

# Pre-analysis Plan for: Attitudes and Opinions on The Effectiveness of Comprehensive Counterinsurgency Among the US Army

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## ABSTRACT:

The US Army currently adopts a “comprehensive” approach to counterinsurgency which emphasizes the importance of minimizing civilian casualties and fostering the legitimacy of host nation governments. The approach balances “enemy-focused” efforts to defeat insurgency with “population-focused” efforts to address its root causes. However, there is currently no systematic evidence about whether and when American military personnel think that population-centric efforts are effective. These beliefs matter because they influence whether and how these operations were implemented on the ground and how counterinsurgency doctrine may evolve in future conflicts. To address this shortcoming, we field a survey of US Army personnel through a comprehensive online survey of US Army personnel. Our survey focuses on three important questions. First, how much support is there for population-focused activities among US Army personnel and how does this support vary across the institution? Second, why do some personnel support population-focused activities but not others? Third, under what conditions do personnel think that this strategy is most effective? Together, these questions shed light on how individuals in conflict environments form causal beliefs about high-stakes issues directly relevant to their personal safety.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The US Army currently adopts a “comprehensive” approach to counterinsurgency which balances “enemy-focused” efforts to defeat insurgency with “population-focused” efforts to address its root causes (US Army 2014). Unlike military doctrine for conventional conflicts, the comprehensive counterinsurgency approach maintains that civilians are the center-of-gravity for insurgent groups and emphasizes the importance of fostering the legitimacy of host nation governments (Petraeus and Amos 2006). This approach was developed in response to the experience of American military units in Iraq and Afghanistan, whose early tactical adaptation to the demands of counterinsurgency preceded and inspired changes in US Army counterinsurgency doctrine in late 2006 (Dyson 2012; Farrell 2010; Russell 2010; Burton and Nagl 2008). While the merits of this approach have been subject to extensive debate among academic circles (Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011; Condra and Shapiro 2012; Downes 2007; Hazelton 2017; Eikenberry 2013; Biddle 2008), little is known about the beliefs of the soldiers and officers entrusted to implement the comprehensive counterinsurgency approach on the ground. In particular, there is currently no systematic evidence about whether and when American military personnel think that population-centric efforts are effective. These beliefs matter because they influence whether and how these operations were implemented on the ground and how counterinsurgency doctrine may evolve in future conflicts.

To our knowledge, no systematic research has yet been conducted to gather the attitudes and opinions of US Army personnel on population-centric tactics and procedures during the last decade. Various academic projects have asked a handful of practitioners about their experiences with counterinsurgency but have done so in the form of limited interviews rather than systematic surveys (Meyerle, Katt, and Gavrilis 2010; Catignani 2012; Johnsson 2017; Adams 2015). An expansive RAND study surveyed American personnel about their experience with development projects under the Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP), but focused almost exclusively on Marines and Special Forces and conducted only a few dozen interviews with US Army personnel (Egel et al. 2016). The most comprehensive evidence on the beliefs of US Army personnel is a qualitative “COIN Survey” conducted in 2006 by Bill Hix (Maj Gen, US Army) and Kalev Sepp of thirty-one American brigades, battalions, and regiments in Iraq which found that sixty-percent of the commanders struggled with the theory and twenty-percent ignored the doctrine altogether (Kaplan 2013). These results are troubling because they suggest that the recommendations of the comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine were not implemented in practice. That early cohorts of US Army officers would be skeptical of the comprehensive approach is perhaps not surprising. Whether continued experience with comprehensive counterinsurgency, as well as further investments in training and guidance, have changed the attitudes of US Army personnel towards the approach is unknown.

To address this shortcoming, we field a comprehensive online survey of US Army personnel. Our survey focuses on three important questions. First, how much support is there for population-focused activities among US Army personnel and how does this support vary across the institution? In particular, do personality types, socialization in the military, and/or past-experiences help shape the attitudes of American military personnel? Second, why do some personnel support population-focused activities but not others? More specifically, are beliefs about the effectiveness of population-centric activities and/or the risks associated with such activities important mediators of support for population-centric activity? Third, under what conditions do personnel think that this strategy is most effective and does insurgent violence act as a moderator of support for population-centric activities?

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 The Promises of Comprehensive Counterinsurgency

The American approach to counterinsurgency evolved over the course of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan to incorporate lessons learned by forces on the ground and gradually adopted a “comprehensive” approach that placed equal weight on winning the trust of civilian populations and on defeating insurgents on the battlefield. Before 2006, US Army counterinsurgency doctrine emphasized an “enemy-centric” approach largely analogous to conventional warfare. Forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan before 2006 received little to no guidance on how to address insurgent threats (“U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations” 2001). Indeed, civilian and military leaders were the reluctant to even acknowledge the emergence of insurgencies in these conflicts, much less provide guidance on how to defeat them (Ricks 2006). In 2004, the US Army responded to demands for guidance by publishing an interim manual on the conduct of counterinsurgency campaigns that maintained a traditional focus on destroying the military capability of insurgent groups and emphasized maneuver warfare (“U.S. Army Interim Field Manual (FMI) 3-07.22, Counterinsurgency Operations” 2004).

