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The Failure of State and Nation Building in Afghanistan

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Declaration

I, Osman Mohammed Afzal, hereby declare that the dissertation titled *'The Failure of State and Nation Building in Afghanistan"* submitted to the University of Public Service Ludovika for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Public Administration Science is a record of original research work carried out by me under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Maria Bordas, Doctoral School of Public Administration Science.
I further declare that:

The research work presented in this dissertation is my own, and it has been carried out from 2019 to 2024/2025. To the best of my knowledge, the dissertation does not contain any work that has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma, in any university or academic institution. I have acknowledged all the sources of information that have been used in the dissertation by citing them properly. Any work done in collaboration with, or assistance received from, others has been duly acknowledged in the dissertation.

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Abstract in English

This study examines the factors contributing to the weakness, fragility, and collapse of the state in Afghanistan, aiming to explain why Afghanistan has persisted as a weak state and why it has also experienced periods of collapse. The research examines the flawed state structure established around Afghan identity following the creation of contemporary Afghanistan in 1880. Focusing on political structure, governance, law, and the broader political system, the study employs both qualitative and mixed method approaches to analyse key issues. While numerous publications exist on Afghanistan, this research emphasizes detailed and specific sources, supplemented by non-written materials such as own experiences, to provide a comprehensive understanding of state failure and collapse.

The study critically explores three key domains: (1) Ethnic Approach, State Structure, and Constitutions of Post-1880 Regimes: analysing constitutional provisions, structural gaps, governmental approaches toward ethnic groups, and the legacy of despotism; (2) Political Structures Post-1880: challenging claims of grassroots constitutional movements, contending that such movements lacked clear origins and genuine influence despite contrary assertions in some sources. Moreover, (3) Internal vs. External Factors in State Collapse: elaborating Pakistan's double game, highlighting the predominant role of internal factors, including tribalism and fundamentalism, in fuelling uprisings against reformist, non-tribal governments, alongside structural inefficiency and ethnic neglect.

In addition, the current study demonstrates the combined role of madrasas, Deobandi Islamic schools, and Pashtunwali in the radicalization of the Taliban. The research further examines the fragility and collapse of the post-2001 period, often attributed to external factors, but argues that internal challenges—rooted in the flawed legacies of monarchy and emirate periods—were decisive, and there is no change regarding fake nationalism and identity; nationalism does not exist in Afghanistan. Political rivalries and centralized power structures undermined efforts toward a value-driven state. Moreover, this study elaborates on the problem of the self-reinforcing failure loop of factors undermining state-building in Afghanistan after 2001.

The study concludes that the extreme underdevelopment of the Afghan state was one of the key reasons for the failure of state-building, as an abstract general cause.

Abstract in Hungarian

Jelen tanulmány az afganisztáni állam gyengeségéhez, törékenységéhez és összeomlásához vezető tényezőket vizsgálja, és arra keresi a választ, hogy Afganisztán miért maradt tartósan gyenge állam, illetve miért élte át időről időre az állam összeomlását. A kutatás az 1880-ban létrejött modern Afganisztán kialakítását követően, az afgán identitás köré épített, hibás államszerkezetet elemzi. A politikai struktúrára, a kormányzásra, a jogrendre és a tágabb politikai rendszerre összpontosítva a tanulmány kvalitatív és vegyes módszertani megközelítéseket alkalmaz a kulcsfontosságú kérdések feltárására. Bár Afganisztánról számos publikáció áll rendelkezésre, ez a kutatás részletes és specifikus forrásokra helyezi a hangsúlyt, amelyeket nemcsak írott anyagokkal, hanem a saját tapasztalaton alapuló ismeretekkel egészíti ki, annak érdekében, hogy átfogó képet nyújtson az állami kudarc és összeomlás folyamatairól.

A tanulmány kritikai szemlélettel három kulcsfontosságú területet vizsgál: (1) az 1880 utáni rezsimek etnikai megközelítését, államszerkezetét és alkotmányait, elemezve az alkotmányos rendelkezéseket, a strukturális hiányosságokat, az állam etnikai csoportokkal szembeni politikáját, valamint a despotizmus örökségét; (2) az 1880 utáni politikai struktúrákat, megkérdőjelezve az alulról szerveződő alkotmányos mozgalmakról szóló állításokat, és amellett érvelve, hogy e mozgalmaknak nem volt egyértelmű eredetük és valódi befolyásuk, annak ellenére, hogy egyes források ennek ellenkezőjét állítják. Továbbá, vizsgálom (3) az állam összeomlásában szerepet játszó belső és külső tényezők viszonyát, részletezve Pakisztán „kettős játékát", és kiemelve a belső tényezők – köztük a törzsi berendezkedés és a fundamentalizmus – meghatározó szerepét a reformpárti, nem törzsi kormányok elleni felkelések szításában, a strukturális hatékonyság hiányával és az etnikai csoportok háttérbe szorításával együtt.

A tanulmány továbbá bemutatja a madraszák, a deobandi iszlám irányzat és a pashtunwali együttes szerepét a Tálibán radikalizálódásában. A kutatás elemzi a 2001 utáni időszak törékenységét és összeomlását is, amelyet gyakran külső tényezőkkel magyaráznak, de amellett érvel, hogy a döntő szerepet a belső kihívások játszották, amelyek a monarchia és az emirátus időszakának hibás örökségében gyökereznek, valamint hogy a hamis nacionalizmus és identitás tekintetében nem történt változás; Afganisztánban a nacionalizmus nem létezik. A politikai rivalizálás és a centralizált hatalmi struktúrák aláásták az értékalapú állam megteremtésére irányuló törekvéseket. Emellett a tanulmány részletesen tárgyalja a 2001 utáni afganisztáni államépítést gyengítő tényezők önmagukat erősítő kudarc-hurok problémáját. A

tanulmány arra a következtetésre jut, hogy az államépítés kudarcának, elvonatkoztatott általános okaként, az afgán állam végletes fejlettlensége volt az egyik kulcsfontosságú tényező.

Keywords: Afghanistan, state-building, Taliban, radical Islam, Pashtun, tribalism, modernization

Kulcsszavak: Afganisztán, államépítés, Talibán, radikális iszlám, pastu, törzsi rendszer, modernizáció

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Introduction

The collapse of the internationally supported Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in August 2021 marked the culmination of two decades of ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful state- and nation-building efforts. Despite unprecedented levels of foreign aid, military support, and political engagement, Afghanistan failed to develop stable institutions, a cohesive national identity, or a self-sustaining governance structure that would have survived the withdrawal of external actors. Following the decision of the US leadership under Donald Trump, the Taliban, disregarding the Doha Agreement, seized power from the ruling government like wildfire. The real experts on Afghanistan in the academic community had been warning about the problems years before the ugly withdrawal. At the same time, a committed, well-intentioned community of the world's most developed countries could not create a viable, democratic Afghan government, and the Taliban returned to power in the country. In August 2021, the state-building effort collapsed for good when Taliban forces retook power in Kabul and proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The collapse was reminiscent of the defeat of the United States and its allies in Vietnam, and indeed, the chaotic withdrawal of troops from Kabul airport and the evacuation of civilians bore many similarities to those that had occurred decades earlier.

As a former Afghan citizen, the failure of state-building has had a personal impact on me, having had to flee the country with my family to escape the deadly threat of the Taliban. For me, who lived through a period of hopeful, American-led state-building, it was a natural choice to choose this topic as the subject of my research. Knowing and understanding the country's historical development, I believe, is key to uncovering the complex components that led to the failure of state-building.

The challenges to state-building in Afghanistan have always been multifaceted. It is clear to me, and to many scholars in the academic community, that the failed attempt was not the result of one, but rather of a complex set of interrelated, sometimes overlapping, causal vectors. Historically, Afghan rulers have struggled to extend their power beyond major urban centres, faced with strong tribal structures, shifting patronage networks, and an environment that favoured local autonomy over centralized control. As a result, the formation of the Afghan state evolved through a hybrid system that combined tribal customary norms, Islamic law, and fragmented patron-client relationships. Attempts at modernization—whether by Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in the 19th century or by the at the end of the 20th century, by King Amanullah

in the 1920s, or by communist reformers in the 1980s- provoked resistance rather than consolidating a cohesive national project.

Afghanistan's history is marked by persistent instability, conflict, fragility, and political collapse. The roots of Afghanistan's contemporary governance challenges extend far beyond the post-2001 era. Since the nineteenth century, Afghan rulers have faced chronic difficulties in establishing centralized authority in a territory characterized by mountainous geography, a dispersed population, and strong traditions of local autonomy. The Afghan state has historically never been consolidated in the Weberian sense; instead, rulers have relied on negotiated authority, patronage, and hybrid forms of governance that combine tribal customary law, Islamic jurisprudence, and personal loyalty networks. These arrangements have produced a political order that was resilient in its own way but lacked the institutional depth and administrative capacity necessary to resist rapid modernization or centralized reform. Attempts by leaders such as Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, King Amanullah, and later communist modernizers to introduce stronger bureaucratic structures or social reforms were met with resistance from tribal confederations, religious authorities, and regional elites. These historical legacies imposed lasting limits on the scope and legitimacy of any centralized Afghan state, shaping the political terrain that international actors faced after 2001.

In my opinion, and I intend to prove this in my thesis, the most important reason for the failure of state-building in Afghanistan was that the predecessors of the current Afghanistan did not go through the historical state development process that would have led to the formation of a solid state in the Weberian sense. Although the stages of state development can be systematized differently from the point of view of different theories and scientific fields (for example, history, political science, sociology), it is generally accepted that ancient societies were followed by a feudal order based on a chain of fiefs, which was characterized by feudal fragmentation. Later, the development of the order monarchy (the emergence of order assemblies) characterized the direction of development, and then the development was directed towards absolutist monarchies. This form of state was characterized by the decline of the orders, the strengthening of central power (royal/princely), the increase in the number of bureaucracy and the army. Later, modern nation-states emerged, a form of state that emerged after bourgeois revolutions. Civilization, the separation of state and religion, resulted in the emergence of modern state-building principles, such as the rule of law, the separation of powers, and representative parliamentarism.

The roots of Afghanistan's contemporary governance challenges extend far beyond the post-2001 era. Since the nineteenth century, Afghan rulers have faced chronic difficulties in establishing centralized authority in a territory characterized by mountainous geography, a dispersed population, and strong traditions of local autonomy. The Afghan state has historically never been consolidated in the Weberian sense; instead, rulers have relied on negotiated authority, patronage, and hybrid forms of governance that combine tribal customary law, Islamic jurisprudence, and personal loyalty networks. These arrangements have produced a political order that was resilient in its own way but lacked the institutional depth and administrative capacity necessary to resist rapid modernization or centralized reform. Attempts by leaders such as Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, King Amanullah, and later communist modernizers to introduce stronger bureaucratic structures or social reforms were met with resistance from tribal confederations, religious authorities, and regional elites. These historical legacies imposed lasting limits on the scope and legitimacy of any centralized Afghan state, shaping the political terrain that international actors faced after 2001.

Nation-building faced equally profound obstacles. Afghanistan is characterized by a mosaic of ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and regional identities, all embedded in historical narratives of marginalization and political exclusion. While diversity itself is not inherently destabilizing, successive Afghan regimes have failed to create an inclusive political framework that could integrate these groups into a common national project. The post-2001 regime has struggled with ethno-political imbalances, particularly the perception that certain factions have benefited disproportionately from international patronage. The exclusion – or perceived exclusion – of a large portion of the rural Pashtun population has created grievances that the Taliban have successfully exploited. At the same time, corruption, electoral fraud, and elite competition have undermined trust in democratic institutions, powered disillusionment among ordinary Afghans, and weakened the sense of national belonging.

External actors have also played a contradictory role in state and nation-building. While promoting liberal democratic norms, they simultaneously pursued geopolitical interests, regional alliances, and counterterrorism goals that often conflicted with the demands of long-term political development. Neighbouring states, especially Pakistan, further complicated the situation through interference, cross-border sanctuaries, and selective political support for Afghan factions. These external pressures reinforced internal fragmentation and contributed to a cyclical pattern of state failure.

Afghanistan's complex ethnic composition reflects varying historical responses to modernization, shaped not only by cultural traditions but also by socio-political positioning within the state. Ethnic groups such as the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and others have historically shown a greater openness to reformist agendas and modernization projects, despite their deep-rooted traditional identities. This receptiveness can be analytically linked to their relative marginalization in the centralized power structures historically dominated by the Pashtun tribal elite. Their engagement with modern values—such as secular education, expanded political participation, and women's rights—can be interpreted as both a means of empowerment and a strategy for challenging entrenched hierarchies.

In contrast, Pashtun tribal communities, particularly those in the rural south and east, have often exhibited structured resistance to state-led modernization efforts. This resistance is not merely cultural or religious; it represents a defensive posture toward perceived threats to tribal autonomy and traditional authority. The consistent pattern of Pashtun opposition to reform—especially when such reforms are initiated from the central government—is exemplified by their reaction to King Amanullah Khan's modernization campaigns in the 1920s. While many Tajik and Shi'a communities embraced his reforms as steps toward progress and inclusion, Pashtun tribal leaders denounced him as a "pagan," suggesting that their resistance was driven by a perceived erosion of Islamic and tribal values that underpinned their power structures.

The shocking but unfortunately inevitable collapse of the Afghan state in 2021 has highlighted the cumulative impact of well-intentioned but deeply flawed international strategies that have ignored historical legacies, internal political dynamics, and the underdevelopment of Afghan statehood. Instead of creating a stable and legitimate state, two decades of intervention created structures that were heavily dependent on foreign financial, military, political, and diplomatic assistance and that were unable to sustain themselves when these external guarantees, especially security ones, disappeared.

This research examines Afghanistan's flawed state nation-building process, the roots of state failure in a plural society, and the incompatibility of traditional structures with modern values. Despite ongoing academic discussions on nation-building and state formation, Afghanistan has never successfully modernized due to deep-seated tribalism and religious fundamentalism. The experience of Afghanistan highlights the broader lesson that successful state and nation-building cannot be imposed from the outside, nor can they rely solely on formal

institutional designs. Instead, lasting state-building requires internalizing the unintended consequences of international intervention.

This thesis argues that Afghanistan's state-building project was undermined not by a single factor, but by the cumulative effect of mismatched institutional design, entrenched informal power structures, and the absence of an inclusive national political vision. Through this analysis, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of why the Afghan state collapsed so dramatically and what broader lessons can be drawn for future state-building efforts in similarly complex environments.

Formulation of the scientific problem

The failure of state and nation-building in Afghanistan (2001–2021) is a multifaceted scientific problem that scholars analyse through several theoretical and empirical lenses.

The essence of the complex scientific problem, which has a substantial literature, can be divided into four main areas that are multidimensionally related to each other through various factors, both theoretically and practically.

A primary academic area related to the research topic is a comprehensive examination of the attempt to transpose the Weberian liberal state model (characterized by rational-legal bureaucracy and centralized power). This model was tried to be imported into a society with deep-rooted traditional and charismatic sources of legitimacy.

In my opinion, experts in the field have examined this academic problem from several angles, identifying several "theoretical gaps" that are linked to the fact that "top-down" modernization policies have ignored local socio-cultural conditions, leading to the emergence of unstable "hybrid orders" in which central government institutions clash with institutions based on traditional customary law.

Another scientific problem of the research topic, which has also been identified by several experts, is the multifaceted external and internal legitimacy crisis, the neo-patrimonial system (combining bureaucracy with patronage), which has been present in Afghanistan since the beginning of the US-led coalition's modernization attempt, and which played a decisive role in the failure of the attempt.

When researching this topic, it is essential to examine the structural structure of Afghan society and government institutions, the contradictions resulting from the extremely underdeveloped state, and the connections between ethnic structural fragmentation resulting from the underdevelopment of the nation-state, as these played a dominant role in the fact that ethnic and tribal loyalty was able to override loyalty to the central government.

From the perspective of fragmentation, the disharmony between the urban elite and the rural population, which represents a significantly larger part of the population, is also a subject of study and was an important factor in the failure of the modernization attempt.

The absolute origin of the rule of law is the existence of constitutionalism, which was born during the modernization attempt in 2004. The constitution itself, measured by Western standards, provided the country with a legal framework in which democratic institutions should have functioned adequately. It should be noted that the issue of Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Hazara autonomy was not considered during the drafting of the constitution, and a very highly centralized constitution was created, which conflicted with Afghanistan's historically fragmented, decentralized society, leading to widespread disenfranchisement outside of Kabul. Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that the new elite in power, primarily Karzai and his entourage, prioritized the distribution of the "spoils" among their own ethnic groups, rather than building meritocratic state institutions.

From a political science perspective, the research topic is also deeply connected to the financial dependence of the central government, as a significant portion of the budget was covered by aid from abroad, primarily from the United States.

These generously donated, and indeed huge aid inflows (sometimes reaching almost 100% of GDP, representing a greater value than the Marshall Plan provided to Western Europe), fuelled systematic corruption and created an “aid-dependent” state that could not survive without international support. Often, due to the labyrinths of corruption, the money did not reach exactly where it was intended.

The specific scientific problem of my research topic is the examination of the Taliban's ideology resulting in extreme brutality, the relationship and mutual influence of the radical conservative fundamentalist Islamist ideology and Pashtunwali, as a system of views based on traditional customary law.

In my opinion, the scientific problem is the contradiction between a Western liberal, true rule of law-based, but imported democratic state-building model aimed at modernization, and a deeply customary, religious, and fragmented Afghan society in many respects. This contradiction, present from the beginning, could not be resolved, despite the best Western intentions and enormous sacrifices, because it was not possible to reconcile modern institutional requirements with the internal political, ethnic, and cultural realities of Afghanistan.

The basis of my research is to find the common denominator among the large number of identified factors undermining state-building, to which the failure of state-building between 2001 and 2021 can be traced.

Review of Relevant Literature

The latest literature by Mujib Rahimi exactly discusses the identical dilemma of Afghanistan: that "Afghan" and Afghanistan are the outcome of Tsarist Russia and British rivalries. The exact, predominant hurdles of state-building in Afghanistan preserve the structure that nurtured the conflict and rifts among minorities, instead of resolving challenges. *"State Formation in Afghanistan"* by Mujib Rahimi (2017) explains the Afghan identity, a single ethnic nationalism, and the genealogy of power. The author provides a post-colonial critique of official discourse, focusing on state formation and ethnic historiography. He uses a set of theories, structuralism, discourse theory, and post-colonial theory, to focus on five critical points. State formation through monarchs and the construction of nationalism have been associated only with the identity of a single ethnicity in Afghanistan. Rahimi's core position is the formation of ethnocentric power and the concept of identity in Afghanistan. Based on different sources, the book hypothesizes about the colonial powers' Pashtun-centric state formation in Afghanistan and discusses the ethnocentric aspects. However, the state-building and nation-building hypothesis is that centralised power management has created rifts among ethnicities that have never led to forming a nation-state in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, the top-down functioning political power nurtured autocracy and tyrannical regimes that the earliest sources such as Ghulam Mohamad Ghubar, Louise Dupree, Mohamad Sediq Farhang, Zahir Tanin and Muhaideen Mahdi narrate and illustrate efforts toward erroneous state nation-building in Afghanistan, which Rahimi also elucidates as the roots of fake nationalism and identity in the pivoting of the reality of state formation. This is

based on earlier literature that considers the history of Emirs, kings, and prime ministers, and efforts toward state-building in Afghanistan. The overview of constitutions since the formation of contemporary Afghanistan shows that policies, political system, and the exertion of political power to create a constitution from a multicultural perspective, centrality of power is not ideal for Afghanistan's society. It, however, sequentially emphasises old structures and maintains a position of political power with tyranny and coercion. Tyranny, coercion, and assimilation are the inherited policies followed by the regimes throughout the political history of Afghanistan (Ghubar, 2012; Dupree, 1980; Farhang, 1996). Gregorian narrates details of governance by Emirs and kings, and to what extent they considered themselves kings to all ethnicities in the country, with an ethnic vision that took in the rest of the ethnicities. He affirms that all this can be analysed in the context of the current challenges series vis-à-vis the old mindset.

Vanda Felbab-Brown's position is that the failure of Afghan state-building can largely be traced to serious flaws in international strategies that underestimated the systemic effects of local corruption, crime, and weak governance. (Vanda Felbab-Brown: *Afghanistan Affectations How to Break Political-Criminal Alliances in Contexts of Transition* 2017)

She also stated that the rampant corruption and organized crime (including drug trafficking) have significantly undermined the legitimacy and effectiveness of Afghan state institutions. Western forces, by collaborating with local warlords and criminals for short-term military gains, have actually strengthened forces that work against the rule of law. In another place, she argues that the failure of Afghan state-building is largely due to serious flaws in international strategies that underestimated the systemic impact of local corruption, crime, and weak governance. In her longer work, *"A New Approach to Drugs in Afghanistan,"* published in 2012, she provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between the opium economy and the conflict. (Vanda Felbab, Brown: *Organized Crime, Illicit Economies, Civil Violence & International Order.* 2017)

Farhang and Dupree also elucidate the Afghan king's attitude toward non-Afghan ethnicities. They assert that one after another, the regimes inherited the autocratic notion and the kings' autocratic policies over the rest of the ethnicities. The latest literature also demonstrates the basic roots and challenges of state-building, demonstrating that the fragility and state collapse in Afghanistan is due to a shortage of sound governance shortage of balance of political power. The political power throughout history was exerted in the same strong centralized system that just focused on capitals, and the government policy was faintly

introduced by (Khans, Arbabs, Maliks, Mullahs) to the rural areas. These ranks were often given by the government and, in some cases, given by local Jirgas to people who had a social base. The deal between the governments from early contemporary Afghanistan (1880) up to the last republic (2021) has not been changed fundamentally or bureaucratized the system. Tribal lords recognised and preserved their semi-authority in the region and used it as the hegemonic source of the government. For this reason, lords and maliks, clan heads and *mullahs* still enjoy social authority and respect by rural society.

According to experts, the roots of conflict and disunity of nationalities are often ascribed to cultural diversities in Afghanistan; however, the lack of balance of power and lack of a sound governance system in the country led to preserving the traditional structure in the society. (Abid, 2017; Shahrani, 2005; Ibrahimi, 2019; Edward, 2011). The notion of recognition of multiculturality was not evident in the regimes.

Furthermore, the constant challenges of Afghanistan are discussed in Young's theory of the *"Five Faces of Oppression"*. She demonstrates that oppression has many faces, such as *"Exploitation, Marginalisation, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, and Violence"*. The concept of oppression, according to Young, is *"the exercise of tyranny by the ruling group"*, which is defined as oppressive in different contexts, as Young explained, as the five faces of oppression, underlining that each concept has close ties with the others. Young's fundamental concern is to explore the "justice" in the political area of the structural perspective of preserving justice. What Young explains and categorises as the oppressions are the artefacts of autocratic regimes that disregard the meaning of "nation-state" (Young, 1988).

Regarding *"Negotiation Cultural Diversity in Afghanistan,"* (Sadr, 2020) considered the diverse nature of Afghan society and a fair governance system, and how the centralised political system could take the opportunity of political development in Afghanistan. (Sadr, 2020. p. 172). Barfield Thomas explores how Afghanistan's political order historically alternated between strict, centralized rule and long periods of local autonomy. He shows that Afghan rulers succeeded when they governed through negotiation with tribes and regional elites rather than through direct coercion. The book traces the cultural and social structures that shaped Afghan identity, highlighting the flexibility and pragmatism of local governance. Barfield also analyses why 20th-century state-building efforts—both Afghan and foreign-led—repeatedly failed to align with these indigenous political patterns. Ultimately, he argues that durable stability in Afghanistan requires understanding and working with its long-standing

traditions of decentralized authority and negotiated power. (Barrnett R. Rubin: *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 2012.)

Rubin traces the historical formation of the Afghan state, showing how diverse ethnic, tribal, and regional communities were incorporated—often only partially—into a fragile political system. He explains how imperial competition, weak institutions, and limited economic development shaped Afghanistan's modern political order. Rubin emphasizes how global networks—refugees, militant groups, trade, and aid—reshaped Afghan society during conflict. Ultimately, he argues that Afghanistan's crises cannot be understood without recognizing the interaction between internal fragmentation and external geopolitical pressures. (Barnett R. Rubin – *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, 2012). Fixing Failed States by Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart vividly discusses failed states' theories of governance and state-building based on the rentier economy and UN peacekeeping for state-building. In addition, their book discusses NATO and UN peacebuilding and peace-making as the priority task for fixing failed states (Ghani & Lockhart, 2009).

Giustozzi's work (2012, Taliban Networks in Afghanistan) underscores that state-building in post-2001 Afghanistan was structurally impeded by the entrenched power of warlords, militias, and local strongmen, whose authority often superseded that of the central government. Rather than dismantling these non-state coercive networks, international and national actors frequently co-opted them, thereby institutionalizing their autonomy and undermining Weberian-type state consolidation. These actors commanded territorial control, informal taxation, and armed followings, which enabled them to operate as parallel governance structures resistant to central oversight. Their factional competition and fluid alliances generated persistent political fragmentation and insecurity, eroding the coherence and legitimacy of formal state institutions. Consequently, Afghan state-building remained shallow and externally driven, while localized armed networks continued to constitute the dominant architecture of political power.

Kilcullen argues that in many Afghan provinces, the insurgency was not initially driven by ideology but by local grievances, tribal dynamics, and resistance to foreign or central government intrusion. He shows how the Taliban were often able to embed themselves in these local conflicts, turning ordinary villagers into "accidental guerrillas." The book highlights the failures of early coalition strategy—overreliance on airpower, weak understanding of local politics, and support for corrupt powerbrokers. Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan must

combine security with deep engagement in community structures and conflict mediation. He emphasizes the critical importance of understanding the local social geography and minimizing the Western presence to avoid creating more "accidental guerrillas." Ultimately, he concludes that the war's central challenge was political, not military: building legitimate, accountable governance that Afghans would accept. (David J. Kilcullenn: *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One.* 2009.)

In *"Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security",* Chayes argues that corruption is a primary driver of global instability, not merely a side effect of governance. She posits that "kleptocracies" systematically alienate citizens, potentially leading them to support insurgent groups seen as less corrupt. Using Afghanistan as a case study, Chayes illustrates how predatory corruption powered the Taliban insurgency. She contends this dynamic threatens global security by fostering radicalism. The book urges a foreign policy shift, calling on Western nations to cease supporting corrupt regimes that generate anti-Western sentiment. The ultimate conclusion reached by Chayes is that the main reason for the collapse of state-building efforts in Afghanistan was the widespread, systemic, and exploitative corruption present in the Western-supported government, which led the populace to favour the insurgency.

Rashid's *"Descent into Chaos, The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia,"* (2008) provides an in-depth and critical analysis of U.S. strategies in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The author contends that the U.S. redirection of resources towards the invasion of Iraq distracted from efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. The book discusses how U.S.-supported Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf engaged in a "double game," covertly aiding the Taliban while presenting himself as an ally to the West. Rashid argues that these significant policy missteps facilitated the notable resurgence of the Taliban and bolstered al-Qaeda's presence in the area. Moreover, Ahmed Rashid argues that Pakistan played a profoundly destabilizing role in the failure of Afghan state-building. He contends that Pakistan never genuinely supported a stable, strong central government in Kabul. Instead, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) actively provided sanctuary, financial support, and military aid to the Taliban leadership. Ultimately, Rashid views Pakistan's strategic objective as maintaining "strategic depth" and preventing Indian influence in Afghanistan, prioritizing these goals over regional stability. In a 2013 essay titled *"Afghanistan: What Went Wrong?"*, Paris argues that more than a decade after the 2001 invasion, the international effort had failed to achieve stability. He points out that the effort produced neither security nor

political stability, and that attempts to establish a legitimate Afghan government were disappointing.

Furthermore, Paris stresses that international organizations and officials were largely "handicapped by their own ignorance" of Afghanistan's complex political and social environment, which made their actions often ineffectual or counterproductive. Paris concluded that more than a decade after the 2001 invasion, the mission had produced neither security nor political stability, pointing to a resurgent Taliban and a widely perceived corrupt Afghan government.

Giustozzi, in his book (2020, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978–1992*), analyses the evolution and eventual collapse of the PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) regime from the 1978 Saur Revolution to its fall in 1992. Giustozzi examines how the communist government attempted to extend state authority over a largely rural and traditionally organized society, and why these efforts failed. Drawing on new archival material and interviews, he details the regime's social-reform agenda, its reliance on Soviet support, and the structural weaknesses of its political and military institutions. He argues that despite episodic consolidation, the state remained fragmented, unable to build a durable social base or effective governance structures. Ultimately, the combination of factionalism, rural resistance, warlordism, and dependency on external patrons led to the disintegration of the regime and paved the way for state collapse after 1992.

Giustozzi, in another book (2009, *Empires of Mud: War and Warlords in Afghanistan)*, examines the rise, consolidation, and political logic of Afghan warlordism from the 1980s through the post-2001 period. He argues that warlords built "empires of mud," highly personalized, militarized power structures rooted in patronage, coercion, and control of local economies. The book analyses how these warlords interacted with states, foreign sponsors, and local communities, often substituting for or undermining formal governance. Giustozzi shows that warlord power depended on fluid alliances, resource flows, and the ability to mobilize armed followers in fragmented political landscapes. He concludes that warlordism has been a persistent feature of Afghan politics because it thrives where state institutions are weak, contested, or externally dependent.

In his book *"Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia"* (2008), Rashid explores the failure of the United States and its allies to stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan after 9/11. Rashid details how the Pakistani government and

its intelligence agency (ISI) continued to support and arm the Taliban, even while receiving U.S. aid. The book highlights the resurgence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, partly funded by a booming opium trade, and the increasing instability of a nuclear-armed Pakistan. In the end, Rashid offers a fierce criticism of Western strategies and a serious alert that the area in crisis represents a significant danger to worldwide security.

"The Delusion of State Building in Afghanistan" by Malejacq (2019) goes through political figures and their roles in response to state-building theories and advises the accommodation of the rule of law. He underlines the concept of elitism in a multi-ethnic society. He evaluates the role of factions and political leaders significant in making a decentralised system that Afghanistan naturality appears federal, dividing political leaders' authority in different zones. They were called *"warlords"* from four sides of the country, bringing examples of how it is possible to create a united Afghanistan through these elites. The reality of politics in Afghanistan does not go further than the traditional leaders until a value-oriented and literate generation fills the vacuum. National Unity was misinterpreted throughout history, often emphasising strong centralisation to authorise the country (Malejacq, 2020; Carrol & David, 2009). Thus, the traditional leaders, Khans, Arbabs, *mullahs*, and generally *Qawm* (tribe elders) have been the key role players in the decision-making of the government in the country throughout history.

Elites of each ethnicity cannot be elites of the rest. The term 'warlords' was used for those who withstood the Soviet invasion and the Taliban before 2001 and remained armed in rural areas (Ghani & Lockhart, 2011). This term brought a rift between the government and the elites of other ethnicities, which was a mistaken deliberation. Marshal Fahim, Marshal Dustom, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Karim Khalili, and Said Mansour Naderi are leaders of different ethnicities whom the government 'technocrats' Used to call the 'warlords' (Malejacq, 2019). Scot and Roy (2015) argue that a rentier state is not responsive to society and often acts as a dictatorship. Afghanistan could be a stable and robust country in the region with its rich natural resources within 20 years of the international troops' presence and efforts toward rehabilitation and reconstruction. Chishti's dissertation (*Post-Conflict Afghanistan: "A Post-colonial Critique",* 2014) argues that peace and state-building efforts in Afghanistan failed due to imposing a secular, Western framework that ignored Islam's role in local society. She contends the international community did not engage with local religious actors and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, creating a legitimacy gap between the government and the populace. The exclusion of women from formal peace negotiations based on a flawed interpretation of

'cultural sensitivity' also undermined inclusive state-building. Her research suggests that sustainable peace requires a context-specific approach integrating local religious and cultural norms.

According to Francis Fukuyama, the mistake of Western powers was to try to create a modern, democratic state in conditions that lacked the capacity for functioning state institutions. The Afghan political system, according to Fukuyama, was characterized by tribal and clientelist relationships, which made it difficult to create a centralized, modern state. (Fukuyama, *"Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy.* 2014). Fukuyama argued that the Afghan state was unable to perform basic functions such as collecting taxes, enforcing the rule of law, or effectively providing public services. Fukuyama emphasizes that it lacked the necessary "organizational tradition" to operate a modern bureaucracy. According to Fukuyama, strong, functional state institutions must precede the introduction of democracy. In Afghanistan, democracy was imposed "top-down" before stable state foundations were in place.

The literature on the failure of state-building in Afghanistan is, as can be seen, indeed extensive. While studying the literature, I found that researchers generally do not point to one reason as the reason for the failure of state-building but rather identify several reasons. There is no common position regarding the main reason or reasons. For this reason, I have prepared a comparative table that presents the reasons emphasized by different researchers.

The body of literature concerning the unsuccessful state-building efforts in Afghanistan is certainly vast. In reviewing this literature, I discovered that scholars typically do not attribute the failure of state-building to a single cause but instead highlight multiple factors. There is no consensus on what the primary cause or causes might be. Consequently, I have created a comparative table that outlines the reasons highlighted by various researchers. I have also included in the table critical remarks that, in my view, could be directed at the work of the researcher exemplifying a particular perspective. The table can be found in Annex 1.

Research Objectives

To achieve the research objectives, in line with the ideas and insights raised during the formulation of the scientific problem, I have set as the main research objective in my dissertation that I will comprehensively explore, analyse, and identify the specific factors and their complex interrelationships that led to the failure of state and nation building in Afghanistan following the international intervention in 2001.

In order to reach the primary research objective, I plan to examine the issue from the historical, geopolitical, and developmental viewpoints of the Afghan state structure to investigate the causes of the Afghan state's collapse in 2021 and the Taliban's resurgence in the country. Moreover, I plan to accomplish the primary research objective by establishing and fulfilling sub-research objectives. I believe that attaining these sub-research objectives will aid in revealing intricate, multi-dimensional elements and eventually reach the primary aim.

