

Opinion Polling in Support of Counterinsurgency

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WHY OPINION POLLING?

An insurgency is a violent struggle between insurgents and a constituted authority for legitimacy and influence over a local population¹. Local perceptions and attitudes are then crucial to counterinsurgency efforts. Opinion polling offers unique insight into local perceptions towards insurgents, government, and common concerns. Of course, opinion polling is also subject to several limitations, especially when used in conflict zones, and practitioners should be mindful of those. Nevertheless, the authors advocate an aggressive use of opinion polling as an assessment tool for counterinsurgency campaigns.

Through their involvement in the design, analysis and reporting of all opinion polls conducted to date² for the Canadian Forces in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, the authors have gained rare experience of polling in this unusual context. By describing this polling endeavour in non-technical terms, this paper aims to share lessons learned and to promote an enlightened approach to opinion polling in the context of counterinsurgency. Recommendations for conducting opinion polling in support of counterinsurgency are peppered throughout this paper.

¹ Adapted from the U.S. Department of Defence “Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept.”

² Since March 2007, there have been seven major opinion polls conducted in Kandahar Province for the Canadian Forces, as well as two minor polls.

POLLING IN CONFLICT ZONES

Opinion polling is a tool used in a wide range of applications from marketing, to social science research, to the prediction of the outcome of elections. Opinion polls have also been extensively used by military and political forces fighting counterinsurgency campaigns. In this context, opinion polls are used to formally assess campaign progress along some set of performance metrics (e.g. relying on polls to measure things such as public support for a constituted authority, an element seen as important to counterinsurgency campaigns), to guide information operation campaigns (e.g. to determine what media outlets would be most appropriate to reach a target audience), and for general situational awareness of local attitudes and perceptions.

In many conflict zones, especially those where western military forces operate, contractors compete to offer their polling services to international and non-governmental organizations, western media outlets, and international military forces. Results from polls conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular, have attracted significant attention from experts studying these counterinsurgency campaigns. In Afghanistan, major polls conducted for the Asia Foundation, World Public Opinion, and the international media have been widely publicized³. Western military forces operating as parts of coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan have also commissioned polls of their own.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Polling in conflict zones such as Afghanistan involves some challenges, many of which will be described in this paper. These include poor communications infrastructure, the lack of detailed maps for contractors, poor security, cultural barriers to freedom of expression, widespread illiteracy, the absence of accurate population estimates, and the difficulty of reaching large numbers of displaced persons. Nevertheless, this paper will argue that many of these factors may be overcome or at least tolerated. Some of these issues are addressed by the contracting companies employed to conduct the polling who utilize local expertise to establish culturally acceptable “best-available” solutions. The employment of an independent and impartial local contractor to conduct polling also serves to minimize potential biases in the results.

Unfortunately, polling does not enjoy a uniformly positive reputation as a tool for gathering information in conflict zones. Scepticism regarding opinion polling for the military in such environments is fuelled by misperceptions regarding the way in which polling is conducted, the perception that locals are unlikely to express their true opinions, and the tendency to focus on some polling results that may run counter to commonly held beliefs about a population’s attitudes. For example, the fact that Afghan polls tend to show popular support for the Afghan National Police, an institution widely seen as corrupt and

³ Asia Foundation poll entitled “Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People” available at <http://asiafoundation.org/country/overview/afghanistan>. WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll of Afghanistan available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brasiapacificra/290.php>. Survey of Afghans conducted in 2007 for the Globe and Mail, CBC and La Presse available at http://erg.vironics.net/media_room/default.asp?aID=653, and a Poll commissioned by BBC, ABC News and ARD available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7872353.stm

incompetent, has lent discredit to polling in the eyes of some observers. This paper will make the case that some subjects might not lend themselves to accurate investigation using polling, at least not when approached in a straightforward fashion, and that interpretation and presentation of results should be done with caution.

At the other extreme, polling may be overly trusted and relied upon with a disregard for associated caveats. There can be a tendency for frequent consumers of polling results to go from highly sceptical to unquestioningly accepting over time, even at the expense of other potential sources of information. The results of polling in support of counter-insurgency must be presented along-side the potential limitations of those results. While this is true of all opinion polling, it is particularly the case in this context because of the added limitations of polling in conflict zones, and because of the consequences of misinterpretation and their impact on mission outcome.

The relatively low cost of the information obtained through polling in conflict zones, compared to information gathered through other means is a driver of polling. The cost of polling is also low in comparison to the high cost of a sustained international military operation. Polling costs are kept low because polls are best administered by locally hired personnel, without any assistance from military forces. While polling cannot supplant the information gathered from, for example, key leader engagements and intelligence collection activities, information obtained through polling can supplement these activities. Unlike other information gathering capabilities, polling can give relatively unbiased information, because for the most part, respondents have little incentive to misrepresent facts for personal advantage, and because it has the potential to reach the general population.

THE KANDAHAR POLLS

Since February 2006, the Canadian Forces have been responsible, under International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Command, for an area of operation in southern Afghanistan covering the Province of Kandahar. This Canadian deployment includes a battalion-size battle group, a provincial reconstruction team including representatives from other Canadian Government Departments, mentors for Afghan National Army and Police units, an aviation unit, a hospital, a national command element and various supporting troops. It is also supplemented by the presence of troops from other allied nations operating in the province. This significant presence brings a desire, for the deployed command element as well as for policy makers in Canada, to assess this mission's evolution towards its goals, as defined in its campaign plan.

As a contributing element to these assessments, the Kandahar Polls were conducted starting in February 2007. As of April 2009, nine polls have been conducted through the Afghan Centre for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR), an opinion research firm based in Afghanistan. All data collection has been performed by that same independent contractor employing a team of up to 75 Afghan interviewers in each wave. Each poll comprised roughly 1300 interviews of equal numbers of Afghan men and women, conducted in either Pashto or Dari, the most commonly spoken local languages.

The Canadian counterinsurgency campaign in Kandahar Province pursues a 3D Approach: Defence, Diplomacy and Development. The polls have thus sought to study the

situation in Kandahar Province along these three lines of operations. The polling questionnaires have specifically focused on the subjects of security; economic development and essential services; governance; and perception of ISAF, the Afghan security forces and insurgent groups. A secondary use of the poll has been to gather information for the targeting and assessment of public message campaigns.