By 2006, however, American military strategy had crystalized around a “comprehensive” counterinsurgency strategy that placed equal weight on winning the trust of civilian populations and on defeating insurgents on the battlefield. This approach was formalized in the publication of the Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM 3-24) which laid out official doctrine (“U.S. Army U.S. Marine Corps Field Manual (FM) 3-24, Counterinsurgency” 2006). This manual was the product of General (US Army, Retired) David Petraeus and an intellectual vanguard of military officers who believed that that insurgents and counterinsurgents are in a violent contest for the support of the local population. They believed that civilians are the center-of-gravity in such conflicts and can be convinced to support the host-nation government if counterinsurgents provide security and reestablish the normal functions of government. In this kind of contest, protecting the civilian population is at least as important as killing insurgents and collateral damage may induce a backlash that outweighs the short-term tactical gains. As a result, proponents call for a large strategic commitment of military, social, political, and economic resources to build the credibility of the host-nation. The doctrine draws heavily upon the innovations of early commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as classical works on counterinsurgency developed in response to communist-national insurgencies in the 1960s (Thompson 1966; Trinquier 1964; Galula 1964; Komer 1972; Krepinevich 1986). The strategy placed high demands upon the military and asked soldiers to become “a social worker, a civil engineer, a schoolteacher, a nurse, [and] a boy scout” (Galula 1964).

The doctrine had important implications for the kind of tactical operations that soldiers were expected to conduct. It prescribes that counterinsurgents should live among the local community in order to provide security, guard against insurgent operators, and earn the trust of the population. In areas where insurgents already control the population center, the theory maintains that counterinsurgents should concentrate their forces to push out the insurgents (“clear”), maintain sufficient forces to repel encroaching insurgent forces (“hold”), and then reestablish government services to build local trust in the incumbent government (“build”). Soldiers trained in conventional warfare would be familiar with the first two steps, but the third represents a departure from the roles traditionally associated with the military. In this kind of contest, protecting the civilian population is in many cases more important than killing insurgents and collateral damage may induce a backlash that outweighs the short term tactical gains (McChrystal 2009).

By and large, empirical work in political science confirms the tactical effectiveness of various aspects of population-centric strategies. Development spending, a crucial component of the population-centric strategy, has been showing to help establish control of contested areas and reduce insurgent violence (Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011). A number of studies show variation in outcomes depending on the type of project, degree of territorial control, and size of the project (Sexton 2016; Adams 2015; Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov 2012). However, most of these studies focus on development spending in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a few studies conducted in other contexts have come to less optimistic conclusions, such as work by Crost, Felter, and Johnston (2014) in the Philippines. Another body of scholarly work shows that civilian casualties caused by military operations reduce support for counterinsurgents and increase insurgent attacks (Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas 2011; Dell and Querubin 2018; Schutte 2016; Wright et al. 2017), although ingroup insurgents seem to be immune from a similar backlash (Lyll, Blair, and Imai 2013; Condra and Shapiro 2012). For an exception, see Lyll (2009) in Chechnya who finds that indiscriminate violence can reduce insurgent operations. The literature also finds that training and supporting local armed forces may be an effective way to undermine support for insurgent groups (Felter 2005; Lyll 2010; Lyll, Blair, and Imai 2013).

## **2.2 Reception by the US Army**

While the political science literature has primarily been concerned with determining whether population-centric activities are effective, there has been little focus on whether such beliefs are held by the military personnel entrusted to implement the strategy. Indeed, the tendency of political scientists has been to portray the American military as uniformly supportive of the comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine. For example, Lyll et al. (2013) write that “a near consensus now exists among practitioners around the notion that counterinsurgency wars are decided by the relative success each combatant enjoys in winning popular support from the civilian population.”

### **2.2.1 Opposition to population-centric activities**

However, the comprehensive military doctrine has in fact elicited significant controversy. While the approach was popular among some of the Pentagon’s top brass, and endorsed most notably by David Petraeus and Stanley McChrystal, other officers questioned whether the comprehensive approach could deliver what it promised. One of its most influential critics has been Karl Eikenberry, who served as a three-star general in Afghanistan from 2002 until 2005 and then again as the American ambassador to Afghanistan from 2009 until 2011. He criticized the strategy as not being “sufficient” to deal with Al-Qaeda in a leaked diplomatic cable in 2009 and published an article in 2013 which characterized the strategy as “incoherent” and “difficult to prosecute” (Eikenberry, 2013). Other prominent critics among the military include Col. Gian Gentile have questioned the efficacy of the approach in achieving America’s core policy objectives, such as the degradation of Al-Qaeda (Gentile 2011, 2013).

Responses to the comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine were also varied among soldiers and noncommissioned officers. Many in the military questioned whether the comprehensive counterinsurgency approach could deliver what it promised. Some soldiers were not convinced that they could ever win the support of the local population. For example, when reporter Michael Hastings traveled with General McChrystal to meet a unit stationed on the outskirts of Kandahar, he was told by PFC Jared Pautsch that “we should just drop a fucking bomb on this place. You sit and ask yourself: What are we doing here?” Reflecting on this experience, Hastings warns that many in the American armed forces “aren’t buying it” (Hastings 2010). Similarly, LTC Dale Kuehl (2009) indicates that the soldiers under his command became frustrated

with the intensity of violence in Amiriyah, Iraq and wanted to conduct large-scale clearing operations rather than supporting development projects.

Culture and self-identity may also have played an important role in shaping support for population-centric approaches. Another common criticism heard among soldiers was that they had not joined the military in order to be social workers. In contrast to the Pentagon's top brass, which was increasingly filled with the "warrior-scholar" type, the rank-and-file of the military still embodied the traditional "macho military man." For example, SSG (US Army) Kenneth Hicks told Hastings that "when I came over here and heard that McChrystal was in charge, I thought we would get our fucking gun on." Similarly, a British battlegroup commander told Catignani (2012) that "the good macho military man doesn't want to be sitting in [defensive positions] ... he wants to be going out in a big macho platoon or company fighting patrol." Summarizing what he learned through interviews with 67 British combat infantry personnel, Catignani argues that the principles of population-centric counterinsurgency were "seen as contrary to the culture and the self-identity of soldiers, and ... what it fundamentally means to be a combat officer."

