

VoxDev – IGC State Fragility initiative (SF_i)

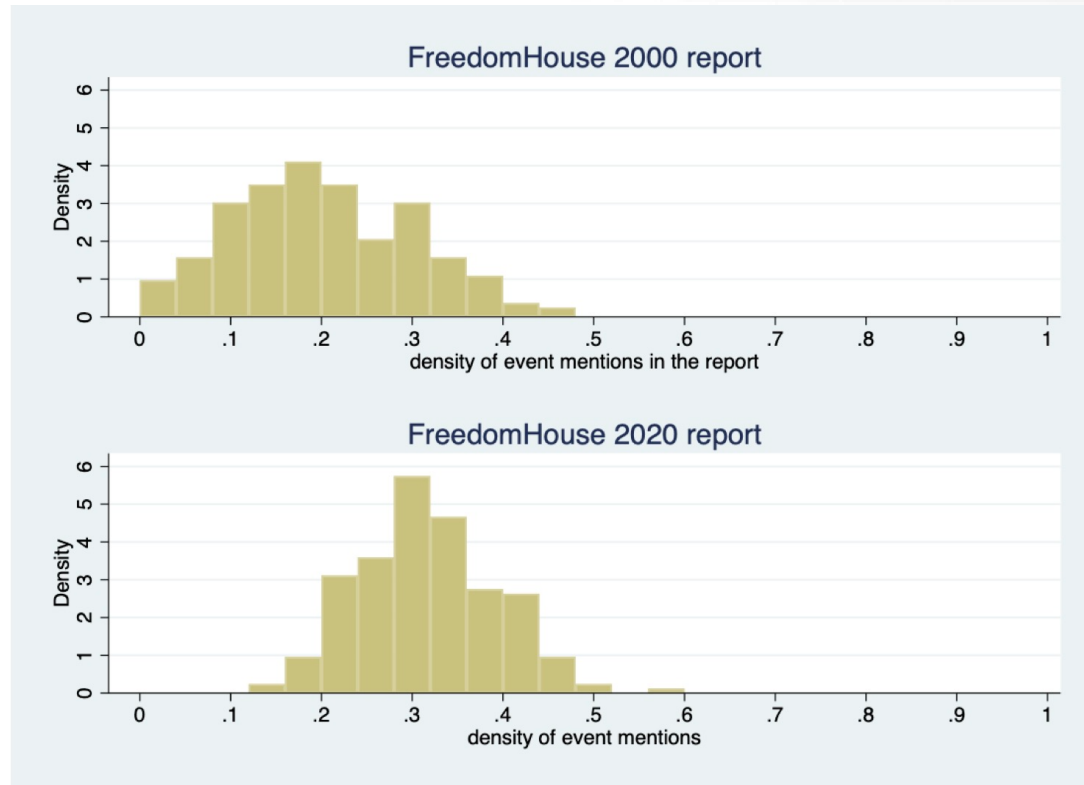
Michael Callen (LSE, IGC, and VoxDev)