The results of the Kandahar Polls have been distributed in various internal reports throughout the Department of National Defence, to various other Government of Canada departments, and to allies, but have not generally been made public, apart from selected results used in public presentations by Canadian military commanders.

WHO WANTS TO KNOW?

The Kandahar Polls were initially designed for the benefit of the Canadian National Command Element in Kandahar Province. However, the results eventually caught the attention of its Canadian higher headquarters, the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command (CEFCOM), and subsequently other government departments involved in the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. The poll now serves to inform campaign assessments at the tactical (in-theatre), operational (CEFCOM), and strategic (whole of government) levels. Some polling results are also used in assessments compiled for ISAF's Regional Command South, the multinational regional command responsible for Southern Afghanistan.

The Canadian International Development Agency, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade are taking increasingly important roles in Canada's Afghan mission. Consequently, these organizations have paid increasing attention to the polls and now use the results in their reporting. Finally, the Afghanistan Task Force, a secretariat of the Privy Council Office responsible for reporting mission progress to the Canadian Parliament, now also relies on the Kandahar Polls to evaluate some of its mission benchmarks. Thus the Kandahar Polls are keenly followed by many of the senior Canadian Government contributors to the Afghan mission. All see polling as a means of evaluating campaign objectives related to the attitudes and perceptions of Kandahar Province's population.

DATA COLLECTION

The use of opinion polling in societies subject to insurgency, such as Iraq and Afghanistan is commonly discredited in some circles. Some of the criticism focuses on a small set of seemingly absurd results, something that will be addressed later, but others focus on perceived flaws in the data collection methodology. This is often due to misconceptions such as that the polls are administered by foreigners or by locals under heavy foreign military escort, or by the belief that the polls' respondents are not representative of the wider population. Because of the scepticism surrounding polling in combat zones, it is important that a robust and well-understood methodology be employed to minimize biases in the results, and win over the sceptics.

HOW RANDOM IS YOUR SAMPLE?

Descriptive statistics work best on large and random samples. Polling a large enough number of respondents is important, but equally important is obtaining a sample that is representative of the population as a whole. While a completely random sample is the best way to achieve this, it is often not practical in the context presented here.

A first obstacle to the quest for a random sample in under-developed states may be the absence of recent and reliable census data. Without a reliable description of the targeted population (such as a census), it is not possible to describe what a representative sample of that population would be. In Afghanistan, the last census was partial, and conducted in 1979. Population changes and displacements since then, especially those due to the conflicts that plagued the country, make current Afghan population estimates unreliable at best. Nevertheless, the Afghan Central Statistics Office provides district (sub-provincial division) population estimates, which can be used to shape a sampling plan⁴.

Within districts, however, no data on population distribution is available. A list of known settlements (i.e. villages, towns, cities, etc) within each district is built and used as a basis for developing a sampling methodology that is as random as possible. The sampling methodology employed by ACSOR in the Kandahar Polls⁵ selects a respondent in a given district by first randomly selecting a settlement from the list of known settlements; then randomly selecting a household from that settlement through a random walk procedure; and finally, through another pseudo-random process, selecting a respondent from the household.

Such a three-step sampling procedure brings two biases to the final sample. First, without information on the size of settlements, each one is equally likely to be polled. This implies that the population of smaller settlements is more likely to be picked than that of larger settlements (i.e. small settlements are equally likely to be chosen, but there are fewer respondents to choose from in those settlements, making it more likely that someone from a smaller settlement gets selected). Similarly, members of smaller households are more likely to be polled than those of larger ones. These biases could be significant for questions where opinions tend to differ according to settlement or household size.

A second obstacle to randomness in sampling in under-developed areas is the difficulty and expense of reaching intended respondents, particularly if only one respondent were to be polled from each settlement. For the Kandahar Polls, clustering of respondents has been used to reduce costs and facilitate the polling process. In each randomly selected settlement, a cluster of ten interviews are collected. Household selection is achieved using a pseudo-random walk through the settlement, and with pseudo-random respondent selection at the household level. Implications on sampling error will be discussed below, but suffice it to say for now that this is intended as a compromise between cost and randomness of the sample. In a socially conservative society such as Afghanistan, there is also a cultural barrier to random sampling. Inter-gender interactions outside of close family are generally forbidden by Afghan customs, and therefore, separate teams of men and women interviewers are

⁴ <http://www.cso-af.net>

⁵ The sampling methodology employed in the Kandahar Polls is technically referred to as multi-stage stratified cluster sampling. A more detailed description of the data collection methodology used by ACSOR is described in: M. Warshaw, R. Kakar, T. Habibzei, Z. Mohsini, "Starting from Scratch – Building Social Research Capacity in Afghanistan", *ESOMAR Congress 2006*, London, September 2006.

required to poll respondents of each gender. For the Kandahar Polls, in half of the selected settlements, male respondents are polled by male interviewers, while in the other half, female respondents are polled by female interviewers. Alternatives that have been suggested include the exclusive polling of men (which is easier given that female interviewers must generally be accompanied), or of heads of households or even of just local leaders. However, the aim of the Kandahar Polls is to capture the views of the entire population. In particular, the Government of Canada and the Canadian Forces consider the voice of women important. Thus, the Kandahar Polls continue to sample the entire adult population.

Other alternatives to the sampling methodology described above have been used in various studies of public opinion in Afghanistan. One alternative involves interviewing people encountered in public places, rather than in their homes, and has been used for other militaries operating in Afghanistan, and by non-governmental organizations, including the International Council on Security and Development⁶. This might offer the benefit of greater anonymity for respondents, but may result in biases towards the opinion of people who frequent public places more than others. In particular, it might be nearly impossible to adequately poll Afghan women in this way. Another alternative is to hold *shuras*, traditional public gatherings, to enquire about collective opinion and extract consensus views, under the assumption that individual opinions are somewhat less important than collective ones in Afghan society. It has been postulated that many would feel freer to express negative or controversial opinions in this traditional context than in private conversation. However, clearly, this approach cannot appropriately extract minority opinions, and is less conducive to a scientific approach, where margins of error must be quantified.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR DISTRICT?

Kandahar Province is subdivided into sixteen districts, sub-provincial divisions with populations ranging from a few thousands to a few hundred thousands, in the case of the provincial capital. Both province-wide and district-level polling results are required by the staff of the Canadian Forces-led Task Force Kandahar to assess the evolution of the campaign along stated operational objectives. This is in contrast to many other polling initiatives carried out by international forces and other international organizations which focus on polling at the national level, and sometimes drill down to the provincial level.

