

# Violence and Votes

## Geography and Citizen Insecurity in Recent Afghan Elections

### Project Overview

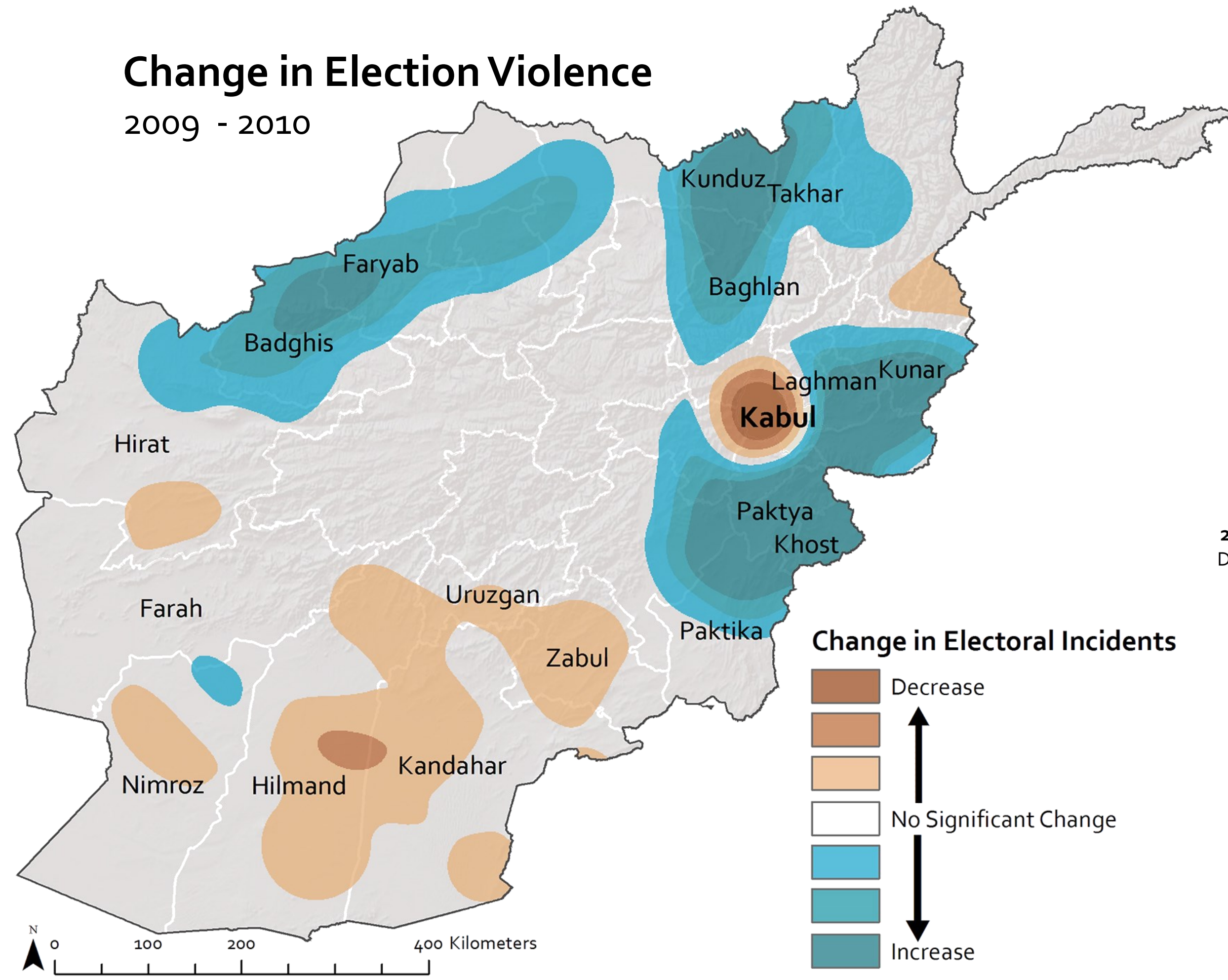
On April 5, 2014, Afghans went to the polls to vote for their second democratically-elected president since the fall of the Taliban. Headlines were cynically optimistic about the outcome, noting relative security as compared to the elections of 2009 and 2010 elections, which were marred by significant irregularities. A notoriously difficult geographic expanse to control, let alone govern, Afghanistan's electoral experience illustrates the link between democratic and violent competition in nascent democracies. This project subsequently considers electoral violence during the 2009 presidential elections and 2010 Wolesi jirga (parliamentary) elections in the broader context of Afghanistan's security environment in order to identify hot spots of election-violence, with an eye to where spikes in violence occurred. It also considers the relationship between violence and voter turnout at the provincial level.