### 2.2.2 Support for population-centric activities

Other sources, however, chronicle the pushback of soldiers and noncommissioned officers when their commanders strayed too far from the comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine. For example, soldiers and low-level officers deployed to the Arghandab valley in central Kandahar province with the 1-17 Infantry Battalion, which suffered the highest casualties of any unit deployed to Afghanistan, criticized their superiors for focusing almost exclusively on clearing operations (*Military Times* 2013). Soldiers reported that they were told "to stay enemy-focused" and that the brigade's motto was "Strike – Destroy." The brigade commander publicly stated his intention to pursue a "counter-guerrilla" campaign and clashed with division commanders recommending more population-focused operations.<sup>1</sup> Borrowing from tactics in conventional maneuver warfare, he articulated an approach that focused on targeting insurgent "formations, supply chains, and leadership near simultaneously." He drew this approach from counterinsurgency guidance published in 1986, shortly after he graduated from West Point, which had long-since been superseded by updated doctrinal guidance. His experience as part of the 'Black Hawk Down' incident in Somalia may have influenced his beliefs about the efficacy of population-centric approaches.

In this case, soldiers and low-level officers largely had opposing views on best counterinsurgency practices and thought that population-focused operations could yield meaningful security gains. SSG Jason Hughes stated that "the non-kinetic side of the house is what wins counterinsurgency, not attrition" and that "if any commander in this brigade [i.e. Harry Tunnell] goes to sleep at night thinking after we've walked through that orchard over there that it's clear, he's a f----- idiot" (*Military Times* 2013). These conflicting viewpoints often came to a head. When Capt. Joel Kassulke posted a quote General McChrystal about the futility of sweeping operations on the wall of the company command post, the battalion commander directed him to remove the quote. Notably, these soldiers referred to their training and previous experiences conducting population-focused operations, perhaps explaining why their preferences diverged so much from their commanders and the soldiers interviewed by Hastings and Catignani.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.michaelyon-online.com/stunning-letter-infantry-colonel-communicate-to-secretary-of-the-army.htm>

### 2.2.3 Why beliefs about counterinsurgency practice matter

While the conventional wisdom is that the military's hierarchical nature should ensure that military actions on the ground conform to official doctrine, there is actually much more room for soldiers' attitudes and beliefs to influence implementation than usually thought. One of the primary contributions of the literature on bureaucracy and public administration is the understanding that agents often have their own preferences for how to conduct the task that has been delegated to them. This literature has shown that the beliefs and motivations of "street-level" agents have an important impact on how policies are implemented on the ground (Wilson 1989; Lipsky 1980; Brehm and Gates 1999; Khan, Khwaja, and Olken 2018; Finan, Olken, and Pande 2015). Organizational leaders, i.e. principals, rarely have complete control over how their policies are implemented by agents. Indeed, in contexts where informed judgments of particular cases are important, tight control over the actions of agents can actually lead to outcomes that are less desirable to the principal than the outcomes that agents would have reached if they had been given more discretion (Bawn 1995).

In the context of counterinsurgency operations, the beliefs of soldiers and junior officers matter because organizational leaders cannot prescribe what actions will work best in any given area of operations. Counterinsurgency campaigns exemplify the problems of "the three block war," where each locality requires its own tailored response and conditions change rapidly (Krulak 1999). For example, the population's attitude towards Coalition forces shapes the kinds of operations that are feasible. In areas that are strongly aligned with the insurgency, conducting dismounted patrols will not increase the flow of intelligence and operations will remain indiscriminate (Schmitt 2009). When operating operations in areas with strong insurgent presence, dismounted patrols, as dictated by the comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy, may actually increase the likelihood that civilians are caught in the cross-hairs.

As a result, the decisions of soldiers and non-commissioned officers matter in counterinsurgencies more than ever before. The key insights in this area were made by General Charles Krulak in 1999 when he argued that the outcomes of peace-building missions such as Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia "hinge on decisions made by small unit leaders." Krulak concluded that in the fight for hearts and minds, the actions of individual soldiers became symbols for American foreign policy and that their influence extended beyond the immediate tactical environment to the operational and strategic level (Krulak 1999). The same concept is echoed by contemporary military leaders. General David Petraeus wrote in his guidance for counterinsurgency that "it is those at the tactical levels – the so-called 'strategic sergeants' and 'strategic captains' – who turn big ideas in counterinsurgency operations into reality on the ground" (Petraeus 2010). More formally, this delegation of authority is enshrined in the Army's concept of "mission command." This managerial strategy maintains that that commanders should communicate to subordinates the objective that they are expected to achieve, but not the means by which to achieve them.<sup>2</sup>

## 3 THEORY

Recognition that the beliefs of soldiers and junior officers matter for the implementation of counterinsurgency strategy is of little help if we do not know what these beliefs are and where they