First of all, I thoroughly assess and examine the adaptability, applicability, feasibility, and sustainability of the Western state model intended for execution in Afghanistan. In this, I aim to study and assess the particular mechanisms by which the externally enforced Western state model conflicted with the existing socio-political realities and historical stages of development in Afghanistan. In addition, in my research, I intend to address the main causes of the modernization deficit, i.e., I will analyse the interactions between social structures and modernization. In my view, the primary research goal necessitates an analysis of the root causes behind the fragility of Afghan state institutions, including elements like corruption, as well as the external influences that adversely impacted the process of state-building in Afghanistan.

To accomplish the primary goal of this research, I think it is essential to analyse how pervasive state corruption, an overdependence on foreign aid, poverty, the geopolitical significance of Pakistan, and a fragile institutional structure influenced by Western models have weakened the legitimacy and functionality of Afghan state institutions, ultimately leading to the failure of state-building initiatives from 2001 to 2021. I think it goes without saying that this sub-area needs to be examined, and assess the impact of regional dynamics (e.g., Pakistan's *"mine politics"*) and deeply embedded traditional/tribal-clan structures on the establishment of a centralized, modern state.

The subsequent aspect I intend to study is whether there is a synchronization among the three facets of modernization (social, cultural, and institutional) and to identify the effects of *"failure cycles."* I also sought answers to the question of what differences have arisen between

the different ethnic groups in terms of tribal relations, more radical or more liberal interpretations of religion, and social and cultural development. Furthermore, the research aims to explore tribalism and Islamic fundamentalism in the country, examining how and to what extent tribalism and fundamentalism have challenged the government structure, and how both phenomena have weakened the state and social order.

In my scientific research, I aim to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What factors contributed to the failure of state and nation-building initiatives in Afghanistan after 2001, despite considerable international investment in both financial and human resources, and how did the absence of coordination among the social, cultural, and institutional facets of modernization play a role in this failure?

2. What were the main points of contention where the externally imposed Western state framework conflicted with Afghanistan's socio-political realities and local developmental stages?

3. What intricate connections can be discerned among the stagnation of social modernization (absence of embourgeoisement and urbanization), the deficit in cultural-normative modernization (secularization), and the shortcomings of institutional modernization (modern state-building)?

4. How did rampant state corruption and over-reliance on foreign aid undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions between 2001 and 2021?

5. What impact did regional dynamics (e.g., Pakistan's *"mine politics"*) and deeply embedded traditional/tribal-clan structures have on attempts to create a centralized, modern state?

6. Through what mechanisms did the lack of synchronization among the three dimensions of modernization create a "failure loop" that prevented sustainable state-building?

7. Based on personal experience and qualitative data, to what extent is public policy participation determined by personal (tribal/clan) loyalty rather than a modern concept of citizenship, and how does this relate to broader social relations?

8. What differences have emerged among the Pashtun, Uzbek, and Tajik ethnic groups concerning tribal relations, interpretations of religion (from radical to liberal), and socio-cultural development?

The research hypotheses

In my opinion, to achieve the main research objective and the objectives of the sub-areas to be researched, the verification or refutation of the hypotheses put forward offers concrete explanations for the failure of the state-building efforts in Afghanistan (2001-2021), considering historical legacies, the clash of modernization models, and regional influences. Accordingly, to achieve the research objectives of the dissertation, *I have formulated the following hypotheses:*

- **H1 (Historical Impediments):** By the early 20th century, Afghanistan lacked a modern, centralized governance system—a circumstance worsened by previous British influence and the later Soviet occupation—which established significant challenges to modernization efforts following the international intervention in 2001.
- **H2 (Cultural and Institutional Clash):** The failure of the U.S.-led state-building was primarily due to the attempt to impose an external, Western-style democratic model without adequate consideration of local cultural traditions and traditional political, governmental, and administrative structures.
- **H3 (Normative and Legal Conflicts):** The deep entrenchment of fundamentalist and radical Islamic interpretations, combined with the dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law, acted as a significant obstacle to the secularization necessary for the successful adoption of a modern, secular legal framework.
- **H4 (Ethnic Fragmentation and Marginalization):** The historical supremacy of Pashtun ethnic values in the formation of the state, along with ongoing ethnic strife and the oppression of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkmens by Pashtuns, obstructed the creation of inclusive political institutions necessary for a cohesive and centralized governance structure.
- **H5 (Lack of Legitimacy and Governance):** The unpopularity and lack of legitimacy of the American-supported central government at the local level were directly related to poor governance, high levels of state corruption, and the centralization of the state that failed to respect the autonomy rights of diverse ethnic groups.
- **H6 (External Destabilization):** Neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan, actively undermined the creation of an efficient and strong Afghan government by providing sanctuaries for radical Islamic groups and the Taliban in border areas (FATA/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), thereby preventing stability.
- **H7 (Cumulative Failure):** The collective, interconnected failure of social, cultural, and institutional modernization dimensions—as described in the hypotheses—created a self-

perpetuating *"failure loop"* that doomed the international state-building project despite immense financial and human investment.

The research methodology

To elucidate the thesis's main standpoint, I intend in my study to employ a Qualitative Research Approach with an Analytical Case Study design. The case under examination is the state and nation-building process in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. This approach is suitable because it allows for an in-depth, nuanced exploration of complex social, cultural, and political dynamics that quantitative methods alone cannot capture. The research is explanatory in nature, seeking to establish causal relationships and deeper meanings behind the observed failure. To achieve a concrete outcome, my research will employ a multi-tiered analytical framework that explores macro-level (models of international intervention, geopolitical influences), meso-level (national governance and institutional structures), and micro-level (local tribal and clan interactions, personal affiliations) dynamics.

The research will be based on a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates:

• Theories of Political Modernity, for investigating the conflict between established societal frameworks and contemporary state systems.

• Institutional Analysis, which emphasizes the difference between formal regulations and the culturally ingrained practices that influence the effects of policies.

• The Three-Dimensional Modernization Deficit Model (social, cultural, and institutional), which will be the guiding framework for the examination of failures in the synchronization of social, cultural-normative, and institutional aspects. In this research, I will rely primarily on secondary data analysis and potentially qualitative primary data to address the specified objectives. The Secondary Data (Literature Review and Document Analysis) will include:

- Extensive review of scholarly articles, books, and dissertations on Afghan state-building, state failure, modernization theories, and international development.
- Analysis of government documents published reports from international organizations (UN, World Bank, USAID, NATO), and NGOs.
- Review of historical texts and documents from the 1800s onwards to understand the historical trajectory of Afghan statehood and previous modernization efforts.

With regard to the primary data analysis, I had a strong intention to conduct semi-structured interviews with participants who had significant knowledge of Afghan political and social dynamics, including former government officials and civil servants from diverse ethnic/tribal backgrounds. However, the need to leave the country prevented this.

At the same time, I used my personal experiences as primary data, i.e., I integrated these experiences into the research method as qualitative insights, as I mentioned in the problem statement, which, in my opinion, provided valuable context for understanding local dynamics. The data collected during the research were analysed using thematic analysis, interpretive analysis, and the methodology of comparative analysis (implicit).

In order to achieve the scientific goals of my thesis and to verify or refute the hypotheses put forward, I have divided the thesis into several chapters. After the introductory part, in the first chapter, *"Historical Legacies as Structural Constraints on State Formation in Afghanistan"*, I wish to explore the historical limitations of Afghan state formation, including the inherited fragmented governance from the British imperial intervention to the 2001 state structure, and the presence of structural weaknesses in Afghan governance. In addition, I wish to point out the historical roots of institutional fragility, which appeared as historical structural obstacles to modernization before 2001. Within this, I wish to deal with the political effects of British colonialism and the state's structural problems caused by the Soviet occupation.

Furthermore, in this chapter, I intend to examine the shortcomings of the post-2001 modernization initiatives imposed externally on the fragile foundations of the Afghan state, which became evident in the cultural and institutional spheres and were particularly significant regarding Western paradigms and the underdevelopment of the Afghan state and society. This mismatch in institutions also played a role in the ineffective operation of the imported democratic institutional frameworks. Furthermore, I aim to highlight and clarify that the disregard for the Afghan hybrid social structure led to a governance model in Afghanistan that is incompatible with the realities of public life in the country.

In the second chapter, *"Normative Discord and Ethnic Fragmentation: The Social Foundations of State-Building Failure in Afghanistan",* my goal is to explore how Afghanistan's deeply rooted normative order and its persistent patterns of ethnic fragmentation jointly undermined the emergence of a cohesive, legitimate, and centralized state. On the normative level, it examines the coexistence—and frequent collision—of multiple legal and

moral systems: tribal customary practices, localized interpretations of Sharia law, and, in some regions, more radical Islamist doctrines.

These overlapping frameworks produced a form of legal pluralism that consistently resisted secular codification and the establishment of modern state institutions. Efforts by external actors after 2001 to introduce a rational-bureaucratic legal order were therefore structurally constrained by the strong societal embeddedness of traditional and religious norms, which often held greater legitimacy than state law.

The chapter also analyses Afghanistan's ethnopolitical landscape, focusing on the historically entrenched dominance of Pashtun political culture and the resulting marginalization of non-Pashtun groups such as Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkmens. These asymmetries prevented the formation of inclusive national institutions capable of transcending group identities. Instead, state institutions were frequently perceived as instruments of one ethnic group rather than impartial national structures. This not only fostered grievances and political distrust but also inhibited the development of a unified national identity, which is essential for successful nation-building. By connecting normative conflicts with ethnopolitical divides, the chapter demonstrates how these social foundations created mutually reinforcing barriers that ultimately contributed to the failure of Afghanistan's state-building project.

Chapter 3, titled *"Internal Illegitimacy and External Interference: Governance and Regional Dynamics in Afghanistan's State-Building Failure,"* examines how the interplay between weak internal legitimacy and persistent external interference fundamentally obstructed Afghanistan's post-2001 state-building process. On the domestic level, this chapter gives an analysis of the widespread perception that the U.S.-backed Afghan government lacked genuine legitimacy among rural communities and major ethnic groups.

Unfortunately, this legitimacy deficit stemmed from chronic governance failures: pervasive corruption, the concentration of political and administrative authority in Kabul, and an unwillingness—or inability—to accommodate the autonomy expectations of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic constituencies. As a result, local populations often viewed the government not as a representative national institution but as an externally imposed and predatory structure, which further weakened state authority and encouraged alternative forms of governance, including traditional councils and insurgent parallel administrations.

The fourth chapter, *"Normative Discord and Ethnic Fragmentation: The Social Foundations of State-Building Failure in Afghanistan, "*also highlights how external

destabilization compounded these internal weaknesses. It focuses on Pakistan's strategic use of its border regions—FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—as safe havens for the Taliban and other militant groups resisting the central Afghan government. By providing logistical support, sanctuary, and political backing, Pakistan enabled insurgent actors to survive, reorganize, and expand, even at moments when international and Afghan forces appeared to gain the upper hand. This cross-border dynamic prevented the Afghan state from establishing a monopoly on control, exercise of power, maintenance of legal order, efficient operation of public administration, and undermined efforts to extend governance into rural areas, ensuring a continuous cycle of insecurity. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates that Afghanistan's state-building failure cannot be understood without recognizing how internal governance deficiencies and regional geopolitical interference reinforced one another, creating conditions in which a stable and legitimate state could not take root.

In the chapter Nr 5, *"The Self-Reinforcing Failure Loop: How Interconnected Structural Weaknesses Doomed Afghanistan's State-Building Project,"* I aim to synthesize the previous hypotheses to demonstrate how Afghanistan's state-building failure emerged not from isolated shortcomings, but from a tightly interwoven set of structural weaknesses that continually reproduced and reinforced one another. It argues that social fragmentation, cultural resistance to externally promoted modernization, institutional incapacity, governance failures, and regional interference did not operate independently; instead, they formed a self-perpetuating *"failure loop"* that gradually undermined every aspect of the international project. Attempts to reform one domain were consistently obstructed by dysfunctions in the others. For example, efforts to create a modern, secular legal system collapsed under the weight of entrenched customary norms and radical religious interpretations, while ethnic exclusion and political marginalization prevented national institutions from achieving broad-based legitimacy. At the same time, weak governance and pervasive corruption eroded public trust, which in turn empowered insurgent networks and strengthened parallel authorities that offered alternative sources of justice and security. External destabilization ensured that the Afghan state could neither consolidate territorial control nor interrupt the cycle of conflict. This chapter demonstrates that these factors became mutually reinforcing: each failure intensified the others, creating a structural deadlock that even massive international financial, military, and technical resources could not overcome. By tracing the feedback loops linking social, cultural, institutional, and geopolitical dimensions, the chapter concludes that Afghanistan's state-

building project failed because the system as a whole was trapped in a cycle of fragility from which no single reform initiative, however well-funded, could provide an escape.

Chapter I. Historical Legacies as Structural Constraints on State Formation in Afghanistan

Introduction

Afghanistan's modern history is characterized by repeated attempts to construct a centralized and cohesive state, yet these efforts have largely faltered, revealing the limitations of external intervention in shaping domestic governance structures. Over the past century, and especially during the international engagement following 2001, foreign actors sought to impose Western-style political, legal, and administrative frameworks on a society shaped by centuries of decentralized governance, tribal autonomy, and localized authority.

The interplay of these factors created persistent obstacles to the development of a legitimate, effective, and inclusive Afghan state. Afghanistan's historical trajectory is marked by the tension between localized, decentralized authority and sporadic attempts at centralization. Tribal structures, religious authority, and regional autonomy historically defined governance far more than formal state institutions. Foreign interventions, including British influence in the 19th century, Soviet occupation in the late 20th century, and the U.S.-led intervention in 2001, repeatedly attempted to impose external models of statehood and administration. These interventions often exacerbated divisions rather than creating sustainable institutions. Cultural and normative systems—particularly the hybridization of tribal customs and Islamic law—further complicated the formation of cohesive state structures. By examining these historical and cultural legacies in depth, this chapter provides a foundational understanding of why Afghanistan's state-building projects repeatedly faltered despite extensive external resources, military intervention, and technical assistance.

Lessons drawn from Afghanistan extend beyond its borders, cautioning policymakers and scholars against the oversimplification of complex social systems and emphasizing the need for interventions that are contextually informed, culturally sensitive, and politically inclusive. The dramatic collapse of the Afghan state in 2021 was therefore neither entirely unexpected nor inevitable; rather, it reflected the culmination of longstanding dynamics that consistently obstructed domestic legitimacy and the successful implementation of externally driven modernization initiatives.

1.1 Historical Governance Structures

Most of the scholars agree that contemporary Afghanistan was founded by Ahmad Shah Abdali and the Durrani Empire. It was the second-largest Empire in the Muslim world. (Elphinstone, 1815). The Durrani Empire, at its peak around the late 18th century, covered approximately 2 million square kilometres. (See Annex 3)

The name "Afghanistan" (meaning "land of the Afghans") was not officially used for the state until the 19th century, during the colonial period. Before the 19th century, the region that is now Afghanistan was part of a larger historical area often referred to as Khorasan (meaning "land of the rising sun" in Persian). The kingdom was also sometimes known as the Kingdom of Kabul. The Durrani Empire, which he founded in 1747, is considered the precursor to the modern Afghan statehood. The term "Afghan" (originally referring to ethnic Pashtuns) and "Afghanistan" appeared in historical texts as early as the 10th and 16th centuries, but these referred to specific geographic areas inhabited by Pashtun tribes, not the unified state with its current boundaries. (Hanifi, 2023)

The name "Afghanistan" was officially used in 1855 when the British recognized Dost Mohammad Khan as the king of Afghanistan. The name was subsequently adopted and extended to the entire kingdom by Afghan authorities. The name "Afghanistan" was confirmed as the official name of the fully independent country in its 1923 and 1964 constitutions

1.1.1 Pre-Modern Governance and Tribal Autonomy

Afghanistan’s pre-modern political landscape was characterized by decentralized governance. From the formation of the Durrani Empire in the 18th century through the 19th century, authority was distributed through negotiated allegiances with tribal leaders, religious authorities, and regional elites. The central state’s reach rarely extended into rural or peripheral areas, and where it did, it relied on coercion, patronage, and personal loyalty networks rather than institutionalized authority.

Tribal structures, particularly among Pashtuns, Hazaras (the Hazaras consider the Mongols and Turks affiliated ethnicities), and Tajiks, provided the primary governance framework at the local level. Decisions related to justice, taxation, and conflict resolution were often handled within the tribal framework, mediated by elders or councils (shuras). This system

allowed local autonomy but inherently limited the development of a centralized bureaucracy capable of implementing uniform policies across the territory.

The Durrani Empire, founded by Ahmad Shah Durrani in the mid-18th century, represents a foundational period in the history of Afghan state formation. Its political system combined a hierarchical monarchy with a confederation of tribal powers, particularly among the Pashtun tribes, and reflected a delicate balance between central authority and local autonomy. The king, or Shah, was initially elected by a Loya Jirga, a grand tribal assembly, rather than inheriting power through strict hereditary succession. So, it was an elective monarchy. This elective mechanism placed the legitimacy of the monarch in the hands of tribal chiefs, most prominently members of the Sadozai royal family and powerful Durrani clans such as the Barakzai. The monarchy's authority was thus inherently dependent on the support of these tribal elites, creating a system in which centralized power and local autonomy coexisted in a mutually dependent yet often tense relationship. (Meredith, 2007)

The Durrani Empire was not a fundamentalist state, though it was founded on Sunni Islam. It was a vast Islamic empire ruled by a monarchy that integrated political, economic, and religious elites to maintain power, but it was not a theocracy defined by a strict, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The empire relied on complex networks of alliances with various groups, including merchant families and Sufi lineages, which influenced its governance and stability. It was a large, multi-ethnic empire that ruled over various peoples with different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. (Fuller, 2007)

In the political order of Afghanistan, the king was formally defined as the sovereign of all the territories and peoples under his rule. In practice, however, amirs and kings often disowned ethnic groups that did not directly threaten their throne. This pattern gave rise to systematic discrimination, particularly against non-Pashtun communities.

The administrative apparatus of the Durrani Empire included a structured bureaucracy in which Persian served as the official language for court, diplomatic, and administrative purposes. Pashto was used culturally, particularly in poetry and oral traditions, emphasizing the Pashtun character of the state while also maintaining the empire's bureaucratic efficiency. Religious leaders complemented tribal governance by overseeing legal matters and social norms, further embedding localized authority within the broader framework of the empire. Within this predominantly Pashtun political order, the Tajiks held a complex and ambivalent position. Although they lacked the hierarchical tribal structures that characterized Pashtun society, Tajiks

were integral to the Durrani military, forming a significant portion of the soldiery that supplemented the core Pashtun troops. Their contributions were also evident in urban centres, where Tajiks played a central role in the bureaucracy, trade, and artisanal production. Despite their military and economic significance, however, Tajiks were largely excluded from supreme political authority, which remained concentrated among Pashtun clans.

The Durrani Empire thus exemplifies the interplay between centralized authority and tribal autonomy, highlighting a system in which monarchy depended on negotiation, alliance, and the accommodation of local power structures.

Amir Abdul Rahman, who ruled at the end of the nineteenth century, became infamous for initiating widespread atrocities and institutionalized marginalisation of ethnic minorities. His successors, the tribal leaders who inherited power after him, largely continued this same vision and approach, using repression as a means of consolidating their political authority.

During Abdul Rahman Khan's centralising campaigns in the 1890s, the enslavement of Hazaras became a systematised and widespread practice, documented by Afghan chronicles and modern historians alike, and formed part of a broader strategy of repression, ethnic subjugation, and redistribution of Hazara lands. (Askar,1988)

To intensify their persecution, the administration deliberately branded them as "pagans," a tactic designed to mobilize the religious majority against them. Religious and ethnic diversity, as Vartan Gregorian observed, lay at the core of the Hazara oppression during this period. (Vartan, 1969)

1.1.2. Amir Abdul Rahman Khan (1880–1901): State Formation, Centralization, and Coercive Modernization in Afghanistan

Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, who ruled Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901, is widely regarded by historians as the primary architect of the modern Afghan state. His reign marked a decisive transformation from a fragmented tribal confederation into a centralized, autocratic polity. Abdul Rahman's state-building project combined administrative innovation with unprecedented levels of coercion. (Rubin, 2002) His thirty-year rule laid the foundations of Afghanistan's political system but also entrenched structural tensions between the central state and diverse ethnic, religious, and tribal communities. As a result, his legacy is both foundational and deeply contested. Abdul Rahman's ascension must be understood within the geopolitical

constraints of the *"Great Game"* between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia. Following the British victory in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880), the Treaty of Gandamak placed Afghanistan's foreign policy under British control, while leaving internal affairs ostensibly in Afghan hands. The British sought a strong ruler who could stabilize the country and prevent Russian penetration. Abdul Rahman, a Barakzai prince who had lived in exile in Central Asia, emerged as the preferred candidate due to his political acumen, tribal connections, and reputation for ruthlessness (Vartan, 1967, pp. 246–250).

Once established on the throne with British subsidies, Abdul Rahman moved deliberately to rebuild the Afghan state. His overarching objective was to eliminate the semi-autonomous power bases—tribal khans, regional rulers, clerical networks, and local militias—that had historically limited the authority of Kabul. Thomas Barfield describes this as a shift from a "negotiated sovereignty" model to a system of "territorial sovereignty," in which the central government claimed authority over all domains of governance, taxation, and justice. (Barfield, 2010, pp. 137–142) This required a systematic dismantling of existing power structures and the creation of new ones loyal to the Amir personally.

Abdul Rahman instituted a series of reforms aimed at constructing a centralized, bureaucratic state apparatus. He reorganized the provincial administrations, replaced hereditary officials with appointed governors, and implemented a regularized system of taxation; he even developed an extensive intelligence system (the *Shurawi*), which monitored officials and ordinary citizens alike. (Kakar, 1979, pp. 110–115)

Language policy also reflected the hybrid nature of the emerging state. While Pashto was encouraged as a marker of Afghan identity, Persian (Dari) remained the dominant language of administration, diplomacy, and the court—a continuation of centuries of bureaucratic tradition (Gregorian,1969, pp. 274–276). This linguistic duality symbolized the coexistence of tribal Afghan identity with the Persianate administrative culture inherited from earlier empires. Crucially, Abdul Rahman recognized that centralization required a capable military. He reorganized the army into a standing force, equipped partially with British-supplied weaponry and trained under a more hierarchical command structure than had existed before. Yet the army also functioned as a political instrument: it was used not only for national defence, but for punitive campaigns against rebellious tribes and communities. Military modernization and political repression were inseparable facets of Abdul Rahman's governance.

Afghanistan, before Abdul Rahman, was characterized by tribal autonomy and decentralized governance. The Amir's centralizing agenda directly threatened this tradition. To consolidate power, he implemented policies that systematically weakened the authority of tribal chiefs and khans. He imposed new obligations such as military conscription, standardized taxation, and limits on local judicial autonomy. These measures provoked widespread resistance, especially among major Pashtun tribal confederations such as the Ghilzai, who rebelled repeatedly during the early years of his rule. (Rubin, 2002, pp. 48–52)

Abdul Rahman responded with aggressive counterinsurgency tactics: collective punishment, destruction of villages, confiscation of livestock, and forced migration of entire communities. These methods represented an unprecedented assertion of state authority and a break from the earlier pattern of tribal negotiation. Barfield notes that "Abdul Rahman replaced the logic of compromise with the logic of coercion," establishing a new political order in which the state sought to dominate rather than accommodate tribal actors. (Barfield, 2010, p. 145) At the same time, the Amir attempted to integrate certain Pashtun groups into the state apparatus. He favoured the Durrani elite—especially the Barakzai dynasty to which he belonged—while suppressing rivals. This selective empowerment entrenched Pashtun dominance within the state, shaping ethnic hierarchies that persisted into the 20th and 21st centuries.

One of the most consequential and destructive episodes of Abdul Rahman's reign was the military conquest of Hazarajat and the subjugation of the Hazara people. The Hazara highlands had long maintained substantial autonomy due to their difficult geography and strong communal structures. Their Shia Muslim identity further differentiated them from the predominantly Sunni Pashtun state. As Christine Noelle-Karimi observes, Hazarajat represented both a symbolic and strategic challenge: it was the largest region not yet incorporated into the Amir's centralized vision (Karimi, 2014, pp. 82–87).

The Hazara uprisings of 1888–1893 were met with overwhelming force. Based on the accounts of Hasan Poladi, Sayed Askar Mousavi, and contemporary Afghan chronicles, Abdul Rahman's campaign included mass executions, large-scale enslavement of Hazara men, women, and children, confiscation of Hazara lands, forced conversions and religious persecution, and systematic Pashtun settlement in conquered territories.

The events of 1888–1893 remain one of the darkest chapters in Afghan history and a key reference point in modern Hazara political consciousness. Religion served as both a legitimizing tool and a mechanism of state consolidation. Abdul Rahman portrayed himself as

a defender of Sunni orthodoxy and used Islamic law to justify harsh punishments against political opponents. His reign also witnessed the forced Islamization of certain regions, most notably Kafiristan (renamed Nuristan), where non-Muslim communities were subjected to conversion campaigns beginning in 1895. (Kakar. 1979, pp. 148–151)

Yet Abdul Rahman's use of Islamic authority was selective and strategic. While he relied on conservative Sunni interpretations to reinforce central power, he also curtailed the political influence of the ulama (religious scholars) when they threatened his authority. Rubin describes this as "instrumentalizing Islam to strengthen an absolutist state" (Rubin 2002, p. 45). Rahman's foreign policy was shaped overwhelmingly by the British Russian rivalry. While he resented British interference, he pragmatically accepted British subsidies and diplomatic support as necessary for internal consolidation. At the same time, he maintained a posture of caution toward Russia, seeking to avoid provoking a direct confrontation. His foreign policy can be summarized as one of strategic neutrality, aimed at preserving Afghanistan as a buffer state.

The Amir skilfully used British financial support, estimated at 1.8 million rupees annually, to build his army and administrative institutions. (Gregorian, 1969, p. 267) This external funding allowed him to avoid overtaxing certain Pashtun constituencies while focusing coercion on rebellious groups. Amir Abdul Rahman left a dual legacy. On one hand, he is credited with creating the foundations of a modern Afghan state: centralized governance, territorial sovereignty, a professional army, and a uniform administrative structure. Many later Afghan rulers—Habibullah, Amanullah, and even the 20th-century republics—relied on the institutional framework he established.

On the other hand, the centralization he achieved rested on extreme coercion, ethnic hierarchy, and exclusion. By suppressing tribal autonomy without creating participatory political institutions, he generated long-term tensions between the state and society. Barnett R. Rubin argues that Abdul Rahman's model "produced an authoritarian state that lacked mechanisms of legitimacy beyond coercion," undermining long-term stability (Barnett, p. 43). Similarly, Barfield notes that the Amir's system created a cycle in which "force became the primary language of governance" (Barfield, 2010, p. 147).

Thus, although Abdul Rahman succeeded in consolidating Afghanistan territorially, he did so in ways that entrenched patterns of conflict, inequality, and mistrust that resurfaced

repeatedly in the 20th and 21st centuries. Despite his authoritarian consolidation, Abdul Rahman himself recognised the conservative nature of his Pashtun tribal base. He acknowledged that even minor reforms risked provoking unrest, and for this reason, he advised his son and successors to proceed with caution, advancing reforms slowly and carefully, just as he had done.

The traditional society, rooted in ethnic affiliations and local jirgas (councils) operating through fragmented and distributive mechanisms, emerged as a rival to a state that revolved around bureaucracy and centralized laws. Consequently, the conflict between society and the state became a defining feature of Afghanistan's post-Abdur Rahman political tradition. From that point onward, political forces aligned themselves with one of these two camps as their primary platform. In this sense, the political culture of post-Abdur Rahman Afghanistan can be characterized as one based on the dichotomy between society and the state.

In cases where the enforcement of state laws in local areas became necessary, the khans and leaders would step in to assist state representatives in implementing these laws. This approach allowed the state to maintain a degree of control without provoking direct resistance, relying on the established authority of local leaders to bridge the divide between society and the state. (Rand, 2009; Aman, 2013) This conservative strategy exemplifies the complex interplay between state authority and local autonomy in Afghanistan's political culture, a dynamic that continues to shape the country's governance and societal relationships to this day. (Gregorian, 1969; Emadi, 2005) Historians and experts on Afghanistan often mention the reformist and constitutional movements present since 1880 until contemporary Afghanistan.

However, the parameters of a constitutional movement have origins in the history of other states but appear differently in Afghanistan. In fact, constitutionalism can be found as a discourse rather than a movement; whereas movements typically have social roots in society, in Afghanistan, it did not evolve into a grassroots regime. (Emadi, 2005; Kakar, 1979) A series of reforms that Habibullah implemented in the country were not the outcome of a constitutional movement, and the king never considered diminishing his authority for the good of the people. (Gregorian, 1969) Therefore, what is referred to under the name of "constitutionalism" in Afghanistan can be understood as a political and intellectual discourse that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily in response to growing demands for limitations on monarchical authority and the establishment of a rule-based governance system. (Emadi, 2005)

This discourse, inspired in part by constitutional movements in the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and other regions, sought to introduce concepts such as the separation of powers, the codification of laws, and the recognition of certain civil rights. (Gregorian, 1969; Mousavi, 1998)

However, in the Afghan context, such aspirations directly challenged the entrenched absolute power of the monarch. As a result, the constitutionalist circle, rather than leading to smooth political reform, provoked deep suspicion and resistance from the ruling establishment. Key figures—both intellectuals and reform-minded leaders—who participated in these debates and attempted to advocate for constitutional governance were often viewed as political threats. In several notable cases, these individuals were subjected to imprisonment, exile, or even assassination under the orders of the monarch. (Gregorian, 1969; Emadi, 2005)

1.2 Centralization and Imperial Pressures (1820–1919)

The nineteenth century transformed the Afghan polity. Caught between British India and Tsarist Russia, Afghan rulers faced unprecedented pressure to centralize military power and territorial control. One of the most prominent developments was the reign of Abdurrahman Khan, also known as the *"Iron Amir"*, and the coercive state centralization efforts he initiated, as already explained in Chapter 1.1.2.

Technically, Abdur Rahman Khan initiated the first systematic attempt to discipline tribal structures and impose territorial sovereignty. Through campaigns in Hazarajat, Khost, and the north, he broke semi-autonomous militias and relocated tribes to weaken opposition. (Gregorian, 1969) However, this "coercive modernization" was financed almost entirely through British subsidies, making the Afghan state a proto-rentier polity, dependent on external resources rather than domestic taxation.

Despite centralization efforts, Abdur Rahman preserved dual legal systems: sharia courts in urban centres and tribal customary courts in rural zones. As Rubin (2002) emphasizes, this duality produced a hybrid state, centralizing coercion while leaving legal authority fragmented. The state's reliance on sharia for legitimacy coexisted with enduring customary practices, a dynamic that continues under the Taliban today.

1.2.1 Afghanistan under Amir Habibullah's Reign

Abdul Rahman's son, Amir Habibullah (1901-1919), took power after his father. He inherited political power with a strong military from his father and endeavoured to compensate somehow for the atrocities and cruelty of the previous regime. The king came to believe that to control the society and to defend the central state from any conspiracy and the tribal lords' plot perfectly, it was necessary to follow religious principles and patterns to keep a calm society and prevent exiles from uniting in opposition to his throne or intriguing against him through foreign powers. Thus, Amir announced an amnesty for prisoners, notably non-Pashtun prisoners such as Hazaras, political prisoners, and others. Compared with his father, Abdul Rahman, Habibullah represented a relatively moderate person and brought fundamental change regarding women's freedom: women could walk in the park and go to the city and other public places. The social norm of Habibullah, accompanied by religious verses, introduced him as a loyal person to the country, which even prompted women singers to repent and ban the custom of polygamy. Abdul Rahman Islamised the Kafiristan (Nuristan) people under the name of Jihad. According to Barfield (2010), *"The god-granted State of Afghanistan"* was the fundamental legitimacy of Abdul Rahman's governance and Jihad conception that Afghanistan should be defended from infidels and ought to be protected from any Christian attacks. (Barfield, 2010, p. 158)

However, Habibullah's decision on the Nuristan people was peaceful rather than his father's. Those Nuristani who converted to Islam could retain their lands from the government, but those who did not convert to Islam could not retain their lands. The second point that was considered taboo in society was that the King, for the sake of decreasing polygamy in the community, purposely divorced one of his wives. (Tanin, 2005; Gregorian, 1969) Although Habibullah brought changes, instead of following his father's method of governance and following in his footsteps, he emphasised unity and coherence in the country against foreign factors. Habibullah substituted cooperation for coercion, although his regime fundamentally followed Abdul Rahman's absolute monarchy pattern. The formation of the central state by Abdul Rahman led to bloodshed and atrocities, and marginalisation of non-Afghan ethnicities; however, Habibullah somehow sought to heal the wounds left by his father's regime. (Tarzi, Amin (2018).

After visiting India in 1907, Habibullah realised that Afghanistan was a century away from any development and needed reform. His fundamental project was establishing a post

system, photography, investing in the power dome of *Jabal Saraj*, leading and controlling water sources to boost the agriculture sector, and drinking water resources for the capital. The reforms of the Habibullah regime, which concentrated only on rehabilitating the cities, and the whole plan and steps toward the state, did not seem enough to alleviate all the wounds and bloodshed committed by Abdul Rahman, his father. Intellectuals who were companions of the Amir and other scholars who were opponents of the anarchic Emirate system in the country ultimately established the constitutional "movement". According to Tanin (2010), citing Ashraf Ghani, "The constitutionalist slogan and manifesto were the Sword, the Holy Quran, and the pen". The sword meant that Afghanistan should be liberated from the British, who had control of the country's foreign affairs. The pen meant that the country's education system must be strengthened. (Tanin, 2010, p. 25) The constitutionalists and intellectuals close to the Amir emphasised that the government must not be separate from the people, and the government, one way or another, ought to have convergence with society. When Amir Habibullah ascended the throne, he retained many of the administrative features and governing methods established by his father, Amir Abdul Rahman. He divided Afghanistan into six provinces—Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Farah, Afghan Turkistan, and Badakhshan—continuing the centralised framework of rule (Barfield, 2010; Gregorian, 1969). Habibullah largely inherited his father's policies and prolonged them, yet his approach bore one significant difference: upon taking power, he proclaimed a general amnesty for prisoners and invited political exiles to return from abroad.