The requirement to produce both district-level and province-wide polling results necessitates some careful thought regarding how best to distribute the interviews between districts; particularly because Kandahar Province's districts vary widely in the size of their populations from approximately 8,000 to 300,000 residents. Distributing the interviews proportionally to the size of the district would result in either very few interviews in the least populous districts (and a correspondingly high error margins), or a very large sample size that is beyond the resources available. As a result, a non-uniform sampling strategy was adopted in which the more populous districts have been under-sampled in comparison to the less populated ones to ensure a minimum sample in each district while maintaining a reasonable sample size (of approximately 1300 interviews). In recent polls, it was decided that in the least populous districts (which also happen to be the least relevant to current operations), a minimum of 60 interviews would be conducted, yielding a district-level sampling error of

⁶ <http://www.icosgroup.net>

approximately 20%. In the more populated, and more relevant districts, at least 120 interviews were conducted, resulting an error of at most 12%.

Such non-uniform sampling of the provincial population introduces distortion to the sample and must be corrected by weighting district level results as they are aggregated into provincial numbers. As a matter of fact this weighting is essential, and although sometimes inconvenient when an analyst is contemplating sophisticated statistical tests, using un-weighted data introduces heavy biases towards the opinion of residents of less-populated districts. These biases are important for the many questions where responses from less populated (and therefore often more isolated, less prosperous and less safe) districts vary significantly from those from the provincial capital and larger, more-developed districts. Of course, the weights used can only be approximations based on approximate district populations, though this introduces an uncertainty that is no different than basing a uniform sampling on inaccurate population distribution estimates.

Clearly, the accuracy of any poll increases with sample size. While 60 was chosen as the minimum number of interviews per district, more interviews might be desirable to further decrease the margin of error. However, there are diminishing returns from additional interviews, and for the smallest districts there is the possibility of saturating the respondent base. For example, in the case of the smallest district with population 8000, a sample size of 60 represents 0.75% of the district population. However, according to the CIA Factbook⁷, the median age in Afghanistan is 17.6. Therefore, more than half of the population is not being sampled in the Kandahar Polls which restrict themselves to interviews of individuals 18 years of age and older. Furthermore, the average household size is expected to be around 10 people, implying that on average, roughly 5 adults live at each address. Thus, roughly 1.5 % of the adults and 7.5% of the households in the smallest district would be sampled in each poll. As this proportion rises with the number of interviews, the risk of annoying residents of the district, or of distorting results by increasing the poll's prominence in the district increases.

YOU CAN'T POLL HERE

A distinctive feature of polls conducted in areas subject to insurgency is that poor security may hamper data collection efforts. For the Kandahar Polls, security concerns had to be considered in the design of sampling plans, and these plans were often altered due to emerging security threats. The extent of the area where the polling contractor was unwilling to venture was often seen as an important polling result itself, indicative of the extent of insurgent influence. In some cases, entire districts were declared off limits by the contractor, in which case the intended interviews were distributed among the remaining districts. In other cases, survey teams attempting to collect data in a given settlement would encounter military operations, or otherwise fear for their safety, and thus move on to an alternate settlement in the same district. Finally, in a recent poll, the polling contractor was willing to interview men in some districts, but found the greater risks involved in interviewing women unmanageable.

⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

When faced with security issues, an important consideration, from the standpoint of the poll's design, is that substitution be conducted in an orderly fashion. In the case of polls where cost factors limit the number of planned interviews, substitutions due to poor security in some areas offer an opportunity to redistribute to other otherwise under-sampled areas. With any substitutions, care should be taken to maximize the value obtained from the substituted interviews. In some Kandahar Polls where substitutions were left entirely to the contractor's discretion, interviews were shifted to areas of less interest, or the substitutions resulted in gender imbalances in district samples.

One of the concerns regarding the omission of insecure areas from the population sample is that it is possible that the opinions in these may differ significantly from the remainder of the province. This is most likely with reference to security-related opinions. By omitting unsafe regions, province-wide results will tend to show overly positive opinions of security. Fortunately, in the Kandahar Polls, the populations of the districts that were not sampled have been small compared to the total provincial population. Unsampled districts have represented fewer than 10% of the population in each poll. This means that if an opinion in these districts varied by as much as 30% from the rest of the population, province-wide averages would change by at most 3%. Thus, the unsampled districts represent a small contribution to the province-wide numbers.

The bigger concern regarding not sampling unsafe areas may be that it is important to know what is going on in regions that are deemed so unsafe that even local contractors refuse to visit them. These regions may be important to counterinsurgency efforts, representing areas that are being actively fought over between insurgent and counterinsurgent forces, or representing areas where insurgents have unfettered freedoms and heavy influence over the local population.

Unfortunately, security issues were not the only reasons for modifications to sampling plans in the Kandahar Polls. Sometimes, these were due purely to miscommunication. In Afghanistan, provincial and district boundaries are not always clearly delineated or widely agreed-upon. Some recently-created districts are not found on any easily available maps, and some districts remain unofficially recognized, with some district administration and infrastructure in place, but without official sanction from the central government. This has led to misunderstanding with the contractor on the areas to be sampled. For example, in early waves of the Kandahar Province Polls, the border between two districts was defined by the contractor as a highway, while the Canadian Forces (and the Government of Afghanistan) recognized the border as the river running parallel to the highway, several kilometres away. The area between the river and the highway happened to be an important battleground of the insurgency, and distinct from the area across the river in the neighbouring district. Thus, it is advisable to exchange maps with a polling contractor, and develop a common understanding of the geography.

Similarly, in some cases, survey teams were unable to locate villages where sampling was intended. This also led to the substitution of some sampling points. Shifting and displaced populations, poor maps, and variations in the phonetic spelling of local place names in English have all hampered efforts to get a clear picture of which areas have eventually been surveyed. The absence of a definitive list of the settlements in Kandahar Province has also contributed to the difficulties of optimizing the polls' sampling plans.

YOU CAN POLL HERE!