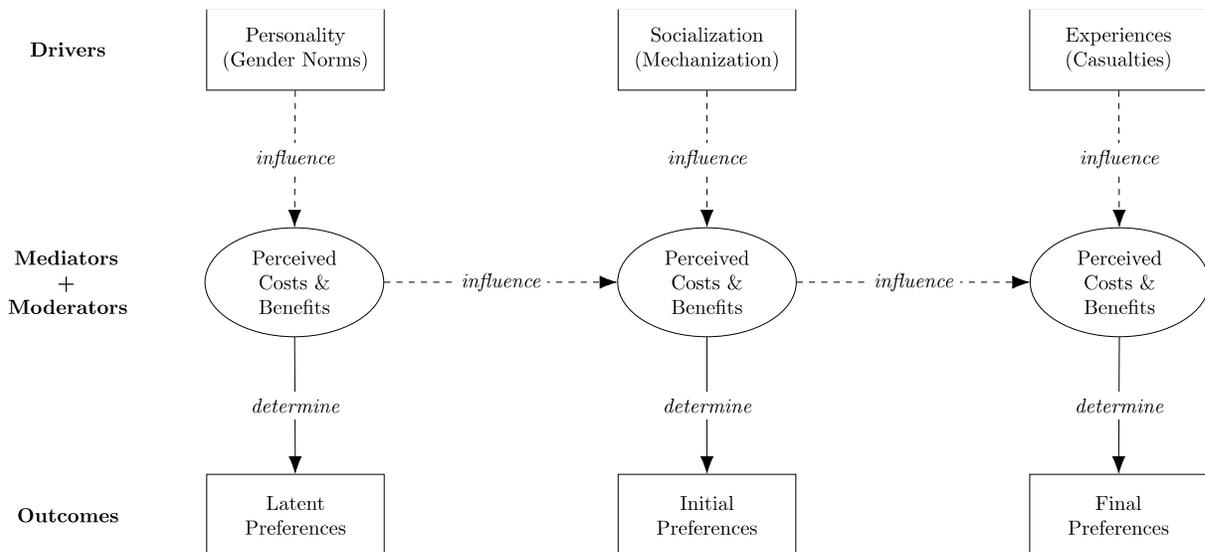
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<sup>2</sup> Mission command is articulated by Army Doctrine Publication 6-0 as "the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander's intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations." (U.S. Army 2014)

come from. In the following section, we provide a simple theoretical framework to interpret beliefs about the effectiveness of population-centric counterinsurgency activities. Such a framework helps us devise hypotheses about which kinds of factors may have had an influence on support for population-centric counterinsurgency, which will be evaluated empirically in the remainder of the paper. After presenting the theory, we then provide specific falsifiable hypotheses about factors we believe will influence support for counterinsurgency activities.

We believe that preferences for particular kinds of counterinsurgency activities are determined by rational beliefs about the benefits and costs of such activities given characteristics of the operational environment. These characteristics include factors such as the degree of insurgent activity and the hostility of the local population to counterinsurgency forces. Such costs and benefits include the likelihood that engaging in population-centric activity will increase local support for the counterinsurgent forces and reduce the frequency of insurgent attacks. These beliefs however, may vary between individuals even given the same operational environment. Variation in these beliefs is explained by factors such as intrinsic personality traits, socialization in the military, and previous deployment experiences. As such, our framework incorporates both aspects of rational choice models and insights from constructivism and psychology which maintain that these cost-benefit calculations are interpreted by the individual.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



### 3.1 Drivers of support for population-centric counterinsurgency

While there are many potential factors which may influence causal beliefs about the costs and benefits of counterinsurgency strategy, we provide three specific testable hypotheses drawn from the literatures on public administration, military sociology, psychology, and counterinsurgency which predict that norms about gender roles, socialization into mechanized units, and experiencing casualties during counterinsurgency missions will reduce support for population-centric activities. Research on bureaucracy and public administration has shown that individuals have powerful worldviews which color their interpretation of their jobs and their missions (Brehm and Gates 1999; Perry and Hondelghem 2008; Khan, Khwaja, and Olken 2018). We argue that soldiers' personality outside of their military experience may help shape how they think about

counterinsurgency. Specifically, previous qualitative surveys have posited an association between the image of the “macho” military man and support for enemy-centric activities (Catignani 2012; Hastings 2010). According to these theories, soldiers and officers sometimes define their role in the military around the use of violence. While this attitude is certainly not representative of most, or even many, of the officers and soldiers entrusted in carrying out the comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign, the presence of such ideas among the military corps helps explain the anecdotal variation in the kinds of operations that were conducted. Such individuals face cognitive dissonance in performing population-centric activities which focus on building relationships with the local population and seek to minimize the use of violence. This hypothesis is summarized as follows:

*Hypothesis 1: Soldiers who hold beliefs which are more heteronormative will have lower support for the population-centric activities in comparison to soldiers whose beliefs are less heteronormative*

A number of seminal works in military sociology have studied how professionalization and socialization changes soldiers’ relationship with the civilian state and the use of force (Janowitz 1960; Huntington 1981; Feaver 1996; Gelpi and Feaver 2002). We argue that soldiers’ experience in the military also affects how they think about the most appropriate tactics to employ during counterinsurgency. In particular, we hypothesize that a soldier’s military specialization, and particularly whether they are used to operating in mechanized or unmechanized units, may affect their predisposition to conduct mounted clearing operations or dismounted operations among the population. Scholars tend to believe that military units draw on their core competencies when planning and conducting operations. In particular, armored units are believed to engage in more large-scale clearing operations than their infantry counterparts (Johnsson 2017). Drawing on cross-case evidence, Lyall and Wilson argue that the physical separation of mechanized units from the population hampers their ability to collect intelligence vital to population-centric operations (Lyall and Wilson 2009).

Other scholars, however, argue that the personalities of individual commanders matter more than unit specialization. For example, Moyer (2011) studies the effectiveness of mechanized units in Iraq and finds no relationship between unit mechanization and insurgent attacks as predicted by Lyall and Wilson. He concludes that commanders adapt their unit’s training and equipment to meet the demands of counterinsurgency operations. Indeed, field artillery units were re-purposed to conduct dismounted operations and armored units rarely deployed with all of the equipment listed on the official table of organization and equipment. Supporting this theory, the empirical record provides prominent examples of armored units pioneering population-centric techniques and infantry units employing enemy- centric approaches, most notably, H.R. McMaster.