Among the most notable of these returnees was Mahmud Tarzi (1865–1933), later celebrated as the *"founding father of Afghan nationalism."* However, the apparent paradox raised by your question—*how can there be nationalism without an existing nation?* —points to the core of what Tarzi's intellectual project was about. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Afghanistan did not yet constitute at all a real "nation" in the modern sense. The country was a dynastic, multi-ethnic polity held together by the rule of the Barakzai (later Muhammadzai) family. Allegiances were primarily tribal, ethnic, and religious rather than national. There existed no unified national consciousness or modern civic identity among Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and others. Mahmud Tarzi, educated and influenced during his exile in the Ottoman Empire, sought to create such a national consciousness through the dissemination of modernist, reformist, and nationalist ideas. He was among the earliest Afghan intellectuals to envision Afghanistan as a modern nation-state rather than simply a tribal kingdom. During Habibullah's reign, two dominant factions shaped the political landscape. The first were the religious factions, led by the influential Ulama, the Sufi leaders, and nobles, who exerted strong

influence over national policy and often preached jihad against the British presence in the region. The second faction consisted of nationalist and scattered modernist circles, who emphasized the opening of schools and advocated limited reforms. (Gregorian, 1969; Dupree, 1973)

Tarzi, seizing the opportunity provided by the amnesty, returned to Kabul and soon became an influential figure at Habibullah's court. He reminded the Amir of the need to mobilize hegemonic resources for the spread of Afghan nationalism, which Tarzi considered central to modern state-building. Once absorbed into the court, Tarzi assumed two crucial responsibilities: first, the reform and drafting of Afghanistan's education system; second, the establishment of the Seraj al-Akhbar newspaper, which he edited from 1911 to 1919.

The journal became a vital platform for disseminating and strengthening nationalist thought, shaping public opinion, and fostering a collective sense of Afghan identity. In this way, Seraj al-Akhbar acquired significant hegemonic power within Afghan society (Gregorian, 1969, p. 169; Shahrani, 1984, p. 44). Between 1880 and 1920, Afghanistan also opened its doors to immigrants from the Ottoman Empire. These individuals, many of whom were professionals with administrative and technical experience, were invited to occupy important government positions. The diaspora families returning from Turkey—most prominently the Tarzi family—played decisive roles in state-building, particularly in the legislative and institutional development of the country. Afghanistan thus owed much to the cooperation and expertise of the Ottoman Turks during this period.

1.2.2 Attempts to modernize Afghan governance in the 20th century (1919–1978)

After Afghanistan became independent in 1919 until 1979, the year of Soviet invasion, the sixty years were marked by intense experimentation in Afghan state formation, during which successive rulers attempted to strengthen central authority, reform administrative structures, and redefine the relationship between the state and society. Yet each effort exposed the limits of political modernization in a country where power was deeply embedded in tribal customs, religious authority, and local autonomy. Attempts to centralize or secularize governance frequently encountered resistance, particularly when reforms were perceived as intrusive or misaligned with local norms. As a result, Afghanistan experienced cycles of reform, backlash, and partial reconstruction, revealing a structural tension between modernizing elites

and a largely conservative rural population. Three major phases—Amanullah's ambitious state-building project, the gradualist Musahiban strategy, and Daoud Khan's republican developmentalism—each illustrate different models of modernization and their inherent constraints.

1.3. Reform Experiments after gaining independence (1919–1978)

Afghanistan gained independence from the British Empire in 1919. The following sixty-year period was marked by characterized by repeated attempts to modernize state institutions and centralize political authority, yet every significant reform initiative encountered deep structural constraints.

Across successive regimes, modernization efforts sought to standardize administration, expand education, reform taxation, and weaken the entrenched power of tribal elites. However, these reforms consistently clashed with the sociopolitical realities of a predominantly rural society organized around tribal customs, localized authority structures, and strong religious traditions. In a political landscape where legitimacy derived not only from dynastic rule but also from respect for communal autonomy, rapid or externally inspired reforms were often perceived as threats to the established social order. As a result, Afghanistan oscillated between periods of ambitious modernization and conservative retrenchment. Three major experiments—under Amanullah Khan, the Musahiban dynasty, and Mohammad Daoud Khan—capture these recurring tensions and the enduring difficulties of building a centralized state.

1.3.1 Amanullah's Reforms and Their Collapse (1919–1929)

Amanullah Khan's rise to power in 1919 marked the beginning of one of the most ambitious political and social reform movements in Afghan history. Having secured full independence from British oversight after the Third Anglo-Afghan War, Amanullah envisioned the construction of a modern, secular, and rationalized state inspired by contemporary European and Kemalist models. His program sought to transform Afghanistan from a loosely governed tribal monarchy into a centralized nation-state capable of exercising uniform authority across its territory.

The reform agenda was sweeping. The 1923 Constitution introduced new legal codes, limited the arbitrary powers of tribal leaders, and established a more formalized bureaucracy. Education became a priority: compulsory schooling was introduced, girls' schools were established in Kabul, and Afghan students were sent abroad for training. Social reforms targeted gender roles and cultural norms—perhaps the most controversial aspect of his program. The encouragement of female unveiling and Western-style dress among the urban elite symbolized Amanullah's vision of a modern Afghan citizenry. Economic and fiscal reforms aimed at standardizing taxation and reducing the autonomy of tribal regions, thereby increasing state revenues and administrative cohesion. (Poullada, 1973.)

Yet Amanullah's modernizing zeal quickly exceeded the state's administrative capacity and the society's willingness to embrace such dramatic changes. The rural population, which accounted for most Afghans, viewed compulsory schooling, taxation reform, and cultural changes as encroachments on their autonomy and religious identity. Tribal elites, long accustomed to negotiating power with the monarchy, saw their influence threatened by attempts to impose uniform state authority. Clerical authorities (ulama) also condemned reforms they perceived as un-Islamic or foreign inspired. These structural tensions erupted into open rebellion in 1928–1929, culminating in Amanullah's abdication. As Louis Dupree, Leon Poullada, and later Thomas Barfield emphasize, the collapse of Amanullah's project illustrates a fundamental pattern in Afghan political history: efforts to modernize ahead of a negotiated political consensus tend to provoke violent backlash. (Poullada, 1973)

After independence, Amanullah launched an ambitious modernization program affecting law, education, and governance. These reforms, however, quickly provoked resistance from conservative clerics and tribal elites, who accused him of violating Sharia. In 1923, leading clerics supported by major tribes issued a declaration rejecting the Penal Code and demanding its repeal (Shahrani, 2005; Tomires, 2020). Farhang (1993) notes that this period encapsulated a growing tension between reformist state-building and entrenched religious authority. Simultaneously, a new generation of constitutionalists—such as Mahmud Tarzi—gained influence, promoting intellectual reform and supporting the institutionalization of state structures. (Ruttig, 2006)

The 1923 constitution established the Shura-ye Waziran (Council of Ministers) and aimed to create a modern administrative system. (Kakar & Schiwal, 2021) However, key religious elites (Ulema) were excluded from the drafting process, contributing to later backlash.

While reforms between 1919 and 1923 achieved partial success—banning slavery, expanding education, building a centralised army, and granting women limited rights—the second phase (1924–1928) slowed due to growing uprisings, particularly among tribes who lost traditional privileges and patronage networks.

Amanullah also advanced political and economic centralization. He divided Afghanistan into nine administrative units, institutionalized the Loya Jirga, initiated gender reforms, expanded infrastructure, and promoted industrial development with German and French technical support. Meanwhile, the 1924–1925 Khost rebellion marked the first major confrontation between the reformist state and conservative rural society (Gregorian, 1969; Vaidik, 1967). When Amanullah returned from Europe in 1928, opposition intensified, and many reforms were reversed under pressure, weakening the monarchy.

The 1923 constitution was ratified by a Loya Jirga of 872 delegates. Gregorian (1969) argues that although the document formalized the separation of powers and centralized authority, the Loya Jirga mainly validated predetermined decisions. One of the most controversial innovations was Amanullah's effort to forge a unified Afghan national identity. His assimilationist vision—labelling all citizens *"Afghans"*—was viewed by non-Pashtun communities as an attempt to erase cultural and linguistic diversity. (Barfield, 2010; Gregorian, 1969) Concurrently, state identity cards, birth registration, and a political party named *Azadi* were introduced. (Pasarlay, 2012) Economic policies emphasized infrastructure such as highways, early railway planning, domestic industrial production, and the restriction of imports.

Culturally, Amanullah promoted a vibrant press, tolerated criticism of the government, invested in radio technology, expanded secular education, and supported sending students abroad. Schools such as Darul Uloom, Mastorat, and Rashidya were founded, and mobile literacy programs were introduced for nomadic populations. Although some scholars argue that his reforms reflected secularist tendencies, Amanullah never fully embraced secularism. Instead, he pursued a rapid transformation that appeared to bypass or challenge traditional society, especially regarding women unveiled public presence, dress codes, and family law reforms. (Shahrani, 2005)

A major turning point came with the second Constitutional Assembly of 1928, where delegates—many representing conservative constituencies—rejected proposed liberalizations, including girls' education expansion, minimum marriage ages, the unveiling of women, and restrictions on polygamy. Despite consultation with Turkish legal experts and Afghan

modernist elites (Shahrani, 2005; Tanin, 2010), the king failed to win support for fundamental reform. Tribal revolts intensified, especially among the Mangal, who opposed the erosion of clerical and tribal authority.

Amanullah's downfall stemmed largely from the speed and scope of reforms. Forcing Western clothing in Kabul and shifting the weekly holiday from Friday to Thursday alienated wide segments of society. (Shahrani, 2005) Although inspired by the modernizing examples of Atatürk and Reza Shah, Amanullah simultaneously continued certain authoritarian strategies of his father, Abdur Rahman Khan, most notably the settlement of Pashtuns in the northern non-Pashtun regions. Shahrani (2005) argues that Pashtunization policies were encouraged by British strategic thinking to insulate the frontier from Russian influence. Amanullah also attempted to rationalize the religious sphere by bringing mosques and madrasas under tighter state supervision. Yet religious scholars retained significant moral authority and mobilized public resistance. Sadr (2021) notes that despite constitutional innovation, real limits on royal power remained minimal, courts lacked independence, and the king intervened directly in punitive matters, such as ordering executions after the 1924 Mangal revolt. The Loya Jirga became an institutionalized decision-making body, but members were effectively selected through informal, often royal, patronage rather than modern electoral processes. By the 1950s and 1960s, under Mohammad Zahir Shah, Afghanistan entered what he described as a "developmental monarchy." The state cultivated external partnerships to acquire aid and investment, while maintaining a delicate balance among competing internal factions. The 1964 Constitution introduced limited parliamentary democracy, political pluralism, and judicial reforms, raising hopes for a more inclusive political order. However, these constitutional reforms were not matched by improvements in administrative capacity. Most ministries lacked resources, tax collection remained minimal, and rural governance continued to rely on tribal shuras, local elders, and customary mechanisms rather than state authority.

In sum, Amanullah's state-building project represented Afghanistan's first comprehensive experiment in constitutional governance, bureaucratic centralization, gender reform, and national integration. However, the exclusion of religious authorities, erosion of tribal autonomy, assimilationist nation-building, and the rapid pace of cultural reform generated broad resistance. By the late 1920s, the convergence of tribal uprisings, clerical opposition, and political fragmentation undermined his regime, demonstrating the limits of top-down modernization in a society where religious, tribal, and regional structures remained deeply entrenched. The Musahiban model demonstrated that gradualism could avoid mass rebellion,

but it also revealed the inherent weakness of a state that depended more on external funding and elite bargains than on effective governance. Looking back, the Musahiban leadership managed to preserve unity and progress within Afghanistan's deeply entrenched traditions, but their cautiousness left the state ill-equipped for the ensuing political and ideological strife. Their legacy is characterized by measured modernization, navigating the balance between reform and tradition in a complex, divided society.

Afghanistan gained political independence in 1919 after the Third Anglo-Afghan War, when King Amanullah consolidated sovereignty and introduced the country's first modern constitution in 1923. (Gregorian, 1969; Barfield, 2010) Following the war, Afghanistan formally became the Kingdom of Afghanistan in 1926, and Amanullah adopted the honorific title *"Ghazi,"* symbolizing his success in mobilizing border tribes under jihad against British India. (Barfield, 2010; Shahrani, 2005). Through strategic diplomacy—balancing relations with the Soviet Union while leveraging anti-colonial sentiment—Amanullah strengthened the monarchy's position domestically and internationally.

Barfield (2010), as cited in Ahmed (2017), emphasizes that Amanullah saw himself as a protector of global Muslim causes, pledging to defend the Caliph, support Muslims in India, and assist anti-Soviet movements in Central Asia. Although Afghan troops engaged British forces in the Khyber region and inflicted notable losses, the war itself was not a decisive Afghan military victory; Kabul sought a truce. Nevertheless, the political outcome—full independence—marked a major turning point. (Barfield, 2010)

1.3.2. The Musahiban Strategy of Gradual Modernization (1930–1973)

Amanullah's fall profoundly shaped the state-building strategies of his successors. When Nadir Shah, and later his brothers and son—collectively known as the Musahiban dynasty—took power in 1930, they adopted a far more cautious and incremental approach to modernization. Rather than directly challenging tribal authority or religious norms, they sought to stabilize the monarchy by integrating traditional elites into the governing structure while slowly expanding administrative capacity.

After the collapse of Amanullah Khan's reformist regime in 1929, Afghanistan entered a period of cautious reconstruction under the Musahiban (Mohammadzai) dynasty, which ruled from 1930 to 1973. The new rulers, beginning with King Mohammed Nadir Shah (1930–1933),

and continuing under King Mohammed Zahir Shah (1933–1973), sought to modernize the Afghan state through a gradual, conservative approach to reform. This policy, often referred to as the *Musahiban Strategy of Gradual Modernization*, aimed to balance the competing forces of tradition and modernization in a deeply fragmented society.

The Musahiban strategy rested on three pillars: gradual reform, pragmatic state-building, and heavy reliance on foreign aid. Infrastructure development became the centrepiece of modernization. Roads, airports, and basic public works projects expanded the state's physical reach, while foreign technical assistance—from Germany, Japan, the United States, and later the Soviet Union—helped train bureaucrats and build modern institutions. Yet these efforts remained limited in scope, reflecting the regime's unwillingness to provoke the kind of societal upheaval that had doomed Amanullah.

The Musahiban rulers had learned from the failure of Amanullah's rapid reforms, which had alienated religious leaders and tribal chiefs. They aimed instead for a process of **"**evolution, not revolution", seeking progress through consensus and patience. Central to this approach was the reliance on the "qawm"—the traditional kinship and local community structure—as the foundation of social stability. (Rubin, 2002) The qwam doesn't translate neatly into English, but roughly means "community," "tribe," "kin group," or "people bound together by a shared identity." Hence, the qawm is a social unit that can refer to people connected by tribal lineage, ethnicity, religion, locality, or even profession. Moreover, it has certain flexibility in its meaning, because it might mean a clan in one context, a village community in another, or even a network of mutual support in cities. Even do they represent trust, mutual aid, and solidarity among its members. Historically, Afghan society has been structured around tribal and kinship ties, and the qawm was the key organizing unit, and loyalty to one's qawm often took precedence over national or class identity. Even today, social, political, and economic life in Afghanistan often revolves around these networks. So, the qawm is something "very Afghan" which is a deeply rooted social and cultural building block of Afghan society, and part ethnicity, part kinship, part network of obligation and trust. The Musahiban dynasty, instead of dismantling tribal hierarchies, the state worked through them, ensuring that modernization would not be perceived as a cultural or religious threat. As a result, while power was centralized in Kabul, provincial and tribal autonomy remained largely intact. (Saikal, 2006)

Economically, the Musahiban period was marked by gradual infrastructure and institutional development. Roads, communication networks, schools, and hospitals were built,

supported by foreign aid from both the United States and the Soviet Union, reflecting Afghanistan's careful neutrality during the Cold War. (Gregorian, 1969) In 1953, Muhammad Daoud Khan, the 43-year-old first cousin of Zahir Shah, assumed the role of prime minister. Daoud aimed to eliminate corruption within the vast Hilmand irrigation project and to accelerate reforms, but he firmly resisted any liberalization of Afghan society. In an effort to adjust Afghanistan's stance of neutrality, Daoud pursued closer ties with the Soviet Union. However, the period of neutrality during the Cold War turned out to be short-lived. Both the Soviet Union and the United States began to provide Afghanistan with increasing amounts of economic and technical support. Between 1953 and 1955, Daoud's government attempted to acquire weapons, approaching the United States multiple times. Nevertheless, he was unable to secure an agreement with Washington, which conditioned arms sales on either joining the anti-Communist Baghdad Pact or, at the very least, signing a Mutual Security Pact. Contrarily, the Soviet Union was willing to supply what the United States would not. In 1956, Afghanistan spent $25 million on tanks, airplanes, helicopters, and small firearms from the Soviet bloc, while Soviet specialists assisted in constructing or adapting airfields in northern Afghanistan for military use. (CIA report, August 7, 1957)

The Cold War had officially reached Afghanistan. Although the intensification of Cold War rivalry in Afghanistan—along with its devastating effects on the nation—would become a significant legacy of Daoud, it was not his most critical one. Instead, during Daoud's time in office, Afghanistan's relationship with neighbouring Pakistan deteriorated irreversibly. Afghanistan increasingly viewed Pakistan as both a rival and a threat. In truth, Daoud's quest for military resources was largely driven by Afghanistan's own Cold War with Pakistan. However, it was Daoud's backing of a Pushtun nationalist movement within Pakistan that would lead to the most enduring consequences.

Industrialization efforts were limited, yet a modest middle class began to emerge in urban centres. (See Annex 7) Education expanded slowly but deliberately: new schools and the University of Kabul trained a generation of bureaucrats and professionals, though curricula continued to reflect Islamic values. (Dupree, 1973) The inclusion of women in education also increased—especially in the capital—but serious gender reforms were deferred to avoid conservative resistance. (Rubin, 2002) Politically, a significant event during this period was the Constitution of 1964, which established a system of constitutional monarchy, a bicameral legislature, and a more open press. (Barfield, 2010) The so-called *"Decade of Democracy"* (1964–1973) represented Afghanistan's most significant approach to constitutional governance

before the 21st century. The 1964 Constitution marked a turning point in Afghan political life, introducing a constitutional monarchy, a bicameral legislature, and limited separation of powers. (Barfield, 2010) Drafted under the guidance of King Zahir Shah and his modernist advisors, the document aimed to balance royal authority with representative governance. It abolished the post of prime minister's familial dominance in the royal line, established an independent judiciary, and for the first time recognized the freedom of expression and press. (Gregorian, 1969) However, while the constitution permitted political freedoms, it was deliberately vague about the formation of political parties—a decision that created long-term instability.

In practice, political parties were not formally legalized, but they emerged and operated informally, often under the guise of student organizations, professional associations, or ideological movements. (Rubin, 2002) This environment allowed various ideological tendencies to surface, reflecting the growing social and intellectual diversity in Afghan urban centres, especially Kabul. Among these were both leftist and Islamist currents, as well as royalist and centrist factions connected to the existing elite. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), established in 1965 by Nur Mohammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal, was the most influential of the new political parties. Although its membership was limited, the PDPA wielded significant power due to its ties to urban intellectuals and military factions. (Saikal, 2006) The party eventually fractured into two main factions: Khalq (*"Masses"*), led by Taraki and later by Hafizullah Amin – more radical and oriented towards rural Pashtuns; Parcham (*"Banner"*), led by Karmal – more centrist, focusing on urban and multiethnic interests. Both factions adhered to Marxist-Leninist principles and had connections with the Soviet Union, although they differed in their approaches and pace for transforming Afghanistan. (Rubin, 2002)

The direct influx of Marxism–Leninism came primarily from educational and international relations in the 1960s. The Musahiban regime pursued a balanced foreign policy, balancing between the Soviet Union and the United States. (Gregorian, 1969) As part of this policy, Soviet scholarship programs were launched, and thousands of Afghan students were able to study in Moscow, Leningrad, and Tashkent, where they were directly exposed to the Marxist–Leninist educational and ideological environment (Barfield, 2010). These students, upon returning home, took up positions in government offices, military schools, and universities, and gradually established a leftist intellectual network. Kabul University in particular became a centre of ideological debate, where Marxist thought emerged openly from

the 1950s onwards. (Dupree, 1973) Marxism–Leninism thus took root in Afghanistan not as an export product but as a local response to modernization. Rapid social change, a new educational elite, geopolitical influence, and political pluralism combined to create an ideological space where Marxism became a watchword for "progress" and "independence" (Gregorian, 1969) This ultimately paved the way for the Saur Revolution of 1978, when the PDPA seized power in a coup and attempted to establish a Marxist state—but this quickly led to civil war and Soviet intervention (Barfield, 2010).

The second largest platform was in the parliament, the Islamist and Conservative Representation. In reaction to the rise of secular and leftist ideas, a countermovement with a religious focus emerged at Kabul University, driven by students and faculty influenced by pan-Islamic and Muslim Brotherhood beliefs. Key figures such as Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf emerged from these groups and later became prominent leaders of the Islamist resistance during the 1980s (Barfield, 2010).

These factions opposed Westernization and socialism, advocating for an Islamic political framework and moral renewal. Their rise in the late 1960s illustrated the division within Afghan political life—an outcome of the limited pluralism under the Musahiban monarchy. In addition to these ideological extremes, there were moderate royalists, technocrats, and bureaucrats who favoured a controlled constitutional monarchy. They formed informal alliances within the parliament and often depended on patronage connections to the royal family (Gregorian, 1969). Their primary goal was to ensure gradual reforms while avoiding radical societal shifts. However, lacking formal organization and widespread support, these royalist groups struggled to effectively mediate between the contending revolutionary forces. Most of the parliament members were sourced from the local elite, including tribal leaders, landowners, and prominent urban figures. Women received the right to vote and representation for the first time, with some being included in the Wolesi Jirga; however, their political influence remained limited (Dupree, 1973). The executive branch, specifically the king and his council of ministers, held the real power in policymaking. The representatives focused primarily on regional interests, such as constructing local roads, schools, and water pipelines, while the parliamentary body itself was either passive or fragmented on matters of national reform (Rubin, 2002). Political parties were not formally established as their creation was illegal until 1973, yet informal factions emerged: Royalists advocated for moderate, centralized reforms within the monarchy; Technocrats and modernists represented largely the urban, Western-educated elite; Left-wing intellectuals were those who transitioned to the PDPA, primarily from Kabul;

Conservatives and religious leaders championed religious and rural interests (Saikal, 2006). In reality, the parliament lacked an effective role in oversight. The royal cabinet dictated legislative proposals, leading to laws that were typically passed unanimously, and political discussions seldom extended beyond a symbolic level (Barfield, 2010).

Despite the constitution's modern appearance, Afghanistan's political institutions were frail. The parliament was made up of inexperienced lawmakers; corruption and factionalism were rampant; and political engagement was mostly restricted to educated urban men (Saikal, 2006). The rural majority, tied to tribal and religious structures, was largely disconnected from national politics. Additionally, the economic disparities between urban and rural areas widened, leading to growing disenchantment among the youth and reform-minded officers. By the early 1970s, repeated cabinet crises and legislative stagnation diminished confidence in the political system (Rubin, 2002). The monarchy's hesitance to institutionalize political parties or broaden social involvement meant that as dissent grew, there were no legitimate democratic avenues to address it. As a result, the weakened parliamentary framework fell apart under increasing pressure. In July 1973, Mohammad Daoud Khan, a former prime minister and cousin of Zahir Shah, took advantage of this void to orchestrate a bloodless coup, dissolving the monarchy and establishing a republic. Although the "Decade of Democracy" aspired, it failed to create a viable constitutional structure for the modernization of Afghanistan (Barfield, 2010).

Nevertheless, political parties were weak, corruption was rampant, and the divide between urban and rural areas widened. The traditional elite continued to dominate the principal power institutions, and democratic engagement remained limited to a small portion of the educated urban population (Saikal, 2006). Despite its shortcomings, the Musahiban approach accomplished something uncommon in contemporary Afghan history—four decades of relative peace and stability (Gregorian, 1969). However, by maintaining the traditional system, the regime delayed the more profound reforms that could have reconciled modern and conservative elements. By the late 1960s, ideological diversity had become evident among the youth, with Marxist, Islamist, and nationalist factions vying for influence, revealing the monarchy's vulnerability (Rubin, 2002). When rifts within the elite became apparent, the stability rapidly disintegrated. In 1973, Mohammad Daoud Khan, a cousin of Zahir Shah and former prime minister, orchestrated a peaceful coup, dismantled the monarchy, and proclaimed a republic—signifying the end of the Musahiban period.

1.3.3. The Daoud Republic and Centralized Developmentalism (1973–1978)

The final major experiment in twentieth-century Afghan state-modernization experiment came with Mohammed Daoud Khan's overthrow of the monarchy in 1973 and his establishment of a republic. Daoud had long advocated a stronger, more centralized state capable of leading rapid economic development and asserting Afghanistan's independence in regional affairs. His agenda represented a return to a more assertive mode of modernization, though still distinct from Amanullah's socially transformative vision.

Daoud followed a developmentalist approach focused on increasing state oversight of the economy, enhancing security agencies, and hastening modernization via technocratic strategies. The new republic relied heavily on Soviet economic and military assistance, deepening Afghanistan's dependence on a single external patron. This alignment also intensified ideological polarization within the country. Daoud's efforts to consolidate power alienated both the Islamist movements, which opposed his secularizing tendencies, and the leftist factions within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), who resented his suppression of their political activities despite their earlier support for his coup.

By the mid-1970s, Daoud's political order was facing a legitimacy crisis like that of earlier regimes. His repression of opposition groups eroded support among Islamists and leftists alike, while his attempts to reduce Soviet influence angered Moscow and strained the regime's principal foreign alliance. Rural Afghanistan remained largely outside the reach of the central government, and Daoud's ambitious development plans failed to translate into meaningful improvements for the majority of the population. These tensions culminated in the PDPA's Saur Revolution in April 1978, which overthrew Daoud and ended Afghanistan's long experiment with indigenous modernization prior to the Soviet invasion.

1.4. Saur Revolution of 1978 and its aftermath

The 1978 Saur Revolution (Afghan: Inqilāb-e Saur, *"Revolution in the Bull"*, from the name of the Afghan month) was a decisive turning point in the modern history of Afghanistan. This communist takeover did not happen overnight, but was the result of decades of social, political, and international processes that also revealed the limitations of the Musahiban dynasty's gradual modernization strategy. The major cause of the communist takeover was the depletion of the Musahiban strategy. The most profound origins can be traced back to the

gradual modernization initiatives of the Musahiban dynasty (1930–1973). This approach effectively maintained the country's stability, yet it failed to establish an inclusive and functional state. Economic progress was limited, the gap between rural and urban areas widened, and opportunities for social advancement were minimal (Barfield, 2010).

While education fostered a new, urban intelligentsia, the ruling class continued to depend on nepotism and personal loyalties. This environment frustrated military officers, teachers, and students, who later formed the foundation of the revolution (Rubin, 2002).

In 1973, Mohammad Daoud Khan, a cousin of the king and former prime minister, executed a bloodless coup to topple Zahir Shah's monarchy and declared a Republic. Initially dependent on an alliance with leftist and PDPA support, he quickly centralized authority and repressed his previous allies (Saikal, 2006). Leaders of the PDPA, such as Babrak Karmal and Nur Mohammad Taraki, were detained, and the party was rendered illegal. Despite advocating for modernization, Daoud established an authoritarian monocratic regime that alienated conservative tribes, religious authorities, and the radical left. Economic reforms stagnated, and the increasing unemployment and inflation sparked social unrest (Rubin, 2002). Starting in the 1960s, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) emerged as the ideological hub for the urban intelligentsia, prominently among educated officials and military personnel.

Although the party was fragmented (Khalq–Parcham), it was deeply ingrained within both the military and civil service. The allure of Marxism–Leninism, offering social justice, land reform, women's liberation, and swift industrialization, became more appealing to the younger generations (Barfield, 2010). The immediate catalyst for the revolution was the April 1978 arrest of PDPA leaders, following the assassination of leftist intellectual Mir Akbar at Daoud's orders. These occurrences triggered a coordinated uprising by military officers who toppled the Daoud regime on April 27–28. The putsch was driven not by the peasantry, but by mid-level military officers. They exhibited a strong allegiance to the PDPA and grew increasingly dissatisfied with Daoud's autocratic governance and the continued privilege of the elite remnants of the monarchy. Economic troubles—such as unemployment, inflation, and corruption—along with the financial burden on the urban middle class, created a volatile situation.

The PDPA developed a network of cell-based conspiracies within the military that enabled the organization of a coup (Dupree, 1973). The so-called Saur Revolution did not occur due to direct Soviet intervention; however, the ideological and military influence of the Soviet

Union significantly shaped its background. It should be noted that the communist world system was at its peak during this period. The Soviet Union, China, and other socialist countries generously supported Third World countries and the so-called "anti-imperialist" movements. Marxism spread among Afghan officers who had received education in Moscow and Tashkent, while the Soviets provided political and economic backing to Daoud's government until it began to align with the USA (Saikal, 2006). When Daoud distanced himself from Moscow in favour of rapprochement with the USA, the Soviet Union lost faith in him. It regarded the PDPA as an alternative, offering an ideologically aligned and friendly regime. Thus, the Saur Revolution was not a sudden communist takeover, but rather a culmination of the modernization contradictions inherent in the Musahiban and Daoud periods. A narrow elite focused on modernization, a disgruntled military, escalating social tensions, and the influence of Cold War geopolitics converged to foster the conditions for communist military takeover. As Barfield (2010) states: "The Saur Revolution was less the triumph of Marxism than the collapse of an obsolete order."

Following the Saur Revolution in April 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) initiated a series of radical socioeconomic reforms based on the Soviet model. The newly established government, first headed by Nur Mohammad Taraki and later by Hafizullah Amin, sought to eliminate Afghanistan's traditional feudal and tribal systems through land redistribution, central planning, and state ownership of essential industries. However, these reforms were executed with a limited grasp of local conditions and resulted in significant political and social upheaval (Barfield, 2010; Rubin, 2002).

The communist regime's goal was to eliminate the feudal and religious order through land reform, educational reform, the emancipation of women, and the weakening of tribal power. However, these measures provoked widespread social resistance in a deeply conservative, rural, and religious environment. The PDPA enacted its significant Land Reform Decree No. 6 in July 1978, which imposed strict limits on private landownership—usually around 40 hectares—and required the confiscation of "surplus" land from affluent landlords (khans) and tribal leaders (maliks). The seized land was intended to be redistributed to landless peasants and tenant farmers to create a new socialist-oriented agricultural class (Dupree, 1973). Nevertheless, the implementation of the program was fundamentally flawed. Local PDPA officials frequently lacked knowledge of land records, leading to arbitrary redistribution and the seizure of land from moderate landholders and even small farmers. Numerous traditional landowners faced imprisonment, execution, or exile (Rubin, 2002). Instead of promoting

equality and productivity, the reform disrupted agricultural relationships, dismantled traditional village leadership structures, and incited widespread discontent. Landholdings became fragmented, irrigation systems failed due to poor management, and agricultural output fell sharply. The ulema (religious scholars) and tribal leaders, who lost their social power, became key figures in the rising resistance. By 1979, significant portions of the rural area were in open revolt, directly linked to the oppressive implementation of the land reforms (Saikal, 2006). According to official plans, approximately 2–2.5 million hectares—about one-quarter of Afghanistan's total arable land—were to be expropriated and distributed among some 600,000 landless peasants (Dupree, 1980; Rubin, 2002).

In practice, implementation was chaotic and coercive. Local PDPA committees, often unfamiliar with rural property relations, confiscated land arbitrarily and without cadastral surveys. Moderately wealthy or even small landowners lost their farms; traditional village leaders were humiliated or killed. The government provided no credit, seed, or irrigation support for the new landholders. By 1979, only 250,000–450,000 hectares had actually been redistributed—a mere 15–25 percent of the planned total (Roy, 1986; Barfield, 2010). The reform destroyed existing agricultural systems, broke down patronage networks, and sparked violent uprisings in many provinces.

Rather than producing social equality, the land reform alienated nearly every rural constituency—tribal elders, religious leaders, and peasants alike. Its failure severely undermined the PDPA's legitimacy and directly contributed to the outbreak of nationwide rebellion, which in turn prompted the Soviet intervention in December 1979. As Rubin (2002) observed, the attempt to impose agrarian socialism on a traditional Islamic society "undermined the social foundations of rural Afghanistan far more effectively than it redistributed them." Alongside the agrarian reform, the PDPA initiated extensive nationalization efforts. The state took control of the banking sector, key industries, foreign trade, and transportation, intending to align the economy with Marxist-Leninist ideologies (Barfield, 2010). However, the Afghan government lacked the administrative and technical expertise required to oversee these sectors. Consequently, there was a decline in production, urban shortages, and escalating inflation, leading the urban merchant class and professionals to oppose the regime. This mix of unsuccessful land reform and swift nationalization alienated all significant social groups, including the clergy, tribal leaders, peasants, and the urban educated class. The PDPA's approach to revolutionary modernization through force proved to be unviable. By late 1979, the

government had lost its legitimacy, paving the way for the Soviet intervention that occurred that December (Rubin, 2002; Saikal, 2006).

In 1978, the PDPA mandated the nationalization of all commercial and development banks. At that point, only five primary banks were functioning in Afghanistan: Da Afghanistan Bank (the Central Bank) — which is now state-owned, Bank-e Millie Afghan, Pashtany Tejaraty Bank, Industrial Development Bank of Afghanistan, and Agricultural Development Bank (Dupree, 1980; Barfield, 2010). The decree from the PDPA placed these banks under a unified state administration, thereby removing any remaining commercial autonomy. Although nationalization was intended to establish a "people's credit system," lending effectively ceased, and urban commercial activities came to a standstill — private businesses found it impossible to obtain liquidity. The proportion of the banking system's total national wealth remained below 1% (Rubin, 2002).