Webinar

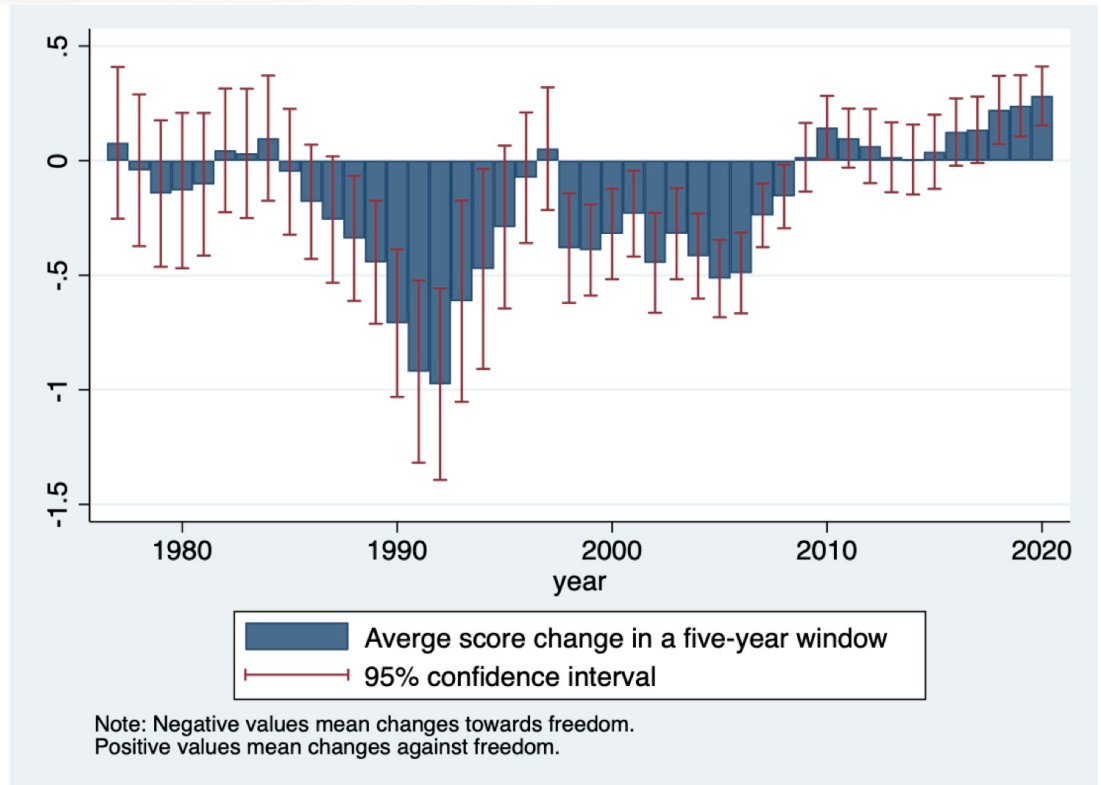
February 5, 2025



The world is less stable and less free



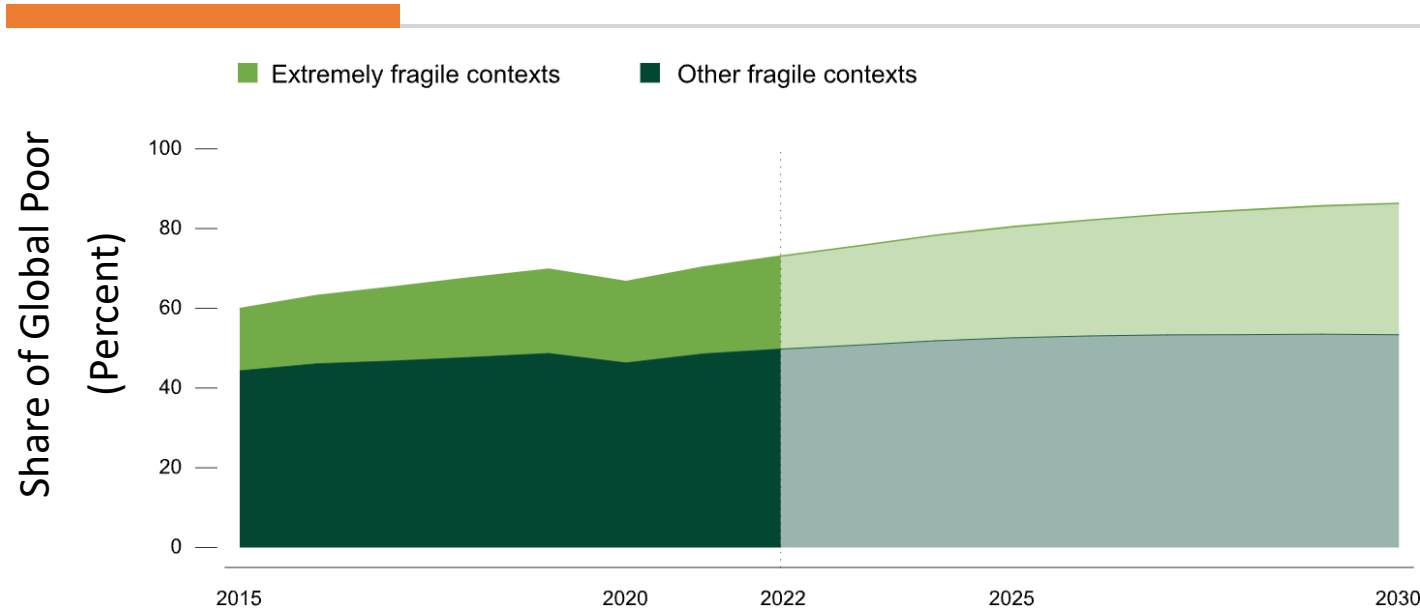
Panel A - Ratio of sentences documenting political events to all sentences in Freedom House country reports for 2000 and 2020.