*Hypothesis 2: Soldiers who typically serve with mechanized units will have lower support for the population-centric activities in comparison to soldiers who typically serve in unmechanized units*

Finally, soldiers’ may pull from their previous experiences implementing counterinsurgency when thinking about the effectiveness of population-centric strategies. Anecdotally, military personnel devising early approaches to insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan pulled on previous experiences

with asymmetrical conflict in Latin American and Somalia (Kaplan 2013). In particular, we believe that occurrence of friendly casualties during formative periods will affect whether respondents support population-centric activities. Casualties among counterinsurgent forces may evoke emotional reactions which make military personnel less receptive to trust-building and interactions with the local population. Practitioners have noted the difficulty of holding back subordinate forces from conducting punitive clearing operations after receiving casualties (Kuehl 2009). Qualitative and empirical research in political science has also confirmed the role of anger and emotions in political decision making, including support for retaliatory violence (Petersen 2002; Garcia-Ponce, Young, and Zeitzoff 2019).

*Hypothesis 3: Respondents whose most significant experience with counterinsurgency resulted in casualties will have lower support for the population-centric activities in comparison to soldiers whose most significant experience with counterinsurgency did not result in casualties*

### **3.2 Mediators of support for population-centric counterinsurgency**

Our theory hypothesizes that the perceived costs and benefits of population-centric activities mediate support for this strategy. The population-centric strategy relies on the assumption that foreign forces can win the support of local populations and bolster the legitimacy of the host nation government by avoiding civilian casualties and by improving local economic conditions. Academic studies have found that reducing civilian casualties and increasing development spending is often associated with increasing support for coalition forces, but there is currently no evidence whether military personnel believe that these effects exist. Military personnel who believe that the attitudes of the local population are rigid, or who believe that corruption and inefficiency limit the impact of development projects on local economic conditions, may be less likely to support population-centric strategies.

*Hypothesis 4: Beliefs about the effectiveness of population-centric activities in changing local support mediate support for population-centric activities*

Similarly, it is possible that respondents believe that population-centric activities are effective at winning the support of local populations, but that the additional risks imposed on counterinsurgency forces by restrictions on the use of force make the strategy unattractive. Much of the opposition to the rules of engagement introduced by General McChrystal in Afghanistan related to the perceived effect of such rules on the risk to counterinsurgent forces (Felter and Shapiro 2017; Hastings 2010).

*Hypothesis 5: Beliefs about the risks posed by population-centric activities to coalition forces mediate support for population-centric activities*

### **3.3 Moderators of support for population-centric counterinsurgency**

Finally, local conditions may affect whether soldiers' support following a population-centric approach. While many factors may be relevant, including population density and the hostility of the local population to counterinsurgency forces, we focus here on the degree of insurgent activity. As evident in the case of the 1-17 Stryker Battalion, soldiers often disagree about the effectiveness

of population-centric activities in areas where insurgents are present. These concerns are reasonable, population-centric activities are more difficult to implement in areas with hostile populations. The population will be less forthcoming with tips about insurgent activities in such areas and the conflict may seem more intractable (Schmitt 2009). Similarly, insurgent activity may undermine the effectiveness of population-centric strategies. Even potentially supportive populations may keep their distance from counterinsurgent forces given the threat of insurgent retaliation and insurgents can destroy investments in infrastructure (Kalyvas 2006; Wright et al. 2017). Insurgent presence may therefore be a key variable that may moderate beliefs about the effectiveness of population-centric activities.

*Hypothesis 6: Higher insurgent activity will be associated with less support for population-centric activities, holding all other factors constant*

## **4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

To test these hypotheses, we use an observational survey used to solicit the respondents' opinions on various topics related to comprehensive counterinsurgency. The analysis relies on their candid and reflective response to these questions. An alternative approach would be to prime respondents with various stimuli that we hypothesize are related to support for counterinsurgency. While such an approach would support the plausibility of the theorized relationships, in this survey we want to study how various factors contribute to the respondents' long-term enduring opinions, not how short-term stimuli can affect how these attitudes are reported during a single survey. The following section lays out how the survey was fielded and several empirical concerns common across specific research questions.

### **4.1 Survey Population**

The following section lays out the target population, methods for creating representativeness, the protocol for recruitment, and provides power analysis.

#### **4.1.1 Target population and representativeness**

The targeted population is limited to individuals who have been active duty service members of the US Army within the last 15 years. Counterinsurgency was a major focus of the Army during this period of time and active duty service members likely either participated in counterinsurgency missions, received counterinsurgency training, or had reason to have an opinion about the practice. An analogous survey of mid-level officers is currently under review at the US Army War College which will allow us to over-sample mid-level officers who will be especially unlikely to respond to online surveys. To overcome selection concerns inherent to paid survey research, we will use raking to weight survey responses on the following variables according to their known marginal distributions among the US Army: age, rank, education, component, and military specialty.

#### **4.1.2 Recruitment and compensation**

This project fields an extensive online survey to a broad set of US Army personnel through the Lucid survey platform. Lucid contracts with 240 survey companies to provide low-cost representative surveys of niche target demographics. These survey companies were provided with a link to the Qualtrics survey, pre-screening qualifications, an estimated survey length, respondent compensation, and various statistics about previous completion rates. A pilot study indicates that