In 1978, Afghanistan's economy was not industrialized. Before 1978, agriculture represented approximately 90% of the nation's GDP, while industry and mining made up only 10% (Barfield, 2010). The key mines that were nationalized or supported by the Soviets include: The Aynak copper mine in Logar province, which is the largest known deposit and was already included in Soviet concession plans during the 1970s; The Hajigak iron ore mine located in Bamiyan, which was a crucial project in future industrialization initiatives. In addition, the Darrah-i-Suf and Karkar coal mines found in Baghlan, which had been under Soviet development since the 1950s, and the Sheberghan gas fields in Jowzjan, which were partially state-owned but came under full "national" control after 1978 (Dupree,1973; Amin, 2006). Overall, there were around 10–12 major mining facilities in the nation, most of which were managed under Soviet technical oversight and relied on exports. No new industrial capabilities were established during the PDPA era; in fact, mining output decreased by 30–40% by 1979 due to the ongoing war.

The country had virtually no heavy industry, with only a handful of light and processing facilities established with assistance from Soviet or German sources. Of these facilities, over 80% consisted of small-scale handicrafts and food processing sectors, with the Kabul Textile Mill and the Jangalak Mechanical Plant being the largest. The PDPA government nationalized these plants through a decree that impacted around 50 to 60 larger industrial enterprises (Barfield, 2010). In 1979, the industrial sector accounted for merely 11-13% of the national income structure and contributed less than 5% to total employment (Rubin, 2002). Afghan

society was still strongly agrarian in the late 1970s. The urban population was barely 15–18%, and the real middle class – civil servants, teachers, military officers, merchants, engineers – made up only 5–7% of the country's total population (Dupree, 1973). The PDPA reforms (nationalization, political purges, economic turmoil) forced thousands of intellectuals and bureaucrats out of their jobs. As a result, by 1979, most of the middle class opposed the regime – many fled abroad or joined the resistance. The Marxist-Leninist attempt to implement reforms, imbued with communist ideology, produced astonishingly tragic results. (see Annex 4)

Unfortunately, this short-lived communist regime heralded the onset of a far more ominous period: the leadership of the PDPA, the Soviet invasion in 1979, and the ensuing prolonged civil conflict resulted in greater destabilization and division within Afghanistan, the ascent of radical Islam, and the birth of a new Cold War in global politics.

1.5.The Soviet War and Occupation in Afghanistan, 1979–1989: Causes, Consequences, and Legacy

This subchapter examines the origins, dynamics, and consequences of the Soviet occupation between 1979 and 1989. It explores how the conflict evolved from a limited intervention into a full-scale proxy war between the superpowers, the human and economic toll it inflicted on Afghanistan, and how it ultimately contributed to the weakening and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 marked one of the most consequential episodes of the late Cold War. What began as an effort to preserve a faltering pro-Soviet regime soon escalated into a devastating decade-long conflict that reshaped the political, social, and geopolitical landscapes of Central and South Asia. The war revealed the contradictions of Soviet foreign policy: while Moscow sought to secure its southern flank and protect socialist allies, it became entrapped in an unwinnable guerrilla war that drained its resources and legitimacy.

In September 1979, a coup occurred in Afghanistan. Acting Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin assassinated President Muhammad Taraki during a Revolutionary Council meeting, as Taraki had been increasingly aligning with Moscow. Despite initially presenting himself as supportive of Soviet interests, Amin declined to visit Moscow, thereby acknowledging the existence of the Soviet-backed government. Amin's bodyguard shot a Soviet general dispatched by the Kremlin to address the tense situation. Consequently, the Soviet government faced two

viable options: withdraw from the region entirely or execute a military intervention to maintain control by force. A political decision was reached, and the details of the operation were developed by the KGB and the General Staff.

The first wave of the Soviet invasion commenced with an airborne division from Uzbekistan, which landed near Kabul on the night of December 26-27, 1979, deploying 7,500 soldiers to seize key locations in the capital. Paratroopers from the 105th Guards Airborne Division and KGB operatives surrounded the presidential residence, ultimately killing President Amin and his family. However, the authentic Afghan government did not solicit Moscow's *"friendly"* assistance. Afghans viewed Babrak Karmal, who was abruptly returned from abroad, as a *"puppet"* of the invaders. Major cities in the country were swiftly captured. By early 1980, over one hundred thousand Soviet troops were present in the occupied territory. What began as a brief mission quickly morphed into a prolonged war of attrition lasting a decade. The Soviet and PDPA forces were able to secure control over major urban areas—Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Herat—and the primary highway network, but they were unable to pacify rural regions (Barfield, 2010).

The countryside was predominantly under the influence of the mujahideen, a coalition of Islamic guerrilla factions unified by their faith and opposition to foreign presence. Operating from bases in Pakistan's tribal regions, the mujahideen received significant financial and military support from the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and other nations through the CIA's "Operation Cyclone" initiative (Dupree, 1980; Rubin, 2002). For the Soviet Union, the invasion of Afghanistan represented more than mere territorial expansion; it was a strategic manoeuvre. The country's strategic position, neighbouring Iran, China, Pakistan, and India, could have offered a route to access warmer seas, which had historically been one of Russia's geopolitical aspirations. Furthermore, the ongoing influence of the Marxist PDPA in Afghanistan was significant for the Soviets in terms of upholding their ideological stance in support of revolutionary movements across the "Third World." Conversely, the United States and its allies could not permit the Soviet Union to secure additional footholds in Central and South Asia. As a result, Afghanistan turned into an indirect flashpoint during the Cold War. This aggressive military move paid off for the Kremlin, as it radically transformed the geopolitical situation after World War II. The occupation of Afghanistan put the Soviet Union about 500 km from the Indian Ocean and the Strait of Hormuz, where part of the Western world's energy supply depended on the production of 2,800 oil wells. According to the analyses of Western geostrategies, the Communist Empire had encircled the world's most significant

energy-producing region. (James Phillips, The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, 1980, The Heritage Foundation). According to White House and NSC (National Security Council) documents, the US was "deeply shaken" because the invasion completely contradicted the existing rules of détente (detente policy). (Zierler, 2018). In response to the invasion, the US initially boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics, subsequently halted the ratification of SALT-II, suspended most economic and cultural collaborations, and initiated military assistance for the mujahideen (Operation Cyclone). Additionally, new policies known as the Guam Doctrine and the Carter Doctrine were specifically created to address the Soviet Union. Every action taken was rationalized by a collapse in trust.

As a result, the conflict became a proxy war between the superpowers, showcasing Soviet conventional might against Western-backed insurgents. The humanitarian toll was devastating. Soviet counterinsurgency efforts relied heavily on aerial bombardments and scorched-earth strategies, obliterating thousands of villages and wreaking havoc on essential irrigation and agricultural systems (Barfield, 2010). By the mid-1980s, approximately one to one and a half million civilians had perished, and five to six million had sought refuge abroad, primarily in Pakistan and Iran (Saikal, 2006). The war displaced nearly a third of the population and left a significant portion of the nation’s infrastructure in ruins. Agricultural production plummeted, famine spread across several provinces, and the traditional tribal-religious fabric was torn apart. The Soviet–Afghan War represented a typical proxy conflict. While the USSR backed the PDPA government, the U.S., Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, and other nations secretly supplied arms and financial assistance to the mujahideen. The CIA orchestrated this aid under the operation known as *"Operation Cyclone,"* which became one of the longest and most costly covert operations ever. The armaments (notably the American Stinger shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles) greatly enhanced the mujahideen's fighting effectiveness, making it challenging for the Soviets to maintain their air dominance. In addition to providing strong military support for the communist (socialist) system in Afghanistan, the Soviets made efforts to popularize the regime, and to this end, they applied a bipolar strategy. On the one hand, they tried to introduce social and economic modernization reforms and carry out propaganda, and on the other hand, they tried to provide the cadres and mass base necessary to maintain the regime.

To popularize and gain acceptance, they launched educational programs to eliminate widespread illiteracy. They opened schools and supported the education of women, which was considered a significant modernization step. In the field of health care, it can be said that several

public hospitals and clinics were built, especially in larger cities, for example, the Hospital of Afghan-Soviet Friendship in Kabul, or Sardar Mohammad Dawood Khan Hospital. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) recruited members and tried to spread the ideas of Soviet-style socialism among the population. In the field of media, the regime and "fraternal aid" were promoted through state-controlled radio broadcasts, newspapers, and posters. Moreover, many Afghan students and military officers were sent to the Soviet Union to study and train, so that they would be committed adherents of communist ideals upon their return home.

The Soviet Union experienced a setback in propaganda during the conflict. The global community, particularly Islamic nations and Western countries, perceived the Soviets as invaders. The expenses associated with the war and the pointless loss of life led to growing dissatisfaction within Soviet society. For Afghanistan, the invasion deepened the country's internal divisions and destroyed its fragile institutions. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), installed and supported by the Kremlin, attempted to impose radical socialist reforms on a predominantly rural and deeply traditional society—reforms that provoked rebellion and set the stage for one of the largest anti-Soviet insurgencies of the twentieth century. The Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan commenced in December 1979, when it dispatched around 80,000 to 100,000 troops to assist the faltering communist government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The rationale was to "stabilize" a regime that had lost control due to radical reforms and violent internal conflicts between the Khalq and Parcham factions (Rubin, 2002). This intervention aimed to protect a socialist buffer state along the Soviet southern border and prevent the spread of Islamic revolution following the turmoil in Iran (Saikal, 2006).

Soviet goals were explicitly transformative: to modernize and secularize Afghan society, strengthen the revolutionary PDPA government, and incorporate Afghanistan into the socialist sphere. The Soviet Union aimed to build a centrally planned, ideologically aligned state capable of implementing mass education, land reforms, and administrative modernization. The total financial cost of the Soviet-Afghan War is not known exactly, but it is estimated that the Soviet Union spent about 30.4 billion Rubles on the conflict between 1979 and 1989. This amount includes direct military spending, financing and training of Afghan forces, and the transportation of equipment. The massive Soviet-led arms race (such as the deployment of medium-range missiles in Europe) and the costs of the war in Afghanistan drained the Soviet economy. In relation to the human toll, approximately 15,000 Soviet soldiers lost their lives

and around 35,000 sustained injuries during the conflict. An estimated 75,000 to 90,000 Mujahideen were killed. Nearly one million Afghan civilians perished. (Shvangiradze, 1973)

By the late 1980s, the defeat in the war became untenable for the Soviet Union. Despite significant expenditures and troop deployments, Moscow was unable to establish political legitimacy beyond Kabul. The conflict drained the Soviet economy, demoralized its military forces, and diminished its global standing (Rubin, 2002). Acknowledging the futility of their efforts, Mikhail Gorbachev described Afghanistan as a “bleeding wound” and declared a troop withdrawal. The Geneva Accords, signed in April 1988, solidified the Soviet commitment to leave while also securing Afghanistan's neutrality (Saikal, 2006). On February 15, 1989, the final Soviet troops crossed the Friendship Bridge into Uzbekistan, marking the formal conclusion of a misadventure that spanned nearly ten years.

However, the withdrawal left behind a fractured and severely damaged state: the PDPA government led by President Najibullah lasted only until 1992, when it succumbed to internal civil conflict. The social and political ramifications were profound—Afghanistan's institutions crumbled, warlordism and sectarian violence emerged, and the refugee crisis altered the dynamics of regional politics. For the Soviet Union, the occupation highlighted the limits of superpower intervention and hastened its decline, leading to its dissolution two years later (Barfield, 2010; Rubin, 2002). Looking back, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan illustrated that external military force could not create stability in a divided society. It turned what was a domestic revolutionary effort into an international conflict, devastated the Afghan populace, and ultimately revealed the vulnerabilities of the Soviet empire during the waning years of the Cold War.

In conclusion, the aims of the Soviets were distinctly transformative: to modernize and secularize Afghan society, strengthen the revolutionary PDPA government, and integrate Afghanistan into the socialist realm. The Soviet Union sought to establish a centrally planned, ideologically cohesive state capable of executing widespread education, land reforms, and administrative modernization. Nonetheless, the actual outcome of the Soviet intervention was contrary to modernization. The invasion led to an unparalleled militarization of Afghan society. The PDPA regime, which lacked legitimacy and was reliant on Soviet military assistance, alienated rural communities through coercive reforms.

The extensive violence resulted in mass displacement, devastated local economies, and empowered various mujahideen factions. Instead of cultivating a modern socialist state, Soviet

engagement caused state disintegration, civil war, and the rise of warlordism and radical Islamic movements. The political landscape of Afghanistan became fragmented into rival resistance networks, paving the way for instability after 1992 and the eventual emergence of the Taliban.

1.6. Summary

In the first chapter of my thesis, I recorded my research results that discussed the development of state structures following the establishment of the Afghan state. I analysed them in chronological order and made statements about the characteristics of each era, primarily from the point of view of Weberian state development. I identified and catalogued all the factors that contributed to the creation of an underdeveloped social structure from the point of view of state theory, and which, ultimately, through their mutually reinforcing factors, united in a common vector, failed in American-led state building. In this part of my research, I relied on numerous literary sources, but I must highlight the works of Olivier Roy, Thomas Bartfield, and Barnett Rubin, which greatly helped the basic ideas of my research. In the first chapter of my thesis, I have revealed that the failure of state-building in Afghanistan has deeper causes, not merely geopolitical, but historical and cultural in nature. The inherited fragmented sovereignty, the strong structure of tribal identities, the modern idea of the state versus religious legitimacy, and the cultural incompatibility of external models constitute the structural node that repeatedly hinders consolidation.

I have shown and argued that Afghanistan's experience of state formation has been characterized by a recurring contradiction between local and central, traditional and modern, internal and external. Despite more than a century of attempts to create a cohesive state apparatus, from the de facto Durrani monarchy to internationally supported republican regimes, the country has remained a fragmented political entity. Its enduring weakness has stemmed not only from war and foreign intervention, but also from structural and historical continuities that systematically undermine efforts at centralization. I have argued that the interplay of tribal governance, religious authority, regional autonomy, and external intervention has produced a hybrid political order that has been incapable of sustaining durable institutions modernized from above.

I have argued through historical examples that Afghanistan's political development has long been shaped by fragmented sovereignty. I have shown that from the eighteenth-century

Durrani Empire to the modern era, political power was based on negotiation between local leaders rather than on coercive state control. Tribal confederations led by autonomous chiefs (khans and maliks) historically maintained their own militias and administered local justice based on customary law (Pashtunwali).

I have adapted and applied Thomas Barfield's concept of *"segmented statehood"* to describe the power structure in Afghanistan. On this basis, I have established that this is a form of state in which power can be envisioned as a mosaic of semi-independent regions. That is, central rulers, whether kings or emirs, recognizing that direct control was impossible in Afghanistan's harsh and mountainous terrain, made political bargains with tribal and clan leaders. The resulting political order was based on bargaining rather than bureaucratic governance. As a result, a decentralized power structure operated, meaning there was no central power, or central control, authority, or legal institution that encompassed the entire society. Society is divided into smaller units (segments), often based on kinship or local communities, which have a high degree of autonomy.

This power structure is the opposite of modern, centralized nation-states, where sovereignty and the exercise of rights are under unified and central control throughout the state. The primary purpose of rights and obligations is to maintain a balance between individual segments, rather than to enforce a unified legal order directed from above.

In my research, I have identified that this tradition of negotiated sovereignty, so characteristic of Afghanistan, has created a political culture that has successfully resisted hierarchical authority. Efforts at centralization, such as those under King Amanullah Khan (1919–1929), have provoked rebellion precisely because they have violated this long-standing pattern.

1.7. Hypothesis testing

I conducted a comparative analysis of the content elements of the summary containing the scientific results obtained based on the research conducted in the first chapter and the hypotheses developed to achieve the scientific goals of the chapter using a research method based on the True-False Statements Comparison Matrix. My Hypothesis Nr1 (H1) formulated as follows: By the early 20th century, Afghanistan lacked a modern, centralized governance system, a circumstance worsened by previous British influence and the later Soviet occupation,

which established significant challenges to modernization efforts following the international intervention in 2001. De facto, H1 consists of four statements, i.e., logical elements.

A) *Afghanistan lacked a modern, centralized governance system by the early 20th century.*

B) *Previous British influence worsened that lack of modernization.*

C) *Later Soviet occupation also worsened that situation.*

D) *These historical circumstances created major challenges for modernization efforts after the 2001 international intervention.*

In order to determine whether H1 is true or false, I constructed a True-False comparison matrix.

Relationship	A	B	C	D
A	—	True	True	True
B	False	—	True	True
C	False	True	—	True
D	False	False	False	—

Meaning:

- A → B (True): The lack of modernization was *made worse* by British influence.
- A → C (True): The same lack was *further worsened* by Soviet occupation.
- A → D (True): The early governance weakness *led to challenges* after 2001.
- B → C (True): Soviet occupation followed and compounded British influence effects.
- B → D (True): British influence contributed indirectly to later modernization problems.
- C → D (True): Soviet occupation added to challenges after 2001.
- D does not cause any of the earlier ones → all False in its row.

The self-connection is marked by "—". Furthermore, I have plotted the results of the comparative matrix in a visual graph. (See ANNAEX 2) Based on the above-mentioned facts, I found my hypothesis H1 to be completely proven.

1.8. Conclusion

Afghanistan's historical trajectory reveals that state-building failure is less the product of transient crises than of deep structural incongruities. The tension between localized authority and centralized ambition, between customary order and bureaucratic rationality, remains unresolved. The layering of tribal, religious, and external influences has created a hybrid system perpetually torn between autonomy and control.

The failure of state- and nation-building initiatives in Afghanistan after 2001 can be attributed to a complex interplay of structural, political, and socio-cultural factors. Despite substantial international investment in financial, military, and human resources, these efforts often failed to align with Afghanistan's historical, cultural, and societal realities.

The institutions of the post-2001 Afghan state were largely designed and financed by external actors—primarily the United States and its allies. As a result, the central government suffered from a pervasive legitimacy deficit, as many Afghans perceived it as an extension of foreign interests rather than a genuinely national project. Deep-rooted tribal, ethnic, and local loyalties often undermined the authority and effectiveness of the central state. The modernization process unfolded incoherently across institutional, economic, and social dimensions. While formal institutions such as the parliament and judiciary were modelled after Western democracies, much of Afghan society remained tied to traditional and religious forms of governance and dispute resolution.

This produced a dual legitimacy system, where modern institutions lacked resonance with local forms of authority, rendering the state ineffective in practice. Persistent insecurity, corruption, and the rise of the opium economy severely weakened state-building efforts. Short-term, mission-oriented military approaches prioritized tactical victories over long-term social cohesion. Similarly, economic aid and development projects were often shaped by donor priorities rather than local needs, which limited their sustainability and grassroots legitimacy. The multitude of foreign stakeholders—the U.S., NATO, the UN, and numerous NGOs—often operated with conflicting strategies and objectives. This lack of coordination fragmented state-building efforts and produced overlapping or redundant projects, weakening their overall impact.

Chapter II: Cultural and Normative Mismatches in Modern State-Building Efforts

2.1. The monsters of the Afghan civil war, fundamentalist radical Islam, and terrorism

The withdrawal of Soviet troops on February 15, 1989, brought not peace, but another civil war and state collapse in Afghanistan. The period 1989–2001 was one of the most chaotic periods in modern Afghan history. Although everyone predicted that the communist government would immediately collapse after the withdrawal, it persisted for three years. The survival of the communist Najibullah regime (1989–1992) was possible because Soviet aid was still in place, with Moscow sending 2–3 billion USD a year in aid, weapons. In addition, the KHAD intelligence service was extremely effective against insurgent infiltration, and the Mujahideen were divided, with separate factions (Massoud, Hekmatyar, Sayyaf, Rabbani, etc.) unable to launch a coordinated attack.

What happened on the ground? Horseshoe-shaped front lines formed around the major cities; the situation was characterized by the strengthening of local militant and tribal petty kings and warlords, while the economy practically collapsed and a humanitarian crisis developed. However, the stalemate ended in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR, as support from the Russians was no longer available, so in 1992 the Najibullah regime fell apart, and the mujahideen groups (Massoud, Dostum, Hekmatyar, Rabbani, etc.) entered Kabul. By the spring of 1992, the Najibullah-led communist government had collapsed after Moscow withdrew its support, and the army gradually disintegrated. The domestic political vacuum was filled not by a unified opposition force but by fragmented, competing mujahideen factions (Rubin 2002; Maley 2009). The Peshawar Accords nominally established the Islamic State, but a significant number of field commanders did not accept the new political structure. Power struggles arose along religious and ethnic lines. After the fall of the communist regime, the forces of Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud controlled a significant part of Kabul. However, the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin organization, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, did not accept Massoud's government. Who was Hekmatyar?

Hekmatyar joined the Muslim Youth organization as a student in the early 1970s, where he was known for his Islamic radicalism, and he was rejected by many of the organization. Later, he espoused increasingly radical Islamist principles. In the late 1980s, Hekmatyar and his organization, the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, used CIA-provided funds and weapons to begin

trafficking opium and later heroin production, making him and his group one of the leading heroin suppliers in the Middle East. (Thomas H, 2007)

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar adheres to an ideology linked to the radical, fundamentalist branch of Sunni Islam. His political views are aligned with Islamism and jihadism, like the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood popular in the Middle East. The United States Department of State officially designated HIG as a terrorist organization in 2003, and designated Hekmatyar as a "Specially Designated Global Terrorist." During the Afghan Civil War in the 1990s, his troops participated in the extensive bombing of Kabul, which killed thousands of civilians. He was also associated with Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda.

His ideology is primarily based on strict Islamic law and the establishment of an Islamist state. He rejected secular and democratic systems and emphasized the unity of the Islamic world, while resisting external, especially Western, influence. He considered armed resistance to be a legitimate means, especially during the Soviet occupation and subsequent conflicts. Although his Pushtun origin influenced his political interests, his fundamental ideological beliefs were a radical interpretation of Islam and the creation of an Islamic state in Afghanistan. Hekmatyar rejected the Peshawar Accord because of deep and long-standing personal animosity between him and Ahmad Shah Massoud, and because he sought the support of Pakistani intelligence to establish a Pashtun government.

The Pakistani military supported Hekmatyar because their goal was to establish a pro-Pakistani government in Afghanistan. However, it soon became clear that Hekmatyar would not be able to achieve this goal. His overly radical fundamentalist views were not popular with most Pashtuns. Therefore, the Pakistani leadership's sympathies began to shift towards the Pashtun Taliban. Another commander of the mujahedin who took part in the civil war was Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, the head of Ittehad-e Islami, a Pashtun organization that received support from Saudi Arabia. Sayyaf engaged in combat against government troops and Soviet forces in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s, receiving substantial funding and support from Saudi Arabia, likely due to his strong religious connections with the Wahhabist Saudi Royal family and religious authorities, as well as his exceptional proficiency in the Arabic language. During the struggle against the Soviet Union and its Afghan collaborators, he developed a close bond with Osama bin Laden. Together, in the Jalalabad region, they established a network of training camps, which would later be utilized by Al-Qaeda operatives, complete with bunkers and military positions. In 1985, he launched a university named Dawa'a al-Jihad (Call of Jihad) in

an Afghan refugee camp near Peshawar, which has been characterized as the "leading institution for terrorism." Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the mastermind behind the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, was one of its attendees. In 1993, Sayyaf's group was accountable for "multiple acts of brutal violence against humans" when his Mujahideen faction attacked both civilians and the Shia Hezb-i Wahdat group in western Kabul. (Anderson, 2002)

The third faction involved in the Afghan civil conflict was Hezb-e Wahdat, led by Abdul Ali Mazari, who represented the Hazara (Shia) community. Recognized by the respectful title Ustad, Abdul Ali Mazari was an Afghan politician and the leader of Hezb-e Wahdat during and after the Soviet–Afghan War, advocating for a federal governance model in Afghanistan. Mazari argued that such a system would address the political and ethnic rifts in the country by guaranteeing rights for all ethnic groups. He also participated in the Iranian Revolution and supported Khomeini. He was reportedly captured and killed in 1995. The Western-backed central government declared him a martyr in 2016. The statue erected in his memory was demolished by the Taliban after their return to power. To this day, he is remembered by Hazaras as Mazari Father.

Abdul Rashid Dostum, head of Junbish-e Milli, a skilled soldier and a particularly gifted tactical leader, has repeatedly proven his abilities. During the first Taliban government, he successfully maintained his territory as an Uzbek warlord in northern Afghanistan, and Dostum is considered liberal and somewhat leftist. He, as an Uzbek, worked on the battlefield with leaders of all the other major ethnic groups, such as the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Pashtuns.

During this time, he remained in control of the country's north, which functioned as a relatively stable proto state, but remained a loose partner of Massoud in the Northern Alliance. He fled the country after the Taliban regained power. (William, 2004; Palgrave, 2009) When reviewing the mujahideen organizations, most factions (Dostum's organization is an exception) represent radical, fundamentalist versions of Islam.

2.2.The emergence and spread of radical, fundamentalist Islam in Afghanistan

The emergence and spread of radical, fundamentalist Islam in Afghanistan must be understood as the product of overlapping historical, political, and geopolitical processes that unfolded from the late 19th century onward but accelerated dramatically during the Cold War and became a defining Islamic interpretation in the war against the Russians.

The emergence and spread of radical, fundamentalist Islam in Afghanistan resulted from a convergence of indigenous religious traditions, state fragility, and external geopolitical pressures that reshaped the country's Islamic landscape over the twentieth century. Historically, Afghan Islam was dominated by Sufi orders (Naqshbandiyya, Qadiriyya) and locally rooted ulema who maintained relatively flexible, syncretic religious practices, while political authority relied on a pragmatic balance between tribal norms (*'urf*) and Sharia (Barfield 2010; Rubin 2002). While traditional Islamic authority in Afghanistan had long been embedded in local Sufi networks and community-based religious practices, the 1970s saw the rise of more ideological, scripturalist Islamist movements influenced by Egyptian and South Asian thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi. These ideas entered Afghan student circles at Kabul University, producing organizations like Jamiat-e Islami and Hizb-e Islami.

At beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, a new generation of urban, educated Islamists at Kabul University— influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology originated from Sayyid Qutb and the Jamaat-e Islami's South Asian revivalism— began advocating for a scripturalist, politically activist Islam as a response to perceived moral decline, communist influence, and state authoritarianism (Edwards 2002; Dorronsoro 2005).

This ideological shift intensified after the 1979 Soviet invasion, when the Afghan jihad became the focal point of a globalized Islamist movement. Pakistan's ISI, backed by U.S. and Saudi funding, selectively empowered hardline factions such as Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, while Saudi actors and Deobandi madrassas exported puritanical doctrines into Afghan refugee camps, marginalizing traditional clerical authorities (Rashid 2000; Coll 2004). Furthermore, the response to the Soviet invasion and control of Afghanistan, various Islamic leaders and groups issued fatwas (Islamic legal opinions) declaring the struggle against the Soviets and their puppet government a religious obligation (jihad). One of the most notable and impactful fatwas was released by the Council of Senior Scholars of Saudi Arabia in 1980, shortly after the invasion. This fatwa legitimized the conflict against the Soviets and urged Muslims worldwide to assist

the Afghan mujahideen with financial support and fighters. This religious declaration played a key role in motivating Arab *"Afghans"* (including Osama bin Laden) to join the fight. Local Afghan religious leaders (Ulema) also issued local edicts that called for jihad against the regime right at the onset of the Soviet invasion, and in reaction to the communist regime's radical reforms. The issuing of fatwas was vital as it provided religious legitimacy to the mujahideen's efforts and transformed the conflict into a global Muslim cause, thus ensuring sustained recruitment and backing. After the fatwa was issued, for committed and fundamentalist-minded Muslims, participation in the war in Afghanistan was not a voluntary decision, but rather the implementation of a religious command.

According to Commins, approximately 35,000 Muslim fighters went to Afghanistan between 1982 and 1992, while untold thousands more attended frontier schools teeming with former and future fighters (Commins, 2006). In this way, the war became not just a proxy war between the US and USSR but also a holy war for local and foreign Islamist fundamentalist groups. Firstly, it has resulted in the conflict having a globalized character. Secondly, previously conservative religious forces became radicalized, and Islamist fundamentalist groups rose to the forefront of the resistance movement.

The radicalization was greatly intensified by external support, especially from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The influence of Saudi Arabia has been manifested through private benefactors and charitable organizations that have invested considerable amounts of money into madrassas (Islamic schools) in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which promoted the strict Wahhabi ideology, leading to the "Wahhabization" (rigidification) of Islam in South Asia. Pakistan played a crucial part in fulfilling American goals. The United States, in collaboration with Saudi Arabia, funnelled billions of dollars in military support and financial aid to the mujahideen via Pakistan and its intelligence service, the ISI.

Pakistan deliberately directed most of the arms to the most radical groups, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's faction. Afghanistan is a country marked by ethnic divisions, which was evident in the various mujahideen factions. The Pashtuns, being the largest ethnic group, made up a substantial part of the mujahideen. Numerous leaders, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, were of Pashtun descent. The Tajiks also played an important role, particularly in the northern and western regions of the nation. Notable figures such as Ismail Khan and Ahmad Shah Massoud, who is famously known as the *"Lion of Panjshir,"* were Tajik as well. Militias formed by Uzbeks, Hazaras, and other minority groups also took part in the combat against the

Soviets. In terms of organization and ideology, the mujahideen did not constitute a unified army or singular organization but were made up of several independent militias led by local commanders. These various factions were organized along diverse ethnic and ideological lines. The primary groups were situated in Pakistan (Peshawar) and received backing from the Pakistani Intelligence Agency (ISI), alongside support from the United States (CIA) and Saudi Arabia. Islam served both as a cohesive force and a source of division within the conflict; they shared a common belief in the *"holy war"* (jihad) against the Soviets yet had considerable differences regarding their interpretations of Sharia and their aspirations for the future Afghan state. International fighters significantly contributed to the spread of Wahhabi and Safavid ideologies within Afghanistan.

Alongside Afghan combatants, thousands of Muslim volunteers, especially a notable number from Saudi Arabia, joined the fight, including Arab mujahideen. Al-Qaeda, the group responsible for the 9/11 attacks, also emerged from this wave of fighters. Following the Soviet withdrawal, the existing diversity and absence of a shared adversary led to intense competition for power, ultimately resulting in a devastating civil war among the mujahideen. The mass displacement of Afghans—over five million refugees—created a generation of youth educated not in Afghan religious institutions but in Pakistani seminaries that promoted rigid interpretations of Islam (Giustozzi 2009). By the early 1990s, these trends culminated in the rise of the Taliban, a movement blending Deobandi fundamentalism, Pashtunwali tribal norms, and the militarized culture of the jihad, establishing a new model of radical Islamic governance unprecedented in Afghan history. As a result, Afghanistan transformed from a society characterized by pluralistic Islamic traditions into a central arena for transnational jihadist ideologies and militant fundamentalism.

The Taliban, made up of Pashtun students who had often studied in Pakistani madrassas and adopted radical Islamic beliefs, surfaced amid the turmoil of the civil war in mid-1994. They gained control over much of the country by promising to establish order and implement Sharia law. In summary, radical Islam in Afghanistan developed and gained strength due to the combined impact of resistance to the Soviet occupation and external financial and ideological backing, particularly from Wahhabism and Deobandi orthodoxy.

2.2.1. Description of Taliban ideology and comparison with al-Qaeda and ISIS

The ideology of the Taliban is a hybrid construction that blends Deobandi fundamentalism,[1] Pashtun tribal norms *(Pashtunwali)*, and the militarized culture of the Afghan jihad, creating a uniquely Afghan form of ultraconservative Islamic governance.

The Taliban's ideology represents a fusion of radical Deobandi interpretations of Islam with a strict adherence to conservative Pashtun tribal codes *(Pashtunwali)*. While the broader Deobandi scholarly community in India and elsewhere often disavows the violence and specific political vision of these militant offshoots, the connection highlights how the movement's strict interpretation of Islamic law can form the ideological basis for radical Islamist political movements aiming to establish states governed solely by their rigid interpretation of Sharia.

At its core, Taliban ideology seeks to establish a purified Islamic order grounded in a strict, literalist reading of Sharia, heavily influenced by the South Asian Deobandi school, which emphasizes doctrinal rigidity, gender segregation, moral policing, and the rejection of religious innovation (*bid'a*). However, unlike classical Deobandism, the Taliban embed their worldview in Pashtunwali, the tribal code emphasizing honour, male authority, revenge, and patriarchal social structures, which shapes their social policies, dispute resolution mechanisms, and gender norms. The movement rejects Western political models, secular nationalism, and democracy as un-Islamic, advocating instead a theocratic *emirate* under the authority of an *Amir al-Mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful) instead.

Taliban ideology is also profoundly anti-pluralist: it tolerates little internal dissent, restricts the rights of non-Pashtun minorities, and regards Shia Islam—particularly among the Hazara community—with suspicion or hostility. During both their first regime (1996–2001) and post-2021 rule, the Taliban have prioritized moral regulation, strict social control, and the political supremacy of clerical decision-making through the *shura* system, while rejecting modern norms such as women's public education, press freedom, and liberal citizenship. Although often described as *"Islamist,"* the Taliban differ from global jihadist groups in that

[1] The Deobandi movement was established in 1866 with the founding of the Darul Uloom seminary in Deoband, India. It emerged as a response to British colonialism and the perceived threat of Western cultural and religious influence on Muslim life in South Asia. The movement strictly follows the Hanafi school of Islamic law (Fiqh). The movement prioritizes traditional Islamic scholarship and operates a vast network of madrasas (seminaries) across South Asia, which serve as centres for religious learning and the preservation of Islamic identity. While the original Indian Deobandi movement played a role in the Indian independence movement and initially maintained a more apolitical scholarly ethos, offshoots in Pakistan and Afghanistan developed highly politicized and militant interpretations.

their ideology is primarily theocratic, focused on controlling Afghanistan rather than waging global jihad. Nonetheless, their religious narrative shares a symbolic affinity with transnational jihadism: the glorification of martyrdom, resistance against foreign occupiers, and the vision of restoring a purified Islamic society through armed struggle. The Taliban ideology seeks domestic control of Afghanistan through a theocratic emirate that fuses a strict Deobandi-inspired Sharia with Pashtun tribal norms (Pashtunwali). Its primary objective is to govern Afghan territory and restore what it considers a purified Islamic order within Afghanistan (and historically parts of Pakistan), not to create a global caliphate as the immediate political priority. Moreover, seeks to govern Afghanistan (or Pashtun-majority areas) under a theocratic emirate model — a centralized Islamic regime, but rooted in Afghan tribal-social structures (Cole, 2022). Its governance has involved applying Sharia courts, controlling education, taxation, and social behaviour — albeit with pragmatic adaptations to local realities.