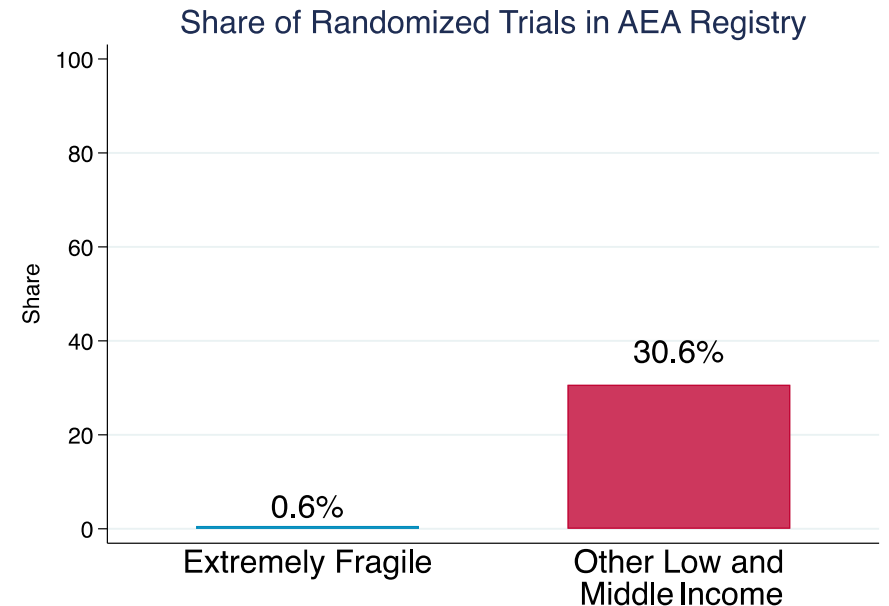
Panel B – Moving five-year average of country changes

From (Callen, Yuchtman, and Weigel ARE 2024) [Link](#)

The world's poor are concentrating in fragile states



Source: OECD States of Fragility 2022



Fragility: “exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state to mitigate those risks.”

Implications for policy-focused research:

