

## **Supplementary Information about the Collection of Interview Data for “Distinction, Necessity, and Proportionality: Afghan Civilians’ Attitudes toward Wartime Harm”**

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The study consists of eighty-seven face-to-face, in-depth interviews conducted in Kabul with Afghan civilians directly affected by war-related violence. The interviews were conducted in April and July/August of 2015. Initially we recruited one hundred interviewees, but thirteen were ultimately excluded from the study. One person turned out to be below eighteen years of age, and another person reported having directly participated in hostilities on the side of the Taliban, which excluded him from the category of “civilian.” The others turned out to attribute their harming to an anti-coalition armed group, for instance the Taliban. All quotations and reported numbers in the paper therefore refer to eighty-seven interviews only.

### **SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES**

Interviewees were recruited from two camps for internally displaced persons in Kabul. Between 2008 and 2015, war-related violence had displaced them from the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahār to Kabul. I selected interviewees who attributed the attacks that displaced them to the international coalition, which includes forces belonging to the NATO-led ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) mission, the NATO-led operation Resolute Support, the U.S.-led operation Enduring Freedom, and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). Due to security concerns, I was strongly advised against going into the camps myself. Instead, I relied on a local partner. He recruited interviewees by talking to elders and senior community members who helped identify individuals who had experienced war-related harm that they attributed to the coalition. While

(dis)agreement to being interviewed could potentially create a selection bias, civilians who were approached were generally keen to participate in the project.

My initial aim was to achieve representativeness in terms of the age, gender, ethnicity, and tribal membership of the Helmand and Kandahār provinces. Achieving full representativeness, however, proved impossible for three reasons. First, many interviewees did not know their precise age. Due to the status associated with advanced age in Afghanistan, my local partners indicated that many interviewees may have overstated their age. Most gave rounded numbers and freely acknowledged that they were unsure about their precise age. The reported ages ranged from eighteen to eighty, with a median age of forty. Second, the local partner who recruited interviewees reported that elders were less often willing to approach women for interviews. Eighteen of the eighty-seven interviewees were women. Given the restrictions on women to publicly share their opinions in Afghanistan, polls and even scientific studies often exclude women altogether and focus only on men. Among the women whom I interviewed, some explicitly expressed appreciation that they were included in the study. Others more visibly struggled with being asked direct questions. Third, reliable statistics regarding the tribal and subtribal membership of the two provinces are unavailable. Ethnically the sample is representative of the provinces of Helmand and Kandahār, both of which are 99 percent Pashtun. Out of eighty-seven interviewees, one was half-Tajik, while all others identified as Pashtun.

It is important to note that this study does not seek to make generalizable claims about the substance of Afghan civilians' attitudes toward the coalition. Doing so would mean any limitations to the representativeness of the sample would be a limitation to the findings. Instead, the study inquires as to the role of beliefs about an attack in the formation of civilians' attitudes. While individuals of different generations or tribes may perceive the circumstances of the same attack in different ways, how an individual processes a particular

belief about an attack's circumstances or aims to inform his or her attitude is unlikely to vary systematically with age, gender, or tribal membership. That is not to say that the same beliefs about an attack necessarily lead to the same attitudes. Rather than demographic factors, for which one could seek representativeness in a group of individuals, it is likely subtler dispositional factors, such as thinking styles, empathy, and cognitive capacity, that account for differences in how a particular belief (for instance, about the intentionality of harm) informs an individual's attitudes.

## **INTERVIEW PROCESS**

I conducted the interviews in the rooms of a local civil society organization, the Afghanistan Human Rights and Democracy Organization (AHRDO). The organization is not affiliated with the government or any party to the conflict. It is best known for its Memory Box project, which uses visual and performance art to help victims of war-related trauma and loss. I hired a minibus to facilitate transport for the interviewees between the camps and the AHRDO building. In line with the research protocol that was preapproved by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee, interviewees were compensated for their time only. In keeping with the local culture, interviewees were given lunch or tea if they had to wait at the AHRDO building for another interview to conclude or if it was lunch or teatime. Interviewees were not otherwise compensated or incentivized.