With regard the al-Qaeda, it should be noted that it is a transnational jihadi movement whose strategic goal is to expel Western presence and influence from Muslim lands and to overthrow regimes it sees as un-Islamic, ultimately to re-order the Muslim world's political systems. It focuses on global jihad, strategic attacks on "far enemy" (e.g., the U.S. and its allies) to provoke wider change. Does not primarily seek territorial rule (although it has occasionally held territory via affiliates). Its ambition is transnational: to challenge global hegemony (especially Western), inspire revolutions in Muslim-majority states, topple "apostate" regimes, and eventually re-order the Muslim world.

In relation to the Islamic State (ISIS), the self-declared caliphate, Prof Maria Bordás argues that "the Islamic State constituted an original and hybrid form of political violence that merged post-colonialism, post-modernity, and post-globalisation, thus impacting domestic, regional, and global politics and security". (Bordás, 2015) Claims to establish an Islamic State / Caliphate, a state-based project with centralized administration: government structures, courts, taxation, control over territory. In addition to state-building, ISIS also pursues global jihad: encouraging lone-wolf attacks, affiliates worldwide, and inspiring radicalization beyond its core territory.

The Islamic State in Afghanistan is primarily represented by its regional affiliate, the *Islamic State – Khorasan Province* (ISIS-K or ISKP). This group emerged in 2015 and remains a significant security threat, engaged in an ongoing conflict with the ruling Taliban regime, and is responsible for numerous high-profile attacks both within Afghanistan and internationally.

Concerning attacks and tactics, ISIS-K uses suicide bombings, military-style assaults, and targeted killings. It frequently targets civilians, particularly the country's minority Shia Hazara population, in mosques, schools, and workplaces to sow sectarian violence and fear. As argued by Tadych (2024), ISIS-K represents an international threat because, in recent years, this terrorist group has focused on orchestrating or inspiring attacks abroad, becoming the "biggest Islamist threat" to Europe, according to some security officials. *Notable external operations include:*

- Twin suicide bombings in Kerman, Iran, in January 2024 that killed over 90 people.
- A mass shooting and arson attack at a concert hall in Krasnogorsk, Russia, in March 2024 that killed over 140 people.
- Rocket attacks from Afghanistan into Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

2.2.2 Theological foundations, takfir, and rigidity

What theological foundations, *takfir*[2], and rigidity characterize these organizations?

As Long pointed out in 2022, the Taliban are largely rooted in South Asian Deobandi teachings, filtered through Afghan religious practice and Pashtun social codes; they are doctrinally strict and socially conservative, but generally wary of issuing broad takfir (excommunication) beyond clear apostasy or rebellion. As per Kostantinos Kavrakis (2022), Al Qaeda ideologically draws on Qutbist and Salafi-jihadist thought (Wahhabi/Salafi currents) that justify offensive jihad against unjust rulers and foreign occupiers; al-Qaeda's cadres and leaders have used takfir selectively as a rhetorical and legal tool but have historically tried to maintain a broader base by avoiding mass-takfir that would alienate potential supporters. (Konstantin, 2022, pp. 1235-1255)

The ISIS embraces an especially extreme takfiri theology that labels many other Muslims (including Shi'a and Sunnis who disagree) as apostates, which legitimized mass executions,

[2] In Islam is the act of declaring another Muslim an apostate (a non-believer or *kāfir*), essentially excommunicating them from Islam. While rooted in Islamic tradition, mainstream Sunni Islam views this practice as a grave error, considering it a divine right and forbidden for individuals, yet extremist groups like the Kharijites and modern jihadists have historically used it to justify violence and purge society of perceived heretics, leading to significant strife. First used extensively by the 7th-century Kharijites, who excommunicated both Sunnis and Shias for perceived sins, setting a precedent for political insurrection. In essence, *takfir* is a powerful, often dangerous, accusation within Islam that distinguishes between legitimate theological differences and extremist ideology that uses it to justify violence against other Muslims.

enslavement, and brutal sectarian violence; its doctrinal rigidity is higher than al-Qaeda's and far higher than the Taliban's practice. Concerning the co-operation, the Taliban and al-Qaeda are historically cooperative (hosted al-Qaeda in the 1990s) but ideologically distinct; the Taliban focused on local governance, al-Qaeda on global jihad—this difference has sometimes produced friction. Post-2001, ties continued in various forms, but strategic objectives diverged.

Regarding the relation between Al-Qaeda–ISIS, the ideological overlap existed, but strategic rivalry and disputes over brutality, timing, and centralization led to a split; ISIS's proclamation of a caliphate in 2014 intensified the rivalry and challenged al-Qaeda's model.

Concerning al-Qaeda and ISIS**,** as Mesut Söhret argued, while they share roots and some ideology, their visions diverged sharply. ISIS's overt, brutal takfiri and sectarian approach, combined with its state-building ambition, made it ideologically and sometimes operationally a rival to al-Qaeda. Their competition over global jihad leadership has been a major source of division. (Mesut, 2023, pp. 193-222) In order to better understand the dissertation and its scientific goals, I have created a common table in which I present the ideology of Islam, its political views, its interpretation, its attitude towards other Muslims, and its relationship with others. (See ANNEX 5)

2.3. The skewing of the evolution of the feudal state, along with its conflicting relationships and the underlying structural reasons that contributed to the breakdown of state-building.

The historical evolution of the Afghan state reveals a continuous struggle between central authority and local autonomy, a dynamic that has profoundly skewed efforts at coherent state building. While Afghanistan never developed a feudal system in the European sense, its socio-political structure has long exhibited feudal-like characteristics: decentralized power, personal loyalty networks, and regionally based authority. These features, intertwined with complex tribal, ethnic, and external dynamics, have repeatedly undermined attempts to construct a cohesive national state. The breakdown of Afghan state-building thus emerges not merely from political failure or external meddling, but from deep structural contradictions between social organization, geographic realities, and imported models of governance.

The analysis of Afghan state development as described in the previous chapters also points out that the social development of Afghanistan shows a significant deviation from that

of Europe. It can be stated that, based on the Weberian model of state development, Afghanistan reached a lower level in terms of feudalism, urbanization, and especially in terms of bourgeois development. Afghan political evolution has traditionally rested on a system of personalized power rather than impersonal institutions. Authority in rural Afghanistan has been defined by tribal hierarchies in which loyalty to clan and tribe supersedes commitment to a national entity. In this sense, Afghan society mirrors the decentralized and patrimonial nature of feudalism. The legitimacy of power stems not from legal bureaucracy but from lineage, customary law, and negotiated alliances.

From the establishment of the Durrani Empire in the mid-eighteenth century under Ahmad Shah Durrani, rulers sought to unite a fragmented political landscape through kinship and patronage rather than through institutional capacity. Successive monarchs ruled by *balancing* rather than *eradicating* local autonomy — recognizing tribal leaders as semi-independent power holders in exchange for symbolic loyalty to Kabul. This arrangement produced a tenuous stability but hindered the development of a centralized state structure. The Afghan state was thus born as a confederation of fiefdoms, not a unitary polity.

Afghan society in the 19th and 20th centuries was characterized by the significant influence of the large landowners (nobles, tribal leaders, and warlords), who owned most of the land and had significant political power. This system was closely intertwined with the traditional tribal structure of the country. (Bernt, 2002, pp. 265-282)

In Afghanistan, socio-economic relations have always been determined by the tribal system and regional, clan elites rather than by the feudal order in the classical European sense. The term “feudal relations” here refers more to the existence of hierarchical, land-based power structures that were closely intertwined with tribal traditions. The foundation of Afghan society has been a segmented, blood-based tribal system (especially among the Pashtun population). This structure was fundamentally different from the society of medieval Europe.

The classical European-type large-land system, based on a centralized chain of fiefs, legally fixed serf dependence and stable, written law, could not develop in Afghanistan for several reasons. In Afghanistan, the development of the classical, European-type large-land system was primarily prevented by geographical features, political fragmentation, and deep-rooted tribal culture. When analysing the geographical features, geological, hydrographic, and topographical features, and their impact on the development of feudal relations, we must

conclude that the harsh, mountainous, and desert terrain of Afghanistan also physically hindered the formation of a unified, large-land-based state.

The arable agricultural resource base of Afghanistan is about 8 million hectares, which is 12 percent of the total land area. (See Annex 6). The main arable lands for permanent crops are located in the north and west of the country, as shown in the figure. Irrigated areas are generally located in the river basins of the north, west, and southwest. Although there are irrigated areas in the south and east of the country, their proportion is small compared to the north, west, and southwest. As shown in Annex 6, most of the country is mountainous or desert, where arable land is limited, often located in isolated valleys and oases. This fragmentation made it difficult to establish and administer the large, connected estates that characterized the European feudal system. Therefore, in many places, isolated agricultural production units were created. Arable land was often located in small, isolated valleys or oases. These areas were easier to control and protect at the local level, within the tribe, than from a distant centre. This fragmentation and the lack of good roads obviously made it difficult to implement a central administration. It was extremely costly and difficult for central governments to maintain administrative and military control over remote, mountainous areas.

This weakness allowed local systems to persist, as the strong tribal structure that came with it also provided a degree of autonomy. Among the Pashtun and other ethnic groups, land ownership and loyalty were not tied to a central king or feudal lord, but to the tribal, clan system. The power of tribal leaders was based on collective identity and local communities. Central governments (such as monarchies) were always too weak to override this local autonomy and impose a unified, top-down landholding system on the country. (Chang & Xiyao, 2022)

Another significant difference is that while in Europe the feudal lord-vassal relationship was vertical, it was organized along a pyramid of subordination from the king down. In Afghanistan, loyalty remained more horizontal, within the clan and the extended family network. The power of tribal leaders (khans) was based on the support and charisma of the community, rather than on exclusive, written law over the land. In Afghan history, central state power was almost always weak and rarely able to enforce property rights outside urban centres. Instead, several overlapping legal systems operated simultaneously: formal state law, Sharia (Islamic law), and Pashtunwali (Pashtun tribal customary law)

Land ownership rights were often informal, unwritten, and dependent on local power relations, which favoured powerful individuals rather than a unified landowning class.

In addition, various governments often used the distribution of public lands to reward their supporters—often tribal leaders or warlords—which further reinforced local, unwritten property relations and created opportunities for corruption and land grabbing. (Giustozzi & Ullah, 2006) It is also clear that another factor hindering the feudal system from reaching maturity was that Afghanistan was a conflict zone between different empires (British, Russian, Persian) for centuries. The skewed evolution of the Afghan state cannot be separated from relentless external interference. During the *"Great Game,"* British and Russian strategies transformed Afghanistan into a buffer zone, creating a dependency on external financial and military support that persisted throughout the twentieth century. Later, Cold War rivalries between the Soviet Union and the United States, followed by Pakistan's influence in supporting Islamist factions, entrenched patron–client relationships, and encouraged governance through foreign subsidies rather than domestic institutional development.

In *The Failure of Political Islam (1994)* and later in *Globalized Islam,* Roy (1994) expands this critique to argue that external attempts to reconstruct Afghan governance — whether Soviet, American, or international — consistently misunderstand local dynamics. These interventions impose frameworks of statehood that have no organic legitimacy within Afghan society. He concludes that Afghanistan represents *"the archetype of the non-state country," where political structures persist through negotiation and reciprocity rather than institutional sovereignty.* (Roy, 1994)

The post-2001 international intervention reinforced this pattern, funding a hyper-centralized bureaucracy that operated largely divorced from Afghanistan's social and cultural foundations.

The continuous wars, border changes, and the weakness of the central power did not allow the formation and consolidation of a stable, intergenerational, legally fixed large landowner class.

In Afghanistan, therefore, feudalism must be interpreted differently; this concept describes a different system in the case of Afghanistan. While in Europe the feudal system was a legally and militarily structured chain of fiefdoms from the king to the serf, in Afghanistan, the hierarchy depended on local power relations, armed power, and the tribal network. The "landowners" here were often warlords or tribal leaders who based their power not necessarily on written law but on military force and local support. (Bernt, 1983)

In European feudalism, large estates were the primary source of economy and wealth, based on settled agricultural production. In Afghanistan, a significant part of the economy was based on nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralism. Grazing rights were often communally owned by tribes, rather than in the exclusive possession of a single landlord.

In Afghanistan, due to the horizontal feudal system, it never reached the absolutist feudal state formation typical of European states. Thus, as we have seen, constitutional monarchy appears in Afghan history; this state arrangement could not have been the result of a social initiative from below, but only a monarchical initiative seeking modernization and reforms. The evolution of Afghan statehood has consistently been "skewed" by conflict between forces of centralization and entrenched localism. Each stage of reform or modernization was met with equally vigorous resistance, revealing the enduring tension between the ideals of a modern state and the realities of Afghanistan's tribal society. Olivier Roy argues that Afghan politics have always been based on "localist legitimacies" — family, religious, or tribal — that resist the abstraction of modern citizenship. (Roy, 1986) Hence, the Afghan state functions as a loose federation of autonomous actors rather than a unified administrative system.

The most persistent conflict lay between the monarchy's aspirations for reform and the vested interests of tribal elites. King Amanullah Khan's ambitious modernization programs in the 1920s — expanding education, reforming dress codes, and centralizing governance — provoked widespread rebellion among tribal leaders who saw these initiatives as assaults on their autonomy and traditional values. The collapse of his regime underscored the structural incompatibility of Western-inspired governance models within a framework of tribal legitimacy. Subsequent monarchs, such as Nadir Shah and Zahir Shah, adopted more cautious approaches, ruling through tribal intermediaries and maintaining the fragile equilibrium between reform and tradition. This equilibrium, however, perpetuated the weakness of central authority.

Another axis of tension emerged between secular state-building efforts and religious institutions. Afghanistan's ulema and traditional clerics often stood as moral counterweights to central governments perceived as un-Islamic or overly dependent on foreign partners. Religious opposition played a key role in mobilizing resistance to state reforms — from Amanullah's modernizing agenda to the communist regime of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in the late twentieth century. As religion became both a rallying point and a source of

legitimacy, it fragmented the political sphere into moral and secular rivalries, further destabilizing attempts at cohesive governance.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics has been a political system defined less by consolidation than by persistent fragmentation. Central authority in Afghanistan has remained fluid, negotiated, and contingent — existing in cities like Kabul while evaporating in the countryside. Periodic efforts to impose a centralized bureaucratic order have repeatedly triggered backlash and collapse, giving rise to cycles of reform, rebellion, and reconstruction.

In summary, the combined effect of several factors prevailed against the achievement of the full, mature level of the feudal system. Among these, the occasional lack or weakness of the central power structure played a significant role. The geographical features of the country were also an obstacle. In addition, the embedded tribal structures and the diversity of legal systems prevented the development of a large-scale land tenure system of the European type, which resulted in land as a resource of power remaining in the hands of local, autonomous networks. These reasons together led to the socio-economic structure moving towards a local, tribal-based power structure, i.e., towards a system that could be interpreted horizontally rather than vertically, avoiding the development of the classic European land tenure pattern.

2.3. Lack of bourgeois development as a key structural factor in state-building failure in Afghanistan

One of the most central and enduring structural problems in Afghanistan's modern history is the absence of bourgeois development. The term "bourgeois" here refers not merely to the rise of an urban middle class in economic terms, but to the emergence of a civic consciousness grounded in legal equality, individual autonomy, and participation in public life. In much of the modern world, the growth of a bourgeoisie has been closely linked to the formation of stable states and modern civil societies. Afghanistan, however, has remained primarily tribal, patrimonial, and religiously organized, where collective loyalties and personal ties have taken precedence over civic identity. This absence of a true bourgeois stratum has profoundly shaped Afghanistan's political instability, state weakness, and economic stagnation.

Bourgeois development presupposes a degree of urbanization, commerce, and economic autonomy, processes that Afghanistan never fully experienced. From the Durrani Empire of the eighteenth century to the late twentieth century, Afghan economic life was dominated by

subsistence agriculture and pastoralism, while the urban population remained small and politically marginal. (Barfield, 2010)

Efforts at modernization from King Amanullah Khan's Western-inspired reforms in the 1920s to Zahir Shah's cautious liberalization in the 1960s failed to generate a sustainable urban middle class or a productive economic base. Afghanistan's geography, characterized by rugged mountains and isolated valleys, further impeded the integration of markets and the circulation of people and ideas.

Unlike other parts of the Islamic world (for example, Ottoman or Persian cities like Istanbul or Isfahan), Afghan cities such as Kabul, Herat, and Kandahar never developed as autonomous centres of civic or mercantile power. Thus, the embryonic forms of a civil society, independent associations, guilds, or secular intellectual networks, never took root. The socio-economic foundation of bourgeois modernity remained absent.

Another key structural factor in the lack of civic development and the failure of state building can be identified as the dominant form of social structure in Afghanistan, the dominance of tribal and religious orders. In the absence of an economically grounded urban class, Afghan society remained structured around tribal and communal solidarities. Social belonging is derived not from professional identity or citizenship but from lineage, clan, and religious affiliation. Tribe and kin functioned as the primary units of loyalty and protection. Decisions, disputes, and justice were managed locally through customary law (Pashtunwali) or Islamic jurisprudence, bypassing the idea of neutral, state-administered law. Authority was personal and negotiated, not institutional or impersonal.

As Roy (1986) and Barfield (2010) both emphasize, Afghan social organization has remained segmentary, i.e., it operates through small-scale, self-sufficient networks that resist incorporation into national institutions. (Roy, 1986). *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan.* Cambridge University Press. The figure of the "citizen" (*civis*) is replaced by the "communitarian actor" (*member of a qaum*), whose rights and duties are defined by collective affiliation rather than state membership. (Barfield, 2010)

Religious authority has played a similar role. The Islamic clergy (ulema, mullahs) provided moral legitimacy and social cohesion in the absence of strong institutions. Islam in Afghanistan has historically functioned less as a centralized clerical hierarchy than as a moral and social fabric that legitimizes local power. (Roy, 1986) This configuration entrenched localized authority and inhibited the secular, individualist ethos typical of bourgeois societies.

One of the key elements of the success of state-building is the existence of economic conditions, but capitalist development in the European sense has not been realized in Afghanistan or has only been realized at a very low level. The bourgeoisie historically emerges alongside a market economy and commercial accumulation. In Afghanistan, however, economic modernization has remained severely constrained by several structural factors, as limited market integration. The economy remained village-based and self-sufficient. Urban merchants never gained enough economic or political influence on shaping policy, unlike in Egypt or Iran.

The external dependence present over a longer period also played a role in the development of the economy. Modernization efforts relied on foreign aid and patronage (British, Soviet, American), producing a rentier logic rather than domestic capital formation.

In addition, decades of armed conflict have fuelled a war economy because this period, from the Soviet invasion to the civil wars of the 1990s and the American fight against the Taliban, militarized the economy. Illicit trade, weapons smuggling, and narcotics production became dominant sectors, fostering patronage networks rather than a productive urban bourgeois class. Hence, Afghanistan's weak economic base prevented the formation of an independent entrepreneurial or professional class that could have acted as a stabilizing social force and demanded accountable governance.

The absence of bourgeois development has had devastating political consequences because it created a gap between the state and society. In modern states, the bourgeoisie typically mediates between state and populace — sustaining institutions, taxation, and civic participation. In Afghanistan, no such mediating class ever emerged.

Barnett (2002) notes that Afghan politics has long operated through clientelist networks and personal relationships rather than institutionalized representation. Local leaders — tribal chiefs, religious figures, or warlords — have functioned as intermediaries, but their legitimacy derived from personal patronage, not from civic accountability. (Barnett, 2002)

Consequently, the Afghan state appeared as an object of conquest rather than a shared institution; the loyalty was personal, not institutional. Moreover, the political participation in Afghan social life occurred through patronage and allegiance, not through public deliberation or legal citizenship. As a result of all this, without a civic culture of accountability and rights, state power remained predatory and arbitrary. Thus, every centralizing project, including

monarchic, socialist, Islamist, or democratic, faced legitimacy crises. Reform was viewed as an intrusion, and modernization as domination.

Throughout the twentieth century, Afghanistan frequently served as a laboratory of external modernization. Both superpowers and international agencies invested in developing infrastructure, education, and bureaucracy. Yet these reforms were imposed from above, not driven by domestic social demand.

As Roy (1994) argues, the Afghan middle class that emerged from these initiatives was "administrative, not entrepreneurial": it derived its status from state employment and foreign-funded projects, not from autonomous economic activity. (Roy, 1994)

When external funding collapsed, so did this proto-bourgeois stratum. The Western notion of the "citizen" — as a rights-bearing, tax-paying participant in the public sphere — did not find roots in Afghanistan. Imported institutions (parliament, elections, NGOs) remained form without substance, operating in a society where loyalty networks, not civic norms, defined legitimacy. The modern state was thus continuously "built and undone" (Roy, 2019).

The absence of bourgeois development in Afghanistan is not merely an economic shortcoming but a structural explanation for the persistent failure of state-building and modernization. The dominance of tribal loyalties, religious authority, and clientelist relations has prevented the emergence of a social order grounded in individual autonomy and civic responsibility.

The absence of a significant bourgeois class development in Afghanistan is primarily due to a combination of its historical status as an uncolonized buffer state, rugged geography, the persistence of strong pre-capitalist tribal and clan socio-economic structures, and perpetual conflict and political instability.

As Roy (2019) concludes, Afghanistan remains "the archetype of the non-state country": modern political forms exist, but the social basis that gives them life is absent. Until then, processes of urbanization, market integration, and civic consciousness take root, the Afghan polity will continue to oscillate between external dependency and internal disintegration, between traditional hierarchy and the elusive promise of modern citizenship. Without a self-sustaining urban middle class — the typical carrier of political moderation, bureaucratic competence, and economic innovation — Afghanistan's attempts at sovereignty have repeatedly collapsed into fragmentation.

2.4.The urban middle class in Afghanistan: its emergence, weakness, limited weight, and political role in the state-building process

The urban middle class, which is one of the main engines and guarantors of modernization, political stability, and social mobility in Western countries, has been a particularly weak and unstable social stratum in the history of Afghanistan. In countries where successful state-building and modernization took place, the middle class became the bearer of civic values, human rights, political pluralism, education, entrepreneurship, and liberal political participation. However, in Afghanistan, the urban middle class was never able to consolidate itself as an independent political and economic force. Its emergence was limited by the backwardness of the economic structure, tribal and religious ties, and external dependence, which distorted the processes of modernization.

Historically, Afghanistan's economy has been based on subsistence agriculture and pastoral nomadism. Urban centres such as Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-i-Sharif functioned primarily as administrative and trading hubs, not as industrialized centres of production or cultural modernization. Industrialization in Afghanistan is nascent, heavily reliant on small-scale handicrafts, with larger industries (construction materials, food, textiles) struggling due to conflict, lack of power, and limited investment, though recent efforts focus on self-sufficiency in goods, promoting local manufacturing, and attracting investment, with mixed results influenced by political instability and dependency on aid.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Afghanistan's urban layers consisted mainly of merchants, craftsmen, civil servants, and religious scholars, i.e., social groups that were integrated into the tribal and religious order rather than standing apart as a modern bourgeoisie. Efforts at urban and bureaucratic modernization, particularly during King Amanullah Khan's reign (1919–1929), sought to create a new educated bureaucratic elite. However, these projects faced fierce resistance from conservative tribal and religious forces, leading to their collapse. As Barfield (2010) notes, Afghan cities remained extensions of rural tribal hierarchies rather than autonomous civic spaces. Urban identities rarely supplanted communal ones. This embeddedness of urban life within broader kinship networks prevented the emergence of a self-dependent civic culture. (Barfield, 2010)

The Soviet occupation (1979–1989) and the subsequent civil wars profoundly reshaped Afghanistan's urban society. The pro-Soviet state prioritized technocrats and ideologically loyal cadres, but the ongoing conflict decimated the urban educated elite. Many members of

the middle class emigrated to Pakistan, Iran, or Western countries, contributing to a severe "brain drain." Those associated with the royal dynasty left the country after the communist takeover, while the intelligentsia associated with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) fled from the Taliban.

This unfortunate period can be described as one of total social disintegration, in which the remnants of the prewar civil and bureaucratic middle class were replaced by warlords, commanders, and religious leaders who derived power from violence and patronage rather than education or civic merit. The wars eroded the institutional foundations that sustain middle-class continuity — schools, universities, professions, and bureaucracies.

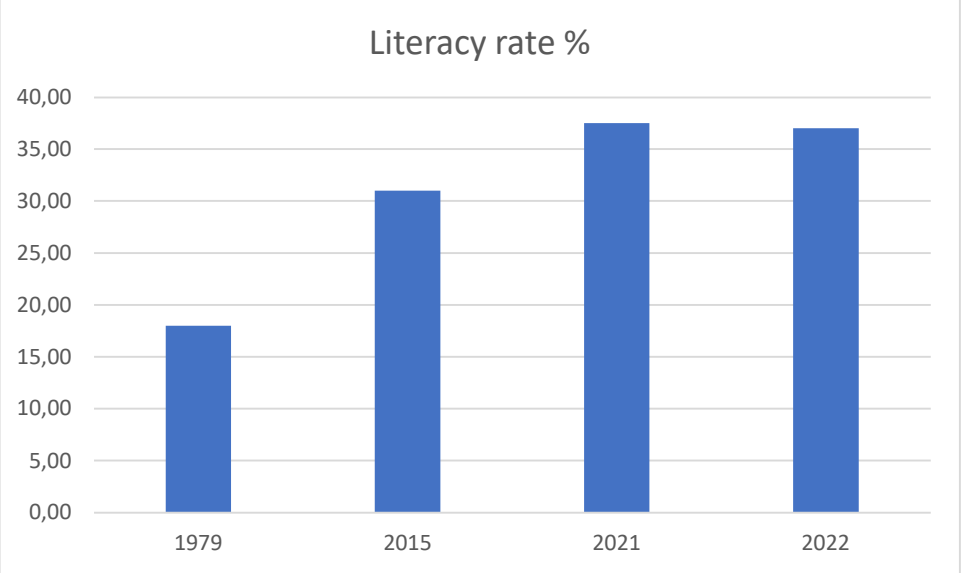
This very devastating process has occurred in a country where illiteracy is already very high. According to UNESCO database, the Afghanistan's adult literacy rate is very low, around 37% (2021), with significant gender disparities: about 52% for men and only 27-22% for women, while youth literacy (ages 15-24) shows higher rates but still large gaps, around 83% for males and 44% for females (2022). In the past decade, UNESCO has provided over 1 million learners with Basic General Literacy and Skills-based Literacy. These figures highlight major challenges in access to education, especially for girls and women, making it one of the lowest globally. (UNESCO (2023) *Community-based Literacy and Complementary Learning Possibilities*). The 2025 reports do not show a numerical decline in the overall adult literacy rate (which was also 37.3% according to 2022 data) but indicate that the situation is stagnating due to serious political and humanitarian reasons, and that the prospects are dramatically deteriorating, especially for women.

The extent of the deterioration can be measured in the complete exclusion of girls and women from education, which has a long-term impact on the future proportion of literate adults because 2.2 million girls have dropped out of secondary education due to the ban in place since August 2021. Moreover, the female enrolment in higher education fell from 27% to zero between 2019 and 2024. In addition, the quality of education has deteriorated dramatically: according to 2025 data, more than 90% of ten-year-olds cannot read even a simple text ("schooling without learning"). Male higher education enrolment has also decreased by about 40% since 2019. Since August 2021, the de facto authorities (Taliban) have banned secondary education for girls (above grade 6), excluding approximately 2.2 million adolescent girls from education. (UNESCO (2023) Community-based Literacy and Complementary Learning

Possibilities. This policy is expected to further worsen female literacy rates in the future, as I presented in Table No. 1, data from the UNESCO report.

We can observe not only gender but also geographical inequalities in terms of illiteracy. Illiteracy rates are much higher in rural areas, where most of the population lives, due to a lack of educational infrastructure (schools, classrooms, transportation).

Table No. 1: Literacy rate in Afghanistan 1979-2022



Illiteracy rates are not only gender-based but also geographically based. Areas inhabited by Tajiks and Uzbeks (primarily the northern and northeastern parts of the country) have historically had better educational infrastructure, and the proportion of the urban population is also higher in these regions.

They often live in urban areas and have historically had higher participation in modern education, government bureaucracy, and commerce, which has led to higher literacy rates within their communities. While precise data are not available, expert estimates put the literacy rate at around 50-60%. Under the first Taliban regime (1996–2001), and even more so after the second Taliban came to power, the educated urban middle class faced systematic suppression. The limited professional and cultural freedoms that had survived through the 1980s were severely curtailed. Teachers, writers, artists, women professionals, and journalists either fled the country or were driven into silence. Urban culture reverted to the margins of political life. The U.S.-led intervention in 2001 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan temporarily revived urban life. A new cosmopolitan middle class emerged in Kabul and other cities, composed of educated youth fluent in English and connected to the global aid and

development economy. This class consisted of professionals working for international organizations, NGOs, media outlets, and development agencies. It fostered new forms of civic engagement and cosmopolitan aspirations, particularly among women and young people.

However, its social and economic foundations were external, dependent on the flow of international aid, foreign contracts, and US military presence. Tragically, this new generation became the primary target for the Taliban, and they were executed in significant numbers; the luckier ones were able to escape. This so-called "international middle class" in Afghanistan, some economists estimated that this group grew from almost zero in 2001 to potentially 2.75 to 4.13 million people by around 2013. (Kazem, 2013)

This emerging middle class, largely concentrated in Kabul and other major cities, was primarily linked to the influx of international aid, the expansion of a service-based economy (government, defence, and related services), and investments in education and urban infrastructure. They were characterized by higher incomes, better education, and aspirations for modern lifestyles and political participation. Naturally, this layer was receptive to American democratization processes and was among the few who supported state-building efforts. As noted by Roy (2019), Afghanistan's ongoing cycles of modernization consistently lead to the emergence of "internationalized middle classes," which disappear as soon as their external backing is withdrawn.

The withdrawal of foreign troops and financial support in 2021 sparked exactly this kind of exodus: the Afghan urban middle class either fled the country, faced execution, or quickly lost their economic foundation, leaving a void that was once again filled by religious and tribal power. The absence, weakness, and fragility of the middle class had serious consequences. The elusive nature of Afghanistan’s middle class has had far-reaching political and cultural consequences: From a political point of view, it deprived the Afghan state of a stabilizing, law-abiding citizenry invested in institutional continuity. Without a strong middle class, the state repeatedly became the property of ruling elites rather than an instrument of collective interest. In the area of culture, the urban modernity remained perceived as alien, not understandable, hated “Westernized,” and detached from traditional Afghan identity, fuelling resentment in rural areas. Socially, the lack of a mediating stratum between elites and poorer rural populations exacerbated polarization and hindered the development of a national civic consciousness. Roy (1994) and Rubin (2002) both argue, and as a former ISAF employee, I strongly affirm the truth of their finding, that without a socially rooted urban middle class, modernization became an

imported performance, a format without real lasting content, incapable of creating lasting institutions or legitimacy. Until such a class can emerge organically, sustained by domestic markets, education, and social institutions, Afghanistan's modernization will remain externally imposed and internally unstable.

In sum, the Afghan urban middle class has remained marginal, dependent, and cyclical, emerging with each wave of modernization and vanishing with each political collapse. It has never acquired the economic autonomy or cultural legitimacy required to become a self-sustaining bourgeoisie.

2.5. Summary

I have argued that as a result, Afghanistan's political legitimacy has remained local and patrimonial, rather than legal-rational. I examined the themes of tribalism, religious authority, and cultural hybridity in their contexts. I have argued that the prevalence of tribal and religious dynamics has demonstrably influenced the structure of Afghan governance to a greater extent than any externally introduced institutional models. The primary mechanism for both political mobilization and the maintenance of social order remain the tribe, rather than the individual, a dynamic particularly salient in Pashtun areas.

At the same time, Islamic law (Sharia) coexists with tribal customs, sometimes reinforcing them and sometimes contradicting them. The fusion of these systems has created a distinctive hybrid form of governance. The obvious reason for this is that Afghan Islam has long functioned as a moral and social structure, rather than a centralized clerical hierarchy. Religious leaders—the ulema and mullahs—have exercised influence at the local level, mediating between divine law and community consensus.

This hybridization limited the consolidation of formal institutions. State law could not easily supersede *Pashtunwali* or religious arbitration, because both derived legitimacy from social embeddedness rather than legal abstraction. Modern bureaucratic authority — grounded in impersonal rules and citizenship — thus confronted deep cultural resistance. Attempts to formalize power often appeared *alien and illegitimate* in a society governed by personalized networks and customary norms. Ethnicity has added another layer of structural fragmentation. Afghanistan's population has never coalesced around a shared national identity. Historical

Pashtun dominance in state institutions, the army, and political leadership has repeatedly alienated non-Pashtun communities.

Rubin (2002) argues that Afghanistan's political order evolved as an "imperial periphery," where the centre ruled through coercion and patronage rather than inclusive citizenship. This asymmetric relationship reinforced perceptions of marginalization: Pashtun rulers were often seen as agents of domination rather than unifying leaders. Meanwhile, the mountainous terrain allowed minorities to maintain de facto autonomy, fostering self-sufficient regional power structures. Ethnic exclusion thus became both a cause and a symptom of state weakness. Successive governments failed to create a national bureaucracy that reflected the country's diversity or to devise mechanisms for equitable resource distribution. The result was an enduring legitimacy deficit, which insurgent movements repeatedly exploited.

