Social Order within and beyond the Shadow of Hierarchy

Governance Patterns in Afghanistan

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Forschungsgemeinschaft

DFG

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Abstract

In this paper I argue that governance can be referred back to the basic sociological categories of social order, institutions and power. More specifically, governance as an analytical concept refers to the ordering function of institutions that limits the role of self-help in social interaction. Since social order clearly predates the state the empirically relevant question is if governance outputs require some kind of functional equivalent to the state or if governance can be observed devoid of statehood in this functional sense. I discuss this question on the basis of evidence from different patterns of local governance (or: governance zones) observed in Afghanistan which are defined by various degrees of state involvement and governance effects. I find that social control is the only functional equivalent to the hieratical state in enforcing institutional rules against the self-interest of actors. Social control devoid of state protection is, however, limited in its geographical and social scope.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Arbeitspapier führe ich den Begriff „Governance" zurück auf die soziologischen Grundkategorien der gesellschaftlichen Ordnung, Institutionen und Macht. Governance als analytisches Konzept verweist auf die Ordnungsfunktion von Institutionen, die die bloße Durchsetzungsmacht (Selbsthilfe) von Akteuren in der gesellschaftlichen Interaktion einschränkt. Gesellschaftliche Ordnung gab es vor dem Staat; daher ist die empirisch relevante Frage, ob es Governance ohne Funktionsäquivalente zum hierarchisch durchsetzungsfähigen Staat gibt. Ich gehe dieser Frage auf der Grundlage von in Afghanistan beobachteten Governance-Mustern nach, welche nach dem Grad der Staatsanwesenheit und Governance-Effekten differenziert sind. Ich stelle fest, dass soziale Kontrolle das einzige Funktionsäquivalent zum Staat ist, das Regeln im Zweifelsfalle auch gegen die Interessen von Akteuren durchsetzen kann. Soziale Kontrolle ohne staatlichen Schutz ist allerdings in ihrer geografischen und sozialen Ausdehnung eng beschränkt.

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Abbreviations

CDC	Community Development Council
COIN	Counter Insurgency
DDA	District Development Assembly
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDLG	Independent Directorate for Local Governance
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NABDP	National Area-Based Development Programme
SFB 700	Collaborative Research Center (Sonderforschungsbereich)
UN	United Nations
US	United States

1. Introduction[1]

Is there governance without statehood? This is one of the defining questions of the research endeavor into governance in areas of limited statehood. According to SFB doctrine, *governance* is defined as "institutionalized forms of social coordination producing and implementing collectively binding rules, or providing collective goods". *Statehood* refers to a very specific form of formal institutionalized hierarchal power, namely "the ability of the state [or an alternative actor] to enforce collectively binding decisions, ultimately through coercive means that are guaranteed by a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence".[2]

On this basis, there does not seem to be much of an empirical puzzle. Social order based on institutions clearly predates the state in its capacity of supporting other institutions and sanctioning those who break the rules. In other words, statehood is just a specific form of aggregating governance delivery. However, if the definition of "governance" includes an explicit reference to a "ruling organization" (*Herrschaftsverband*) intentionally acting in order to produce binding rules and public goods, then *statehood* is part of the definition and the question posed above becomes tautological. The term "governance" as it is commonly used in contemporary mainstream social sciences implicitly links the concept to modern, state-bound society (cf. Benda-Beckmann et al. 2009: 1). Thus, in order to avoid a tautology, the concept of statehood needs to be purged from the concept of governance before we can attempt to answer the question of whether governance independent of the state can exist in areas of limited statehood (cf. Risse 2007). In order to strip governance of its modernist bias, I will refer the term back to the basic sociological categories of social order, institutions, and power. Hence, before discussing contemporary cases of governance with strictly limited state involvement, I want to spend some time on an "archaeology of sociological thought" from which the notion of governance derives.

First, enduring association (encompassing processes of *Vergesellschaftung, i.e. society formation*, as well as *Vergemeinschaftung, i.e. community formation*) is the process that forms social order (see Weber 1980: 21ff). Societies that follow from an enduring association of people do not necessarily require a political framework that identifies itself as one society.[3] Thus, *social coordination*

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1 I delivered an earlier version of this paper at the conference "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood: By Whom, for Whom, and to What Effect?" May 26-28, 2011 in Berlin, hosted by the SFB 700, Freie Universität Berlin.

2 The definition follows the SFB discourse on these concepts, see Sonderforschungsbereich 700 (2007). The SFB definition, however, stresses the aspect of institutionalized *intentional* social coordination in order to produce rather than just happening to produce collectively binding rules and collective goods. For the purpose of this paper I chose to ignore this otherwise potentially crucial focus on agency and intention in the definition of governance. I acknowledge that intentional social coordination (whether successful or not at reaching the intended outcome) is an important specification that does not make governance distinct from other potentially also unintentional social ordering-processes; but it does make governance a specific, more narrow case, of social ordering (cf. Göhler et al. 2009).

3 Though a formal political framework helps in order to identify the confines of meaningful boundaries of a society. According to most of the classical thinkers of sociology, a degree of shared institutional architecture and shared interpretations of itself (meaning, sense) are seen as defining aspects or core functions of society. See, for example, meaning according to Elias (1983); cohesion of modern society according to Durkheim (1964); Weber's (1980) notion of sense in defining social action; or Tönnies's

producing binding rules and collective goods can refer to social units of very different sizes and compositions. The state and its hierarchical modes of delivery (statehood) are only one possible solution for the challenge of providing coordination, binding rules, and collective goods.

Second, *collective goods* are conceptually distinct from *public goods*. Collective goods are non-rivalrous goods within exclusive collectives (club goods or network goods would be special cases of collective goods). In the case of public goods, the public is the all-inclusive collective (hence, public goods are considered non-excludable and non-rivalrous). The concept of public goods therefore relies on the differentiation between public and private spaces of social interaction. This is a principal dichotomy in modern state-based societies but does not exist in all societies and is often a rather weak concept in areas of limited statehood. When considering the provision of collective goods in areas of limited, defunct, or otherwise non-ideal-type Westphalian statehood, we must also carefully consider which social collectives benefit from governance outputs.[4]

Third, it is often very difficult to define the quality of the "binding power" upon which institutions rest. It is the binding power that sets proper norms apart from pre-conscious structures of orientation such as customs, routines, or habits; the latter do not result in institutions (see Elwert 2003). The binding power of rules is relative, situational, and never total, and it is different for different groups in a society.[5] In order to identify social order as a result of governance, the definition requires rules and regulations to be collectively binding. But this is a question of scale. It is an open question how binding and encompassing institutions must be in order to qualify as governance. The question of scale and extent is a principle problem of governance definitions that rely on ideal types rather than the shades of grey in real-world social phenomena and processes (see Koehler 2004 and Koehler/Zürcher 2007b).

(1991) ideal vs. mechanical elements of society. Hence, while society does not necessarily require political representation aside from functional systemic interdependencies, it does require a degree of consciousness or identity as a society.