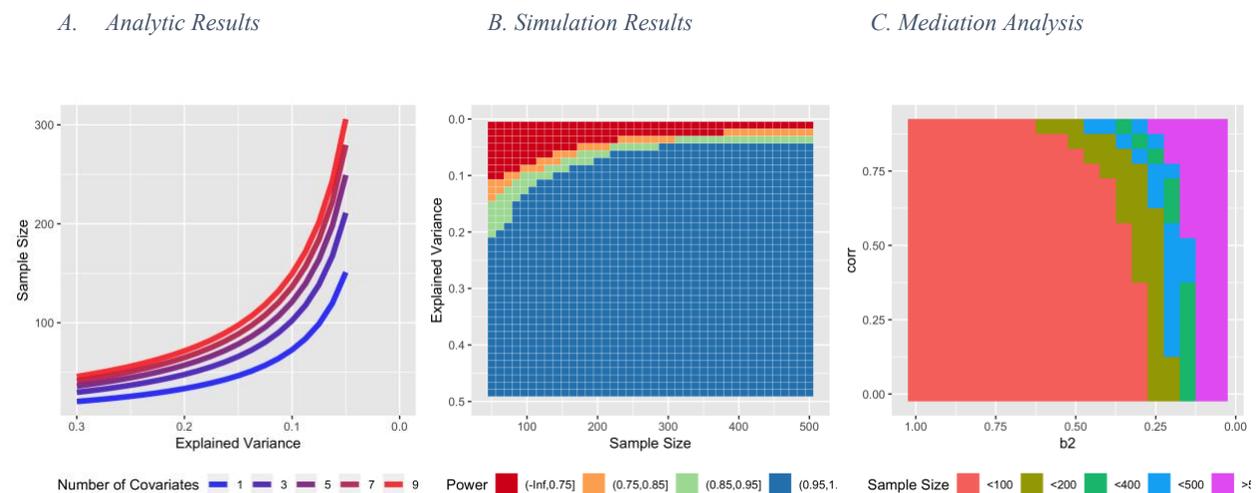
the largest number of respondents in our survey were recruited through InboxDollars, a service which provides several means to earn additional income from home. We paid \$5 for each completed survey response, the majority of which went to the survey respondent while the remainder covered the survey company's costs. Precise respondent recruitment and compensation information is not known because these qualities may vary between subcontracted survey firms. Respondents will not be eligible to receive compensation if they do not pass several attention checks embedded in the survey. We employed loosely restrictive quotas to ensure that our sample was not dominated by a single demographic group.

### 4.1.3 Power analysis

Our objective is to recruit between 200 and 300 respondents. Because our survey is narrowly targeted, it takes much longer to identify eligible respondents and a pilot study indicates that we are able to attract approximately 20 eligible respondents per day, half of which pass additional qualifications embedded in the survey as well as several attention checks. In the pilot study, the pre-screening questions were shown to 1053 potential respondents, 313 passed the initial qualification screener, and 92 of which successfully completed the survey.

These rates are sufficiently large to detect our quantities of interest. A sample size of about 100 respondents is sufficient to detect the effect of reasonably important explanatory variables. The following power calculations were made using the *pwr* package in R to estimate the sample sizes needed for linear regressions with a varying number of independent variables. A single independent variable explaining about 7.5% of the total variance could be detected at least 80% of the time while accepting a Type 1 error rate of 5% ( $p=.05$ ) with a sample size of 100 respondents. That same sample size could reject the joint null hypothesis of no effect for 9 variables if they together explained 15% of the total variance.

Figure 2. Power Analysis for Linear Models and Mediation Analysis



Simulations with artificial data created to resemble the likely distribution of responses to our survey items provide similar results. These simulations use a single independent variable taking integer values from one to five centered on three, a probable distribution of responses to our Likert scale variables. These simulations varied the explanatory power of the independent variable and sample size to estimate the minimum sample size needed to detect a statistically significant

effect at least 80% of the time. Again, the results indicate that a sample size of about 100 respondents is sufficient to detect the effect of an independent variable explaining about 10% of the total variance.

Finally, we conduct analytical sample size calculations for the mediation analysis using the *powerMediation* package in R. We find that a sample size of about 100 participants is sufficient as long as the correlation between the independent variables and the mediator variables is relatively low ( $< .5$ ) and the mediator is relatively strong (coefficient  $> .25$  with sigma 1 for both the mediator and the error term). Detecting a coefficient of size .125 or smaller requires 500 or more observations. The strength of the correlation between the mediators and the independent variables is less important than the strength of the relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable. We predict a relatively strong impact of our mediators on the dependent variable and moderate correlation with the independent variables.

## 4.2 Sources of Bias

We implement the following design strategies to address the possibility of ineligible respondents, inattentiveness, response bias, concern for sensitive questions, and missing data.

### 4.2.1 Ineligible respondents

We are primarily concerned with ensuring that survey respondents actually have experience in the US Army and are not simply completing the survey for the remuneration. An initial small sample pilot study which asked a leading question about military background was flooded with respondents who are unlikely to have had military experience. In the full survey, the pre-screening procedure has been changed to ask a standard, non-leading question about a respondent's employment with twelve options choices, including options to indicate active and inactive military duty. The following question narrowed the pool to respondents with experience in the US Army.

In the survey itself, we further confirm the participants' eligibility by asking them to give duplicate specific details about their military service at the beginning and end of the survey using different terminology. Specifically, we ask participants to report the highest rank they achieved at the beginning of the survey using the rank names (enlisted soldier, noncommissioned officer, etc) and then again at the end of the survey using the pay-scale grades (E-1 to E-4, E-4 to E-9, etc). Respondents who were not part of the military will have difficulty remembering what rank they picked at the beginning of the survey, and with associating it with the pay grade. This is confirmed by the small sample pilot study which showed no correlation between rank and pay grade. The order of the same choices is different in the second question. A hidden timer will record how long it takes the respondent to recall their rank the second time. The chance that a respondent randomly chooses the same rank is 1/6.

### 4.2.2 Inattentiveness

The survey is fairly long, estimated to last about 15 minutes, and some respondents may skip quickly through survey sections, creating measurement error. To minimize the influence of such responses, each page of the survey contains a hidden timer. Respondents whose average page completion times are more than 2 standard deviations above the mean will be coded as inattentive. The survey will also include an attention check at the end of the Most Significant Experience block and at the end of the Subcomponents block. Respondents who fail either of these checks are then terminated from the survey, do not receive additional questions, and do not receive compensation. In supplemental materials, we will check whether support for population-centric counterinsurgency, which is asked before any attention checks, is conditional on levels of

attentiveness, which may be correlated with other relevant respondent characteristics (Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances 2014).