### Methodology

In order to address these two questions, voter turnout data from the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan was combined with population statistics from the Afghan Central Statistics Office. Election day security incidents, gathered by the National Democratic Institute, were geo-tagged, and ACLED conflict data for Afghanistan clipped to only include the three-month span around the September 2009 presidential election. Kernel density analysis was then conducted to assess the change in election violence between 2009 and 2010. For the 2009 presidential election, specifically, the density of election violence was compared to a three-month range of other violent conflict related to ongoing ISAF operations in-country. Additionally, categorical analysis enabled determination of high, medium and low levels of both voter turnout and election violence by province, normalized by provincial population, in order to visualize areas of the country where election violence potentially impacts turnout.

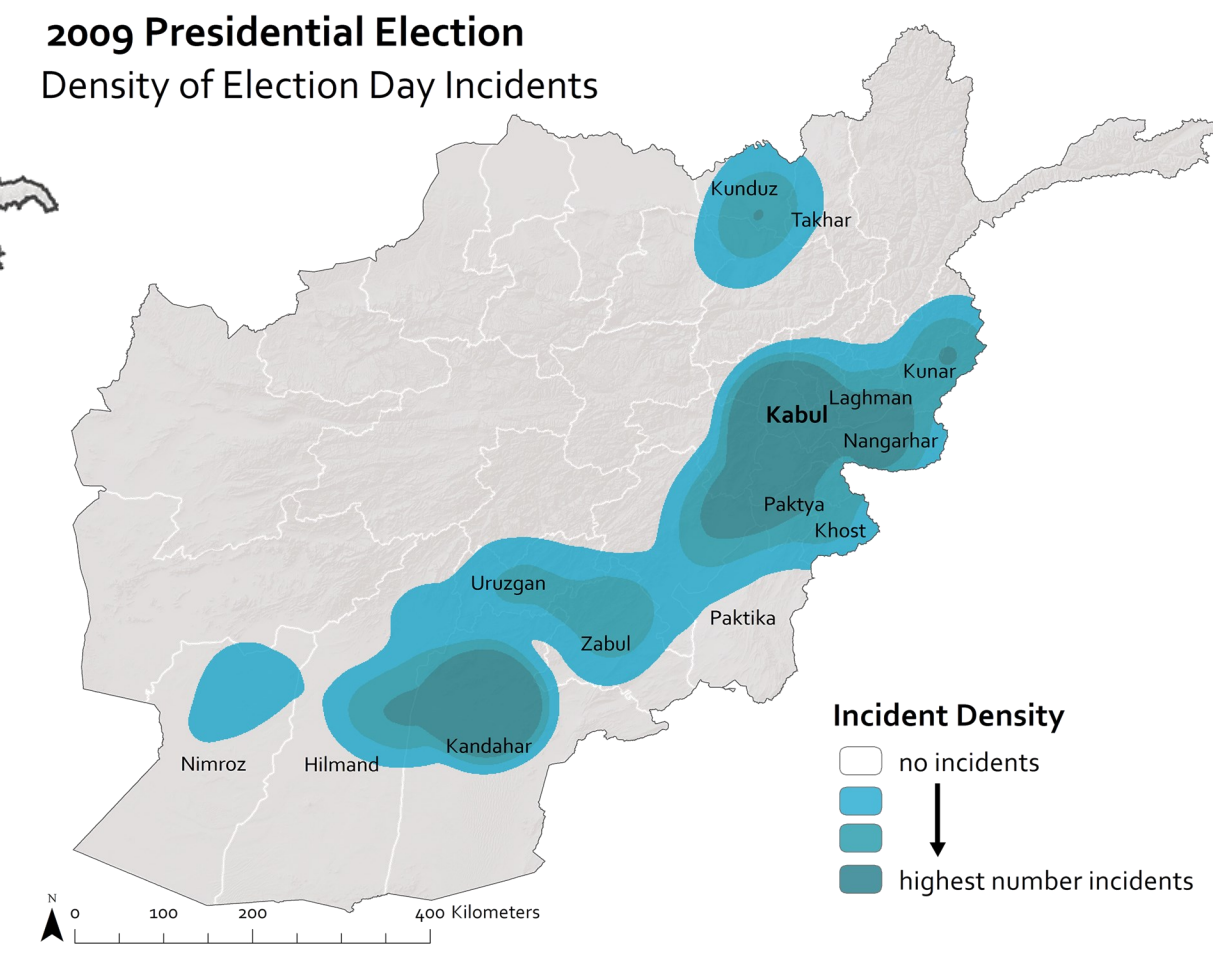