4   A phenomenon referred to as "selective statehood" independently by the social anthropologist Julia Eckert (2004), Koehler/Zürcher (2004) and, more recently, Zürcher (2007). Beisheim et al. (2011) examine the hypothesis that in areas of limited statehood the states are selective in their provision of governance outputs in different policy fields.

5   There is no agreement within, let alone between, the disciplines of social science about the definition of institutions (for an overview of social sciences' use of the concept of institutions see Esser 2000: 1-43). There is, however, some common understanding that institutions have to do with binding rules, are conceptually different from organizations (though this differentiation is not always consistently applied), and reflect organizational principles that are more extensive in time and space than the concrete social situation and concrete social actors to which they apply. The double-phrased definition by Douglas North appears to capture this common ground eloquently when he explains institutions as "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanely devised constraints that shape human interaction" (1990: 6). The focus on binding-power, persistence and adhesion of institutions often did not pay due respect to the cracks in institutions itself, i.e., the contradictions, resistance and conflict intrinsic to institutions and not induced from outside (as notable exceptions see Dahrendorf (1968) for a theoretical concept of conflict-society, Hirschman (1970) for his classical work on exit and voice as principle strategies in response to an institutional order that is not for everyone and Scott (1990) for hidden transcripts setting the ground for radical challenge even under conditions of oppression). In order to understand genesis, adaptation and demise of institutions the cracks are, however, key.

The question of what makes rules stick is linked to the discussion of principles in early political anthropology of the 1940s and 1950s: namely the puzzle of social organization and political order in segmentary tribal, i.e., acephalous societies.[6] Anthropologists of this period produced substantial empirical evidence that *institutionalized forms of social coordination producing collectively binding rules, or providing collective goods* are not, in principle, confined to societies possessing some form of central authority.[7] Two critical questions emerged in the debate, which were typical of the prevailing structural-functionalist understanding of social order at that time. The first was the issue of institutional change when institutions were considered to be self-enforcing (producing an outcome of equilibrium with no endogenous incentives to challenge the institutional rules that would outweigh the expected costs involved).[8] The second debate centered on the binding power of informal institutions: how are informal institutions protected against rule breaking, avoidance, and strategic action by parts of society with the capacity and will to challenge the rules of the game.[9]

Anthropologists and sociologists have identified principle constraints compelling individual actors to conform to society's notion of the "common good" that can be found in all societies, including segmentary ones. The organizational form, relevance, and impact of these constraints vary, however, from society to society. Some of these constraints are external to social organization itself, as in the case of biological conditions or the natural environment. Others are intrinsic to social organization. For the latter case, social order is based on enforced or self-enforcing institutions and, when institutional rules break down, at minimum on a constellation of actors and their relative power *vis-à-vis* each other (e.g., material constraints that shape interaction).[10]

In societies without central enforcement capacities (acephalous societies) the binding power of collective rules is ensured against deviant behavior through institutionalized forms of social control, i.e., the specialized institution of social control enables other institutions to operate by protecting them against deviation and foul play. I use the ill-defined though common term of social control in a narrow anthropological sense (cf. Barnard/Spencer 2002: 622) to denote the specialized institutions that primary social groups (basically face-to-face communities)

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6   Some of the principle works of this early period of political anthropology are Fortes/Evans-Pritchard (1940); Evans-Pritchard (1940); and Middleton/Tait (1958). The next generation, building on those classic works, were Gluckman (1965); Leach (1970); Schapera (1967); and Bailey (1969), to name an influential few.

7   The argument has been made, however, that the empirical assessment of such societies took place in the context of high colonialism and statehood thus "contaminating" the acephalous sample with hierarchal effects (cf. Tignor (1971), also the recent discussion of modern statelessness with aspects of statehood in Förster (2012)).

8   An early attempt to reconcile institutional change with an equilibrium model is made by Gluckman (1968). For a recent discussion of this issue see Greif/Laitin (2004).

9   One of the most influential and still relevant theoretical constructs is based on Gluckman's observation that crosscutting ties lead to a conflict of loyalties that, in effect, preserves rather than destroys social order and the cohesion of the social fabric (see Gluckman 1965: 17ff).

10 Cf. Elias's (1970) analytical approach to constraining and hence ordering the effects of actor configurations.

have in place to define collective norms, monitor compliance, and sanction transgression (see Koehler 2004: 295). The institutions of social control are case-specific but often include individual or collective sanctions of reputation, some forms of exclusion from the community, and threats of spiritual pollution. Social control in this sense tends to be informal and is usually devoid of formalized hierarchy or an apparatus of coercion.[11] This does not, however, mean that social control may not have dire and at times fatal consequences for sanctioned transgressors (exclusion, for example, can deprive families or kin-groups of access to vital resources; self-help in feuds can be fatal).

Social control aside, it is vertical power – manifest or projected – that works as a sustainable solution to conflict between the binding power of rules and the potentially destructive competition between self-interested actors. If vertical power takes the form of a hierarchal political organization that lays claim to legitimate authority and a monopoly of violence, we are speaking of statehood. Neither the state as an organization nor statehood as a vertical organizational principle, however, is a necessary pre-condition for sustainable, rule-based social order. In this point we depart from Tanja Börzels claim that "we hardly ever find societal self-coordination without the involvement of state actors that have the capacity for taking and enforcing unilateral decisions" (2012: 9). Forms of societal self-coordination leading to institutionalized forms of social order in the absence of statehood have been observed in many non-state or pre-state societies. But as I will demonstrate below, it is difficult today to empirically prove the complete absence of statehood in any given social context.

At the same time, vertical power is no guarantee that the rule-based coordination of social action prevails over the strategic action of self-interested actors. As in the case of the modernizing state, central authority itself can be a powerful force in the intentional or unintentional destruction of pre-existing institutionalized social order.[12] In other cases, vertical power can destroy the institutional foundation of statehood and turn governance outputs into arbitrarily and selectively distributed goods (one prominent example of this is the destruction of the institutional order of the Soviet state and the Communist party during Stalin's reign of terror).[13]

Following the above considerations I can now reframe the question of governance without statehood in basic sociological categories: Do social institutions produce governance outputs without formal hierarchies and without a degree of hierarchical enforcement, i.e., statehood?

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11 In classic sociology with its focus on the modern, industrialized, and urbanized world, the term has been used to signify forms of both horizontal and hierarchical control over norm-conforming behavior in secondary social groups, i.e., in modern society; this approach can treat the bureaucratic state as a powerful institutional setting specialized in social control (see Meier (1982) for a critical assessment of the evolution of the concept in mainstream sociology). This is not the concept of social control that I am referring to here.

12 See Elwert (1995); cf. Scott (1998) and Scott (2009) for his principle criticism of destructive high modernization and resistance against it.

13 Börzel (2012) refers metaphorically to the more destructive effects of hierarchal power as the "dark side of statehood."