One bright spot in the Kandahar polls has been interview completion rates. The novelty of polling, low employment rates, and a desire to make their voice heard may be factors that have resulted in a relatively high success rate in finding and completing interviews with intended respondents. In a recent poll, 1681 attempts were required to complete 1299 interviews. Of the incomplete interviews, 127 were because no one was at home in the households being visited, in 21 cases no adults were home, and in 70 cases the randomly selected respondents in the households were away. In all those cases, up to three attempts would be made to return and find respondents later on the same day. The other interviews were not completed due to refusal by the respondents. Of these, 67 respondents declared that they were insufficiently informed to proceed, 34 felt that only the head of the household should be polled, 57 declared being too busy and 6 aborted the interview, upset over its content.

ARE YOU SURE?

An important element of understanding the results of any poll is understanding its margin of error. This is important in understanding whether observed differences (between districts, or between successive waves of polling) should be discarded as potentially resulting from random statistical fluctuation. Sampling error is the component of a poll's error resulting from the sampling method. Sampling error is typically expressed as an interval (or half the width of the interval) within which the true value can be expected to fall with 95% confidence (i.e. 19 times out of 20). The details of the sampling error calculation are beyond the scope of this paper, though some of the qualitative considerations affecting error are discussed here.

The sampling error depends on several factors, primary of which is the size of the sample. The larger the sample, the smaller the error, and in the limit that the entire population is sampled the error vanishes.

For a fixed sample size, the error also depends on the result. For a simple Yes/No question, the error is maximal when the responses are split 50/50. Often it is this worst-case error that is reported because it does not vary between questions, allowing a single error to be reported for the entire poll.

For the Kandahar Polls, where roughly 1300 respondents are interviewed in each wave, the worst-case province-wide sampling error would be 2.7% if a simple random sampling procedure had been employed. In districts where 60 respondents are interviewed, sampling error for district-level results would rise to 13.0%.

The way in which a population is sampled (i.e. the sampling methodology) also affects sampling error. As discussed earlier, the Kandahar Polls are performed in such a way that the number of interviews per district and the number of male and female interviews are specified in advance. This is referred to as "stratification". Also, multiple interviews were conducted in each randomly selected village, referred to as "clustering." Both stratification and clustering affect sampling error.

As previously described, stratified sampling may be necessary to ensure a minimum sample size in each sub-region for which polling results are to be reported. Stratification can either reduce or amplify sampling error depending on the way stratification is performed and how the answers are distributed. In the worst case, answers are distributed similarly in all strata. Stratification then increases sampling error as it amounts to a suboptimal distribution of the interviews. For the Kandahar Polls, this stratification thus increases the province-wide sampling error to 3.2% in the worst case. At the district level, stratification of the Kandahar Polls have been done only by gender. Since the gender stratification likely reflects the population distribution (i.e. equal male and female populations), it is not expected to have a significant effect on district-level sampling error.

Next, the effects of clustering can be considered. As previously described, due to the logistical constraints involved in polling the population of an underdeveloped region, it can be practical to sample respondents in clusters from selected locations. The effect of this clustering on sampling error depends on cluster size, on the number of clusters, and on variability of results within clusters versus the wider population⁸. This third factor is referred to as intra-cluster correlation. When results within clusters are completely correlated (i.e. respondents within clusters always answer questions in the same way), it is clear that the value of additional interviews within each cluster becomes nil. Conversely, if responses within clusters are completely uncorrelated, that is, are independent of the cluster, then the clustering only amounts to a less uniform sampling of the population. The more respondents within clusters answer questions in the same way, the greater the effect of clustering on sampling error. Larger cluster size and higher intra-cluster correlation amount to an effective reduction in sample size. For a typical question of the Kandahar Poll, the intra-cluster correlation coefficient might amount to 0.03, meaning that members of each village are 3% more likely to share an opinion than individuals chosen at random from the entire population. When combined with the previous factors, the sampling error becomes 3.7% for province-wide results, 20% in districts where 60 interviews are conducted, and closer to 12% in districts where 120 interviews were conducted.

These estimates of the sampling error are generic and don't take into account inter-question error variability due to the way in which the results for each question are distributed, nor the fact that the intra-cluster correlation is question-dependent. The error estimates are, however, useful for getting some insight into the typical size of the uncertainty in the polling results.

HOW SURE CAN YOU REALLY BE?

In addition to sampling error, there are systematic biases in the results. Polls of the population of underdeveloped areas undergoing insurgency are likely to be subject to other significant sources of variability or bias. These may include possible mistrust of the polling process by respondents, who may fear or misunderstand the interviewers' intent, or the exercise as a whole. It is a common misconception that the interviewers are affiliated with the government in place. Some questions might further be seen as threatening. Cultural norms might also discourage public and unfettered criticism of state or other institutions. For

⁸ P. Levy and S. Lemeshow, *Sampling of Populations – Methods and Applications*, Third Edition, Wiley-Interscience, 1999, Toronto.

example, in a recent Kandahar poll, 64% of respondents said that they did not feel comfortable expressing negative opinions of the Afghan Government in public. Finally, interviewers are themselves likely biased, as an insurgency leaves few indifferent. There is also a systematic bias introduced by the multi-stage sampling methodology in which villages are randomly selected from each district, households are randomly selected from each village, and individuals are randomly selected from each household. As discussed earlier, this results in a tendency to oversample the populations in smaller villages and smaller households.

The sampling error estimates presented in the previous section assumed a meticulous application of the sampling methodology to get an as-random-as-possible sample of the population. However, this is unlikely in an area such as Afghanistan.

In Kandahar Province, one important limiting factor is the lack of accurate geographical information to the surveyors. There is no definitive list of all the villages in the province that could ensure that each one is equally likely to be surveyed. Furthermore, poor maps and the informal or inconsistent way in which settlements are named mean that survey teams are occasionally unable to find villages where sampling is intended. Omission of regions that are too unsafe for surveyors to visit also results in a bias towards sampling of safer regions.

It is also possible that interviewers, either intentionally or unintentionally, do not follow the prescribed sampling procedure. To minimize such occurrence, the contractor for the Kandahar Polls imposes a number of quality control mechanisms on its teams of interviewers. In a recent poll, 7.5% of the interviews were back-checked in person by a representative of the company to verify that proper household and respondent selection methods were used, and that answers to a selected subset of questions had been accurately recorded. Furthermore, 3.1% of interviews were monitored by a supervisor from the company. No interviews were rejected following these particular back-checks, but some had been rejected in previous polls. The contractor also imposes checks on the data entry, having the data entered electronically twice independently, and then having the two versions compared for consistency.