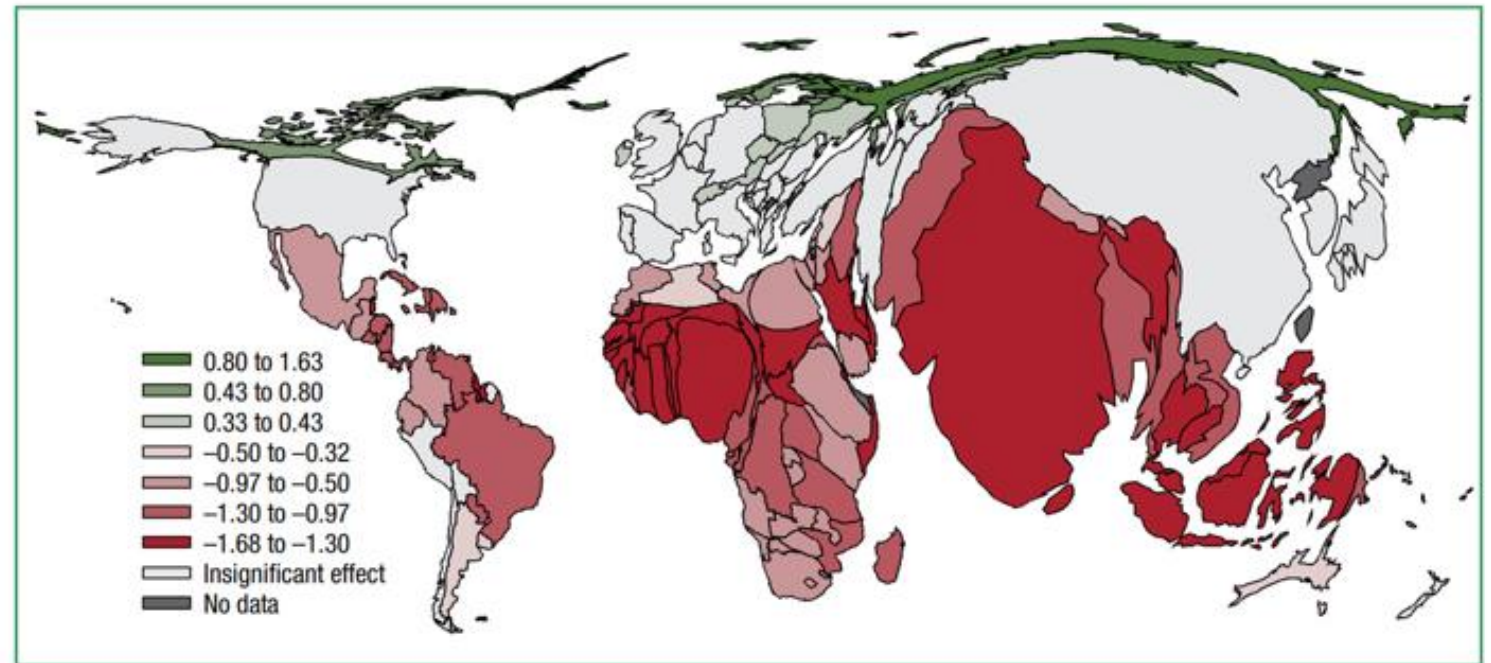
1. What can we do to address vulnerability in these settings?
2. What are pathways toward durable development?
3. How should we conceptualize ‘fragility’? What are its distinguishing characteristics?

Only 0.2% of top 5 journal articles from 2000 regard extremely fragile states.

Climate change will disproportionately affect poor and fragile countries

- Meeting the challenge of climate change requires capable states
- Survey of 8,252 politicians in Nepal (95% of constituencies) reveals that climate action is not a political winner. (Callen, Fiorin, Pande, Prillaman, Singh, 2025)

Figure 1 Impact of one degree Celsius hotter temperature on GDP per capita (Acevedo et al. 2018)



Source: Acevedo et al. (2018).

Note: The map depicts the effect of a 1°C increase in temperature on real per capita output at the country level, with countries rescaled in proportion to their population.