As stated above, and based on historical and anthropological evidence, the answer to this question is most likely "yes." In the contemporary world, however, some effects of statehood can be observed virtually everywhere. Hence, empirically, it is near impossible to observe governance completely isolated from statehood effects. In her paper, Tanja Börzel (2012) introduces four functional alternatives to statehood as the manifest or projected enforcement of rules by governments (referred to metaphorically as the *shadow of hierarchy*): the fear of anarchy, the impact of external statehood, the socially embedded forces of the market, and the social control of communities. Börzel observes: "The literature provides ample evidence for the existence of functional equivalents to the shadow of hierarchy cast by governments drawing on consolidated statehood. Yet, they still appear to rely on some forms of consolidated statehood" (2012: 13).

I argue that only social control is a conceptually valid functional equivalent to (the shadow of) hierarchy as a defining quality of statehood; fear of anarchy follows from the projection of statehood at risk, external statehood is statehood, and the socially embedded market can be subsumed under social control or under self-enforcing institutional arrangements.[14] The social embedding of power and unconstrained forces of the market, guarded by often informal institutions of social control, is the only functional equivalent that is conceptually independent form the notion of statehood. To the extent that social control is enforceable, it can make rules stick when negotiation and competition between actors fail to produce socially acceptable outcomes. Social control and statehood are functionally equivalent in two meaningful ways: both solve the problem of rule-enforcement against the partisan interests of actors; and both, at least to some extent, are based on a notion of legitimacy in enforcing rules.

Social embedding and social control are conceptually distinct from the projection of hierarchy intrinsic to the concept of statehood; social control works horizontally, whereas the state controls vertically. Social control and statehood do, however, affect each other. In terms of governance outputs they may be redundant, they may compete, or they may erode each other. But social control and statehood are the two principle elements of social order capable of "making rules stick" even if they go against the strategic interests of individual actors or the potentially destructive effects of rule avoidance, free riding and food dragging.

We have discussed elsewhere, in detail, the ordering and dis-ordering social effects of the interplay between official, informal, and traditional institutions for post-socialist societies in the Caucasus and the Balkans (Koehler/Zürcher 2003b). What is of general importance and hence relevant for our understanding of governance effects in other parts of the world is that official formal institutions and societal informal institutions are functionally interdependent. We have found them to be interdependent in three important and distinct ways: First, societal institutions – including traditional, informal, and criminal normative systems – may fill the

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14 Self-enforcing institutions do not belong in the category of functional equivalents to statehood since they do not require manifest or projected sanctioning capacities. Self-enforcing institutions work because they are in the best interest of relevant actors. They break down if challenged by relevant actors who find that the institution is not (anymore) in their best interest. Hence, the term "self-implementing" describes this category of institutions better than "self-enforcing."

organizational voids left by weak, defunct, or selective states and hence keep some core functions of statehood operational even under prohibitive conditions (conflict, war, breakdown of empire, economic crisis, etc.).[15] Second, informal institutions may be vital for the effectiveness of official institutions – even informal institutions that in normative terms may contest the official order.[16] Third, we may also find more intuitive cases where informality takes over and leads to systemic dysfunction.[17]

State and society, statehood and social control, government and governance may be set apart in academic discourse and treated as conceptually distinct from each other,[18] but this does not correspond to contemporary empirical reality. It is not sufficient to identify functional equivalents to the state in the production of governance (or, as anthropologists would call it, social order). It is the interplay, not the alternative, that matters.

Summing up, the empirically interesting question is not the categorical question of whether there is governance without statehood. The question is not one of *either/or* but rather one of *more or less*. Modern statehood may be the point of reference and dominant manifestation of formal political power in all corners of the world. But how and to what extent does governance occur when statehood is contested or too weak to be the final arbiter in case all else goes wrong? This is the question I will discuss for a specific contemporary area of limited statehood, namely Afghanistan's northeastern provinces.

2. Afghanistan

Ten years after the international intervention started, Afghanistan's official political order as it was created in the first three years following the Petersberg Accord[19] is now in deep crisis. The core of this crisis is not only the insurgency against the state and constitution, varying in intensity from region to region. It is not just the fact that the Western-driven state-building intervention has fallen short of expectations in terms of security, rule of law, and economics, and is explicitly looking for ways to achieve an orderly military exit, thereby playing down its initial goals. A key component of the current crisis is that the Afghan state has squandered its initial vote of confidence from the people, due to its incompetence, omnipresent corruption,

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15 See Koehler (2000: 75ff) for informal institutions that locally filled the gaps the Soviet system left in terms of legitimacy and contract security/trust in Georgia.

16 We made this point for the case of sophisticated corruption as parallel but supportive statehood in Azerbaijan (see Koehler/Zürcher 2004), and as a means of punitive control in Armenia (see Koehler/Zürcher 2003a); the point has been made in more general terms by Bailey (1969) in his classical work on the anthropology of politics.

17 This case we made for predatory corruption in Georgia (see Koehler/Zürcher 2004).

18 Joas (1996) and Latour (1995) refer to processes that set modern society conceptually apart from premodern, primitive societies as the "Reinigungsarbeit der Moderne," the "cleansing-work of modernity," for which academics are the principle cleaning professionals.

19 The agreement to set up fundamental state institutions after the ousting of the Taliban (UN 2001).

clearly rigged elections, corrupt adjudication, informal exercise of power, and informal control over resources.[20] The structural[21] and political[22] weaknesses of the state that emerged as a result of the international intervention, and the return of an organized and effective challenge to this state by the Taliban-led insurgency, call into question whether the 'red lines' laid down for initiating peace talks with the insurgents are realistic (cf. Bundesregierung 2010). In particular, retention of the current constitutional order cannot be taken for granted in a situation where, on the one hand, it does not work, and on the other hand, the insurgency is not so much about seizing power as changing the constitutional order of society.

To understand how Afghanistan is governed, as well as the role of the state and the space available to the state's armed and unarmed competitors, we need to examine governance in the country's villages, valleys, and districts, where the state, its competitors, and society face off. This is what we have been doing systematically in sample villages and districts across the provinces of northern Afghanistan for the past several years.[23]

3. The governance arena

Even after years of war and the current political-military crisis, Afghan society has retained elements of order.[24] Families, households, mosque congregations, villages, and village clusters tackle key everyday collective issues – in this precise ascending sequence, but with di-

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20 See, for example, ICG (2010) on the judiciary system, Wilder (2007) on the police system, Gardizi et al. (2010) on corruption of sub-national governance, and Tierney (2010) on corrupting and potentially undermining effects of the US military and reconstruction spending on Afghan state building.

21 These comprise primarily: a central constitution and administration *de facto* faced with a regionally fragmented political reality (cf. Lister 2005; White/Lister 2007); and also the fact that Afghanistan will, for the foreseeable future, be unable to provide for its own internal and external security, meaning security structures will require external financial and technical assistance (cf. Rubin 2011).