The translators and I took great care not to give interviewees any perceived reasons to misrepresent their views or feel pressured. We conducted the interviews in a room with only myself, one or two translators, and one interviewee present at a time. After conducting fifty (forty-five of the reported) interviews, the translators had become intimately familiar with the project and the questions, which allowed them to conduct the remainder of the interviews in

their entirety without me or any other foreigner in the room. The main translator was fluent in both Pashto and Dari. The second translator, a Pashto speaker, was fluent in the accent of southern Afghanistan, particularly of Helmand Province.

When recruiting the interviewees, the local partner was instructed to emphasize the scholarly nature of the study and the researcher's lack of affiliation with any government or party to the conflict. We started each interview by stressing this again and by seeking informed consent from the interviewees to tell us their stories and answer our questions about their experiences of being harmed in war and displaced to Kabul. None of the interviewees were literate enough to sign a consent form. We also stressed that interviewees should feel free at any time to interrupt or end the interview. We assured each of them of their full anonymity. While many introduced themselves by their full name, I never noted more than their first name, gender, age given, tribal membership (and subtribal membership, if volunteered), location where they were from, and year they were displaced to Kabul. In the article, the interviewees are referred to only by gender, age given, district, province, and the date of the interview.

The interview format allowed us to build trust and reduce the risk of the interviewees deliberately distorting their views. To reassure interviewees, we took notes rather than record the interviews. As an acknowledgment of the traumatic nature of the events that interviewees recounted and the complexity of the questions we asked, interviews were not limited in time. After seeking informed consent and noting their details, we encouraged the interviewees to tell their stories and did not interfere or interrupt them before we asked them structured questions. While they were initially accounting for what had displaced them to Kabul, the interviewees were given no indication of the precise substantive objectives of the study, so they were under no pragmatic pressure to tell their story in a particular way. The structured questions that we asked of them afterward were repeated, often in different ways, to allow

interviewees to work through them both emotionally and intellectually. The need to explain, rephrase, and discuss questions would have made a survey an inappropriate data-gathering tool.

## **INTERVIEW STRUCTURE AND CONTENT (EXCERPTS)**

The interviews followed the basic structure below.

1. *Introduction of the researcher and translator(s)*
2. *Informed consent*
3. *Demographic details*
4. *Unstructured narrative:* Interviewees were asked the following broad, open ended question: “Please tell us what events led to your decision to come to Kabul.” If interviewees’ stories did not include an account of harm attributed to coalition troops, I would ask: “Before coming to Kabul did you or your family ever suffer war-related violence directly?” Otherwise, I generally did not interfere in their initial stories. At certain points, I asked for clarification or elaboration, such as in two cases when interviewees mentioned intentionality as relevant to how they assessed their harming.
5. *Structured questions:* Below is an approximation of the structured questions. We generally did not change the order of the questions, but particularly when interviewees had trouble understanding a question, we repeated it in different ways. I include here questions that are reported in the article:

“Do you blame the attacker/coalition for the attack/ harm done to you/your family?”

If yes: “Do you also blame any other party to the war?”

If no: "Do you blame anyone else?"

"Do you think the harm done to you/your family was intended/deliberate? Do you think that one aim of the coalition's attack was to harm you/your family?"

If no: "Do you think the harm caused to you/your family could have been avoided in the attack, for instance, if the coalition had been more careful or launched the attack in a different way?"

"How important, do you think the attack was militarily at the time it happened?" (As this question often confused and sometimes upset interviewees, we only asked it in the first forty-five reported interviews.)

"Do you think the coalition is fighting for a legitimate aim in Afghanistan? Do you think it is fighting to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan/your province/your district?"

"Do you think any of the other parties to the war has a legitimate aim? Do you think they are fighting to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan/your province/your district?"

"Is it legitimate to kill civilians as a side effect of attacks that pursue a legitimate overall war aim?"

In some cases, at the end of the interview we asked participants about their view of a trolley problem scenario adjusted to be plausible in Helmand. We also asked interviewees whether there was anything else they wanted to share about their story.