#### 4.2.3 Response bias

Answer order may prime respondents in ways that affect their answers. The order of the answers for all subjective questions that have non-ordered options are randomized. For ordered answers, affirmative answers are always provided first.

#### 4.2.4 Sensitive questions

The survey has been determined to be “Exempt” by the Stanford Institutional Review Board (IRB) because it poses minimal risk to the participants. A pilot study indicates that the questions are not considered sensitive, facilitating candid responses. A convenience-sample pilot study indicates that the questions are not deemed sensitive. Promise no personally identifying information. To our knowledge, questions are not legally compromising. At the end the survey, we ask respondents how sensitive they believe the questions were. We will assess the robustness of our results to dropping respondents who report that the questions were at least somewhat sensitive, as these respondents are more likely to have obfuscated their answers. Throughout the survey, we include wording that indicates that the responses reflect only the respondent’s opinion.

We collect no personally identifying information with the exception of IP addresses to prevent respondents from taking the survey multiple times. IP addresses will be stripped from any replication materials. Respondents are instructed to skip any questions they feel are sensitive and are given the opportunity to express how sensitive they believed the questions were at the end of the survey.

#### 4.2.5 Missing data

We expect a low-level of item-wise missing information based on our pilot survey and the professional nature of the survey. Missing responses will be imputed using AMELIA using all available covariates and reported in the robustness section. Respondents who fail to complete the survey will be dropped from the analysis, and we will check for balance on the experience covariates.

## **5 EMPIRICAL DESIGN**

### **5.1 Descriptive Statistics**

The first component of the survey estimates the average level of support for population-centric activities across the US Army, both in abstract and in practice. These are descriptive statistics used to answer important empirical questions and to motivate the remainder of the empirical analysis.

#### 5.1.1 How much support is there for population-centric activities?

First, we analyze general support for population-centric activities in our sample. We ask respondents how often units should mostly be engaged in population-centric and enemy-centric activities as well as what their ideal distribution of effort is between population-centric and enemy-centric activities. Beyond these abstract notions of support, we ask respondents to report how strongly they agree with several of the logical sub-components of the comprehensive counterinsurgency doctrine, such as whether civilian casualties reduce support for coalition forces. We will provide both aggregate support for the logical sub-components as well as Likert Scale

Plots for each in the Appendix and highlight areas with the highest and lowest support in the main text. The questions used in this analysis are noted below, with R denoting reversed scales.

- 1) General preference for PC over EC [Q11 – Q12]
- 2) Ideal distribution of effort [Average Q13, Q14, Q15]
- 3) Agreement with theory [Average Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q30R, Q31R, Q32R, Q34R]

#### 5.1.2 How frequently are population-centric activities employed?

Next, we supplement analysis of support for population-centric activities with evidence of the implementation of population-centric activities in practice. These estimates are derived from self-reports of survey respondents about their experience conducting counterinsurgency operations. We ask respondents to report the number of deployments during which they primarily engaged in population-focused activities and also collect more detailed information on the kinds of operations they conducted during a single “most significant” experience with counterinsurgency. These two separate questions help us balance the breadth and depth of our analysis without overburdening the respondents.

- 1) Implementation across mission [Divide Q68 by Q67]
- 2) Most significant experience [Q56]

#### 5.1.3 How do military personnel define population-centric activities?

Finally, we unpack how military personnel define the activities that define population-centric and enemy-centric strategies. Given the interdependence of operations that focus on insurgents and the population, it is not how military personnel think certain kinds of operations should be best classified. For example, do military personnel believe that using fires to deny insurgents access to an area is an enemy-centric activity or a population-centric activity?

We provide empirical evidence about how military personnel define population-centric activities by asking respondents to both classify that particular experience from mostly population-centric to mostly enemy-centric [Q56] and also asks them to report the frequency with which they engaged in nine different potential counterinsurgency activities [Q57]. We will regress the respondents’ assessment of their deployment’s counterinsurgency approach on each of these nine operational variables to determine which have the strongest influence on the respondents’ classification of their mission type and in which direction the relationships go. We will also test the robustness of the results by transforming the dependent variable into a binary indicator for enemy-centric (more or mostly enemy-centric) or comprehensive (balanced to mostly population-centric) and using a logistic regression. Both analyses will use bootstrapped standard errors.

## 5.2 Drivers of Support for Population-centric Counterinsurgency

The second component of the survey explores the sources of variation in support for population-centric activity. Why do some personnel support population-centric operations but not others? Do these beliefs depend systematically upon a respondent’s training, experiences, beliefs about the nature of the conflict, and/or personality? To answer these questions, we first construct an index representing support for population-centric counterinsurgency through factor analysis, and then regress several hypothesized drivers on the index.

### 5.2.1 Dependent Variable

Because any individual question about support may be subject to noise and obfuscation, we construct four separate sub-indexes of support for counterinsurgency, described below. We then use these indexes to create a meta-index of counterinsurgency approach and validate the findings with the sub-indexes. We will use the following four sets of questions to generate sub-indexes of counterinsurgency support.

- 1) General preference for PC over EC [Q11 – Q12]
- 2) Post-experience preference for PC over EC [Q60 – Q61]
- 3) Agreement with statements [Q91, Q92, Q93R]
- 4) Ideal distribution of effort [Average Q13, Q14, Q15]

The meta-index will be computed using the sub-index indicated above and the ‘factanal()’ function in R, computing regression scores for a single factor. Factor analysis is preferable to a simple average because it infers the weights to place upon these sub-indexes from the data, rather than assuming that each contributes equally to support for population-centric activities. We will validate the results with the sub-indexes in the Appendix and to a scale constructed using a simple average.