22 This includes first and foremost corruption as a governance technique generating informal resource flows and securing temporary centralized state influence – via patronage, extralegal privilege and venal loyalty in the provinces and districts, but which at the same time does great harm to the legitimacy and performance of the state. Connected with this is the second key political weakness of the Karzai regime - its inability to govern inclusively for Afghanistan as a whole, embracing relevant strategic groups. The strengthening of tensions between the non-Pashtun powerbrokers in the northern provinces and the Pashtun-dominated center are proof of this. The third key political weakness is that the government has not yet succeeded in launching a meaningful peace process with the Taliban involving Pakistan and Iran, or even in laying out the groundwork for this. Recent developments, including the discussions of political representation for the Taliban in Quetta and direct negotiations between the Taliban and the Kabul government are not very promising; initiating a meaningful peace process from a position of weakness on the side of the Afghan government and against the backdrop of an announced exit date for ISAF is difficult to imagine.

23 See Koehler/Zürcher (2007a); Zürcher/Koehler (2007); Böhnke et al. (2010); Koehler (2008).

24 Social order beyond the political framework of states is a concept that keeps being rediscovered by scholars from state-centered disciplines like political science or development studies, who, time and again, appear to be surprised by the empirical fact that social organization does not start or stop with states (see Koehler/Wilke 2011); for a recent attempt to reestablish social order as a concept cutting across all fields of social science see Mielke et al. (2011). In social and political anthropology, the empirical fact of social order and social self-organization, conceptually independent of statehood, has been at the heart of research throughout the history of the discipline.

minishing reliability moving up the scale from family to village, village clusters, and valleys. "Diminishing reliability moving up the scale" means, first of all, that the capability of local institutions performing key governance functions, such as collective security, conflict regulation, and distribution of and access to collective goods, diminishes moving up the scale as the sway of informal social control also diminishes. The further up from local communities one moves, the more important become strongmen with little institutional embedding or only a purely formal institutional connection. In northern Afghanistan, the latter primarily comprise armed groups originating from the jihad and civil war of the 1980s and 1990s, many of whom have gained office in the new state. Hence, it includes the remnants of the commander system that was established after the fall of the Najibullah regime in the early 1990s.

The formalized and officially chartered *shura* system is a recent innovation that complements traditional social control. The elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) are the backbone of formal local self-governance. CDCs were introduced as part of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) for prioritizing and implementing rural development projects using so-called block grants. This program is run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), which conceives of itself as the state patron of the formalised *shura* system. Since its introduction, CDCs have developed into accepted local representative institutions in many localities (see Nixon 2008). A presidential decree expanded their official functions in 2006 (see MRRD 2006). In many districts, the CDCs were grouped together into clusters, in which they selected joint delegates. Initially this was encouraged by development organizations acting as facilitating partners in the framework of the NSP. Such clusters were also used for delegating representatives to the District Development Assembly (DDA) – the highest organizational level within the framework of the MRRD's *shura* complex. In theory, each cluster delegates a male and female representative to the DDA, although in practice there are often fewer female representatives than males, and occasionally some clusters have no representation in the DDA.

Despite its structural and political weakness, the state does shape local self-organization. It does so by playing a variety of roles that initially seem mutually incompatible. First, there is the official vertical of power, reaching down to district level via the presidential apparatus, provincial governors, and district managers, as well as the representatives of line ministries (cf. IDLG 2010). In districts not directly affected by the violence of the Taliban-led insurgency,[25] official state capacities vary according to levels and types of corruption, and the personality and qualifications of leading district officials.

In terms of sub-national governance, there is institutional competition between the MRRD's National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP) and the Independent Directorate for Local Governance's (IDLG) Social Outreach Pro-

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25 The term "insurgency" may well be misleading for the situation in Northern Afghanistan – although the Taliban have been able to win support among some parts of the population, the armed struggle over power, state form and social order is predominantly an intervention planned, supplied and run from outside the Northern Provinces.

gramme.[26] The MRRD and the IDLG are locked in a dysfunctional contest regarding who will provide effective sub-national governance (see Koehler/Gosztonyi 2011). So far, the IDLG has built top-down governance structures, while the MRRD has focused on village-level governance (the CDC complex). The two systems meet at the district level. Now the IDLG has initiated a new push to take over sub-district governance via appointed community *shuras* of locally powerful people, pre-selected by the security services (*shura-i mahal*), and a new *arbab/malik* system (appointed village headmen). The IDLG-approach attempts to restrain the MRRD-led structure to the field of development. This competition threatens to undo and demolish the only area in which the Afghan state managed to provide legitimate and functional governance services to its population.

Besides these official institutions, it is the informal tools of governance used by the central government and its competitors that shape the local forms of social organization. Three informal modes dominate in this context: political patronage via patron-client networks, autonomous organization of violence (e.g., arbitrary rule by former jihadi commanders), and the Taliban's provision of alternative governance services, especially in the fields of security and justice, and perhaps signification, as a basic function of social order according to Norbert Elias (1983).

Patron-client networks have always been a key component of governance in Afghanistan. Vertical resource flows, local conflicts, and the architecture of power in the provinces, districts, valleys, and villages cannot be understood without examining these networks. In today's Northern Afghanistan, these networks constitute the most important bridge between central and regional state officials – such as Hamid Karzai, Abdul Sayyaf, Rashid Dostum, Qazim Fahim, and Ustad Atta – and the local powerbrokers in the districts. Access to patronage provides protection for licit, illicit, and illegal acquisition of resources and the informal exercise of power in the localities. The price for this is political loyalty in political or economic conflicts (including elections) and the patrons' sharing in the rents, generated especially in the illegal sectors of the economy such as drugs and arms smuggling. The patron-client arrangement might also include *armed* support if all else goes wrong – in fact, the implicit capability of a patron to raise armed support might be a key source of power on the national level. These resources, in turn, help expand the patronage network. Thus, almost any local conflict outside the family realm involves the influence of patrons, and in politically sensitive districts this can lead to the escalation of any conflict.

The independent local organization of violence is one of the reasons why the weak state is forced to resort to strategies of cooption (of which patron-client networks are an advanced form based on the vertical gap in power) and *in extremis* indirect rule via local strongmen (Koehler/

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26 Both programs are donor-financed and to a significant extent donor-driven. The principle force behind the MRRD-programs is the World Bank (though most governmental and non-governmental development agencies active on local level have a stake in the NSP and NABDP by now), the principle forces behind the Social Outreach Programme are the UN and the US Government, which regards it as part of the COIN approach.

Wilke 2011). Real independent organization of violence has become rare since the intervention of 2001 and now only exists very locally on a small scale. But there remain sub-districts dominated by informal entrepreneurs of violence beyond state control. Partially independent areas are more common, i.e., where local militias led by former jihadi commanders have gained in significance due to official attempts to counter pressure from the Taliban.[27] It is highly unclear whether the state will later be able to revoke such partial autonomy and reintegrate such organizations into official security structures. This makes the formation of local militias a clear step backwards in the struggle of the Afghan state to attain a monopoly on violence. In the North, the influence of armed militias and their commanders had clearly receded prior to the surge in violence resulting from the Taliban intervention 2009-2011 (Koehler 2010). This was also the most important reason that Afghans we interviewed gave in 2007 for the very high acceptance of the presence of international forces in northern Afghanistan, according to our surveys.