Of course, some checks directly performed by the analysts receiving polling data may also be desirable. For the Kandahar Polls, quality control of the received raw data was never executed systematically, but informal checks were nevertheless frequent. Two main types of quality checks were done. One could be described as outlier detection – looking for unlikely responses that might be indicative of a flawed interview or cluster. An example of a probable error uncovered in this way resulted from looking at the education level of respondents. The Kandahar Polls have rarely found respondents with graduate degrees, but in one poll, there were four. Further investigation showed that they were all women from the same remote village. Most of the other women sampled in that village also possessed some form of post-secondary education. This was assumed to be indicative of a cluster where that particular question had been either poorly administered or the data improperly entered. A second type of test has consisted in cross-tabulating the results to different though related questions where a correlation should be anticipated. For all such tests, the data have so far shown the anticipated pattern indicative of the expected correlation.

THE FIRST RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this paper, the authors make several recommendations regarding polling. These are the first:

1. Present assessments based on polling results modestly, they are likely subject to significant biases and variability.
2. Rely on an independent contractor to minimize any biases or partiality.
3. Gather the best available demographics and geographical information to inform the sampling plan's design. Develop a common understanding of this information with your contractor.
4. The data collection methodology should aim to get as random a sample as possible.
5. If sampling is not uniform, weight any reported results to de-emphasize over-sampled groups.
6. Select a qualified and professional contractor, and apply quality controls; the reliability of your data will be challenged.
7. Understand the margin of error in your data. Report your estimate of a poll's margin of error and all sources of biases and uncertainty along with your analysis. Ensure that any claims you make regarding the data are not due to sampling error.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

IN MY SUBJECTIVE OPINION

Two basic types of question can be asked in a polling interview: objective and subjective questions. Objective questions approach an issue by attempting to collect factual data related to the issue, while subjective ones are concerned with respondents' general perception of the issue. Electricity distribution has been an important subject for the Kandahar Polls, and will be used to illustrate. Towards assessing this important element of the development situation in the province, two approaches may be taken. Questions can aim to objectively collect facts about the extent and reliability of that grid (e.g. *Do you, in this house, have access to electricity from the state grid?*), or alternatively, to subjectively evaluate respondents' satisfaction with the electrical grid in their neighbourhood (e.g. *How satisfied are you with the electricity situation in your neighbourhood?*).

It may be argued that understanding a population's subjective opinions regarding their needs and satisfaction with their current circumstances is more important, from a nation-building/counterinsurgency perspective, than determining their needs based on an objective assessment of their current situation. In other words, the best way to win over a population is to provide them what they perceive that they need, not what you perceive that they should need⁹. For example, despite evidence of the poor quality of drinking water in Kandahar

⁹ The counter-argument is that satisfying the immediate perceived needs of a population is less important than providing for their long-term needs. Provision of a proper education system, for example, may not be

Province, the Kandahar Polls have shown that residents are generally satisfied with their access to clean drinking water. This might suggest to decision-makers that there is little to gain (politically) from digging more wells for the local population. In a similar example, one poll addressed road conditions from both an objective and subjective standpoint. It found that residents of an important district thought their roads to be in very poor conditions, but were nevertheless satisfied with their transportation infrastructure.

An objective assessment is more difficult than a subjective measurement of satisfaction. It requires taking into account many factors, such as, for the electricity distribution example, access to the electrical grid, frequency and duration of service interruptions, uses of power by households, safety of the power lines, and properties of the electrical current reaching residents. Furthermore, polling is unlikely to be the most reliable tool for these. Technical solutions may be available to more reliably evaluate the state of an electrical grid, although polling may be convenient, given the ease with which more questions can be added to regularly held polls.

Despite the arguments in favour of subjective questions, results for such questions often cannot directly and meaningfully be interpreted. For example, a respondent's rating of local security along a scale from "very unsafe" to "very safe" is not enough to illustrate local conditions. These results become most useful when considering trends over time (i.e. whether or not an area is perceived as being safer than previously), or regional differences (i.e. whether an area is perceived to be safer than another). Going back to the electricity example, results showing dissatisfaction in some areas does little to help understand the underlying problem. A subsequent more objective approach, or an entirely different data collection activity will be necessary to understand how best to improve electricity distribution.

Subjective questions do suffer from one other flaw: expectation creep. Subjective questions subject to expectations, which can change over time. For example, if historically an individual has always had poor access to electricity, and does not rely on its constant provision, then that individual may be content with their access to electricity. However, over time, if access to electricity is improved and individuals start to rely on it, then their satisfaction may decrease despite the increased availability. Similarly, people's expectations for the competency of the government and local security forces (police and army) are likely very different now than they were immediately after the fall of the Taliban. Thus, popular opinions of the current institutions may be worse than opinions of the weaker and less capable institutions hastily set up following the change in regime. Similarly, changes in perceived freedom of expression over time may mean that people feel freer to express negative opinions than they did in the past.

Nevertheless, since the current Afghan counterinsurgency campaign relies on winning local "hearts and minds", subjective polling questions remain the best way to peer into the state of mind of the local population.

perceived by locals as important given immediate needs such as jobs, though the latter is a long-term solution to the former. However, this sort of thinking does little to help in winning over the population. This is the nature of counterinsurgency.

A QUESTION OF TIME

In using polls to assess the evolution of an insurgency the analyst will be tempted to formulate questions referring to time periods. For example, in an early Kandahar Poll, many questions asked whether particular aspects of life in Kandahar had improved or gotten worse over the previous twelve months. The twelve-month period was chosen based on the idea that many things would follow an annual cycle, and thus comparison to the previous year would be most relevant and easy for the respondents. Nevertheless, in a later poll, the questions were changed so that they referred to a three-month period. Given that quarterly assessments were to be delivered, it was thought that questions referring to the latest quarter would be more relevant.

This inconsistency in question formulation revealed an interesting anomaly. When asked if they or a member of their family had been victim of a crime in the last twelve months, roughly the same proportion of respondents answered that they had as did when asked about the last three months in a later poll. As there is no other reason to suspect that the crime rate would have dramatically increased between the polls, the natural conclusion would be that respondents did not effectively consider the given time periods in formulating their responses. Respondents might, despite being asked about a specific time period, have been generally reporting the occurrence of recent crime.