### 5.2.2 Independent Variables

We hypothesize that the following independent variables will be drivers of support for population-centric counterinsurgency. The variables are operationalized as follows.

- 1) Heteronormative attitudes (Personality).
  - We borrow five questions from the Gender Role Beliefs Scale (Brown and Gladstone 2012) in Q100 and five questions about the role of women in the military (Porter and Adside 2001) in Q99. Questions will be aligned and averaged to create a “heteronormative attitudes” index.
- 2) Mechanization (Socialization).
  - Respondents are asked to identify which kind of unit they typically serve in Q98. Responses will be coded as Mechanized (Armor, Stryker), Unmechanized (Airborne, Light Infantry), or Other (Operational Support, Force Sustainment, Special Forces, Other)
- 3) Friendly Casualties (Experiences).
  - We ask respondents whether their unit experienced any casualties in Q54.

### 5.2.3 Empirical analysis

Each of the previously mentioned independent variables will be included in an OLS regression where the dependent variable is the meta-index of support for counterinsurgency. Robustness to using each of the sub-indexes of support for counterinsurgency will be included in the Appendix. We will adjust the p-values for multiple comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) method to control the false discovery rate using the p.adjust function in R. Regressions will also include the following controls: educational attainment (continuous scale), age (continuous scale), number of deployments, number of population-centric deployments, number of enemy-centric deployments, attentiveness (binary). The regressions will include weights based on raking described in 4.1.1. Each of the five hypothesized associations will also be shown non-parametrically in the Appendix.

#### 5.2.4 Identification Assumptions

The first two independent variables are potentially confounded by other personality traits like acceptance of hierarchy or political ideology, although such affects are likely to be minor. Individual soldiers have no influence over the strategy implemented in a particular area or the likelihood of friendly casualties so we believe that that effect is particularly robust.

### 5.3 Mediators of Support for Population-centric Counterinsurgency

Beyond providing insight into the overall receptiveness of the US Army to population-centric activities and identifying sub-populations who are especially likely to support or not support the approach, this paper aims to understand why respondents hold these beliefs. In order to better understand the opinions of those who disagree with the strategy, we test for the following mediating variables drawn from our qualitative study of counterinsurgency operations (Baron and Kenny 1986; Imai et al. 2011).

#### 5.3.1 Independent Variables

We will use the following independent variables, described in greater detail in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**: rank, training, military specialty, social science background, heteronormativity. We will then measure the mediating influence of perceived benefits and perceived costs of the population-centric strategy with the following two measures:

- 1) Perceived Benefits of population-centric activities will be measured by averaging over Qs 23, 24, 25, 26, 27.
- 2) Perceived Costs of population-centric activities will be measured by averaging over Qs 30, 31, and 32.

#### 5.3.2 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the meta-index of support for counterinsurgency, described in detail in Section **Error! Reference source not found.** We will validate the results on the three sub-indexes of support for counterinsurgency in the Appendix.

#### 5.3.3 Empirical Analysis

We will test for the role of the mediating variables described above using the causal mediation framework coded in the `mediate()` function from the mediation package in R and test for the robustness of the identification assumptions using the `medsens()` function. We believe that these mediators are causally unrelated and can therefore use the `mediate` function sequentially rather than the more restrictive `multimed()` function (Imai et al. 2011). We will include the survey weights produced by the raking procedure and the following controls: educational attainment (continuous scale), age (continuous scale), number of deployments, number of population-centric deployments, number of enemy-centric deployments, attentiveness (binary), and counterinsurgency training (indicators for each response).

#### 5.3.4 Identification Assumptions

In addition to the usual assumption of no reverse causality or confounding variables between the independent and dependent variables (addressed in the previous section), mediation analysis also requires that the same assumptions hold between the mediators and the dependent variable. In particular, these assumptions that respondents' beliefs about the impact of insurgent violence, the effectiveness of trust building, and operational risks are not post-hoc rationalizations of their

beliefs about population-centric counterinsurgency which are in turn actually determined by other factors. While we cannot completely rule out this possibility, we believe that these topics of enough substantive importance to military personnel experienced with counterinsurgency that they will have merited independent thought and consideration. Finally, we must also assume that there are no omitted confounding variables affecting both the mediators and the outcome variable. One such potential confounder would be exposure to training about counterinsurgency practices, which might independently shift these causal beliefs and also support for the approach in general, without a causal relationship between the two. For this reason, we include indicator variables for several types of training (practical, theoretical, and self-taught) and include these in the controls.

## **5.4 Moderators of Support for Population-centric Counterinsurgency**

The extent to which practitioners believe that population-centric activities can be effective in areas with significant insurgent presence may mediate their overall beliefs about the effectiveness of the strategy. We test this belief directly in Q18 and also employ the following regression strategy to identify moderator effects.

### **5.4.1 Empirical Analysis**

We ask respondents for their support for population-centric activities under varying levels of insurgent activity and implement the following procedure:

1. Convert the survey responses from wide to long format, creating three observations for each respondent corresponding to Q3.3, 3.4, and 3.5.
2. Code a variable “support” taking responses to the answers to Q3.3, 3.4, and 3.5 taking values 1 [mostly enemy-focused] to 5 [mostly population-focused]
3. Code a variable “violence” taking the corresponding values 2,1,0
4. Regress “support” on “violence” using a linear mixed effects model (lme4 package in R) with random intercepts for the Subject to account for non-independence. Compute p-values using Satterthwaite's method for denominator degrees of freedom (lmerTest package in R).
5. For robustness, run the same models including “violence” as a factor rather than numeric variable, using 0 as the base case, results in the Appendix.

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