A new development, which does not adhere to the model of governance split between local self-organization and a distant, dysfunctional state, are communities directly under the control of the Taliban: the Taliban gained a toehold starting with grassroots mobilization on the lowest levels, and then successively built up to higher command and administration levels on the back of the support from their target communities (cf. Giustozzi 2009).

Understanding them as an alternative to both the current state and the local independent organization of violence, the Taliban have succeeded in a few districts and sub-districts in the North in establishing governance structures that go beyond violence, attacks, and the intimidation of the official administration and local population. The Taliban provide governance services on the community level exactly where both the state and local independent violent actors fail, with the provision of security and justice that is less corrupt (though often very harsh and frequently partisan), more efficient, and more Islamic. Usually, however, they only succeed where groups (often Pashtun) feel particularly disadvantaged or endangered. In a few exceptional cases, the Taliban have also succeeded in installing non-Pashtun Taliban leaders as dominant governance providers in non-Pashtun settlement areas (mostly in Uzbek areas, allegedly via the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan).

Compared to the exercise of power by commanders or the Taliban, demand is still widespread for the state as a relatively neutral adjudicator in conflicts and a relatively reliable guarantor of security (military and police). Demand for these services, however, relates almost exclusively to problems exceeding the capacities of local social institutions, i.e., there is a sort of "subsidiarity principle" between local self-organization and the state: Matters that local communities can handle on their own are kept free of the state. State corruption, distortion, and bias in favor of groups that are wealthier or better connected are the main reasons why communities only
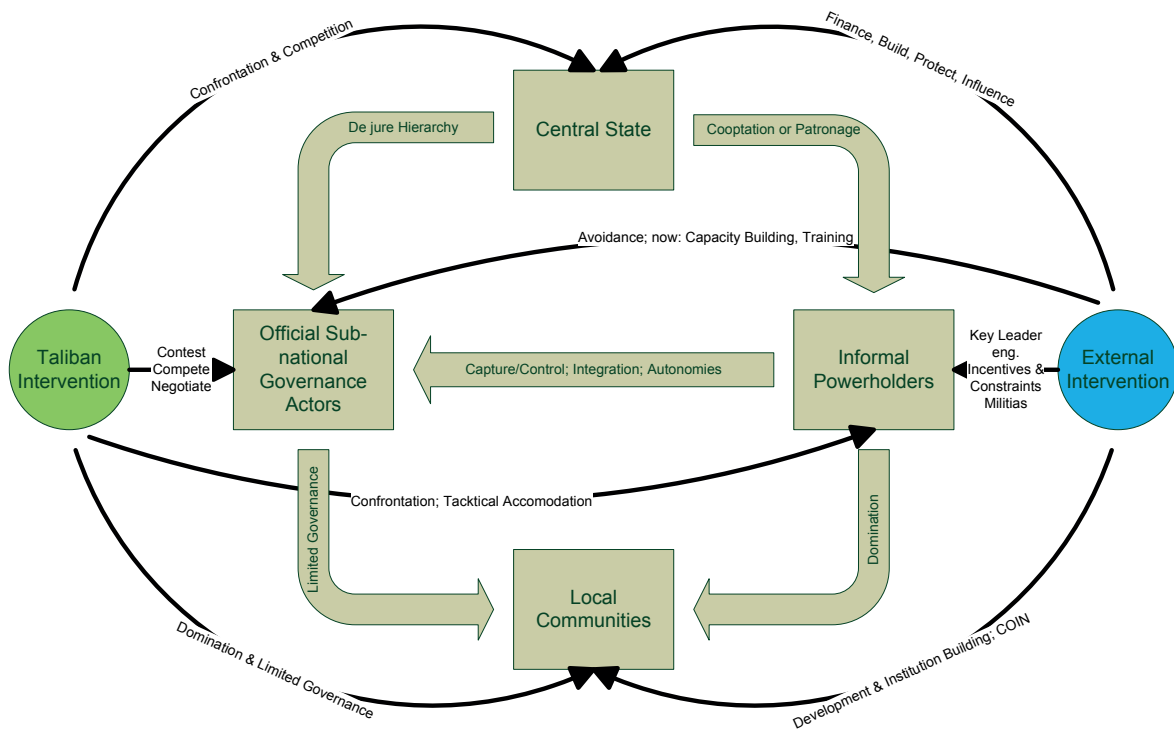
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27 For a critical assessment of the various attempts, see Human Rights Watch (2011).

turn to the state in extreme cases.[28] Where local problem-solving capacities fail and a conflict escalates as a result, or where a disadvantaged group cannot obtain justice, the state is the first point of appeal, before commanders or the Taliban. Only when the state proves itself incapable do alternative providers of power and governance enter the picture (see Koehler 2010).

Finally, there is the foreign military and development intervention that, according to mandates and programs, aims at strengthening statehood, good governance, and civil society institutions in Afghanistan. While the overall investment in state-building and development is undisputed, the governance effect of the investment by external states comes into question based on two observations. First, there is the claim that the foreign security and development drive in some cases establish parallel lines of governance delivery (e.g., in the cases of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams or by circumventing defunct or corrupt subnational government institutions in the implementation of development programs, see World Bank 2008). And second, there is consistent evidence that immediate security priorities – most dramatically during the early stages of the intervention and then again in the different COIN approaches that followed in contested or insurgent-controlled areas after 2005 – often lead to alliances of convenience with local armed groups or even the creation of armed groups that are detrimental to sustainable governance and statehood (see Ruttig 2009).

Chart 1 pictures the main governance-actors and their relationships with each other, as explained above.

Chart 1: Relationships between principle governance actors

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28 In fact, state officials also often refuse to get involved in local conflicts before all local possibilities of conflict resolution have been exhausted.

In this mixture of weak formal state institutions, foreign intervention, a partly formalized *shura* system, entrepreneurs of violence, and the Taliban's bid for power, we have distinguished the six governance zones below in northern Afghanistan. These zones differ according to the prevalent modes of regulating matters of collective interest. They have different implications for the impact of security and development measures.

The governance zones are defined by the varying presence of: (1) statehood as a formal and legitimized hierarchy with the ultimate capacity to enforce rules; (2) social control as a functional equivalent to statehood in protecting institutions against strategic interference and rule-breaking as a backup when self-enforcing incentive structures of institutions, socially embedded self-help, and negotiations fail; and, finally, (3) the arbitrary, unconstrained, and institutionally disembedded use of force by powerful actors. In functional terms, some of these zones overlap (see chart 2, p. 22) and geographically the borders of the zones are fuzzy and blurred (something the map on p. 25 cannot adequately reflect).