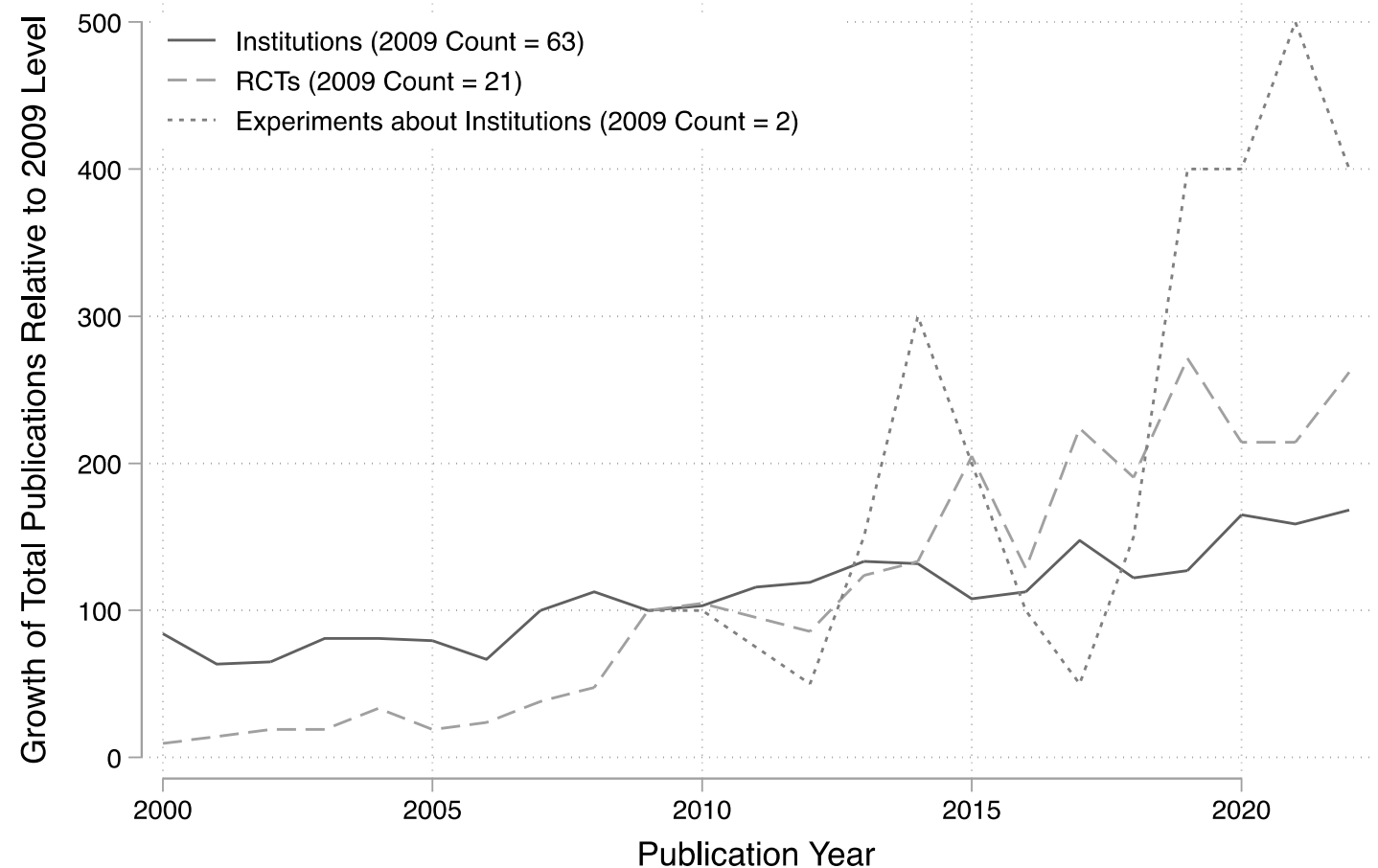
Reproduced in Kala, Balboni, and Bhogale. Adaptation – VoxDevLit

There is growing interest on the pathways to more durable institutions

Near consensus that durable and open **institutions** are important for economic growth

Studies that meet three conditions:

