The Afghan Diaries provide a fascinating overview of conflict events in Afghanistan from January 2004, to December 2009, but have received little academic attention due to the difficulty of working with 76,000 entries, as well as the challenge of identifying the significant events from within all the noise. A major effort for this project was the sorting and cleaning of data, determining which entries represented violent events and which did not.

To produce a useful dataset of violent incidents within Afghanistan, this project excludes 37,726 carefully selected events. Events were excluded as non-violent based on the methodology developed by O'Loughlin et al. in “Peering into the Fog of War,” while events outside of Afghanistan were excluded using ArcGIS filtering.

Conflicts Violence & Ethnicity

After isolating the relevant conflict incidents to include in the dataset, the data was imported into ArcGIS using the latitude and longitude provided with each individual event record. Using the data analyst tool, violent incidents were visualized using kernel density for points of 2,500m and a search radius of 50,000m. There was no population weighting: violence was simply left proportionate to the number of incidents. It is notable, however, that the same geography pattern nonetheless emerges even if violence is weighted by casualties.

To generate the polygons useful for analysis in other maps, the rasters were converted into four quantities, and these quantities were made into permanent divisions using the Spatial Analyst tool to reclassify the rasters into quantities. This reclassification was then converted into two polygons (“high intensity” and “moderate intensity”) using the Conversion Tools function “Raster to Polygon.”

While these raster polygons help to illustrate the costs of war, to develop more analytical insights the violent events dataset was then directly appended to additional datasets. Violent events were joined to, for example, ethnic area information, with relevant fields including casualties, area and other statistics then provided in summary form for each ethnic polygon. Polygons representing the same ethnic groups were summarized together to provide a comprehensive view of violent events and casualties across a single ethnic group. Similar information could be appended to other GIS datasets, and similar statistics obtained on the impact of war across any geographically relevant dimensions.