(1)Governance by government. This zone is characterized by official institutions (state as well as societal, with the state as *ultima ratio* in terms of setting the rules and deciding disputes) providing key governance functions. This is not equivalent to the normative concept of "good governance," but can be seen as a prerequisite for good governance. This type of governance is still a rare occurrence in Afghanistan, and we find it only in some parts of some of the districts of northern Afghanistan.[29]

While the extent of this governance zone is still very limited, the output and visibility of the state as perceived by ordinary Afghans has been improving in recent years. This fact raises hopes that areas where the government is the ultimate provider of governance services will further expand in the future – unless of course the insurgency stops this positive development by force.

More concretely, the improvements mentioned above relate to the state's visibility in terms of providing public services, development, and security.[30] The demand for services in these fields is also increasing. In terms of security, the official Afghan security forces (mostly the police, but partly also the army) are perceived as the best and the most desirable alternative available (clearly "beating" other providers present in the research area, such as international forces, the Taliban, or militias). Both statistically and in qualitative interviews, the police is seen as contributing positively to local security. Equally important is the fact that people are not afraid of the police (this contrasts strongly with the perception of other armed actors including the Taliban and international military forces). The positive assessment of the police

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29 During the training of Afghan researchers in Mazar in April 2011, a seasoned former Mujaheddin, now a politician, remarked that this type of governance is absent in Afghanistan – we would not even find it inside the president's office. We then agreed to soften the ideal-type criteria to a spatial concept were local state institution are the principle provider of governance services.

30 In the 2007 survey, the perceived role of the state in development improvements registered by respondents was much lower than the perceived role of development agencies. In 2009 perceptions were nearly equal.

has not changed since 2007. This finding is somewhat surprising considering the significantly worse quantitative and qualitative results on corruption, effectiveness, and fairness in the conflict processing of the police. From the local perspective, however, this contradiction with regard to different governance outputs can be explained. The police are credited with a positive security effect relative to the known and available local alternatives: militias, factional forces of local strongmen, and Taliban. At the same time, the people know that the police have limited capacities and are affected by corrupt practices. As one former Taliban commander put it in an interview with the author in May 2011 in Taloqan city: "The militias must be placed under police control even if the police are bad – then at least we have an official address to turn to with our complaints."

In the target regions, the state at the local level is thus still perceived as a potential part of the solution to the governance challenge and not as a principle obstacle to better governance. State performance is measured against local expectations of governance, and these expectations differ in a number of aspects from Western benchmarks of good governance. We found, for example, high approval rates for a district governor who used a degree of pressure and a degree of force in organizing collective work – a project that was perceived as being in the interest of everyone. By seriously beating a couple accused of having had illicit sex, he also clearly stepped over the limits of what formal state law authorized him to do (e.g., corporal punishment); but the district governor was otherwise perceived as incorruptible and honest, and is held in high esteem. In contrast, high levels of venality of services and corrupt and biased decision making are consistently negatively evaluated by interview partners and associated with low legitimacy.

In the few cases of governance by government we find some evidence of functional subsidiarity (the state enters only when local institutions cannot deal with an issue) and redundancy (state and societal institutions back each other up in functional terms) between increasing statehood and the performance of societal institutions, most importantly the institutionalized *shura* system delivering governance services and using social control to enforce adherence to the rules.

As we will see in the case of other, more widely present governance zones, as a rule we do not find evidence of subsidiarity and redundancy between societal and state governance provision.

(2) Hybrid governance describes a situation in which governance functions are delivered via official institutions, but the informal power of the office holders combines with official authority in making these institutions work. A typical example of this governance form are former jihadi commanders (who still have recourse to violence) being appointed as district managers. Hybrid governance may look at first sight like governance by government, but often involves a degree of state capture by the informal strongmen or powerful local elites. Interestingly, state capture and informal interference are by now typical power-strategies, not only by autonomous local entrepreneurs of violence (until recently they were clearly on the defensive), but also by the central government in an attempt to penetrate areas not fully under the control of the political leadership (or not delivering the "right" votes during elections). This approach of

parallel rule is also used to implement illegal exploitation schemes (e.g., taxing the drug trade) and dominance in areas under governmental control.

The way in which the political elites in Kabul (in control of the central state) interfere in local politics in the North is, however, widely considered to be highly destabilizing. Interviewees, including senior representatives of the provincial and district administrations, repeatedly complained about Kabul's interventions into local affairs via patron-client networks (as opposed to official channels). The manipulation of these networks, which are often at odds with each other, is felt to have a highly destabilizing effect on the local political situation and also seriously discredits the state as an institution. The success of the Taliban is often attributed to manipulative and malicious political tactics of the center (e.g., *divide et impera*).

A number of well-informed local interview partners claimed that local provincial-level power brokers had set up their own "Taliban" in order to counter the Taliban-intervention allegedly sponsored by the central state that is designed to destabilize the rule of locally embedded elites in the North. In Balkh Province, Governor Ustad Atta is widely believed to have set up his own "Taliban" to fight and discredit insurgents sponsored by his rival, Juma Khan Hamdard. Juma Khan is believed to enjoy the backing of Kabul.

(3) Arbitrary rule refers to the absence of reliable governance functions and to a situation dominated by brute power unconstrained by binding rules. In the northern provinces, this type of rule is mostly exercised by former commanders either in political offices or protected by political patronage. Completely autonomous entrepreneurs of violence have become the exception rather than the rule in virtually all districts covered. In contrast to hybrid zones of governance, arbitrary rulers provide only very limited governance functions (if any) in the areas under their control, and the threat or application of arbitrary violence is widespread.

Until recently, the commander system of arbitrary rule was clearly on the decline. However, as a reaction to the growing insurgency in the North, the Afghan government (usually with the support of US military) has begun to set up local militias often under the leadership of former jihadi commanders. Arbitrary rule by violent actors is thus reemerging in a number of areas in northern Afghanistan.

The reemergence of arbitrary rule by commanders has an interesting and partly counter-institutive impact on the perception of fear, insecurity, and governance provision – trends we have been following since 2007. Initially insecurity and fear perceptions[31] were very low, but they significantly increased in 2009. In 2011 we find confirmation of increasing insecurity. In rounded numbers, the fear of informal armed groups (mostly referring to militias and insurgents) is up from 20% to 80%.

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31 We measured security perceptions by asking questions on the security of the household and community. Regarding fear, we asked about concrete actors ("Are you afraid of..."). For a detailed description of the survey, see Böhnke et al. (2010).