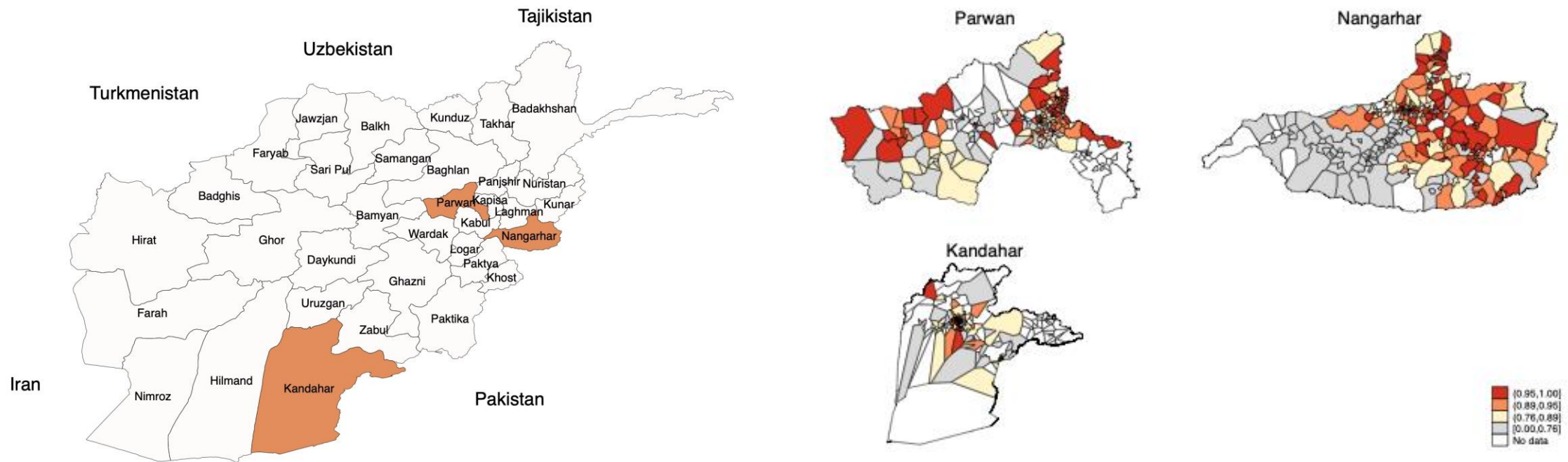
1. RCT
2. At a plausible “critical juncture”
3. Focused on rules of the game



From Callen, Yuchtman, and Weigel (ARE 2024) [Link](#)