Foreign powers have been central to the Afghan state-building paradox. External actors have repeatedly tried to impose modern state frameworks onto a society organized around patronage and local legitimacy. During the nineteenth century, British colonial policy sought to transform Afghanistan into a buffer state, defining its borders and supporting pliant rulers like Abdur Rahman Khan. The result was an artificial territorial entity whose internal cohesion was never realized. The Soviet occupation (1979–1989) introduced a new bureaucratic centralization under the People's Democratic Party, but its Marxist reforms clashed with Islam and tradition, provoking massive resistance. The U.S.-led intervention (2001–2021) reproduced similar dynamics in liberal-democratic form. Western donors financed a highly centralized constitution and state apparatus modelled on Weberian governance principles. It should be emphasized that this model was sociologically misplaced: it assumed the existence of a civic nation and impersonal institutions that Afghanistan lacked. Instead of empowering local governance, foreign assistance reinforced clientelism, rent seeking, and dependency. When external funding diminished, the state collapsed once more. The cumulative result of these historical and cultural factors is a self-reinforcing cycle of fragility. Afghanistan's state-building paradox, therefore, lies not merely in military weakness or governance deficits but in the mismatch between political form and social foundation. Every modern state model — whether monarchic, socialist, or liberal — has failed because it misunderstood the embedded norms that shape Afghan legitimacy.

2.6. Hypothesis Testing

With reference to the H2 that was formulated as follows: H2 (Cultural and Institutional Clash): The failure of the U.S.-led state-building was primarily due to the attempt to impose an external, Western-style democratic model without adequate consideration of local cultural traditions and traditional political, governmental, and administrative structures.

1. **A)** *U.S.-led state-building effort failed.*
2. **B)** *The failure was due to imposing an external, Western-style democratic model.*
3. **C)** *This model ignored local cultural traditions.*
4. **D)** *This model ignored traditional political, governmental, and administrative structures.*

Relationship	A	B	C	D
A	—	True	True	True
B	False	—	True	True
C	False	False	—	True
D	False	False	False	—

Meaning:

- **A → B (True):** The failure of U.S.-led state-building is explained by the Western model.
- **A → C (True):** The failure also stems from the neglect of local traditions.
- **A → D (True):** Likewise, ignoring traditional institutions contributed to the failure.
- **B → C (True):** The Western model contradicted local cultural norms.
- **B → D (True):** The Western model clashed with traditional governance structures.
- **C → D (True):** Cultural neglect often overlaps with ignoring political/administrative traditions.
- **D** has no outgoing “True” relationships (final consequence rather than cause).

The self-connection is marked by “—".

Like H1, I have plotted the H2’s results of the comparative matrix in a visual graph. (see ANNAX 1). Based on the above, I found my hypothesis H2, also to be completely proven.

2.7. Conclusion

Failure of Afghanistan’s post-2001 state- and nation-building efforts cannot be explained merely by resource insufficiency, but by the complete lack of synchronization between the institutional, cultural, and social facets of modernization. The state’s formal structures existed on paper but failed to take root in the daily life of Afghan society, leaving a fragile system devoid of genuine legitimacy and durability.

In addition, the externally imposed Western state framework in post-2001 Afghanistan clashed with the country’s socio-political realities and local stages of development on several fundamental levels. These points of contention stemmed from deep divergences between imported institutional models and Afghanistan’s historical traditions of governance, social organization, and political legitimacy.

Western state-builders promoted a highly centralized political model, with strong presidential authority and bureaucratic control. However, Afghanistan’s traditional political order has always been decentralized and plural, relying on local governance through tribal elders (*maliks*), councils (*jirgas*), and religious leaders. This produced a disconnect between the formal state and the social base of authority. Because local actors were marginalized in decision-making, central institutions appeared externally imposed and illegitimate.

The modern Western nation-state presupposes a cohesive national identity under a unified political authority. Afghanistan, however, was, and remains, a mosaic of ethnolinguistic, tribal, and sectarian identities, including Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. The externally imposed model underestimated these internal divisions and the historical absence of a unified national consciousness. Top-down nation-building failed to reconcile these competing identities, instead reproducing patterns of exclusion and mistrust.

In essence, the externally designed Western framework conflicted with Afghanistan’s reality because it imposed institutions and norms that lacked organic roots in Afghan society. Rather than evolving from local traditions and capacities, state-building was largely a technocratic exercise shaped by donor priorities. The failure to harmonize imported models with indigenous governance patterns and developmental stages ultimately undermined

legitimacy, sustainability, and public trust — key ingredients of any successful state formation process.

I do believe that, and based upon my research outcomes, I could argue that until these historical legacies are addressed, not by erasing them, but by integrating them into governance structures that reflect Afghan realities, every attempt at institutional reform will continue to collapse. The major reason for this, as Roy (2019) aptly summarizes, Afghanistan represents "the archetype of the non-state country": a polity where the forms of modern governance exist, but the social content that sustains them is missing. Western-style nation-building emphasized liberal-democratic values—individual rights, gender equality, and market reforms—often without sufficient engagement with the conservative social and religious fabric of Afghan society. This cultural disconnect deepened alienation between the population and the externally designed state institutions.

In this light, I should conclude that Afghanistan's tragedy is not the absence of state-building effort, but the persistent cultural and structural misfit between imported visions of order and the lived realities of Afghan society.

I have concluded that, unlike in many developing states where the middle class grew out of industrialization and private-sector accumulation, Afghanistan's urban middle strata emerged primarily through bureaucratic employment, military service, education, and foreign aid–supported sectors. From the early twentieth century onward—particularly during the reigns of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and King Amanullah—state modernization projects produced a small cohort of civil servants, teachers, military officers, and professionals concentrated in Kabul and a few provincial capitals.

Chapter III: Normative Discord and Ethnic Fragmentation: The Social Foundations of State-Building Failure in Afghanistan

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I highlighted that the contemporary history of Afghanistan is marked by ongoing cycles of state formation, breakdown, and violent conflict. Scholars in comparative politics frequently link these failures to outside interference, colonial border divisions, inadequate economic progress, or the challenging terrain of the Hindu Kush. For example, Seth G (2009) argued that "Mountain warfare", difficult-to-control valleys, and peripheral areas hinder government presence. (Seth G, 2009.)

Barnett (2002) emphasized that regional and great-power interventions—British-Russian competition, then US-Pakistan-Saudi support—reorganized the local power field, disrupting the central state. (Barnett, 2002) Another scholar, Gilles (2005), stated that Soviet intervention and Pakistani strategy perpetuated fragmentation and the militia system. (Dorronsoro, 2005)

Moreover, Giustozzi (2009) highlighted that External sponsors keep warlords alive, which undermines state-building.

According to Barfield (2010), the Durand Line and the British “buffer state” concept created an unstable periphery that Kabul was never able to integrate.

Nonetheless, while these aspects are certainly significant, I contend that additional factors have also contributed to the emergence of state fragility and the shortcomings in state-building. In this chapter, I will explore how the ethnic makeup of Afghanistan's population, along with the existence of entrenched tribal customs and their opposition to centralization efforts, has impacted and ultimately led to the inability of any government initiative since the late nineteenth century to establish a lasting, legitimate, and centralized Afghan state.

I do believe the issue originates from a more profound structural barrier: the conflicting norms between diverse moral and political systems, coupled with deeply ingrained ethnic divisions that influence the allocation of power, allegiances, and identities.

In order to show that deep normative contradictions (conflicts over values, authority, and legitimacy) and ongoing ethnic fragmentation played a major role and undermined the possibility of a unified political community, I will examine the internal contradictions tearing

apart society in this chapter. I will also show that state-building did not fail primarily due to institutional weakness or outside intervention.

In this chapter, I will examine and make the case that normative conflict is the clash and nearly unsolvable opposition between various systems of legitimacy—religious jurisprudence, modern bureaucratic rationalism, revolutionary ideologies, and tribal codes—all of which assert moral authority within Afghan politics. Furthermore, Afghanistan's ethnic fragmentation represents a complex mosaic of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and many other tribes with very different political goals and historical backgrounds. Together, they produce a fractured political environment where no state has ever been able to establish a monopoly of power or coercion, and no normative framework has ever acquired cross-ethnic legitimacy.

Additionally, I will analyse and contend in this section of my thesis that these mutually reinforcing pressures are the main cause of the Afghan state-building's failure. While ethnic fragmentation determines patterns of alliance, resistance, and political mobilization, normative conflict impedes the growth of common expectations of government. When combined, they provide an institutional instability cycle that reinforces itself. I break up my analysis into four sections: first, the historical underpinnings of normative pluralism; second, the evolution of ethnic fault lines; and third, the interplay between conflicting moral orders and ethnic politics, as well as their combined impact on state-building initiatives in the 20th and 21st centuries.

3.2. The historical roots and underpinnings of normative pluralism in Afghanistan

From the early Durrani state in the mid-eighteenth century to the twentieth-century modernizers, Afghan rulers confronted a social order dominated by tribal autonomy and localized customary law. Among Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group, the *Pashtunwali* code established principles of honour, justice, mediation, and retaliation that operated independently of state authority. The code valued egalitarian male participation in decision-making (via *jirgas*) and resisted external intrusion. This cultural logic produced a deeply embedded expectation that legitimacy arises from communal consensus, not from bureaucratic or distant political institutions. Pashtun tribal autonomy is fundamentally linked to Pashtunwali. The Pashtunwali, an old, unwritten code of honour and conduct that has long been the cornerstone of social order in Pashtun-populated regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan, is inextricably related

to Pashtun tribal autonomy. This rule permits tribes to follow their own customs and traditional legal systems while operating mostly autonomously of central administrations.

Rather, I contend that the Pashtunwali possesses its own rationale and serves as an illustration of what Richard McAdams and Zafar R. Siddiqui referred to as "judicial anarchy" in a different context. (McAdams, Richard, Siddiqui, Zafar, 2015, pp. 108-120).

In a community lacking a competent state apparatus, individuals need to seek alternative methods for settling conflicts. In this type of society, penalties are personal and are carried out by the victim (often not themselves), rather than by a central government. Nevertheless, personal violence comes with the potential for revenge and an increase in violence to a more severe degree. To curb the rise in violence, it is essential for institutions to clarify what constitutes violations and to resolve disputes, preventing parties from wasting excessive resources on conflict. Pashtunwali offers general principles for identifying legitimate conflict issues and establishes a mechanism, the jirga, for handling disputes when they occur. It offers a proto-legal framework that exists alongside, enhances, and at times clashes with the official legal system of the state. Pashtunwali lacks comprehensive regulations for every possible situation. The normative aspects of Pashtunwali, as we will observe, are quite adaptable and can be regarded more as a code of honour rather than a traditional legal code.

Although Pashtun customs bear some resemblance to the customary law of other Afghan tribes, they are distinctive in both their persistence and their harshness. They constitute the primary normative rules in force in the region: the governments of both Pakistan and Afghanistan have little influence in areas where large Pashtuns live, and in some cases have no contact with these populations at all. Afghanistan has never really had a central government that effectively covered the entire country, and Pakistani criminal and civil law is not even nominally applicable in the so-called tribal areas of the North-West Frontier Province, as stated by Ginsburg (2011, pp. 96-99). Rather than coming from classical Islamic texts, many of the harsh regulations of the previous and present Taliban governments were developed from Pashtun practices; in recent years, the treatment of women has drawn a lot of unfavourable attention. Although the Pashtunwali may appear to be a primitive code, replacing it with contemporary legislation would be beneficial for all parties.

This framing of the issue, however, sets enlightened moderns living under the rule of law against unsophisticated rural communities. The main pillars of Pashtunwali are "Melmasthia" (hospitality), Badal (revenge), Nanawatay (providing asylum), Tarboorwali (agnatic rivalry),

Siyali (competition within an extended family, Nang (honour), Namus (chastity of women), and Jirga (council of the elders). The rules of Pashtunwali are unwritten, and many of them revolve around the central concept of *Nang.* The central concept in Pashtun society encompasses an individual's and family's reputation and social standing. Defending one's honour is the paramount duty, at any cost.

The Nang is usually translated as honour. While some behaviours are thought to strengthen honour, others are thought to undermine it. Nang is comparable to a good reputation, which is a capital good that may be lost with time. Pashtun society is renowned for its lack of hierarchy: elders and those in positions of leadership are respected, yet every Pashtun man has unalienable rights. The relationship that Afghans have with guns is unique. The gun acts as an equalizing force and is a necessary possession. Craig Cordell Naumann argued (2009) that because of the way it treats women, the Pashtunwali has also drawn interest and disgust from outside sources (Cordell, 2009). Despite being inferior and subservient, women should be protected above all else since they are a source of honour. Dishonouring a man's wife is a certain cause for conflict. The “Melmasthia” is an essential aspect of the Pashtunwali ethical code. “Melma” translates to visitor. Nonetheless, hospitality ought not to be understood in the manner a Westerner might perceive it. It signifies providing hospitality to visitors, regardless of differences in race, religion, and economic status. It also implies that when sheltered by the host, the guest must not be injured or delivered to the foe. This is unrelated to any past connection between the host and the guest. In this regard, melmasthia is prioritized over *badall* (an additional principle of Pashtunwali); therefore, even an adversary seeking refuge must be offered sanctuary and defended from their chasers.

Elphinstone observed in 1815: “The Afghans' hospitality is their most notable trait.” The application of this virtue is deeply tied to national pride, to the extent that the criticism of an unwelcoming individual is that he lacks "Pashtunwali" (Elphinstone, 1969, p. 226).

Osama bin Laden took advantage of Mullah Omar’s kindness when he, in breach of his promise, initiated an attack on the United States from Afghanistan, fully aware that the Taliban would not deliver him to the Americans. The principles of Pashtunwali, especially Nanawatay (asylum, a weaker party can seek refuge or ask for forgiveness from a stronger party, and if the request is accepted, the stronger party is obligated to protect the asylum seeker, even at the cost of their own life) and Melmasthia, were key in his decision. The centrality of honour (Nang): It is often emphasized in the literature that the central concepts in Pashtun society are Nang

(honour) and Saram (shame), and that the expulsion of a guest would have been considered the greatest shame.

The Taliban viewed extradition as an attack on the Muslim community and their own honour. Pashtunwali still exists, representing a unified code of conduct in a society where justice is not readily available and is inaccessible to most people because the reach of state laws is minimal. Understanding Pashtunwali does not provide a roadmap for governing Pashtun tribes. It is not some magic bullet. However, it does help us understand Pashtun culture. Once understood, the framework can help us develop a strategy for working with the tribes.

To achieve the academic goals of this thesis, it is necessary to examine the relationship between Pashtunwali and Sharia. In everyday life in Pashtun regions, the two systems operate in parallel. Most people choose the jirga (Pashtunwali) for dispute resolution because it is faster, cheaper, and more embedded in local social norms than the weak and often corrupt formal state courts. Political actors, such as the Taliban, advocate the exclusive application of Sharia and often attempt to override Pashtun traditions, especially those that conflict with Sharia law or undermine their central authority. Nevertheless, Pashtunwali deeply permeates Pashtun culture and influences social behaviour and decision-making even among the Taliban.

The relationship between Pashtunwali and Sharia law (Islamic law) is complex, ranging from coexistence to conflict, depending on local interpretation and the strength of the central government. Although both play a significant role in Pashtun societies, there are significant differences in their origins, flexibility, and specific norms.

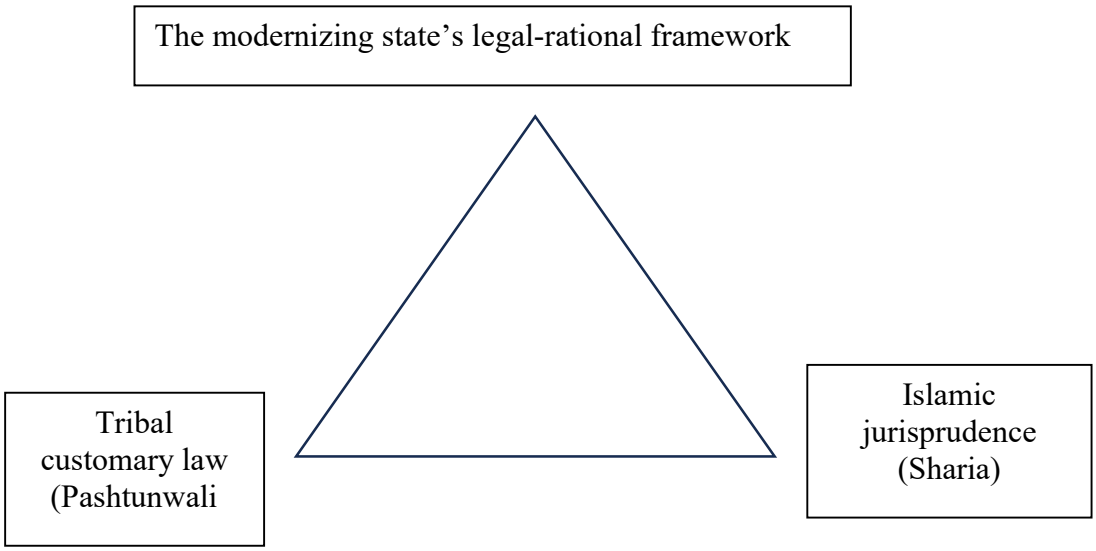
Islamic jurisprudence constituted a parallel moral order. Sunni Hanafi scholars held significant autonomy through courts, endowments, and educational institutions. Their authority often overlapped—but sometimes clashed—with tribal norms. For ulema, legitimacy stemmed from religious learning and the application of divine law (sharia). As Khan, Hamid M. (2015) noted, the two systems overlap in many cases, but in practice, they often conflict, especially in relation to women's rights and criminal justice issues. (Khan, 2015) In the following table, I have summarized the main differences between Sharia and Pashtunwali.

Table No. 3: Comparison of Pashtunwali and Sharia

Feature	Pashtunwali (Customary Law)	Sharia (Islamic Law)
Source of Law	Oral tradition, tribal customs, and local precedents	Quran, Sunnah (Prophet's example), and scholarly interpretations
Judicial Body	Jirga (council of elders) uses mediation and arbitration based on local consensus.	Qadi (judge) within a formal, state-sanctioned court system
Women's Rights	Often restricts women's inheritance rights, consent in marriage, and public life; emphasizes seclusion (*purdah*) to protect male honour.	Gives specific rights to women in inheritance, divorce, and marital consent, which Pashtun practice often ignores
Justice System	Emphasizes “Badal” (retributive justice/revenge) to restore honour	Favors formal, state-sanctioned punishments and divine justice; the Quran asks for forgiveness

While the systems overlap in some areas, conflict often arises in practice, particularly regarding women's rights and criminal justice. Sharia is often viewed as an ideal, while Pashtunwali governs daily life in many rural areas. The simultaneous presence of Sharia, Pashtun legal systems, and centralizing, modernizing rulers and governments created a tripartite legal field in a contradictory system, which I present in the following diagram.

Figure No. 1: Tripartite legal field



No single system was fully integrated with the others. Instead, governance developed as a patchwork of legal systems, each of which demanded the loyalty of different segments of society. The Pashtunwali code of law has played and continues to play a vital role in maintaining tribal autonomy. In the often remote, mountainous Pashtun regions, where central state authority is weak or absent, the Pashtunwali ensures social order and manages conflicts within and between tribes.

Pashtunwali also played a significant role in the struggle against external forces. The Pashtun population's fierce resistance to external influence - be it the British Empire, the Soviet Union, or Western powers - stemmed from a desire for independence and the protection of *"Nang"* (honour) as enshrined in the Pashtun code of law. The Pashtun population's fierce resistance to outside influence – whether from the British Empire, the Soviet Union, or Western forces – stems from the desire for independence and the defence of *"Nang"* (honour) as enshrined in the Pashtunwali.

The jirga system allows communities to make local decisions and manage their affairs, reinforcing their autonomous status vis-à-vis the state. The operation of the Jirga often intentionally bypasses or conflicts with state laws (for example, regarding women's rights). This creates a *de facto* sovereignty in the tribal areas, forcing the state to acknowledge the Jirga's decisions to maintain social peace and stability.

As argued by Ginsburg & McAdams (2004), the Jirga functions as a decentralized, bottom-up governance mechanism that historically allows communities to maintain a degree of self-rule while managing conflicts with external, state-level interference. The decisions made

by a Jirga are based on the consensus of local elders and deeply rooted community traditions (*Pashtunwali*). This internal legitimacy is often far stronger and more accepted than the distant and frequently perceived as alien state legal system. (Ginsburg & McAdams, 2004, pp. 1229–1314)

The state is often unable or unwilling to protect the honour, property, or resolve the disputes of local communities effectively. The Jirga provides immediate, local justice and protection (e.g., through the regulated application of *Badal*, or retribution), which is essential to the Pashtun way of life. In sum, the Jirga provides the meta-rules for a functional, "anarchic" legal system without a central state, effectively replacing the modern state's courts and police force and solidifying the communities' autonomous status.

Overall, Pashtunwali is a deeply rooted cultural and ethical code that enables Pashtun tribes to preserve their autonomy and distinctive way of life, often bypassing modern nation-state legal systems.

Attempts to impose centralized systems of taxation, conscription, or legal reform repeatedly collided with these indigenous norms. For tribes, state centralization meant encroachment on local autonomy; for rulers, it was a prerequisite for a modern state. The resulting tension hardened into a structural pattern: Afghan elites in Kabul promoted administrative modernization, while rural communities insisted on maintaining interpretive authority over justice and social regulation. Normative pluralism becomes *normative conflict* when actors actively reject each other’s concepts of legitimate rule.

3.2.The Modernizers and the Crisis of Normative Integration

The "crisis of normative integration" arises from the modernizers' aim to harmonize these three systems (i.e., Pashtunwali, Sharia, and the modern state framework) or, more often, to subordinate traditional systems to state law. However, state law enforcement is often weak and limited in the peripheries. Local communities, remaining on the ground of pragmatism, call upon the normative system that proves most effective in each situation, be it a local Jirga (tribal council) or a state police force.

The crisis stems not only from the technical incompatibility of laws, but also from deeper cultural and political resistance. The universal norms promoted by the modern state (such as

gender equality or individual rights) often stand in stark contrast to traditional, hierarchical social structures and codes of honour. Modernization thus brings not only development, but also profound conflicts over identity, power, and the nature of legitimate justice. Efforts by Abdur Rahman Khan (1880–1901), Amanullah Khan (1919–1929), and the mid-twentieth-century reformers sought to rationalize administration and weaken tribal autonomy. Their projects introduced constitutions, centralized armies, secular education systems, and bureaucratic courts. Yet these reforms challenged entrenched moral expectations: they threatened to replace community-based authority with distant state institutions.

The downfall of Amanullah's progressive government in January 1929 illustrated the issue. The downfall of the reformist regime in January 1929 resulted from a broad tribal revolt and opposition from Islamic conservative factions aiming to enhance central state authority and expedite modernization. The fall exemplifies a "crisis of normative integration," as the modernizers' Westernized, rational-legal framework conflicted with entrenched local traditions (Pashtunwali) and Sharia law.

His policies attempted to introduce new legal codes, unveil women, and integrate rural districts under central control. Resistance came not simply from economic grievances but from the perceived erosion of moral and cultural order. For many Afghans, the reforms violated the normative foundations of social life, turning the modernization project into a cultural threat. These was the reasons why he failed to secure support from powerful elites (tribal leaders, religious scholars) who stood to lose power and didn't build a strong enough military to enforce changes. The example to follow, Turkey, modernized by Atatürk, had a strong army, so Atatürk successfully crushed the various rebellions.

Amanullah's attempt to transform Afghanistan into a modern nation-state like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkey alienated several key interest groups and made them enemies of the reform effort. One fundamental mistake was the neglect of traditional structures. Amanullah ignored the tribal leaders (khans) and religious elders (ulema), who traditionally held significant power in local affairs and in Jirgas. His reforms, such as tax reforms and compulsory conscription, directly threatened the economic and social privileges of these elite groups. His ambitious modernization projects, including building infrastructure and industries (like cement, sugar), were costly and financed partly by cutting subsidies and levying new taxes, burdening the populace. So, he introduced cash taxation instead of the previous commodity-based taxation, which made the situation of the peasants more difficult and threatened the collapse of

the traditional economic order. Although he tried to introduce new technologies and industries, the country did not have enough skilled technical personnel to successfully operate the initiatives, so many plans failed.

The example to follow, Turkey, modernized by Atatürk, had a strong army, so Atatürk successfully defeated various rebellions. According to Zürcher (2004), in Atatürk's Turkey, after the establishment of the republic in 1923, four major, large-scale rebellions occurred, two of which (Şeyh Said and Ararat) lasted for several years and required a serious military effort to suppress. Amanullah, however, was so confident in the success of the reforms that he neglected to maintain a strong and loyal army to protect him from opposition to the reforms. When an uprising broke out in 1928, the army was unable to protect his regime.

Unfortunately, Amanullah Khan's ten-year rule was marked by a fierce struggle between traditional values and the desire for modernization. Khan's reformist aspirations met with stiff resistance. However, the reforms affected women's rights and education in addition to the constitution. The resistance based on religion arose from a weak imitation of the state system of Western countries. The collapse of Amanullah's reformist regime in 1929 epitomized the problem. His policies attempted to introduce new legal codes, unveil women, and integrate rural districts under central control. Resistance came not simply from economic grievances but from the perceived erosion of moral and cultural order. For many Afghans, the reforms violated the normative foundations of social life, turning the modernization project into a cultural threat. Thus, long before the arrival of ideological movements or ethnicized militias, the Afghan political field was already fractured by multiple, competing moral orders, each incompatible with centralized rule.

The findings of my research indicate, as I have shown previously, that the decline and failure of Afghanistan's initial modernization effort stemmed from the dominance of traditional structures, inadequate cultural readiness for modernization, the imposition of foreign cultural influences, the external and rushed character of cultural shifts (such as enforced transparency, banning polygamy, mandatory education for girls, and related reforms), the disregard for reference groups, and the discontent of influential leaders with the modernization efforts. The "top-down" nature of the reforms and the forced adoption of Western cultural trappings, such as the requirement for men to wear Western attire (suits, hats), deeply offended traditional Afghan values. Measures affecting women's rights, such as the abolition of the compulsory veil

and the education of girls, were particularly opposed by conservatives, who saw them as an attack on Islamic norms.

In sum, the crisis of modernizers and normative integration is an inevitable byproduct of the process of trying to impose a monolithic state legal system on deeply pluralistic, multi-layered societies. The Pashtun example highlights that law is not simply a command directed from above, but a living, contested field where the forces of tradition, religion, and modernity continuously shape people's normative reality.

3.3.Ethnic Fragmentation and the Absence of a Shared National Community

Afghanistan's ethnic landscape is shaped by layered histories of migration, conquest, and settlement. The largest groups—Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks—are joined by Aimaqs, Turkmen, Nuristanis, Baluch, and numerous others. These communities differ in language, sect, geography, political traditions, and relations with the state. Crucially, these divisions were never fully integrated into a unified national project.

Afghanistan is a country characterized by ethnic variety, which contributes to its geographic identity. Even though this variety has been present in numerous nations around the globe, these nations do not experience the crisis and instability that Afghanistan does. A notable aspect of this country is its ongoing control and subjugation, which has led to a distinct history and character unlike that of other countries and nations.

The general or specific context of Afghan society might be the reason for these distinctions, leading to ethnic relations and conflicts in this country to unfold in a manner distinct from that of other countries. This has allowed for the creation of ethnic identities. Currently, the connection among the tribes is influenced by symbols and tribal values, ethnicity, and relatives, resulting in a severely unhealthy political framework. The tribal culture continues to influence the inhabitants of this region, and even under ordinary circumstances, it manifests in essential matters, leading to a crisis and instability in inter-ethnic relations. The Taliban takeover and the establishment of the present political system in Afghanistan could signify the conclusive end of ethnic wars. However, we can only observe a decrease in the number of intense ethnic conflicts characterized by armed clashes due to the current military dominance of the Taliban, while many underlying tensions in the nation persist in their political, social, and cultural dimensions, both visible and hidden. Afghan society is made up of various ethnic groups and tribes, each with its own language and religion. Each tribe is made up of different branches that are sometimes rivals (such as the Abdals and the Ghalzas).

Only estimates are available about the exact population and ethnic composition of Afghanistan, as the war and the Taliban's return to power have once again changed both the number and composition of the population.

In accordance with all estimates, the Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group, traditionally the backbone of Afghan society and politics. The Tajiks, who mainly speak Persian (Dari), are the second largest group, with a significant urban population. The Hazaras live mainly in the mountainous Hazarajat region of central Afghanistan and are mostly Shia Muslims. The Uzbeks and their related Turkmen are concentrated in the northern provinces of the country and are mostly Sunni Muslims, as are most of the Pashtuns and Tajiks.

To achieve the goals of this study, I used the Majid Nikjooy, Amin Khakpour, and Parisa Ghasemzadeh publication's data (2022) from the Journal of Sustainable Development, as a reference, based on which:

According to a representative survey, the proportion of Pashtuns is 41%, Tajiks 27%, Hazaras 9%, and Uzbeks %. Major ethnic groups are:

- Pashtun: 41% (Largest group, Iranic, dominant in south/east).
- Tajik: 27% (Second largest, Iranic, significant in cities).
- Hazara:9% (Shia Muslim, distinct features, central highlands).
- Uzbek: 8% (Turkic, northern provinces).
- Aimaq: 4% (Iranic, western areas).
- Turkmen: 4% (Turkic, northern borders).
- Baloch (Baluchi): 2% (Iranic, southern/western borders).

The ethnic composition is represented in Annex 9.

The constitution and national anthem of Afghanistan name 14 ethnic groups as part of the Afghan nation, identifying the ethnic groups as comprising the following groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Pashayi, Nuristani, Imaq, Arab, Kyrgyz, Qazalbash, Gujjar, Brahui, and other ethnicities (Constitution of Afghanistan, 2003: 4).

Sayed Abdul Ghayoom Sajjadi identified the following ethnic groups present in Afghanistan: "Arab, Imaq, Baluch, Brahui, Ashkashmi, Farsiwan, Firouzkohi, Gaurbati Gharabt, Gujar, Hazara, Hindu, Jalali, Jamshidi, Jet, Jogi, Kyrgyz, Kotana, Maliki, Maori, Mish

Mast, Mongol, Tajik, Monjani, Nuristani, Orsuri, Parchi, Peshai, Pashtun, Qarlak, Pikraj, Kazakh, Qabchag, Qazalbash, Roshani, Sanglichi, Sikh, Tatar, Taimni, Timuri, Tirehi, Turkmen, Uzbek, Vakhi, Jewish and Vazuri" (Sajjadi, 2016, p. 77).

Interestingly, the Hazara group differs from other groups not just in religion (Shia) but also in origin. Hazara are of Asian origin, mainly from Central Asia, and today live in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. They make up a significant part of the Afghan population, but their origins are disputed, and historically, they are linked to the Mongol Empire, which means that both Mongol and Iranian/Persian influences were mixed in the population, so their Asian origin is indisputable. This ethnicity has mixed Mongolian and Persian roots, and their names and culture reflect this.

Based on the combination of all the above statements, it can be inferred that there are at least 14 and at most 57 distinct ethnic groups residing in the area known as Afghanistan, who communicate in over 30 different languages.

The ethnic fragmentation of Afghanistan has numerous serious consequences that undermine the country's stability, the legitimacy of its governance, and the prospects for peaceful development. First, we must mention the political instability and weakened central authority. Ethnic divisions erode the legitimacy of the central government, especially if one group becomes dominant, which is the case in Afghanistan. This makes state-building processes difficult, as resource monopolization and ethnically based patronage often replace effective power-sharing mechanisms.

Consequently, non-Pashtun factions often established different sources of power, such as local leaders, religious networks, or regional armed groups. Their allegiance to the Kabul government was contingent and transactional, lacking a foundation in national identity.

As previously mentioned, since the establishment of the Durrani Empire, the Afghan state has relied on Pashtun dynastic authority. Pashtuns held control over political structures, military frameworks (although Tajiks were involved in the army and governance), and land ownership systems. For non-Pashtun groups, particularly Tajiks and Hazaras, the government frequently seemed like a tool of ethnic control rather than an impartial mediator. Eras of military pacification—like Abdur Rahman Khan’s violent campaigns against the Hazaras—strengthened stories of ethnic oppression.

The next consequence of ethnic fragmentation is the emergence of armed conflict and potential civil war. The sense of identity, belonging to a group, was observed in the fight against the Soviets; the various mujahideen groups were organized on ethnic lines. Ethnic identity is often used to mobilize masses for political and military purposes, exacerbating violence and civil war. Groups organize along ethnic lines, deepening distrust and increasing the possibility of revenge-driven conflicts.

The 1978 Saur Revolution, the communist takeover, and the subsequent Soviet invasion shattered any remaining coherence in Afghan society, which was not an ethnically coherent society anyway, and the memories and harmful legacy of Pashtun dominance were deeply rooted. Resistance groups mobilized along ethnic and regional lines, funded by external sponsors who preferred to work through ethnically defined commanders. The mujahideen era (1979–1992) reinforced ethnic boundaries within political and military structures. Tajik commanders dominated the Jamiat-e Islami networks; Uzbeks formed the core of the Junbish; Hazaras organized around Shiite parties with Iranian support; Pashtun groups were affiliated with the Hezb-e Islami[3] or Harakat-e Inqilab movements.

Unfortunately, the diverse ethnic composition, which is, on the one hand, the wealth of the country, on the other hand, has hindered the creation of a national identity, among other reasons, and has eroded the already weak social cohesion. It is an obvious further consequence that the extremely weak sense of national identity and the deep ethnic fault lines have hindered and currently hinder the emergence, development of social cohesion and the achievement of some level of communal *"pan-Afghan"* consciousness. All this, consequently, has contributed to the failure of "nation-building" in Afghanistan, at the same time maintaining sources of persistent tensions and leading to political instability.

Furthermore, the almost continuous armed conflict, security and political instability since the 1970s has led to a complex humanitarian crisis, with millions of Afghans becoming internally displaced or refugees in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. The influx of refugees from Afghanistan, coupled with fears of Soviet expansion, has forced American

[3] Hezb-e Islami (The Islamic Party) is an influential Afghan Islamist organization founded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in 1976, and fought against the communist regime and then the Soviets in the Mujahideen War, receiving significant Western and Pakistani support, but later split into splinter factions (e.g. Hezb-e Islami Khalis), while Hekmatyar's organization (HIG) remained active as an adult, signing a peace agreement with the government in 2016, but more extremist elements remain present.

intervention. The emergence of indiscriminate American support, using the enemy of my enemy is my friend principle, has further complicated the situation.