While the fear of informal armed groups has dramatically increased (indicating an increased presence of militias and thus of the existence of areas of arbitrary rule), we could not observe in all cases a corresponding increase in perceptions of insecurity. In other words, arbitrary rule can increase the fear of the specific armed groups in an area, but this increase does not necessarily lead to an increase in general insecurity there. Thus far – and contrary to our initial expectations – we do not find consistent correlations between negative perceptions of security and the presence of commanders and armed groups. Based on our qualitative research in zones coded as "arbitrary rule," we can offer two likely explanations for this: First, the concept of insecurity in this part of Afghanistan relates to war and not so much to the abuse of power by socially more or less embedded strongmen. And second, related to the social embedding, while most Afghans we talked to clearly considered the *kommandon*-system of the 1990s to be the worst part of recent Afghan history, they may have had very different opinions about their own local *kommandon* or strongman. In other words: commanders may be bad in general, but our commander keeps even worse (and socially not embedded) entrepreneurs of violence out of the valley, so he is acceptable.

While the impact on security perceptions is not univocal, arbitrary rule does, however, appear to negatively affect governance perceptions regarding fairness, care, and corrupt practices, which are worse in areas associated with militias.

(4) Self-governance comprises various forms of local self-organization in the absence of external power-interventions by the state or other hierarchal organizations. It often coincides with areas difficult to access or of no strategic importance for either the state or its competitors (such as the Taliban).

In areas detached from hierarchical rule of the state or its alternatives, the local governance architecture varies. The dominant institution in these areas of very limited statehood is some form of institutionalized council (often the CDC, but also traditional *shuras* or, in Pashtun and Baluch communities, *jirgas*). In other areas, religious leaders and specific confession-based local institutions are more important, while in still other areas, inherited offices or community-appointed headmen are more important.

The majority of people surveyed still prefer to deal with local issues and conflicts via local *shuras* as long as this is possible (i.e., whenever possible, they prefer to avoid turning to the state for solving local conflicts). The *shuras* have by far the highest legitimacy and approval rates among all institutions assessed in terms of fair conflict processing. In terms of fairness, state institutions (including the police) do not fare nearly as well as the *shuras*. Only if the *shura*-system fails or if conflicts spiral out of these local institutions' control, do people turn to the district-level state institutions for help. In the areas assessed, neither Taliban governance nor informal commander governance are seen as attractive. The problem is that the state often (though not always and not equally in all districts) fails the people in delivering the demanded conflict processing services in a non-corrupt and impartial way. The general impression from

the survey is that people would like to see more of their own state in terms of governance and service delivery, but this demand is often not met adequately.

This observation is valid across most governance zones, but especially in remote areas, where people in need of official governance services might have to travel for several hours, sometimes even for days, before reaching a state representative. Thus, one often encounters a subsidiarity approach to the state: only when local (communal) governance is incapable of solving a problem do people turn to the state; the more defunct or corrupt the local state, the stronger the reliance on the *shura*-system.

(5) Contested governance we call an environment when governance delivery itself is the issue at conflict. Here, not only power is contested, but also the right and ability to deliver certain governance functions to the people. Currently contested governance relates to more or less violent competition between the state on the one hand and the Taliban on the other, as alternative governance providers.[32] If yet other alternative governance providers emerge, this arena of contest might become more complex.

Participating in the contest for (security) governance with reference to statehood are a multitude of different actors, who are at times only remotely state controlled. First, there are the still under-equipped and understaffed official security organizations of the state (most importantly the military, the police, and the secret service); then there are international military forces who still have the lead in most counter insurgency (COIN) operations. And finally, as a US-driven reaction to growing insurgency success in contested areas of the North, local militias have been re-introduced to the COIN approach. Those groups – locally referred to as *arbakee* (local pro-government militias), local police or simply Mujaheddin – are often under the influence of former jihadi commanders.

These armed groups are generally perceived as a very significant security problem, both by local communities as well as by the official police at district level. The main problem is that these militias are *de facto* not under the control of the local community or tribe.[33] Members of the militias are usually not recruited from the well-respected families of the community, but are more often than not referred to as "street kids" and "criminals" by our interview partners. Moreover, most militias are not registered and controlled by the official security structures in any systematic or transparent way. Infighting between different *arbakee* groups, as well as the extortion of the population by these groups, is common.

We also encountered a number of cases in which local armed smugglers first turned Taliban (for business reasons), then, after military pressure mounted, turned *arbakee* and thus retained

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32 Among the insurgents only the Taliban lay claim to the establishment of an alternative, country-wide system of governance (an Emirate).

33 In the rare cases where tribal institutions are intact, as appears to be the case among Turkmens in Qalai-e Zal District in Kunduz Province, militias reportedly perform better (cf. Nazar/Recknagel 2009).
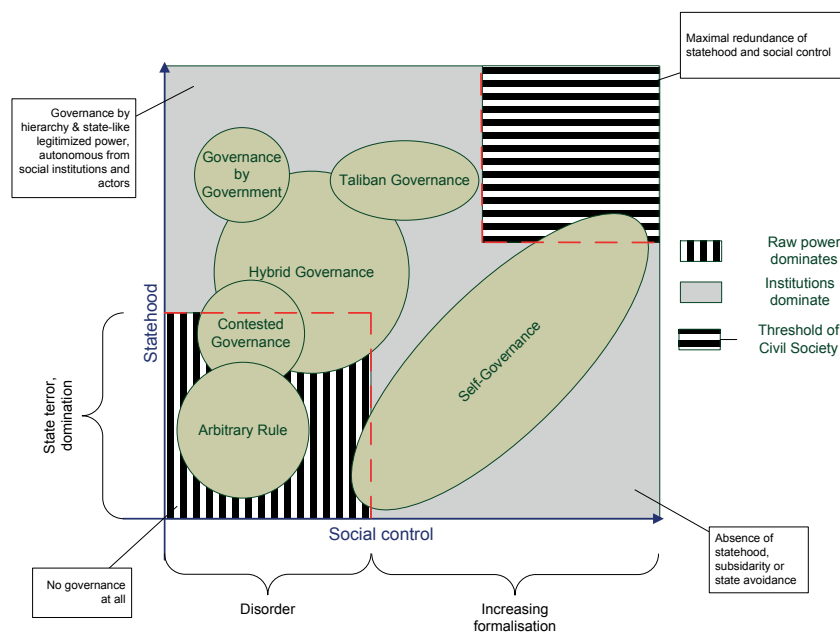
their weapons and local influence. Other *arbakee* units first fought the Taliban but were known to side with them on occasion.

(6) Taliban governance refers to a situation where the Taliban have not only managed to drive the official state institutions out of an area and subdue local societal institutions of self-government, but have also begun to deliver governance functions and enforce their own rules. Taliban governance focuses on two areas: the fields of security and justice. Other forms of governance provision are either left for the local communities to take care of, or a minimal state presence is tolerated (e.g., in the provision of minimal education or health services).

Communities that experienced longer periods of Taliban governance (mostly compact Pashtun areas, but also some Uzbek areas in few districts) compare security under Taliban rule to the chaos that followed after the Taliban were driven out of the area in late 2010 and early 2011. Even interview partners from these communities who did not like Taliban rule as such, stated that in terms of security and predictability the Taliban were preferable to criminals, *arbakee*, and the (often) indifferent or ineffective police that followed. By all indication, the state appears to be thus far highly unconvincing during the long and volatile hold phase of COIN operations.