Sample: Top 13 economics and top 2 political science journals

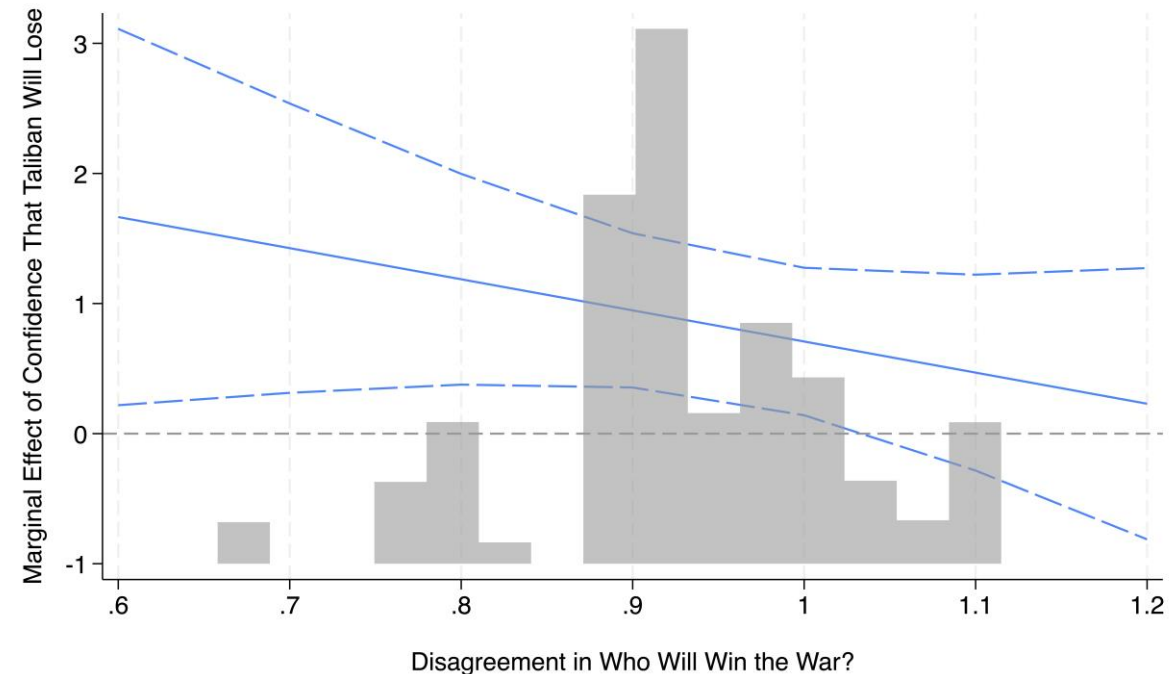
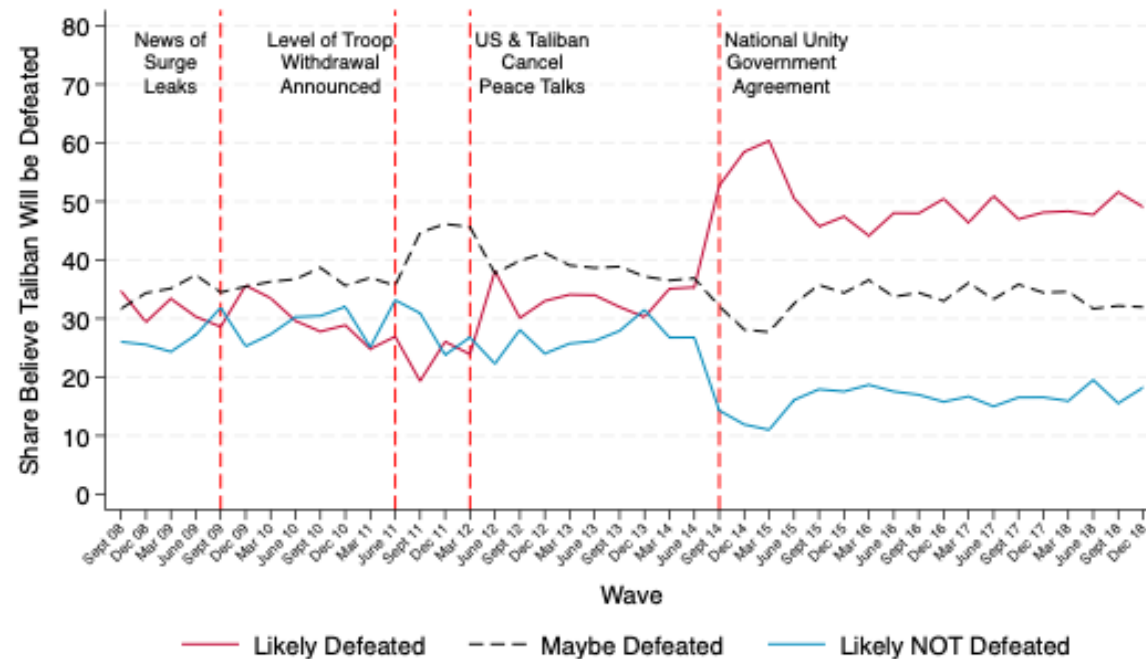
Strengthening Fragile States: Evidence from Mobile Salary Payments



From: Blumenstock, Callen, Faikina, Fiorin, and Ghani (WP 2024) [Link](#)

VoxDev Summary: [Link](#)

Fragility, uncertainty, and investments in state capacity



From: Blumenstock, Callen, Faikina, Fiorin, and Ghani (WP 2024) [Link](#)

VoxDev Summary: [Link](#)

Takeaways and Resources

Takeaways:

- Ending poverty requires ending it in fragile states, yet progress has stalled
- There is a paucity of research on effective policies in fragile states
- Fragile states are different in a way that affects most policies: they face the extreme risk that institutions might change

Resources:

- IGC State Fragility initiative: <https://www.theigc.org/initiatives/state-fragility-initiative>
- VoxDev: <https://voxdev.org/topic/institutions-political-economy>
- Empirical Studies of Conflict: <https://esoc.princeton.edu/>
- J-PAL Crime and Violence (<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/initiative/crime-and-violence-initiative>) and IPA Peace and Recovery (<https://poverty-action.org/peace-recovery>)
- CEPR ReCIPE (<https://cepr.org/research/programme-areas/reducing-conflict-and-improving-performance-economy-recipe>)