### Change in Election Violence

2009 - 2010



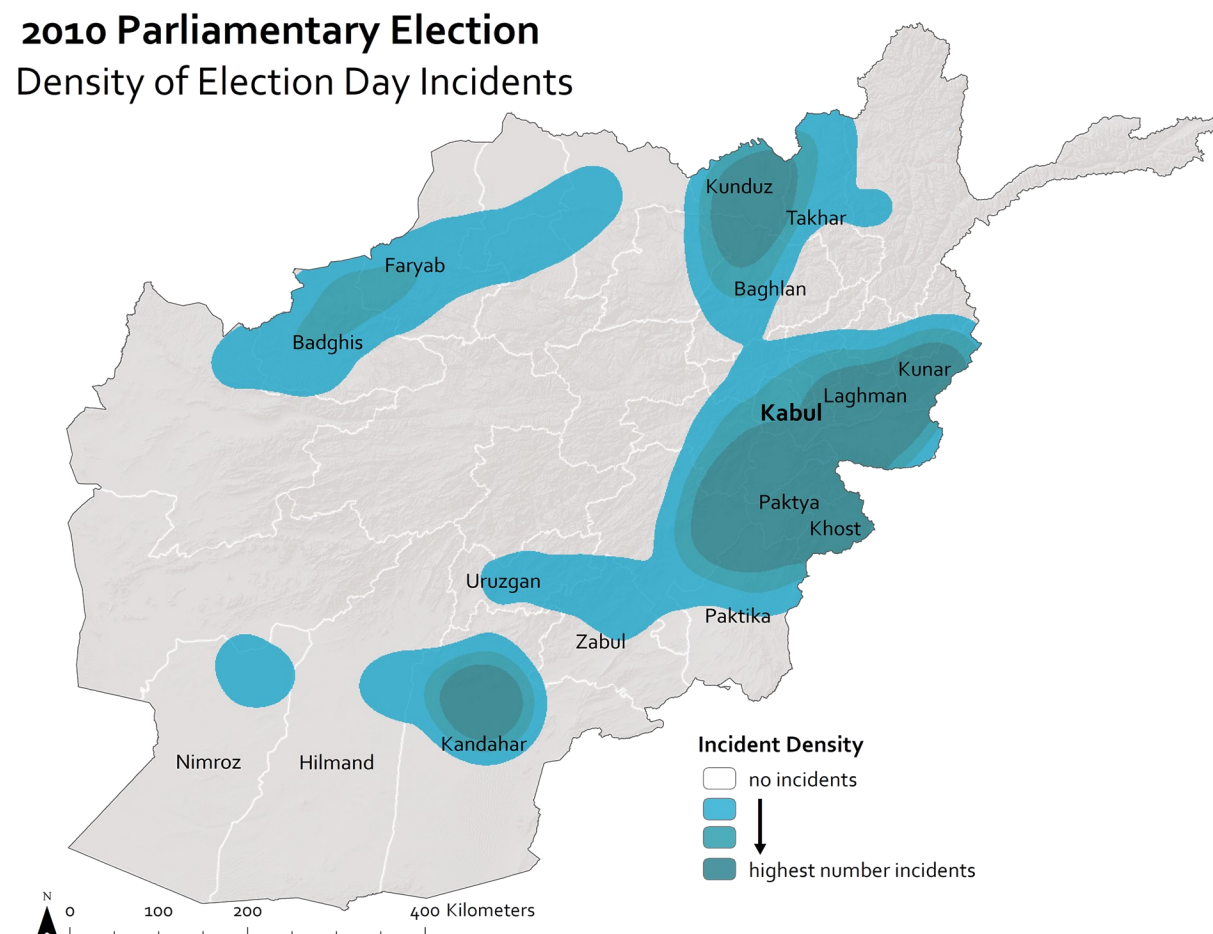
### 2009 Presidential Election

Density of Election Day Incidents



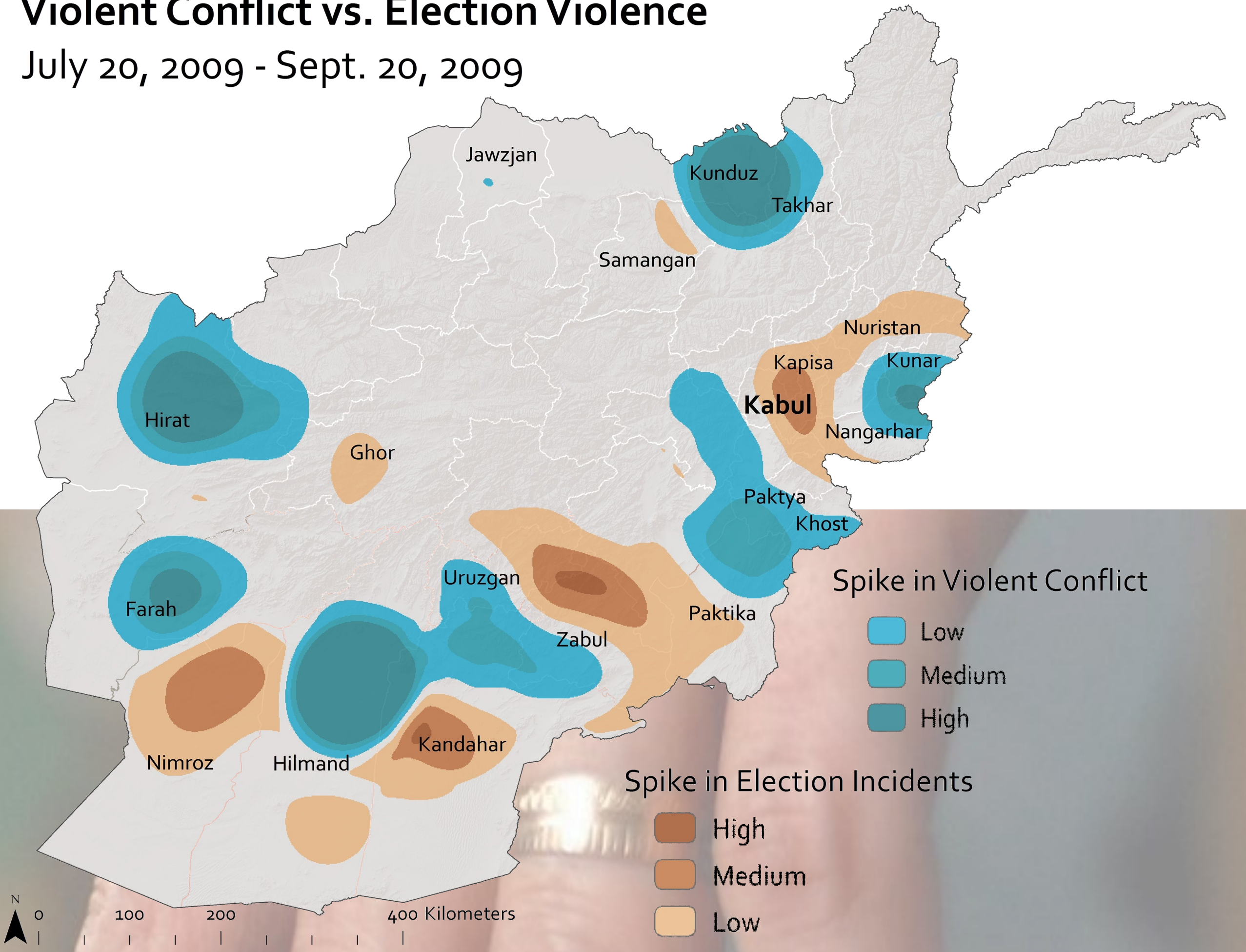
### 2010 Parliamentary Election

Density of Election Day Incidents



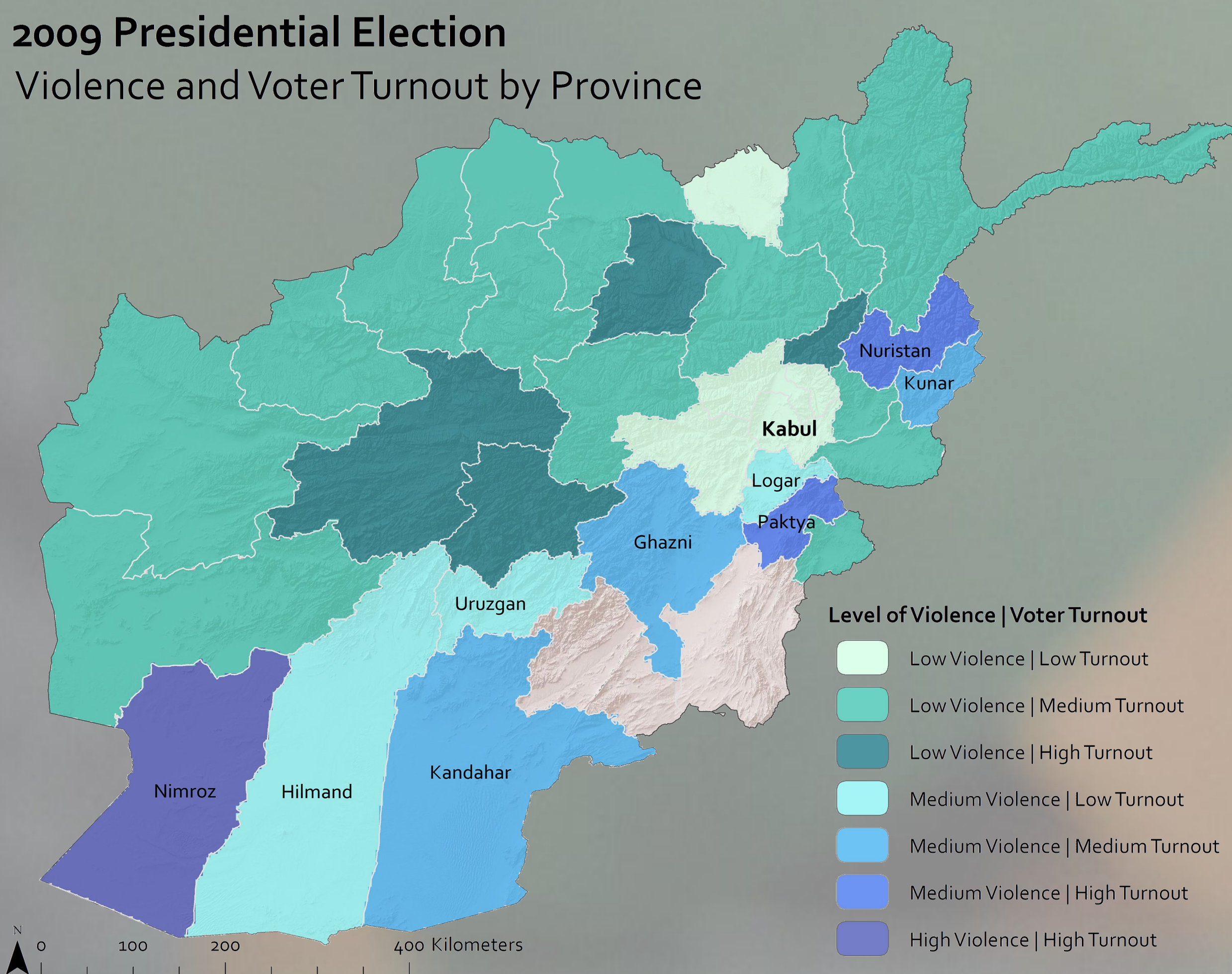
### Violent Conflict vs. Election Violence