While the Taliban may have been pushed out from a number of areas they controlled in 2010, many have stayed on and adopted a low profile. Others temporarily switched to the government side and became *arbakee*; yet others withdrew to other safe areas to return in the future when opportunity offers itself. The population thus perceives Taliban setbacks as temporary and believes that the Taliban are there to stay. Many people feel and fear that neither the government nor former jihadi structures will have an effective answer to a renewed Taliban offensive once the foreign forces leave.

Chart 2: Governance zones

4. Conclusion

Governance, as a rule, is a mundane affair. It helps people organize their unspectacular and unheroic daily lives within the confines of socially accepted norms. Even in a place like Afghanistan, affected by decades of violent conflict, households and communities are able to solve most or their daily problems via institutionalized forms of coordination. Self-help and strategic action are more common than in stable states, but they are still the exception rather than the rule. When local institutions fail to provide commonly accepted outcomes, people tend to turn to the state in search of a neutral external arbiter.

There are, however, specific dynamics that limit the reliability of governance and in some cases even lead to the breakdown of governance altogether:

1. The state's inability or unwillingness to provide governance when local societal institutions fail and state intervention is demanded by the communities;

2. The government itself resorts to informal, manipulative political intervention into local affairs that damage governance capacities of local institutions;

3. Violent contest between government, foreign intervention, and competing actors (most importantly the Taliban) over the right and power to implement their vision of governance;

4. Finally, the general limitation to horizontal, societal governance in terms of scope: Social control as the only proper functional equivalent to hierarchal enforcement of rules against foul play and power interference is limited to what anthropologists call the "eye of the village." Sanctions of reputation (the social allocation of shame and honor), leading to social exclusion and limiting access to vital resources or, conversely, fostering social integration and access to those resources, is geographically limited to tightly knit face-to-face communities.

Hence, we find indications of governance without the state in the research region, but its scope is very limited. Most governance does take place in the shadow of weakly institutionalized states (rather than the shadows of statehood) – though it only occasionally enters into direct interaction with the state.
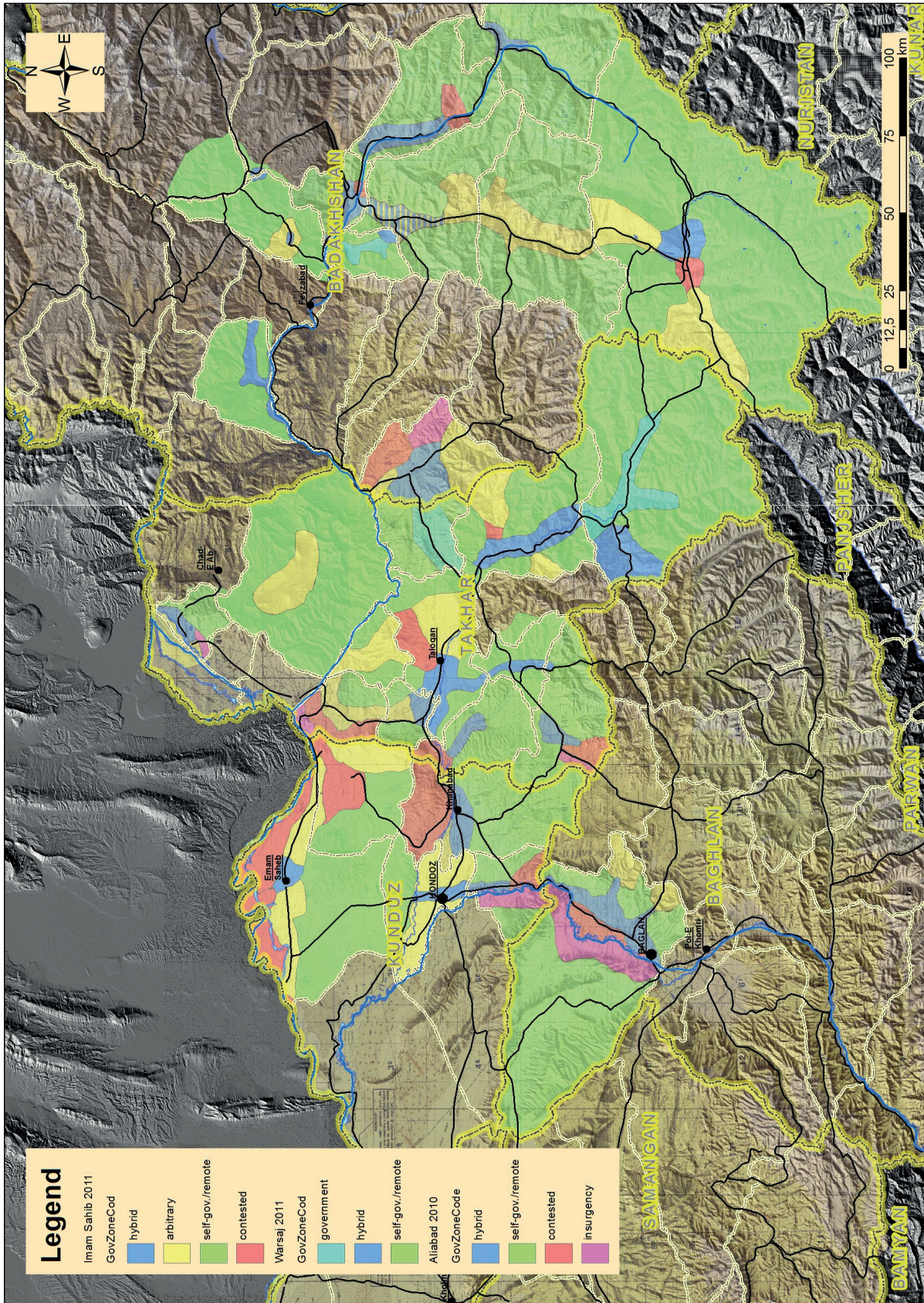
Looking ahead, what will remain of the currently trendy term "governance" if this term can indeed be explained by the basic sociological categories of order, institutions, and power? What if governance is little more than a term to describe the blind spot that state-centered disciplines developed towards social order before, beyond, or after statehood?

It is fitting to recall Simon Roberts's sober conclusion to the question of why it is so difficult to talk about law beyond the state, replacing "law" with "governance." He writes: "Looking for-

ward, the anthropology of law should be content to resolve itself into the respective anthropologies of norms and of government, attentive to the distinct but nevertheless related problem of 'order' and 'domination.' Within the ambit of these general enquiries, 'law' is best viewed as an interesting folk category, encountered under specific and limited conditions" (Roberts 1994: 979).

Also the concept of governance is best seen as an interesting folk category, encountered under specific and limited circumstances. The "folk of reference" here are the lineages, clans and tribes of academic and administrative professions specializing in the art and the analysis of governance. Governance is not, however, a basic analytical category referring to new or newly discovered phenomena and principles of social organization.

Map 1: Overview of Governance Zones in Northern Afghanistan

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