About 750,000 people have formal refugee status (Amayesh cards), but the total Afghan population is estimated at 3.8 million, with the remainder residing in the country with or without various visas. About 1.3 million have registered UNHCR Proof of Registration (PoR) cards, and another about 1.5 million live in the country with or without an Afghan National Card (ACC). (UNHCR Iran Factsheet, 2024)

The situation in Afghanistan has been characterised by decades of conflict and instability, with severe humanitarian consequences. As a result of the crisis, millions of the country's population have become internally displaced within the country or have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. According to UNHCR data, Pakistan and Iran host the largest number of Afghan refugees in the world, with the latest estimates (end of 2024 and during 2025) indicating that there are approximately 3.8 million Afghans in Iran and approximately 2.8 million in Pakistan, in various legal statuses. It is important to note that these figures include both officially registered refugees and Afghans who do not have valid residence permits or other documents.

The situation is dynamic, as authorities in both countries (Iran, Pakistan) have deported Afghans back to Afghanistan in large numbers during 2024 and 2025, often under pressure or force. In 2025 alone, more than 2.5 million Afghans returned from Iran and Pakistan, further exacerbating the already difficult humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

This complex situation is further exacerbated by the potential for external intervention. Conflicts between different ethnic groups create opportunities for regional and global powers to directly intervene in Afghanistan's internal affairs, which has further exacerbated instability. American fears generated by the Soviet invasion and subsequent Soviet expansion, and the rise of radical groups unprincipledly financed under the slogan "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", have also exacerbated the problems.

In addition, there are serious violations of human rights and minority rights. The dominant Pashtun tribes and clans often have and continue to have discriminatory policies against other ethnic and religious minority groups. This is particularly evident in the restrictions on the rights of women and girls, which have been further exacerbated under the current Taliban regime.

The dominant Pashtun tribes and groups often pursue discriminatory policies against minorities, leading to human rights abuses, including restrictions on the rights of women and girls, particularly under the current Taliban regime.

A major consequence of ethnic fragmentation is the risk of state fragmentation, led by ethno-politically homogeneous instead of pluralistic institutions, which threatens the idea of a stable, inclusive, and rights-respecting Afghanistan. Researchers such as Cliffe and Worden (2017) emphasize the need for "meaningful electoral and power-sharing reforms" for sustainable stability. Propose that the issue can solely be addressed via a substantial and inclusive power-sharing framework. Moreover, in her article (Clife, 2021), it may be the only idea that both Ghani and the Taliban can accept, as neither side sees the other as truly legitimate. The brutal reality, however, is that the Taliban never had any form of power sharing; they sought absolute dominance.

3.4.The Fragmentation of Authority (1978–1996)

The 1978 PDPA communist coup (the so-called Saur Revolution) directly caused the collapse of the existing social and political order in Afghanistan by violently seizing power and implementing radical, top-down Marxist reforms that sparked widespread armed resistance and decades of conflict.

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew the government of President Mohammad Daoud Khan in a brutal military coup in April 1978. This Cold War event not only marked the end of Afghanistan's traditional monarchical and republican systems, negatively affecting relations between the two superpowers, but also led to the fatal breakdown of the existing social structure in several keyways and determined the future of the country for a long time. It set off a domino effect that led to the militarization of society, the breakdown of political stability, and the rise of radical fundamentalist Islam.

As Rubin argued, the PDP regime went through several stages, each defined by the type and amount of foreign support the regime received. (Barnet, 1995)

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was among the political groups that emerged during the political opening spurred by the 1964 constitution. This new constitution transformed Afghanistan from an absolute monarchy into a constitutional

monarchy, incorporating parliamentary elements and, crucially, permitting the formation of political parties for the first time. Though a law on political parties was passed by parliament, King Muhammad Zaher Shah never signed it, leaving the nascent parties in a legal grey area.

The PDPA, ostensibly respecting this legal status, continued its activities but avoided publicly using the term "party," instead operating under the name Jerian-e Demokratik-e Khalq, or "People's Democratic Current." While moderate groups ceased their activities, more radical factions on the left (primarily Marxist groups) and right (various Islamist groups) went underground and began infiltrating the armed forces. This blockage of party pluralism ultimately fostered the adoption of violence to achieve political power.

In 1973, military officers aligned with the Parcham faction backed the coup that brought Sardar (Prince) Muhammad Daud to power. Several Parcham members were appointed as ministers, but Daud marginalized the group from 1975 onward, influenced by his shift towards the Shah of Iran. History repeated itself when military officers affiliated with Khalq and Parcham – encouraged by Moscow and the Communist Party of India, after the two factions had reunited in 1977 – overthrew Daud and killed him and most of his family on April 27, 1978. This event, a military coup in essence, was dubbed the ‘Saur Revolution’ by the party.

From the start, the PDPA struggled with internal divisions. The party had already split in 1967 into Khalq and Parcham, named after the party's early publications. Khalq members were primarily Pashtuns, while Parcham was largely seen as non-Pashtun, even though its most prominent leaders – Khaibar, Karmal, and the late president Dr. Najibullah – were also Pashtuns (Karmal was detribalized and mainly spoke Dari). In August 1968, Settam-e Melli, or ‘[Against] National Oppression’, led by Central Committee member Taher Badakhshi, split off because it prioritized the ‘national question’ over the ‘class question’, unlike the two main factions.

The communist takeover was brutal. Daoud Khan and most of his family were put to death during the savage takeover, and his allies were either slain or removed. This brutality established a precedent for ruthless repression and signalled the breakdown of earlier political standards. Radical reforms were implemented after the incredibly violent coup. Without consulting the local populations or their traditional leaders, the PDPA government, particularly the powerful Khalq faction, attempted to enact swift, drastic, Marxist-Leninist-inspired socio-economic reforms. The old land tenure and credit structures that are essential to rural living

were directly targeted by these changes, which included land redistribution and the outlawing of usury.

Traditional religious beliefs were severely outraged by the far-left coup and the violent and coerced cultural transformation that followed. The conservative and religious Afghans were profoundly offended by the new regime's non-Islamist ideology and the "catastrophic symbolic move" of replacing the national flag with a red flag in the Soviet manner. Widespread repression followed this. All opposition members, including Islamists, Maoists, intellectuals, and rival PDPA factions, were suppressed by the PDPA administration through mass arrests, torture, and executions. Many Afghans fled the nation or took up weapons because of this "red terror" campaign, which created intense public unrest.

The local, informal order that has long controlled rural Afghanistan has been weakened by a top-down strategy and a disdain for tribal leaders and traditional representatives. Uncoordinated but widespread armed insurgencies in the countryside have been fostered by the ensuing power vacuum and the breakdown of established authority.

In addition to rerouting already-existing social divisions, as argued by Giustozzi (2000), against the common enemy, the Soviet Union's decision to prevent the pro-Soviet regime from collapsing militarily also created new fault lines because rural rebels opposed the Kabul government using ethnically based militias rather than united forces. (Giustozzi, 2000) As a result, the Soviet invasion and the ensuing ten-year fight were crucial in dividing the Afghan conflict along ethnic lines, leading to rivalry and split amongst various ethnic groups rather than a cohesive resistance based on Islamist philosophy.

So, the Soviet intervention disrupted traditional social hierarchies and power structures. The destruction of villages, the displacement of the population (millions became refugees), and the expulsion of local leaders undermined the authority of the central state and local, non-ethnic-based systems. As I mentioned earlier, Soviet intervention generated the intervention of other countries. External sponsors (Pakistan, Iran, the USA, Saudi Arabia) armed and financed groups that were favourable to them, often ethnically defined.

Pakistan primarily supported radical Islamist groups with a Pashtun majority (such as the factions that later formed the core of the Taliban), as the Pakistani leadership wanted to exploit the potential of Pashtun nationalism for its own geopolitical goals.

Iran supported the ethnic-based Hizb-i Wahdat organization (Unity Party), which was gaining strength among the Shiite Hazaras, building on Shiite loyalty. Iran saw itself as the protector of Shi'a Hazaras and used Hizb-i Wahdat as a channel for its regional interests, especially during the anti-Soviet and post-Soviet civil wars. According to Olivier Roy (2002, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards' (IRGC) Quds Force provided crucial military and financial support to Wahdat and other anti-Taliban forces (like the Northern Alliance) to counter the Taliban's growing power. (Roy, 2002)

Other mujahideen groups, such as the Tajik-majority Jamiat-i Islami, became representative of the Tajik people. According to Saikal (2010), the Soviets themselves sought to unite certain groups along ethnic lines (for example, they created Uzbek militias led by Rashid Dostum) to divide the resistance and strengthen their positions. (Saikal, 2010, pp. 114-126)

Ethnic identity becomes a political force: During the war years, ethnicity, alongside or instead of ideology (communism vs. Islam), became the main tool for political mobilization and competition for resources (weapons, money). Military commanders often recruited fighters from their own ethnic group, which strengthened loyalty and cohesion between groups. After the Soviet withdrawal, this ethnically based division, reinforced by weapons and foreign support, led to the collapse of the central government in 1992 and the escalation of the civil war, where various warlords and factions now openly opposed each other on ethnic grounds.

The post-1992 civil war deepened fragmentation. Violent battles in Kabul pitted ethnic factions against each other, generating mass displacement and communal trauma. Ethnic identity became a central axis of political mobilization, not a secondary factor.

The Taliban movement that emerged in the 1990s articulated a normative vision rooted in Deobandi-inspired Islamism combined with Pashtunwali moral codes. Though not exclusively Pashtun, the movement drew heavily from Pashtun rural networks. As the Taliban expanded, many non-Pashtun communities viewed them as a vehicle for Pashtun reassertion rather than an inclusive national project. This perception shaped the formation of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, which was itself a coalition of Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek forces.

As a result, from an ethnopolitical perspective, Afghanistan's political landscape was divided by the early 2000s, with each major group retaining its own militias, foreign ties, and political narratives. In Afghanistan, ethnic groups are carriers of unique normative projects, not

just linguistic or cultural classifications. Hazara communities have strong Shia religious traditions and collective memories of persecution; Uzbeks rely on kinship networks and historical ties to Central Asia; Pashtun communities balance tribal, Islamic, and state-centred norms; and Tajik rural societies rely more on religious networks and local patronage.

In Afghanistan, the different "moral orders" (or rather, traditional norms and social codes) within different ethnic communities differ significantly, and these differences contribute to social tensions and conflicts. The main differences are evident between Pashtun-majority areas and regions inhabited by non-Pashtun minorities, especially in terms of the legal system, the status of women, and social hierarchy. The traditional moral code of the Pashtuns is defined by an ancient, unwritten tribal code of honour called Pashtunwali. This code emphasizes values such as hospitality, granting asylum, revenge, and protecting the family, as previously explained.

The current Taliban regime, largely composed of rural Pashtuns, seeks to combine certain elements of Pashtunwali with a fundamentalist interpretation of Sharia (Islamic law), which manifests itself in further restricting the rights of women and minorities.

The social structure of Afghanistan's other major ethnic groups—the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks—is influenced less by a strict tribal law and more by local interpretations of Islam, ties to the central government, and past experiences. As a persecuted Shiite minority, the Hazaras have a strong feeling of communal solidarity and a desire for modernity, which is frequently accompanied by a desire for the rule of law and more democratic, multiethnic governance. This is clearly due to the previously discussed historical reasons. Like the Hazaras, the Tajiks and Uzbeks derive their moral foundation from local Muslim beliefs and familial structure. Their political objectives frequently include exercising decentralized power and balancing Pashtun hegemony. During the Mujahideen Era in Afghanistan, which spanned from 1992 to 1996, ethnic militias were the nation's de facto rulers. Afghanistan fell into anarchy when Soviet soldiers left in 1989, with many groups fighting for dominance. The country was further divided along ethnic and ideological lines by the conflicting normative ideals of Islamist, ethnic-nationalist, tribal, and local warlords' control.

The fall of Kabul was a metaphor for the failure of unification. Once a hive of activity and a ray of hope for a united Afghanistan, the capital city turned into a battlefield for rival groups, with bloodshed and instability becoming the norm. The nation's unrest was exacerbated when the Mujahideen, who had previously been praised as heroes for their part in opposing

Soviet rule, turned on one another. The Taliban first took over Kabul in 1996, after a civil war broke out in Afghanistan in the 1990s following the Soviet withdrawal between the victorious mujahideen rebel groups. The groups, which had once enjoyed the support of America, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, lost their importance in world politics after the Soviet withdrawal, and the unresolved stalemate was only waiting for a strong organization to act. Parts of Afghanistan were already occupied by the Taliban in 1994, and the capture of the capital marked the turning point after which they proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1997 and began to establish their own legal system based on their radical views, which also included a rather extremist interpretation of Sharia.

The rise of ethnic militias as de facto sovereigns highlighted the lack of a centralized authority in Afghanistan, with each faction asserting its own vision of governance. The Islamist factions sought to impose a strict interpretation of Sharia law, while ethnic-nationalist groups sought to promote the interests of their respective ethnic communities. Tribal leaders and local warlords also carved out their own spheres of influence, further complicating the political landscape.

The Afghan state faces numerous, incompatible normative entrance points since each group incorporates distinct moral expectations of power. They cannot all be satisfied at the same time by a single institutional framework. The Taliban's First Emirate, which lasted from 1996 to 2001, represented a normative counter-project to the chaotic and fragmented governance of the Mujahideen era in Afghanistan. When the Taliban emerged as a powerful force in the mid-1990s, they presented themselves as a cohesive and disciplined movement that aimed to establish a strict interpretation of Islamic law and restore order and stability in the country.

The Taliban's rise to power was fuelled by a desire to bring an end to the lawlessness and violence that had characterized Afghanistan in the years following the Soviet withdrawal. Drawing on their interpretation of Islam, the Taliban sought to impose a rigid form of governance that enforced a strict code of behaviour, particularly regarding women's rights and social mores. While their rule was harsh and repressive, the Taliban also provided a semblance of law and order that had been sorely lacking in the country.

The establishment of the Taliban's First Emirate represented a challenge to the competing normative visions that had dominated Afghan politics during the Mujahideen era. While the Mujahideen factions had been unable to form a cohesive and inclusive government, the Taliban

presented a unified front that was committed to imposing their vision of an Islamic state. This normative counter-project appealed to many Afghans who were weary of the chaos and violence that had plagued the country for years.

However, the Taliban's rule was also marked by brutality and human rights abuses, particularly towards women and minorities. The strict enforcement of their interpretation of Islamic law led to widespread condemnation from the international community. During their rule, which lasted from 1996 to 2001, executions became commonplace, with theft punishable by amputation and adultery by stoning. Women were stripped of most of their rights, and a strict dress code was imposed on everyone. Music, television, and kite flying, once popular among children in Kabul, were banned. They cracked down on ethnic and religious minorities, with Shiites and Hazaras being their primary targets. For example, according to the UN Human Rights Watch, the male Hazara population of Mazar-e-Sharif was systematically executed after the city was captured in 1998. (UN Human Rights Watch, November 1998 Vol. 10, No. 7, Massacre in Masari Sharif) The Taliban's First Emirate ultimately came to an end in 2001, following the September 11th attacks and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's First Emirate represented a stark contrast to the fragmented governance of the Mujahideen era, presenting a normative counter-project that aimed to restore order and impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law. While their rule was marked by repression and human rights abuses, the Taliban's rise to power highlighted the complexities and challenges of governance in a country as diverse and conflicted as Afghanistan.

At the ideological core of the Taliban's rule was the implementation of a strict Deobandi-inspired version of sharia law as the sole source of legitimacy and authority. The regime rejected the pluralistic legal frameworks that had previously governed Afghan life — including tribal jirgas, local customary law (*'urf*), and the influence of Sufi religious traditions. These were replaced by Taliban-appointed *qadis* (judges) who interpreted Islamic law according to the movement's narrow doctrinal framework. In doing so, the Taliban attempted to construct a single moral and legal structure that would bind all Afghans under a monolithic conception of Islam.

Although many people were alienated by the suppression of various ethnic and local customs, particularly those outside the Pashtun heartlands, which provided the Taliban with a large portion of their support and leadership. Warlordism did temporarily decline because of the Taliban's consolidation of power, despite its authoritarian nature. In a war-torn nation

where, local commanders had previously enjoyed almost complete authority, the movement was at least partially successful in reestablishing order. However, social inclusion and political legitimacy were sacrificed to achieve this stability.

The Taliban swiftly came to be seen as a tool of Pashtun control, despite its claims to represent a global Islamic movement. Most of the leadership and core fighting forces were Pashtun, and rather than relying on a common ideology, they frequently used violence and repression to extend control into non-Pashtun areas. Under the banner of the Northern Alliance, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek organizations organized violent resistance because they believed the emirate to be racially prejudiced. Consequently, what had been intended to be a universal religious institution became clearly ethnic in nature. Thus, the historical patterns of ethnic hierarchy and exclusion that had long afflicted Afghanistan got intertwined with the Taliban's normative agenda, which was purportedly about Islamic unity.

The Taliban’s unbending focus on ideological purity and Pashtun dominance alienated large segments of the population, leading to an enduring legitimacy deficit, especially among non-Pashtun communities. Their governance model, rather than bridging Afghanistan’s cleavages, effectively deepened them, shaping the conditions for continued resistance and eventual collapse of their regime in 2001.

In sum, the failure of Afghan state-building is a complex issue that cannot be attributed solely to geographical factors, poverty, foreign intervention, or institutional design. Rather, at its core is a deep-seated and unresolved tension between the various normative orders that shape Afghan society—tribal, religious, and modernist—as well as the ethnic fragmentation that underpins political mobilization and collective identity. This tension, argued by Edwards (2002), has hindered the construction of a unified and cohesive state that commands universal loyalty and support.

Afghanistan is a country characterized by a lack of consensus on moral and political frameworks, with no single ideology or system of governance able to unite the diverse ethnic and tribal groups within its borders. The deep-rooted ethnic divisions have historically fuelled resistance to centralized authority, further complicating efforts towards state-building and political stability.

The discord among different normative orders hampers the establishment of shared expectations for governance, while ethnic fragmentation leads to political competition along communal lines rather than through national institutions. This creates a cycle of instability that

thwarts reform efforts, undermines the legitimacy of the state, and impedes long-term consolidation. Addressing these structural obstacles requires an institutional approach that can accommodate the diverse normative orders present in Afghan society. This may entail decentralized governance structures, plural legal systems, or inclusive power-sharing arrangements that can bridge the divide between different ethnic and ideological groups. Without such a re-evaluation of governance mechanisms, Afghanistan is likely to remain stuck in a cycle of contested authority, fragmented sovereignty, and recurrent failures in state-building.

3.6. The Madrasa Networks and the Deobandi School as Sources of Taliban Radicalism and Obstacles to Afghan State Modernization

In my opinion, Taliban radicalism, which is condemned by many Muslim scholars, is one of the sources of the modernization of the Afghan state and the failure of the Western state-building model adopted by the USA.

The ideological roots of Taliban fanaticism, radicalism, and systematic brutality can be traced in large part to the madrasa networks associated with the Deobandi school of Sunni Islam, particularly as they developed in Pakistan during the Afghan jihad and its aftermath. Deobandism, originating in nineteenth-century British India as a reformist movement centred on scriptural puritanism and moral discipline, was not inherently violent. However, its South Asian revivalist orientation, emphasis on religious orthodoxy, and rejection of syncretic Islamic practices provided a doctrinal framework that could be radicalized under conditions of prolonged conflict and state collapse.

In the contemporary Muslim world, Afghanistan and Pakistan are among the few countries where rural madrasas thrived during the 20th century. These madrasas lacked a structured hierarchy in their education and were not integrated into any government educational system. Their significance was often influenced by the financial backing of their leaders. The origins of these networks can be traced back to British India, and they operate independently of national borders. Most of these madrasas are linked to the Deobandi school of thought, which is prevalent in northern Pakistan, although some are affiliated with smaller fundamentalist groups such as the Ahl-i Hadith (People of Hadith) movement.

Shah Waliullah (1703–1762) and his descendants spearheaded a Muslim reformist movement in the 18th century, which is where this intellectual approach got its start. A madrasa was founded in Deoband, close to Delhi, in 1867. The Deobandi school (correctly: Deobandi, after the name of the Indian city of Deoband) is a revivalist movement within Sunni Islam founded in India (in the present-day state of Uttar Pradesh) at the end of the 19th century during British colonial rule. It was created to preserve traditional Islamic teachings and counter the influx of Western, modernist ideas, and thus had a characteristic of rejecting Western thinking. The Deobandi school still has significant influence in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

The connection between the Deobandi movement and the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence is one of limitation and particular interpretation. To grasp this relationship, it is essential to see the Hanafi school as a wide legal basis, with Deobandism representing a specific movement structured upon that base. In other words, although every Deobandi adheres to the Hanafi tradition, not every Hanafi subscribes to the Deobandi approach. The Hanafi school, founded by Imam Abu Hanifa in the 8th century, is the oldest and most widely followed of the four Sunni legal traditions. Historically characterized by its use of reason (*aql*), legal preference (*istihsan*), and flexibility, it served as the official legal code for the Ottoman and Mughal Empires. It is a broad tent that encompasses diverse cultures, from the liberal traditions of the Balkans and Turkey to the conservative communities of Central Asia. While traditional Hanafism is known for its adaptability to local customs (*urf*), Deobandism is highly suspicious of cultural innovations (*bid'ah*). They advocate for a more rigid, puritanical application of the religious law.

While the Deobandi school focuses more on traditional religious sciences, it practically sees the answer to the crisis of modernization of Islam in a return to the original (or supposed) teachings, as argued by Bordás (2019), one could say, back to the 7th century. Al-Azhar, on the other hand, has been teaching modern sciences (medicine, engineering, agriculture) in addition to theology since 1961. Furthermore, a proponent of the moderate line *(Wasathiyyah)*, the institution will continue to actively promote religious moderation, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence in 2025, acting against extremist ideologies.

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayyeb, has repeatedly stated that the Taliban's ban on women's university education contradicts Sharia (Islamic law). The imam emphasized that Islam requires both men and women to acquire knowledge "from the cradle to

the grave." The institution says the Taliban's decisions are "shocking to the conscience of Muslims and non-Muslims" and represent a radical interpretation that does not represent true Islam. According to Al-Azhar scholars, the Taliban favour strict tribal culture and customs over the principles of Islamic law. As early as the 1990s, they stated that the Taliban "do not understand Islam."

Continuous pressure (2025): In December 2025, the international religious consensus, to which Al-Azhar had also adhered (for example, through the 2025 Islamabad Declaration), which states that educating girls is a religious obligation (*fard*), remained on the agenda. The Taliban were violating this consensus.

The imam's criticism was not only directed at the ban, but also at the Taliban's religious preparedness: He pointed out that there are more than 2,000 hadiths (prophetic sayings) that support women's education, and that many female scholars have shaped Islamic history.

He called on the Taliban to reconsider their decision, because "following reality and truth is more important" than political prestige. Al-Azhar's position remains authoritative in the Sunni world in 2025. The institution has consistently distanced itself from the claim that the oppression of women in any way is a religious obligation of Islam. The imam warned the world not to believe the Taliban's claim that their decision is approved by Islam, because that religion is "the exact opposite" of what is being forced on the population in Afghanistan. These statements are significant because Al-Azhar, as the global centre of Sunni Islam, deprives the Taliban of religious legitimacy, making it clear that their actions are not religious, but political or cultural in origin.

In accordance with the US Department of State's data, the institutional dominance of madrasas in Pakistan is spectacular: nearly 65% (some sources say up to 70%) of Pakistani religious seminaries (madrasas) are run by Deobandi organizations, primarily the umbrella organization Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabia. (US Department of State, 2022, Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan)

The movement aimed to create a distinctive fusion of traditional Islam and classical Persian culture while simultaneously purging Islam of foreign influences. A key component of this reformist group's strategies was education. Sunni Hanafism is the foundation of their belief system. As noted by Metcalf (1982), they also became more vocal in their hostility to Shiism,

which one of their modern supporters characterizes as "plotting to transform Pakistan into a Shia state." (Metcalf, 1982)

The emergence of madrasas in Afghanistan was probably due to the traditional reluctance of the community to send their sons to public schools. The reason for this is simple: the lack of schools in rural regions and the lack of infrastructure to allow for travel.

Following the Soviet invasion, Afghan refugees poured into Pakistan, strengthening cross-border ties. For the sons of impoverished refugees, these madrasas offered schooling, boarding school, and sometimes modest salaries. Tens of thousands of young Afghans, mostly Pashtuns, who had been forced from their homes, enrolled in these Pakistani madrasas and provided many Taliban soldiers. During the 1980s, hundreds of Deobandi madrasas emerged in Pakistan's border regions, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, often funded by Saudi charitable networks and tolerated or encouraged by the Pakistani state, especially the policy of re-Islamization pushed by General Zia-ul Haqq. These institutions educated a generation of Afghan refugee youth who lacked exposure to pluralistic social norms, civic education, or alternative religious interpretations. The curriculum typically emphasized literalist theology, rigid moral codes, obedience to religious authority, and a binary worldview dividing society into believers and deviants, thereby fostering an exclusionary conception of Islamic order.

The radicalization and the gradual strengthening of the strongly anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in the madrasas and through them in the Taliban movement were generated by three important events. First, the Gulf War (1990-1991), during which US troops appeared in Saudi Arabia, the holy land of Islam, then the bombings carried out in Afghanistan in response to al-Qaeda attacks in 1998, the invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11, and the fall of the first Taliban regime. In the poor rural areas of South Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan), Deobandi madrassas (religious schools, typically funded by Saudis) are often the only free form of education available. Children studying here often do not receive a secular education (mathematics, natural sciences), only religious education. Although they may be somewhat educated in a religious sense, they have no concept of modern knowledge, and therefore may remain uneducated in the labour market, often with no other career option than to join the Taliban.

In sum, the Deobandi madrasas situated in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan became integrated into larger jihadist environments. Although the Taliban initially prioritized domestic stability over global jihad, their ideological upbringing coincided with transnational militant organizations, further entrenching a culture of violence justified through religious narratives.

The lack of opposing religious authorities and the breakdown of centralized state structures in Afghanistan enabled this radicalized Deobandi interpretation to dominate regions controlled by the Taliban. In this context, madrasa networks operated not merely as recruitment channels but as institutions that produced norms, influencing the Taliban's perspectives, governance methods, and coercive strategies. This resultant political landscape fused strict theological interpretations with violent coercion, significantly enhancing the Taliban's image of fanaticism and brutality while hindering opportunities for inclusive state development.

Based on the above, I have identified the factors explaining the causes of Taliban brutality as follows. First, the Ideological framework and legal interpretation instilled in youth, as the Taliban rely on a primitive, strict, puritanical (Deobandi-like) interpretation of Islam and local fatwas, which formulate punishments (flogging, amputation, execution) as "religious" and thus legitimize violence. In addition, the means of exercising power and instilling fear are brutality and terror, because the purpose of public, forceful punishments is to demonstrate deterrence and order, which is suitable for maintaining mass control, and in this way, they want to reduce disobedience and strengthen their power quickly and spectacularly.

Furthermore, the logic of security and retaliation also plays a role, as in a war environment, retaliation and collective punishment can become a self-defence/enemy-debilitating tactic, especially when it is difficult to distinguish combatants from civilians.

Taliban radicalism, which originated, was born and fuelled by *medresses,* has been a primary driver of state-building failure in Afghanistan, both during the 1990s and throughout the 20-year international intervention (2001–2021). The Taliban ideology outlined above fundamentally rejects every detail and ideology of modern statehood. The Taliban's radical interpretation of Sharia law fundamentally contradicts the Westphalian nation-state model. Their ideology prioritizes divine sovereignty over popular sovereignty. This has made it impossible to sustain the establishment of a democratic constitution and civic institutions – key elements of international state-building. According to UNESCO, in four years, 2,2 million girls

have been banned from the school. (Azoulay, 2025) The Taliban have never hidden their enmity toward democracy.

The ideological rejection of modern statehood points to deeper layers of Taliban radicalism that are incompatible with the Western-style state model built before 2021. This opposition is not only political, but also fundamentally philosophical and legal. Maulvi Abdul Hakim Haqqani[4] (2022) wrote explicitly in his book titled "Alemaratol eslamiah wa nezamoha" (Islamic state and its system/structure) that *"the people are obliged to obey the ruler, but this does not come with any rights*, and *…human beings would not be equal, and equality would be a corrupted result of democracy…. Free and fair political elections, which are at the basis of equal participation by all human beings, would represent an imported ideal of 'infidels' that Muslims should avoid."* (Haqqani, 2022, pp. 75, 141.)

Even do, in terms of governance, Haqqani supports the idea that legitimacy derives from rule achieved through force. He asserts that the criteria for choosing a ruler and the legitimacy in Islam would rest upon the use of force. The ruler would possess the authority to govern and would be obligated to eliminate any opposition through force. For instance, during a significant gathering of clerics appointed by the Taliban on July 1 and 2, 2022, it was declared that anyone who opposed the Taliban would face execution by beheading. Consequently, the Taliban reject elections and parliamentarism as corrupt ideals imported from "infidels." The people are not citizens, but subjects with duty is obedience.

This book highlights that the legal sources are restricted to those referenced by Sunni Muslim Sharia scholars, which clarifies Haqqani's endorsement of amputation and flogging as forms of punishment. According to Haqqani, Taliban ideology is fundamentally incompatible with women's rights and disregards international norms, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Women are systematically excluded from governmental and public life, a position justified through essentialist and normative arguments that confine them to motherhood and the domestic sphere, while discouraging male involvement in childcare. Haqqani further maintains that women's presence in society should be severely restricted and that gender equality is

[4] Maulvi Abdul Hakim Haqqani, also known as Abdulhakim Ishaqzai, is a prominent Afghan Islamic scholar, writer, and a key figure in the Taliban, serving as the Chief Justice of Afghanistan's Supreme Court since 2021, a role he also held during the first Taliban regime (1996–2001). A founding member and close associate of the late Mullah Mohammed Omar, he's an influential religious leader, mentor to current leaders, and was the head of the Taliban's Qatar negotiation team. Currently, he is the head of justice, heads the Supreme Court (Stera Mahkama) in the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. He holds a professorship and is considered a theorist for the Taliban.

portrayed as irrational and contrary to Sharia law. Within this framework, male superiority is constructed as both natural and legitimate, whereas gender equality is dismissed as offensive, immoral, and culturally inappropriate.

By banning women from education and public life and restricting minority rights, the Taliban's radicalism systematically dismantled the human capital necessary for a functioning modern bureaucracy. Moreover, government positions are filled almost exclusively by mullahs and religious leaders, without regard for professional competence or ethnic representation. Concerning the leadership, ethnic Pashtuns dominate the Taliban's senior and mid-level ranks (90%). Modern states (i.e., states having territorial sovereignty, monopoly of legitimate violence, a political community based on citizenship, and a centralized institutional structure) are based on a written constitution and positive (human-made) law, which ensures equality of rights. However, in the Taliban regime, the sole source of law is Sharia, or more precisely, the radical interpretation of the Hanafi school of law. By 2025, the Taliban had abolished the previous constitutional framework, replacing both the prosecutor's office and the supreme court with Islamic courts. Consequently, since the law is "divine", it cannot be disputed or modified based on human arguments (e.g., human rights).

As stated by Kawa (2025), the Taliban has built 22,972 Islamic religious centres by 2025. This process clearly demonstrates that the express goal of the complete transformation of the Afghan education system based on Taliban ideology is to ideologically transform society in the long term and make the Taliban's radical religious dogmas decisive.

The current structure of the Afghan state poses challenges to the stability of the country. The lack of a skilled bureaucracy creates difficulties in the effective provision of basic services (e.g., economic management, healthcare), and ethnic exclusion may affect the future stability of the system and almost completely preclude the implementation of any reform or modernization efforts.

In sum, the madrasa networks influenced by the Deobandi tradition have played a significant role in shaping Taliban ideology and governance practices, which in turn challenge key principles of Afghan state modernization; however, this influence operates in conjunction with broader historical, political, and socio-economic factors.

I do believe that it is reasonable to argue that madrasa network*s* and the Deobandi school of Islam have contributed to Taliban radicalism and have posed obstacles to Afghan state modernization. Many Taliban leaders were educated in Deobandi-inspired madrasas,

particularly in Pakistan, as Maulvi Abdul Hakim Haqqani, the major ideologist of the Taliban. Moreover, the Taliban governance, shaped in part by madrasa teachings, conflicts with secular lawmaking, citizenship-based equality, bureaucratic rationality, and women's participation in public life. In this sense, these networks undermine state modernization as defined in Weberian or liberal-institutionalist terms.

3.5. Institutional design, centralization, and the failure of political inclusion

The links between the extreme radicalism of the Taliban and the unsuccessful state-building efforts in Afghanistan can be examined and assessed through three key areas that are vital for reaching the research objectives and, in my view, are of significant importance: the development of institutions, severe centralization, often refer ed to as the *"Kandahar model,"* and the total absence of political inclusion. The state leadership under the Taliban regime after 2022 clearly shows signs of theocracy, which completely relegates professional bureaucracy to the background and makes adequate professional leadership impossible.

Since their return to power in 2021, the Taliban have systematically dismantled the republican institutional framework built after 2001, replacing it with a structure, in which religious ideology overrides state functionality. The rule of the Supreme Council (Rahbari Shura) became extremely important. Instead of modern ministries leading policy, decision-making is concentrated in religious councils based in Kandahar. Institutional stability is not derived from written laws but from the religious decrees (fatwas) of the Supreme Leader (Emir). Consequently, the real power is in the hands of the Supreme Council (Rahbari Shura) based in Kandahar and the direct advisors to the Emir. While the ministries in Kabul carry out the day-to-day administration, strategic directions (e.g., banning women from the administrative system, political life, and education) are dictated from Kandahar, often without consulting the ministers.

A major source of institutional failure is the replacement of professional meritocracy with "jihadist credentials." According to Philip & Curtis' research report (2025), the majority of administrative positions are held by mullahs, leading to a technical decline in essential public services such as healthcare and infrastructure.