Another indirect indication of the disadvantage of relying on specific time periods when polling in a developing society is highlighted when looking at respondents' ages, as reported in the Kandahar Polls. In one particular wave of polling, 18% of respondents could not provide an answer when asked about their age, but furthermore, 42% provided ages that were multiples of five (an indication that many were likely providing only a rough estimate of their age).

The calendar seems less important to many residents of Kandahar Province than to the analyst who had been formulating the Kandahar Poll questionnaires. Questions referring to time periods are now avoided in the Kandahar Polls, often replaced with questions asking more simply if some aspects of life are improving or getting worse.

THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

Questions that try to assess an individual's perception of trends offer some interesting insights. Formulating a question in terms of whether the respondent has perceived something to be changing (i.e. commenting on a recent trend such as whether something has improved or gotten worse) and comparing with another question probing *current* satisfaction with the same thing allows for some interesting comparisons that shed light on how these questions may be interpreted.

As an example, when asked "*how satisfied are you with the provision of drinking water in your area?*" 78% of Kandaharis said that they were somewhat or very satisfied. This was down from 83% in the previous poll conducted 3 months prior, implying that water was generally perceived less favourably than, or at best the same as before. However, when asked directly about the direction of the trend, 80% of Kandaharis indicated that the drinking

water situation was somewhat or much better than at the time of the previous poll. These results appear to be inconsistent.

The authors suspect that the questions asking directly about change might be the less reliable ones. It is worth noting that questions about change in a situation and questions on the state of that same situation often give results that are very similar. That is, the proportion of respondents that are satisfied with a given situation is usually close to the proportion of respondents that thinks that this situation has improved. The authors believe it likely that when asked to compare the current and past situation, many respondents do not actually do so, but rather base their answer on their satisfaction with the current situation. This would mean that change is best measured by asking the same question in successive waves and comparing answers.

A corollary of this assertion that asking the same question successively is necessary to measure change is that questions should remain unchanged between polls. For the Kandahar Polls, some questions have been modified between successive polls, with the good intentions of improving them, but with the unfortunate consequence of making it impossible to track the evolution of attitudes. In the authors' opinion, the need for consistency in question formulation should generally override the desire to improve these formulations.

There are some things that do lend themselves to a question that asks about perceived change rather than current status. These are typically things that are not easily quantifiable. For example, perceived prosperity is something difficult to quantify. As such, the question "*how prosperous is your family?*" is ill-phrased, whereas "*has your family recently become more or less prosperous?*" gives some insight into the perceived prosperity of the individual.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

It goes without saying that if translation of a questionnaire from the language used by the analysts to that used by the respondents is required, great care must be taken to ensure that the meaning of questions is preserved. The potentially vast cultural divide between analysts and respondents can only be accentuated by less-than-perfect translation.

Anecdotally, in one poll conducted for American Forces in Afghanistan, one respondent is said to have answered a question referring to ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force) with "Oh, I love ISAF! As a matter of fact, next time you come by, why don't you bring some? I will cook it for us and we can share it with tea."

For the Kandahar Polls, it was found useful to have the Pashto and Dari versions of the questionnaire produced by the polling contractor translated back to English by an independent party to verify that the meaning had not been lost. Incidentally, this exercise showed high quality in the translated questionnaire, but effectively identified one small error in the translation of an acronym. Obviously, such acronyms and other military lingo should be avoided in the questionnaires to be presented to a civilian polling contractor.

The analysts designing a polling questionnaire must be aware of their cultural biases. These include biases related to the culture being polled and biases related to the organization in which the analysts work. It also involves differences between the outlooks of analysts and

those of respondents living in war zones. Use of cultural advice from independent interpreters or cultural advisors, or from a local polling contractor can go far towards avoiding cultural pitfalls.

THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT!

Some polling results can be compared to data coming from other sources. For example, the CIA World Factbook¹⁰ describes literacy in Afghanistan as the proportion of the population 15 and older that can read and write. In 2000, it estimated that 43.1% of men, and 12.6% of Afghan women satisfied that criteria. One Kandahar Poll recorded 55.8% of men and 9.9% of Kandahari women 18 and older declaring that they could read. Given the different definitions, dates, and that the poll covered only a single province, more urban in character but also with more conservative views towards the education of women, the numbers appear to be compatible. However, not all such comparisons to other sources show such compatibility. One example emerged from questions about the Afghan presidential elections of 2004. More respondents declare having voted than ballot box numbers would suggest actually did. Similarly, high intentions to vote in the 2009 elections have been declared despite low actual voter registration rates. Such responses might be due to embarrassment by the respondents, or to a desire to please interviewers.

Systematic biases exist in other types of questions as well. One of the most notable in all polls conducted in Afghanistan is that favourable opinions towards the Afghan National Police, including their perceived professionalism, capability and corruption have been observed consistently. This police force is widely criticized as corrupt and incompetent by authorities on the subject. Popular grievances towards the Afghan National Police (ANP) are commonly heard by those that have worked with Afghans. Yet polls generally show satisfaction and support for this dysfunctional force. This fact has commonly been cited as an argument in attempts to discredit polling efforts.

The authors will not offer a definitive explanation of the phenomenon. It might be due to a general misunderstanding of questions by respondents, or a misinterpretation of responses by analysts. It might be due to other cultural factors discouraging private criticism of others, or any criticism of authorities. It might be further due to misunderstood affiliations of the interviewers, often assumed to be agents of the Afghan central government, which could result in fear or apprehension and untruthful answers to certain categories of questions. It may also be that expectations of the ANP are low or that people have a better opinion of an Afghan security solution, however poor, than of a foreign solution, and wish to express this through the poll. What is certain is that such polling results should not be trusted, and assumed flawed in some way. At the very least such results should be de-emphasized, and presented with strong caveats on their likely validity.

Nevertheless, such strongly biased polling results do not have to be entirely discarded. It is reasonable to assume that, to some extent, the biases would apply equally to all regions where a question was asked, and to all successive polls where it was asked. If that was the case, the trends exhibited in the biased answers could still be indicative of the true situation. If the heavily biased polling results regarding the ANP were to take a turn for the worse (or

¹⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

the better), one could expect that the true situation has also evolved in the same way. Similarly, if the heavily biased results were somewhat more positive (or negative) in a given district, one could expect that to be also true of the underlying situation.

