super-majority)</td>
<td>Ethnicity (Pashtuns are a super-majority)</td>
<td>Afghan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B: FIGURES

Figure 1: Map of Sudan showing medial vegetation line. Ethnic conflict is centered in the Western region where vegetation is receding.
Figure 2: Map of ethnic fracturalization (diversity) by province. Provinces in the South and South East corridor bordering Pakistan have the least ethnic diversity, and are primarily populated by Pashtun clans.
Figure 3: Pashtuns as a proportion of each province’s population
Figure 4: Tajiks as a proportion of each province’s population
Figure 5: Hazaras as a proportion of each province’s population
Figure 6: Uzbeks as a proportion of each province’s population
**Figure 7**: Ethnic Distribution of Afghanistan, based on the Survey of the Afghan People, 2006-2015 (n=72,261)

**AFGHANISTAN ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION**

- **Pashtun**: 40%
- **Tajik**: 34%
- **Hazara**: 10%
- **Uzbek**: 9%

Combined: Turkmen, Arab, Baloch, Aimak, Nuristani, Sadat, Pashaye, Qezelbash, Kyrgyz, Gujar 7%
Figure 8: From Haber et al. (2012), a DNA analysis of Y-chromosomal haplogroup frequencies using principal component analysis (arrow added for emphasis on Hazaras)
Figure 9: Evidence of ethnic voting (Source: Survey of the Afghan People, 2015, based on self-report)

VOTER BEHAVIOR BY ETHNIC GROUP:
2014 PRESIDENTIAL RUNOFF ELECTION
(SELF-REPORT)

ASHRAF GHANI (PASHTUN) & GEN. DOSTUM (UZBEK)
ABDULLAH ABDULLAH (TAJIK) & KHALILZAD (HAZARA)
PREFER NOT TO SAY

PASHTUN  UZBEK  OTHER MINORITIES  HAZARA  TAJIK
Figure 10: Spoken languages by frequency. (Source: Survey of the Afghan People, 2010-2015 (n=42,903), using self-report question *Which languages can you speak?*)

**LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN AFGHANISTAN**

- **DARI**: 78.6%
- **PASHTO**: 50.4%
- **UZBEKI**: 10.6%
- **ENGLISH**: 5.2%
- **TURKIC**: 2.9%
- **URDU**: 2.3%
- **ARABIC**: 1.1%
- **HINDI**: 0.3%
- **RUSSIAN**: 0.2%
Figure 11: Self-reported voter behavior by ethnicity of voter, 2014 presidential elections (first round). (Source: Survey of the Afghan People 2014)

VOTER BEHAVIOR BY ETHNICITY:
2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (FIRST ROUND)

- VOTED FOR PASHTUN/UZBEK TICKET
- VOTED FOR TAJIK/HAZARA TICKET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>PASHTUN</th>
<th>TAJIK</th>
<th>UZBEK</th>
<th>HAZARA</th>
<th>TURKMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted for pashtun/uzbek ticket</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted for tajik/ hazara ticket</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 12: Number and ethnicity of President Ghani’s nominations for the Office of Administrative Affairs (OAA) and advisers (Unpublished source: Sharan, 2015)

* Chart used with permission of author
Figure 13: Number and ethnicity of government appointments by Abdullah Abdullah (Tajik) and Mohammad Mohaqeq (Hazara) (Unpublished source: Sharan, 2015)

- Chart used with permission of author
Figure 14: Ethnic identity centrality has increased between 2013-2015 (Source: Survey of the Afghan People)
Figure 15: Average household income by region (in Afghanis). The greatest inequalities appear within the South West, where Pashtuns and Hazaras hold comparable average household incomes, and Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other minorities have comparatively low average incomes. Super-minority ethnic groups appear to have the highest average household incomes, based on self-report, in the North West and Kabul/ Central region, but also in the East.
Figure 16: Self-reported sympathy with non-state AOGs who use violence to achieve their goals. While most Afghans report no sympathy with AOGs, Pashtun respondents are more likely to report feeling a little or a lot of sympathy.

### SYMPATHY WITH ARMED OPPOSITION GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Pashtuns</th>
<th>Pashtuns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Lot of Sympathy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little Sympathy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Sympathy</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 17: Illustration of the social identity theory framework, including the three strategies to achieve a secure identity and their associated tactics. (Diagram adapted from the text of Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
Figure 18: Order of identity centrality by first and second choice (Source: Survey of the Afghan People, 2013-2015)
Figure 19: Identity priorities by province (Source: Survey of the Afghan People, 2013-2015)
Figure 20: Identity centrality by socioeconomic status and gender
Figure 21: Conceptual model for the cycle of threat perception and identity centrality

Perceived threat

Increased sensitivity to future threats

Increased centrality of threatened identity
Figure 22: Illustration of identity centrality as strategic in the form of playing cards. Situational identity centrality may be a strategy to achieve short-term goals, such as by playing the identity card that is expedient or advantageous for resource or identity needs in the moment. General identity centrality may reflect an overall strategy for which cards to play in life, tied to long-term individual goals.
**Figure 23:** Illustration of overlapping identities in Afghanistan between religious, national, and ethnic identity categories.
REFERENCES


