

Doctoral Dissertation

**Assessing Sensitive Development and Conflict Resolution Issues in
Afghanistan: Application of Randomized Conjoint Design and List
Experiment**

(Summary)

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Armed conflict and violence can have direct costs like loss of human capital and destruction of physical infrastructure in society. But it also creates indirect consequences through its impact on the economy and household decisions like child labor and early school drop-out. Earlier studies on conflict resolutions and child labor tend to focus on the direct cause of armed conflict and its impact on child labor. In this study, we tried to identify the fiscal illusion problem, a significant barrier for any development program, including child labor programs, and find the key strategies for creating an optimal policy package to solve the protracted conflict in Afghanistan.

Further, in this study, we measure the public support for the future political model where we can accommodate the Taliban. In detail, three sub-objectives of this dissertation are discussed as follows: To attain the first objective, in chapter 2, we intentionally designed two similar hypothetical anti-child labor policy target programs, the difference in budget allocation or cost scheme using a fully randomized conjoint analysis and compared the supporting rate for the anti-child labor policy program between the two groups namely: tax payment and share of government expenditure. The estimated results of the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) between the two program cost attributes of two profiles showed completely opposite directions, suggesting that a significant fiscal illusion problem exists among central government officials working in Kabul. Moreover, women and staff in lower government positions were found to be more biased.

Regarding the second objective (chapter 3), this dissertation examined the impact of three information strategies on preferences for hypothetical key provisions of a peace agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. As Afghanistan is home to intractable conflicts that gained complexity in the past two decades due to the participation of foreign powers and human rights violations perpetrated by the Taliban regime. Thus, we expected that the historical information (i.e., the Hiroshima phoenix episode), pecuniary information, and religious information that would be provided to a sample of business elites and employees in

Kabul might observe the change in their perceptions toward the Taliban and this change would signal pro-peace behavior and support for a peace agreement.

The results showed that all three information strategies significantly increased the respondents' support for a peace agreement. In terms of the aggregate impact of information strategies on the respondents' preferences, pecuniary information had the most influence, followed by historical information about the Hiroshima phoenix episode, with religious information having the least effect. The third and last objective (chapter 4) contributes to identifying the true public behavior toward accommodating the Taliban in a future political system and shows that the current situation where the Taliban imposed their regime on the Afghan people is not based on the free will of people. Further, this study quantified the degree of social desirability bias, in which respondents answer the questions in a socially desirable and acceptable manner instead of revealing their actual perceptions.

In the context of public support for accommodating an unwanted neighbor in a political system, this bias emerges based on their direct fear of the insurgent groups and their Islamic beliefs. To identify the characteristics of the public in favor of and against the Taliban, this study mitigated the social desirability bias by conducting the item count technique combined with the direct question. The overall results of this chapter show that respondents tend to support the establishment of a free, democratic, and inclusive government that includes representatives from all ethnic groups across the country.