July 20, 2009 - Sept. 20, 2009



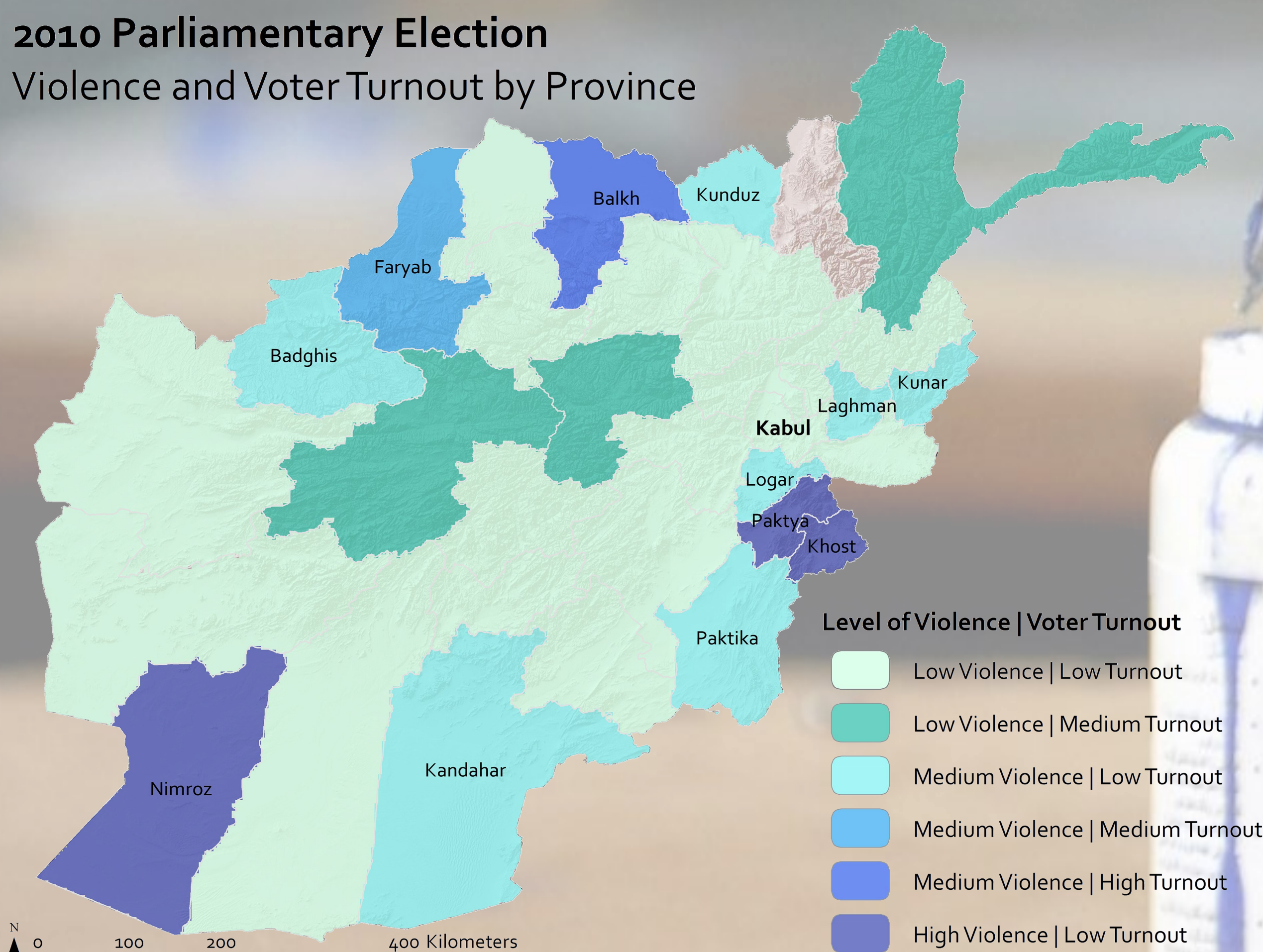
### 2009 Presidential Election

Violence and Voter Turnout by Province



### 2010 Parliamentary Election

Violence and Voter Turnout by Province



### Limitations

While I had initially hoped to be able to consider electoral incidents at different levels of administrative geography given the implications for power dynamics, I was unable to identify the necessary data. Subsequently, this analysis focuses at the provincial level which limits understanding of this violence in the context of additional possible explanatory factors, including socio-economic indicators or demographics. Additionally, there is inherent imprecision in both reported violent conflict and election irregularities which should be considered when interpreting the results shown here. Similarly, interpretation of these results must consider the differences between presidential versus parliamentary elections certainly at play in the patterns of turnout and violence between 2009 and 2010.

### Conclusions

Ultimately, this analysis cannot determine whether electoral violence in Afghanistan represents a subset of political violence within a broader conflict context, or 'the ultimate kind of electoral fraud' committed by those seeking any means to undermine the democratic process. It does, however, make clear that geospatial considerations of electoral violence provide critical understanding of citizen insecurity at times when electoral competition increases violence. Partial conclusions can be drawn as well surrounding change over time, with decreases in election violence in high-priority areas, such as Kabul, suggesting greater attention to election security following the 2009 election. Tellingly, several provinces (including Nimroz and Kandahar) with higher rates of election violence in 2009 see a decline in voter turnout in 2010. Visualizations such as those presented here should subsequently be utilized in planning for future elections in order to heighten security as well as civic engagement in previously insecure areas.

Data Sources: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, "Afghanistan Security Incidents," 2009 and 2010; Afghan Geodesy and Cartography Head Office; Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan; Afghan Central Statistics Office; Armed Conflict Location and Event Data - Afghanistan. Background image from CTV News Canada.  
Map Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 42N | Cartography by Stephanie Flamenbaum, May 2014