One last source of unreliable responses are questions that many respondents are not adequately informed to answer. Such questions have included one asking about distance to the closest health facility and another asking about respondents' constitutional rights. Similarly, cultural norms in Afghanistan may mean that women may not be aware of the current political situation (nor for that matter would some rural men for whom "all politics are local"), resulting in uninformed responses to some questions. It should be remembered that many respondents are likely fairly unsophisticated, and will often give very little thought to their answers. In a recent Kandahar Poll, an average of 35 minutes was taken to answer roughly 70 questions requiring over 150 individual answers.

ALL ABOUT THE TRIBE

In Kandahar Province, where Pashtuns constitute the dominant ethnic group, tribal affiliation is thought to be an important determinant of political loyalties and attitudes. As such, it has often been suggested by clients of the Kandahar Polls that disaggregating results according to the respondents' tribal affiliation could be instrumental to understanding the underlying trends.

A first obstacle to breaking down results by tribal affiliation is the non-existence of reliable demographic data on tribal affiliation. Various maps can be found showing the distribution of the dominant tribal groups of the province, but these are often mutually contradictory and in any case do not provide the degree of detail needed for a proper disaggregation of polling results. The essence of the difficulty is that given a non-uniform sampling of the population, tribal demographic data is needed to precisely compute the weights to be used in inferring the attitudes of tribal groups.

Beyond the absence of reliable demographic information, the fact that tribal affiliation is generally not clearly defined, and that respondents may self-identify using varying criteria increase the difficulty of conducting a rigorous analysis. The tribal hierarchy of Pashtuns is itself poorly understood by western scholars, but furthermore may allow respondents to associate most closely with sub-tribes at different levels of the hierarchy.

If nothing else, the Kandahar Polls are proving to be an interesting source for inferring the province's tribal map. Indeed, questions on ethnic, religious and tribal affiliations of respondents asked over several polls are providing a data set that can now be used to describe the tribal characteristics of the province.

SOME MORE RECOMMENDATIONS

8. In analyzing results from subjective polling questions, trends over time and regional differences in answers are most relevant.
9. The best questions are simple and straightforward.

10. Check the translation.
11. Be aware of your cultural biases; make use of cultural advisors to avoid cultural pitfalls.
12. Avoid questions referring to specific time periods (e.g. last three months), or to time in general.
13. Minimize changes in the questions between polling waves to allow for comparison of results from one poll to the next.
14. Some subjects don't lend themselves to polling. Absurd results on such subjects will attract unwanted negative attention.

REPORTING POLLING RESULTS

MAPS AND LINE CHARTS

It was previously mentioned that for questions requesting a respondent's subjective opinion, trends, both temporal and spatial, tend to be far more relevant than discrete results. In another section, it was claimed that the trends for heavily biased questions may still be indicative of the underlying situation. Here, it will now be pointed out that all polling questions involve an element of subjectivity. For the Kandahar Polls, results related to trends over time and space have proven to be among those providing the most insight.

Two main ways of reporting change over time have been used for the Kandahar Polls. The first is a straightforward comparison of successive results, typically involving the use of a test to validate the statistical significance of change between the two polls. A first difficulty in this approach involves the design of reasonable statistical tests, which for district-level results may require small sample statistics tools, and mechanisms to account for the fact that sampling is stratified and clustered. A second difficulty involves the choice of the results to compare. For quarterly polls, should a result be compared to the one from the previous quarter, or previous year? Complicating this, some results have shown seasonality over time, moving up or down with harvests or winter lulls in insurgent activity. Clients of the polls are nevertheless often keenly interested in mission progress, and want to know if results have improved or worsened since the previous poll.

A second way of presenting temporal trends has been the use of line charts showing all previous results to a given question over time. This provides a complete visual presentation of temporal trends, exposing the difference between seasonality, temporary dips, and persisting trends. The exclusive use of line charts, however, does not allow one to see as easily whether change is statistically significant. Given enough data points, such a chart may give some insight into the amount of statistical fluctuation in the data.

The analysis of polling results becomes more art than science, when it comes to deciding which polling results are to be reported. Statistical tests might provide insight, but biases are an important and usually incompletely understood source of error. Change that initially appears significant sometimes, after subsequent polls, appears to have been one-off and likely to have been due to inopportune sampling. The authors have on some occasions reported changes that appeared to be significant, but that in later polls reverted to the previous norm. It is possible that such results were in fact temporary changes in the situation, but most are

now thought to have been simply due to sampling outliers. At the district level, in particular, sampling of only a small number of clusters brings very high potential variability in results for questions with strong intra-cluster correlation. The authors now look for multiple indicators of change before emphasizing it in the presentation of the results. This could happen after having observed a given situation over more than one poll, having several separate questions indicate a similar trend, or when a change in polling results matches changes in indicators from other sources. There is however always a danger that analysts will interpret results in a way that suits them – modesty and vigilance in reporting is encouraged.

Spatial trends in polling results are most clearly presented using maps. A typical map presenting Kandahar polling results uses a colour scale to present the results from the various districts of the province. There is sometimes a difficulty in reducing responses to a single number allowing the use of such a colour scale. Answers must be reduced to two categories, unless more complex maps are to be used, where a pie chart or bar graph is drawn on each district. It has proven to be important to remove non-responses (i.e. respondents who chose to refuse to answer or who could not provide an answer to a question) from the data drawn onto maps or line charts. Not doing so can highlight differences that are due only to varying levels of non-responses over time or between districts.

THAT CAN'T BE RIGHT! (PART 2)

In the course of a polling exercise, it is likely that unexpected results will be uncovered. Previous sections argued that unusual results could easily be due to poor question formulation, resulting in misunderstanding by respondents or misinterpretation of the results. They could also result from the biases and sampling error of polls. However, when such possibilities can be discarded, it is also possible that an unexpected result is due to a change in the true situation, or to a previously misunderstood element of local attitudes. A difficulty in analysing polling results is that one will be faced with numerous sometimes equally likely possible interpretations for intriguing results.

The previous sections argued in favour of modesty and circumspection in interpreting polling results, but additional steps could be taken when uncertainty persist. One approach consists in approaching various experts with the problems, when such experts can be found. The polling contractors themselves might offer some insight, but cultural interpreters and other experts on the society being polled can help. Another longer term approach is to expand subsequent questionnaires to approach the questions differently, or to collect additional information on the subject of interest. The use of open-ended questions to complement the ones generating unusual responses is often useful. Another useful approach may be the use of subsequent focus group discussions, or in depth interviews with a smaller number of respondents to obtain a deeper understanding of the attitudes expressed through polling.

Ideally, however, polling would not be the only data collection exercise taking place to assess a counterinsurgency campaign. Typically, various governmental, non-governmental and international organizations collect and publish indicators of the economic, social and political situation that may be useful to counterinsurgency assessments. The authors believe that analysts assessing counterinsurgency campaigns should also be collecting data on their

own indicators. If, for example, freedom of movement was a key campaign element, hiring a local contractor to measure traffic levels along important routes might be useful. If a campaign was focused on the provision of specific services, such as children's education, then detailed surveys of the education infrastructure and schooling rates could be conducted. Local media can be monitored, as a second window into local attitudes and to gain understanding of the element influencing these attitudes. More generally, numerous indicators of normalcy and functioning institutions could benefit assessments. The authors would suggest that polling should be but an element, albeit an important one, of a plan to assess a counterinsurgency campaign.

AM I HAVING AN EFFECT?

In the context of counterinsurgency campaigns, assessments are meant to be compared to previous actions, so as to determine the effect of those actions, and to decide if they are achieving their purpose. Polling can directly measure the impact of some actions, such as public information campaigns. However, higher level campaign objectives monitored through polling, such as perceptions of security, increased prosperity and faith in government institutions looks at a bigger picture, and are too coarse and focused on the long term to be compared to specific punctual activities.

For the Kandahar Polls, some simple relationships between things such as prolonged combat operations and reduced perceptions of security in given areas have been observed. However, little success has so far been achieved in matching polling results to other specific actions and policies. One such effort was undertaken when a high-profile insurgent attack occurred in Kandahar City, and was followed by some high-intensity Afghan National Army-led operations in neighbouring Arghandab district. It so happened that a poll had been conducted days before the incidents, and so a second poll in Kandahar City and Arghandab was commissioned within a few weeks after cessation of the activities. Results were interpreted in terms of the effect of these actions on public opinion. The polling results showed some interesting changes in public opinion of various institutions (Taliban, Afghan National Army, Government of Afghanistan, ISAF), as well as perceptions of security, which differed between Kandahar City where the insurgent attack occurred, and Arghandab where the counter-insurgency operations were conducted.

Early Kandahar Polls attempted to isolate polling results from the area deemed to be the coalition military footprint in the province. One approach to this was taken by reporting results for districts deemed to be in the footprint separately from the others. This was however thought to be too coarse, as the actual military footprint did not follow district borders. Another attempt was based on the inclusion of each sampled settlement as either within or outside the footprint, but the poll's design was not meant for such analysis, making it unclear how the interviews from individual settlements should be weighted.

In any case, it was found that the extent of the military footprint was often not the main factor influencing responses to polling questions. Pre-existing geographical and socio-economic conditions (e.g. urbanization, proximity to major roads, productivity of the land) were often more important factors in explaining results.

HOW DEEP IS YOUR ANALYSIS?

Many sophisticated statistical techniques have been contemplated for the analysis of the Kandahar polling results. Some attempts have been made to extract deeper insight beyond a simple descriptive presentation of responses. Analytical tools such as principal component analysis, multiple correspondence analysis, cluster analysis, and novel tests of association and hypothesis tests have been used or developed. Such work is undoubtedly interesting, and worthy of pursuing, but has not figured prominently in the reporting of the Kandahar Polling results. This is in part because these techniques have typically provided secondary results, providing additional texture to the simple straightforward ones. It is also due to the high margins of error and significant biases to which the Kandahar Polls were subject, the uncertainty associated with complex results linking more than one polling question quickly becomes unmanageable.

The simple descriptive reporting of the proportion of respondents having answered a question in a given way, occasionally disaggregated according to important demographic or geographic groups seem to provide most of the insight that may be extracted from the Kandahar Polls. In most cases where results from different questions are to be compared, simple observation of the contingency tables linking the results may provide enough intuition into the underlying relationships, while more sophisticated tools can provide clues as to which relationships should be investigated.

The results of a major poll are typically summarized for distribution to a wide audience. In such a context, it is desirable to aggregate several results into overarching conclusions. It is also desirable to relate the results to current events and to understanding of the situation coming from other sources. However, one should always be mindful of the particular poll's limitations and biases. Only conclusions that are strongly supported by the poll's results should be retained. Modesty in the interpretation of polling results is warranted as it is easy to fall into the trap of making inferences that suit one's desired outcome or preconceived outlook, when those results could equally be attributable to other less appealing factors.

THE LAST FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

15. Don't report results for questions that were obviously misunderstood or whose results are not credible.
16. Avoid inferring causal relationships, or linking changes between waves to events that occurred in that time period unless you are very sure of the cause.
17. Seek other data sources. Polling should only be one element of a wider data collection plan for reliable assessments of a counterinsurgency campaign.
18. Analysis may benefit from the use of sophisticated tools, but results should be presented in a succinct and intuitive way, avoiding statistical esoterism.
19. And again, present assessments based on polling results modestly; they are likely subject to significant biases and variability.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to opinion polling, many people from various professional backgrounds profess some expertise, and even the laymen are happy to provide their advice. The observations and recommendations made by the authors are based on their practical experience with the Kandahar Polls, rather than on any pre-existing expertise in opinion polling. It is hoped that these recommendations can be useful to those considering the use of polling as a tool for the assessment of counterinsurgency campaigns.

The authors were fortunate that when they developed the first Kandahar Poll, local polling capacity existed in Afghanistan that could be easily harnessed. In many regions subject to insurgency, however, including Kandahar Province only two years earlier, this capacity may not exist and must be developed before polling can take place. Given the success and now widespread demand for Kandahar Polling products in the Canadian Department of National Defence, it is likely that a coming challenge faced by Canadian Military Operations Analysts will be that of building local polling capacity in a new and under-developed theatre of operations for a future expeditionary mission.

Despite polling's great value to assessments, the authors are far from suggesting that it should replace reporting from other sources. In assessing the Canadian campaign in Kandahar Province, polling has gone from being an obscure and easily disregarded side show to being sometimes over-emphasized in important operational assessment reports. The Operational Analysts assisting the teams conducting mission assessments should always seek the development of other data collection tools to complement or confirm assessments coming from polls.