The Taliban government in Afghanistan functions as a hierarchical theocracy, with the Supreme Leader (Hibatullah Akhundzada) and a council of clerics making final decisions. A

de facto government structure comprises several ministries (such as Defence and Interior) headed by Taliban officials, but implementation is frequently localized because of tribal dynamics and factionalism, resulting in a complicated, religiously motivated command structure rather than the usual separation of powers. The current Taliban regime's governmental structure is demonstrated in ANNEX 10. At the pinnacle of political power is the unquestioned Supreme Leader (*Amir al-Mu'minin)*, whose name is Mullah Mawlawi Hibatullah Akhundzada. He has absolute religious and political power by issuing fundamental decrees *(fatwas)*, even repeatedly, without consulting his ministries; these decisions are unappealable and final.

He decides everything from appointing ministers to selecting judges, and his decrees are the supreme law of the land. He does not use modern technology and reportedly communicates with officials by letter or landline phone as bin Laden did in Abbottabad. Akhundzada is extremely reclusive and has rarely appeared in public since coming to power. His only public appearance was at the Darul Uloom Hakimah madrassa (religious school) in Kandahar in October 2021.

Hibatullah Akhundzada has effectively set up a parallel administrative system in Kandahar that operates as a *"shadow government,"* methodically superseding and overseeing the official ministries in Kabul. By 2025, this concentration of power has emerged as the hallmark of his rule, creating a distinct distinction between the "Kandahar group" (hardliners who are loyal to the Supreme Leader of the Taliban) and the "Kabul group" (officials responsible for everyday governance).

Among the ministries, we must highlight the Ministry of Virtue and Crime Prevention (MPVPV), which has developed into the Taliban's main cross-ministerial organization. Although it is a ministry in name, it operates above other ministries, guaranteeing the strict application of Sharia law in Afghanistan. Since its reinstatement in 2021, it has emerged as the primary body governing the conduct, appearance, and day-to-day activities of Afghan nationals. According to the Human Rights Council's report, the already extremely strict religious regulations were further intensified, and new ones were added, such as women being prohibited from singing or speaking into a microphone.

Furthermore, in a way that is completely incomprehensible to the civilized world, in 2025, this ministry introduced a ban on the publication or broadcasting of images of living beings (humans and animals) in electronic media. This led to the closure of television stations and news agencies in several provinces, and the media switched to a radio-only format. Based on

the law, a religious police force has been practically established (like in Iran), which is authorized to set up checkpoints and operate mobile patrols. (Human Rights Council, 2025, Study on the so-called “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”, UN, A/HRC/58/74.) Based on the law, a religious police force has been practically established (like in Iran), which is authorized to set up checkpoints and operate mobile patrols. The ministry continues to play a central role in the coercive dissemination of Taliban ideology in 2025, significantly restricting individual freedoms and the operation of the media, as it prohibits Shiite, Sufi, or non-Muslim religious practices that are considered “un-Islamic.”

It is no coincidence that, according to the Economist's Democracy Index 2024, Afghanistan received the worst rating among 167 countries. (EIU: Democracy Index 2024, https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2024/).

As per Azizi (2025), the Taliban leader’s office has given control over state finances. The Financial Accountability Law, which came into effect in August 2025, was issued and signed by Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's supreme leader, as a legal provision in the form of a decree. The legislation enhances Akhundzada's authority by mandating that all ministries and public entities disclose their income and expenses transparently to the Central Finance Office, which the Supreme Leader directly oversees. By requiring all ministries and public organizations to openly report their earnings and outlays to the Central Finance Office, which is directly supervised by the emir, the law strengthens Akhundzada's power. The decree's main objective is to ensure that the emir's office has authority over the whole state budget by centralizing financial procedures in Kandahar, eschewing the prior autonomy of ministries in Kabul.

As Guttares noted (2025) in his report on Afghanistan, the move is part of Akhundzada's strategy to fully centralize the country's governance by 2025, subordinating the formal Kabul government to his own administration in Kandahar.

The supreme leader exercises virtually direct supervision over ministries, often summoning the entire cabinet from Kabul to Kandahar to issue direct instructions. Furthermore, to maintain total control, Akhundzada appointed the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) (Da Istikhbarato Loya Ryasat) as the “backbone” of his regime. This apparatus helps enforce his decrees and maintains a dominant role over potentially dissenting factions in the ministries

in Kabul. The Director General of the GDI is Abdul Haq Wasiq.[5] He reports directly to the supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada.

Under Wasiq's direction, the GDI is crucial to upholding the authority of the Supreme Leader, fighting numerous armed anti-Taliban organizations like the Islamic State (ISIS-K), and keeping strict control over the media and internal opposition. Additionally, he also created his own army of 7000 soldiers. A special-purpose force of about 7,000 troops in Kandahar protects the Supreme Leader to ensure total independence from the regular army or police. These armed forces' main duty is to ensure Akhundzada's physical security. This arrangement guarantees that the Office of the Supreme Leader in Kandahar has the actual power to adopt, reject, or amend any government decision, while the Kabul ministries manage the state's logistics.

The second level of the administration is the regional/provincial level. Afghanistan is administratively divided into 34 provinces (Dari: *wilayat*). The most populous province is Kabul, with about 6 million inhabitants. One of the characteristics of the Taliban regime is that provincial governors are both religious leaders and military commanders. In the system established after the takeover in 2021, the two are not separated from each other, as the Taliban hierarchy is based on religious authority and battlefield history.

Concerning the religious titles, all governor in office today (34) holds a religious title, such as *Sheikh, Mawlawi* (senior scholar), or *Mullah* (religious scholar). For instance, according to the Middle East Institute: Taliban Leadership Tracker, Mawlawi Hizbullah is the governor of Zabul, and Mawlawi Muhammad Aman Obaid is the governor of Kabul.

During the conflict with NATO forces, most governors were *"shadow governors"* or military leaders for the Taliban. The primary requirements for appointments are loyalty and religious dedication.

A 15–24-member Ulema Council, which monitors the adherence of governmental decisions to Sharia law, also accompanies each governor. The 34 provincial governors, without exception, have a dual background: both trained religious leaders and experienced military commanders. In terms of military history, the governors led military units (so-called mahaz) in the fight against ISAF forces, so the current governors previously served as "shadow governors" of the Taliban and/or as military commanders during the war against NATO-led forces. After

[5] Abdul Haq Washiq is one of the infamous “Taliban Five” who were released from Guantanamo in 2014 in exchange for American soldier Bowe Bergdahl.

the Taliban took power, military history dominated the appointments, in addition to loyalty and religious commitment being the main criteria.

Administrative Layers Below the Provinces are the districts *(Wuleswali).* Below the province, the *Wuleswali* is the main administrative division. There are 448 districts as of 2025 (the Taliban recently established 27 more districts to boost security and tax revenue). A District Police Chief and a District Governor, who is frequently a military leader or religious leader, oversee each district. Five distinct Taliban directorates are currently housed in each district office: State Justice, Virtue and Vice, *Zakat* (charity tax), *Ushr* (agricultural tax), and Martyrs/Disabled Affairs. In parallel with the *Wuleswali*, the cities are governed by Municipalities *(Sharwali)*.

There are over 160 municipalities across the country that manage urban centres independently of the rural district structure. Mayors are appointed directly by the central government. In 2025, these positions are uniquely filled by Taliban loyalists rather than technical urban planners. The basic level of governance is the villages *(Qarya)*. This is the smallest unit of government. However, if we consider that most of the population in Afghanistan lives in rural areas, then it can be said that this is an extremely important level, since there are approximately 45,000 villages in Afghanistan. The villages were traditionally represented and governed by Maliks. *"Maliks"* in Afghanistan can refer to traditional village representatives with local authority, or specifically to influential figures like Sheik Andul Malik, a Taliban leader and judge, or Abdul Malik Pahlawan, an Uzbek warlord and politician, highlighting the term's dual meaning as a general concept and a specific name for powerful individuals in Afghan politics and society. *"Maliks"* (or Arbab) in Afghanistan can refer to traditional village representatives with local authority, or specifically to influential figures like Sheik Andul Malik, a Taliban leader and judge, or Abdul Malik Pahlawan, an Uzbek warlord and politician, highlighting the term's dual meaning as a general concept and a specific name for powerful individuals in Afghan politics and society.

Since the Taliban came to power in 2021, the traditional influence of the Maliks has waned in favour of religious leaders (mullahs), but in some places they remain the cornerstones of local administration in remote areas. In most places, however, the Taliban have replaced them with so-called Village Ulema Councils (religious scholars) to ensure compliance with local Sharia law and collect taxes. Local levels now place a strong emphasis on collecting traditional Islamic taxes (usr and zakat) to finance provincial operations. At the district and

village levels, the primary role of administration is intelligence gathering and enforcement of the “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.”

The Taliban, like the Islamic State, has established a religious police force. The Taliban follow the conservative Hanafi school of Sunni Islam, mixed with local tribal customs (Pashtunwali). The Islamic State adheres to a Salafist-jihadi orientation and views the Taliban as "bad Muslims" or apostates because they made deals with the West (e.g., the *Doha Agreement)*. The Taliban regime and the Islamic State (especially its Afghan branch, *ISIS-Khorasan*), although both radical Islamic fundamentalists, are sworn enemies of each other due to fundamental ideological and strategic differences.

The two groups enforce an extreme version of Sharia law on the population, which includes public executions and amputations; severe restrictions on women's rights, including being banned from travelling without a male relative as an escort; and imposing limits on what types of teachings can be imparted in schools. Central to both forms of extreme repressive regimes is the form of "moral policing" that seeks to enforce by armed force the most minute details of everyday life (dress, length of beard, and mode of prayer). “Law for Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice.”

The Supreme Leader now has direct and total power over Afghanistan's highest court, the Supreme Court of Afghanistan, also known as the *Stera Mahkama.* Abdul Hakim Haqqani, a founding member of the Taliban and close friend of Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, is currently serving as Chief Justice. The Supreme Leader has the final say and can overturn any court decision; hence the court lacks practical independence. In 2025, the court continues to impose death sentences and physical punishment, including public whipping. According to the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner’s report (2025), since the Taliban came to power in 2021, the number of death sentences and executions in Afghanistan has dramatically increased in 2024 and 2025. (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner’s report, 2025, Afghanistan must immediately stop public executions and corporal punishment.)

The Taliban government, as I have revealed and proven, is characterized by internal tensions that hinder the development of effective state leadership. The obvious reason for this is the tension between the completely blinded religious ideological control of the Kandahar-centred leadership and the pragmatic approach of the thinking in Kabul, which is characterized

by the name of Sirajuddin Haqqani. This is not a very spectacular confrontation, but it is certainly a present internal power tension.

3.6. Barriers to State-Building: Patronage and the Incentives of Fragmentation

The evolution of the number of local administrative units (districts) in Afghanistan and the issue of "subdistricts" in 2025 are closely related to political economy, patronage systems, and the incentives for fragmentation. Although in the official statistical sense, subdistricts *(alaqadari)* have ceased to exist, the Taliban administration is still actively using the rewriting of administrative boundaries for political purposes in 2025. In this subsection, I would like to highlight the political-economic mechanism that led to the failure of centralized state-building in Afghanistan for decades, how it was connected to the patronage system, what interests the actors in the system had in maintaining the weak state structure, and how all of these together became obstacles to state-building.

From a political science perspective, the conditions are favourable for the emergence of a patronage system in an underdeveloped country like Afghanistan, where political rationality, including tolerance, moderation, long-term planning, and proceduralism, has not yet become a fundamental value among elites and citizens. An ineffectual political culture has been sustained by traits like mistrust, opportunism, and allegiance to people rather than the system, rather than bolstering democratic institutions. In Afghanistan, political power has for decades been based not on formal state institutions but on informal patronage networks and personal loyalty bargains. This system has become particularly prominent and problematic during the period of the Western-style state-building experiment between 2001 and 2021 and has therefore become one of the main reasons for the failure of this state-building experiment.

One element of this system is a compromise with warlords and de facto power-sharing. Under Hamid Karzai's presidency, the central government was unable (or unwilling) to break the power of local militia leaders. Instead, it provided them with “governor” positions and resources. For example, Atta Mohammad Noor’s governance. Noor served as governor of Balkh province from 2004 to 2018. He is one of the most cited examples of how a former mujahideen commander built a “fiefdom” (personal fiefdom) within the state. According to Dipali (2014), while Balkh became one of the most stable and wealthy provinces in the country,

Noor achieved this through authoritarian methods, integrating his own militia into state security forces (e.g., the ALP), and informal control over the local economy.

According to Dipali (2025), the city of Mazar-e Sharif, which had become a battleground between Atta, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and, to a lesser extent, Commander Mohammad Mohaqqeq, following the Taliban's defeat in 2001, for her first case study. In 2004, Atta had 7,000 gunmen; by 2005, this number had increased to 10,000 in Balkh and roughly 50,000 in other northern Afghan regions. He had other sources of revenue, including the Kod-e-Barq Factory, which generated $540,000 per month in 2002, and the border crossing with Uzbekistan. It's also reported that he made additional money trafficking drugs. Also, it's said that he gained further income from drug trafficking. In addition, he was receiving money from Ahmad Shah Masoud, Tajikistan, Iran, India, and then from US troops. However, Tajiks and members of the Jamiat party who controlled the central government's army and police, Marshal Fahim, the minister of defence, and Younis Qanooni, the minister of interior affairs, provided Atta with material and political backing. Furthermore, Dostum was despised by Karzai (because Dostum was an Uzbek) and two other senior officials, who employed Atta as a weapon to undermine him.

In the summer of 2004, Atta was elected governor of Balkh province due to his strength in the military, economy, and society. Because his official position allowed him to increase his informal power, he enjoyed serving in the central administration. He appointed Jamiat party leaders as important figures in Balkh's security establishments. He monopolized local economic initiatives and distributed land to his commanders. In addition, to maintain security and put an end to poppy farming in Balkh, the governor acted in accordance with the interests of the central government, sending sizable amounts of local income to Kabul. Another representative example is the case of Sherzai. A Pashtun strongman named Gul Agha Sherzai was named governor of the province of Nangarhar. Before his arrival, local leaders and rebels from the Jabbarkhel, Pashaei, and Khogyani tribes competed for control of the area. Sherzai possessed powerful military, economic, and sociopolitical ties as well. When he was in Kandahar, he had a mutually beneficial relationship with President Karzai and close ties with American forces. In addition to his other sources of income, he made an estimated $1.5 million a month from dealing with Americans. While Sherzai was in Kandahar, some American authorities even calculated that he made $300 million. Of course, there are many other examples, but as described above, the two examples are sufficient to represent that both warlords had become

wealthy and were therefore only interested in maintaining their own political positions, since the establishment of a strong central government was no longer in their financial interest.

Karzai's point of view is also understandable; as Giustozzi (2009) stated, for him, maintaining the almost inexhaustible American financial resources was his primary interest. He was forced into these deals precisely to offset, cover up his own military weakness, and win them over to some extent, if not by providing them with financial advantages, at the same time weakening his potential rivals by involving the powerful warlords in the government's division of spoils.

This system can be defined as a form of neopatrimonialism, since power is formally embodied in modern institutions (ministries, governorates), but in practice, the distribution of resources (money, jobs, land) is based on personal loyalty and patronage deals. However, as the example of Afghanistan has shown, this method only brought short-term stability, but in the long term undermined the legitimacy of the state, because the population identified the government with corrupt local warlords.

Another element of the neo-patrimonial system is the payment of so-called *"ghost employees"*, i.e., non-existent soldiers and teachers. This phenomenon has been one of the most documented forms of corruption and the neo-patrimonial system in Afghanistan. It has been cited in numerous reports and studies, especially by the US government's independent oversight body, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report in 2020, 50-70% of the police force in some southern provinces may have been fictitious, meaning the United States may have unwittingly funded the salaries of non-existent individuals.

The SIGAR Final Report (2025) sadly states: "*From 2002 through mid-2021, the United States Congress appropriated approximately $144.7 billion for Afghanistan reconstruction—far more than it spent on the post-World War-II Marshall Plan in inflation-adjusted terms. The mission promised to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan yet ultimately delivered neither."* Interestingly, the report says that the existence of "ghost" personnel played a central, decisive role in the rapid collapse of the Afghan central government. Elements of the patronage system included illegal land distribution and illegal transfers. The political elite often distributed state lands to loyal supporters to secure their political support (for example, the case of the Sherpoor district of Kabul). As Nathan stated (2012), in the early 2000s, powerful figures, including ministers and officials, illegally seized state land in Sherpoor to build lavish homes,

sparking public outrage and becoming monuments to corruption. Sherpoor became a symbol of inequality because the contrast between the luxury mansions and informal settlements elsewhere in Kabul highlighted the deep divisions and power imbalances under Karzai's presidency.

How did the *"Political Marketplace"* theory of Alex de Waal work in Afghanistan?

The essence of the theory is that politics in fragile states is not based on institutions or ideologies, but rather operates like a business market, where political loyalty is a commodity that can be bought and sold. Local warlords or tribal chiefs, the "sellers," support the central government in Kabul, the "buyer," not because they support or believe in the state, but rather because the government compensates them for their allegiance. (Waal, 2015) This reward can take the form of government jobs, cash (often from US aid), or ignoring illicit trade (such as opium).

Local players keep an eye on the market all the time. Loyalty is instantly "sold" to the opposition if the Taliban or a nearby warlord makes greater promises or if the central government is unable to pay. This explains why the Afghan army disintegrated so swiftly in 2021: commanders fled, deserted, or struck a deal with the Taliban after determining that the government could no longer support and protect them.

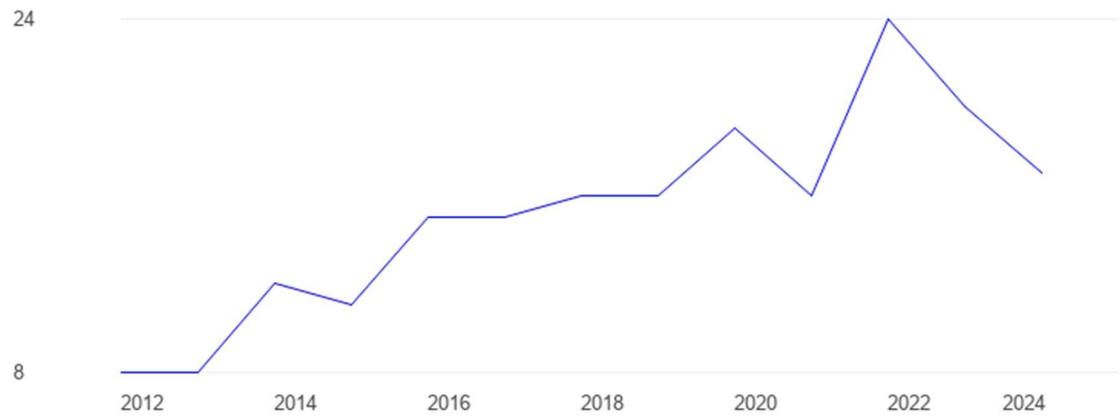
In this system, maintaining fragmentation appears as a business advantage for local warlords; maintaining stability at the national level and the unity of the country is not in their interest at all, because fragmentation maintains competition. A strong state would have centralized border control and tax collection. Local warlords and dishonest bureaucrats supported fragmentation because it allowed them to control the illegal opium trade without central oversight and pocket customs taxes.

Laws and bureaucracy merely impede negotiation, according to the logic of the marketplace. Official state institutions, such as the police and courts, are thus reduced to "set pieces." In the state-building model between 2001 and 2021, corruption unfortunately emerged as a system characteristic. In this model, corruption was not a flaw, but the fuel of the system. Without money, there is no loyalty; without loyalty, there is no power. Unfortunately, from 2001 to 2022, the country was extremely corrupt, as Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) stated.

The "Karzai scandal" mostly refers to the financial mismanagement and systematic corruption that hampered Afghanistan's reconstruction during Hamid Karzai's administration (2001–2014). The largest private bank in the country lost around $1 billion, or about 5% of its GDP at the time. Mahmood Karzai, the president's brother, was a significant stockholder. It has come to light that the bank gave the political elite bogus loans to finance political campaigns and purchase opulent houses in Dubai. Most of the politically connected individuals implicated, including the Karzai family, escaped prosecution despite international pressure, which many observers point to as the point at which the Afghan government lost its credibility at home.

The president's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, head of the Kandahar Provincial Council, has also been frequently accused (several times by the CIA) of playing a central role in the Afghan opium trade and maintaining private militias. The following graph, based on data from Transparency International (2024), depicts the change in the corruption index in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2024. (Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index 2024). The Taliban regime is trying to deal with systemic corruption.

Figure No.2: Corruption index in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2024.



In the latest Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2024, published by Transparency International on February 11, 2025, Afghanistan ranks 165th out of 180 countries surveyed, down from 162nd in 2023. With this ranking, Afghanistan remains among the most corrupt countries in the world, and in the South Asian region, it is only surpassed by Myanmar (168th) in terms of corruption. The collapse of the Afghan state-building project in 2021, viewed through the lens of 2025's retrospective analyses, reveals that the failure was not an operational accident, but a structural inevitability rooted in the country's political economy. The interplay

between normative discord and ethnic fragmentation created a landscape where a centralized, rule-of-law state was not only difficult to achieve but strategically undesirable for the very elites tasked with building it.

The neo-patrimonial nature of the Afghan Republic ensured that formal institutions, parliaments, courts, and ministries remained hollow shells. As this chapter has demonstrated, the reliance on patronage networks transformed the state into a vehicle for resource distribution rather than a provider of public goods. By co-opting warlords and local strongmen into the administration, the central government institutionalized corruption. This *"strongman governance,"* while providing a veneer of stability in the short term, fundamentally decoupled the state from its citizenry. The social contract was replaced by a transactional loyalty that existed only as long as international "rent" continued to flow into the system.

3.7. External Interventions and the Internationalization of Normative Discord

Joel Migdal's State-in-Society framework, which was previously discussed, and Francis Fukuyama's theory of state capacity, which is also mentioned, intersect to provide a deeper theoretical interpretation of Afghanistan's government failure: it is a result of external interventions and the internationalization of normative discordance. Due to an unresolvable conflict between the exported institutions and the local social reality, state-building initiatives in this environment failed because they were unable to satisfy Weberian standards of legitimate authority. According to Suhrke (2011), a sort of "normative short circuit" befell the Afghan state after 2001.

The international community built on Weberian rational-legal legitimacy, based on elections and formal bureaucracy, but this model clashed with what Migdal calls the *“mélange”* of society. In this environment, real social control remained in the hands of local clans, religious leaders, and warlords, who exercised power according to their own traditional or charismatic norms. Rubin argues that the fragmentation of the Afghan state is not due to internal *“character flaws”* but rather to the country’s forced integration into the international state system. The country was forced into a system shaped by external interests that did not consider local social structures. Weberian rational and legal legitimacy, founded on formal bureaucracy and elections, served as the foundation for the international community. However, this paradigm ran against what Migdal refers to as the *"mélange"* of society. In this setting, local family

groups, religious authorities, and warlords continued to have true societal control, exercising their authority in accordance with their own, charismatic or conventional standards.

According to Weigand (2022), on legitimacy, shows that the *"normative discordance"* created by external interventions was fatal because the *"image"* of the state was tailored to international expectations, while its "practices" remained corrupt and feudal.

The state's credibility was damaged by this dualism. While the Afghan government portrayed itself to Western donors as democratic in order to sustain funding, the rural populace saw the state as an alien force enforcing a set of norms that were frequently unpredictable and difficult to understand. China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Russia[6], and the Central Asian States (except for Tajikistan) are all in agreement. These nations share a common stance on the Taliban and are willing to work with them to some extent. The Taliban and these nations' delegations have previously had several encounters. They will likely decide together to recognize the Taliban regime and work together to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through an impartial party.

After the September 11, 2001, attacks, Pakistan, under the leadership of General Pervez Musharraf, became a key ally of the United States in the war on terror. This was reflected in Pakistan providing vital logistical routes and intelligence support to NATO forces, for which it received billions in US aid. At the same time, however, Pakistan, mainly through its influential military intelligence agency (ISI), secretly provided shelter and support to the Afghan Taliban insurgents and the Haqqani network. Taliban leaders and their families often found refuge in Pakistan's border regions and even in major cities (such as Quetta).

Support for the Taliban, in the form of training, shelter, finance, and intelligence, was aimed at bringing a Pakistani-friendly regime to power in Afghanistan. As Rizwan, Taieb, and Jami noted (2021), this dual policy has caused ongoing tension with both the US and the Afghan government. Afghan Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani have frequently accused Pakistan of supporting the insurgency, which has hindered bilateral cooperation and peace efforts. The disputed status of the border areas (Durand Line) has further complicated the situation, as the porous border has made it easier for militants to move around. The Afghan

[6] On July 3, 2025, Russia became the first major world power to officially recognize the Taliban government as the legitimate authority of Afghanistan. This historic diplomatic shift followed a series of legal and political steps to normalize relations with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). Russia views the Taliban as a necessary ally in the fight against ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan Province), which has conducted high-profile attacks in both Afghanistan and Russia.

state's attempts at modernization (especially after the communist coup in 1978) attempted to introduce Western or Soviet-style norms (e.g., radical land reform, women's equality, secularization) that were in sharp contrast to the Islamic and tribal values of traditional Afghan society. This "normative discord," or tension in values, was fundamentally an internal conflict. The conflict became international when external actors projected their own ideological frameworks onto this internal tension. This internationalization has deprived the Afghan state of its ability to develop its own, internally accepted norms.

In fact, this was a reason why the conflict became intractable because the opposing parties identified not only with each other but also with conflicting international norms (communism vs. political Islam vs. liberal democracy). This led to the complete fragmentation of the Afghan state, as there was no common social foundation on which a functioning state could be built.

3.8. Summary

The presence, military support, and generous financial assistance of international troops between 2001 and 2021 have proven futile in strengthening a democratic state in Afghanistan. The Afghan government has failed to seize the opportunity offered by the international community and the United States' involvement in Afghanistan over the past 20 years. While the United States is largely to blame, the Afghan central government is directly responsible for the failure of state-building. In other words, there are many internal factors contributing to Afghanistan's inability to establish a state.

In this chapter, I have scrutinized the complex interrelationships of normative strife and ethnic fragmentation, factors that can be traced back to historical causes, and the social, cultural, and traditional embeddedness of the failure of Western-style state-building in Afghanistan. I have explored and analysed the historical roots and foundations of normative pluralism in Afghanistan. I have reliably substantiated and proven that there is a clear connection between Sharia and Pashtunwali. I have also pointed out the similarities and differences between Pashtunwali customary law and Sharia-based Islamic law.

I have examined the complex interrelationships between attempts at modernization and the crisis of normative integration in a historical context. I have found that the reform policies of leaders pursuing modernization policies, which aimed to give more rights to women through the introduction of new codes and to bring rural areas under central control, encountered serious

resistance. The resistance arose not simply from economic grievances, but from the perceived erosion of moral and cultural order.

Based on the analysis I have conducted, I have demonstrated that imposing a monolithic state legal system on highly heterogeneous, multi-layered cultures would inevitably lead to a crisis of modernization and normative integration. The Pashtun example shows that law is a dynamic, contested sphere where the forces of tradition, religion, and modernity continuously influence people's normative reality, rather than being merely a command from above.

I have explored the elements of the ethnic fragmentation of Afghan society, which I have presented in a separate appendix. I have presented the social differences and occasional similarities of the various ethnic groups. I have pointed out the persistence of the aspiration for Pashtun dominance, which has traditionally characterized the medieval and modern history of Afghanistan. Afghanistan, which is home to at least 14 and at most 57 distinct ethnic groups, has several detrimental effects that jeopardize the stability of the nation, the legitimacy of its government, and the chances for peaceful growth.

I have established and identified the factors explaining the causes of Taliban brutality, which stem from several sources. On the one hand, the Deobandi Islamic school is already a very rigid, intolerant interpretation of the words of the Quran and Sunnah. On the other hand, this religious conservatism has been combined with Pashtun customary law, Pashtunwali, in the madrasas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. As I have shown, the Taliban want to secure their long-term supply with the youth flowing out of the madrasas.

3.10. Hypothesis Testing

Using a research method based on the True-False Statements Comparison Matrix, I performed a comparative analysis of the content elements of the summary that contained the scientific results obtained based on the research conducted in the third chapter and the hypotheses developed to achieve the chapter's scientific goals.

My Hypothesis Nr3 (H3) formulated as follows: The deep entrenchment of fundamentalist and radical Islamic interpretations, combined with the dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law, acted as a significant obstacle to the secularization necessary for the successful adoption of a modern, secular legal framework. In did, the hypothesis Nr3 (H3) contains four distinct statements:

A., Fundamentalist and radical Islamic interpretations are deeply entrenched within society.
B., Local customs, blended with Sharia law, exercise dominant influence over social and legal practices.
C., Combination of these two factors constituted a significant obstacle to the process of secularization.
D., Secularization is a necessary condition for the successful adoption of a modern, secular legal framework.

Relationship	A	B	C	D
A	—	True	True	True
B	False	—	True	True
C	False	True	—	True
D	False	False	False	—

Interpretive logic: *True*: the hypothesis in the row logically or causally supports/presupposes the one in the column. *False:* There is no necessary or one-way relationship. The diagonal (—) is a self-relation.

A → B (True) The deep entrenchment of fundamentalist and radical Islamic interpretations reinforces the authority of religious norms, which in turn strengthens the dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law in social and legal practices.

A → C (True) When fundamentalist interpretations are deeply embedded in society, they contribute directly to resistance against secular norms, thereby supporting the claim that such interpretations form part of the obstacle to secularization.

A → D (True) Entrenched fundamentalist interpretations undermine the conditions necessary for secularization, which is itself a prerequisite for the successful adoption of a modern, secular legal framework.

B → A (False) The dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law does not necessarily imply the deep societal entrenchment of radical or fundamentalist Islamic interpretations, as customary practices may persist independently of ideological radicalism.

B → C (True) The prevalence of local customs integrated with Sharia law can directly obstruct secular reforms, supporting the claim that such practices contribute to the broader obstacle to secularization.

B → D (True) Where local customs and Sharia-based practices dominate legal life, secularization is constrained, thereby impeding the adoption of a modern, secular legal framework.

C → A (False) The existence of an obstacle to secularization does not necessarily require deeply entrenched fundamentalist interpretations, as other factors—such as political instability or institutional weakness—may also inhibit secularization.

C → B (True) If secularization is obstructed, it is likely that local customs blended with Sharia law retain significant influence, indicating a reinforcing relationship between these practices and the persistence of non-secular governance.

C → D (True) An effective obstacle to secularization logically undermines the conditions required for adopting a modern, secular legal framework, directly supporting the necessity claim in D.

D → A (False) The necessity of secularization for legal modernization does not imply that fundamentalist interpretations are deeply entrenched; legal systems may fail to modernize for reasons unrelated to religious ideology.

D → B (False) The requirement of secularization for legal modernization does not presuppose the dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law, as barriers to modernization may arise from non-cultural or non-religious factors.

D → C (False) Stating that secularization is necessary for legal modernization does not, by itself, establish the presence of a concrete obstacle to secularization; it merely specifies a conditional relationship. To evaluate the validity of **H3**, this study employs a true–false comparison matrix to systematically assess the logical and causal relationships among the four statements (A–D). The matrix specifies whether the presence of one hypothesis logically supports, reinforces, or is independent of another, thereby clarifying their directional relationships.

A **"True"** relationship indicates that the hypothesis in the row either causally contributes to, logically presupposes, or strengthens the plausibility of the hypothesis in the

column. A **"False"** relationship indicates the absence of a necessary or unidirectional connection. Self-relations are excluded.

This comparative structure allows for the disaggregation of the composite claim in **H3** by testing whether its constituent elements—namely, entrenched fundamentalist interpretations (A) and the dominance of local customs blended with Sharia law (B)—jointly and asymmetrically contribute to obstacles to secularization. In doing so, the matrix also evaluates whether *secularization functions as a necessary condition* for the successful adoption of a modern, secular legal framework (C), rather than as a contingent or sufficient factor. By making explicit the logical dependencies and asymmetries among the statements, the true–false comparison matrix strengthens analytical transparency and facilitates falsification-oriented reasoning consistent with comparative and process-tracing methodologies. It can be visually illustrated in a graph in Annex 2.

The H4 hypothesis contains 3 distinct statements (claims) bundled into one sentence:

1. **Historical claim**: Pashtun ethnic values had supremacy in the formation of the Afghan state.
2. **Sociopolitical claim**: There has been ongoing ethnic strife, including oppression of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkmens by Pashtuns.
3. **Causal–institutional claim**: These conditions obstructed the creation of inclusive political institutions necessary for cohesive and centralized governance.

So analytically: H4 is a complex hypothesis, which practically consists of three component statements, where the first two function as causes and the third consequently derived from the two. Below is a true/false comparison (logical support) matrix for the three component statements found in H4, using the same interpretive logic that I have already defined earlier.

True / False Comparison Matrix

	A: Pashtun supremacy	**B: Ethnic oppression and strife**	**C: Failure of inclusive institutions**
A	**—**	**True**	**True**
B	**False**	**—**	**True**
C	**False**	**False**	**—**

Justification

- **S1 → S2 (True)** Structural dominance of one ethnic group plausibly enables or reinforces oppression and inter-ethnic conflict.
- **S1 → S3 (True)** A state built on the supremacy of one group undermines incentives and mechanisms for inclusive institutions.
- **S2 → S3 (True)** Persistent ethnic conflict and marginalization directly obstruct institutional inclusiveness and state cohesion.
- **Reverse directions (False)** Institutional failure or ethnic conflict does not *logically require* prior Pashtun supremacy; alternative historical or political causes are possible.

3.11. Conclusion

Normative pluralism in Afghanistan refers to the persistent coexistence of multiple, often competing, systems of norms, laws, and sources of authority that regulate social and political life. Rather than being an aberration or a product of recent conflict, this pluralism is deeply rooted in Afghanistan's historical trajectories of state formation, social organization, and external intervention.

Long before the emergence of a centralized Afghan state, social order was governed primarily through localized normative systems embedded in tribal, kinship, and communal structures. Customary law (*ʿurf*), tribal codes such as *Pashtunwali*, and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms constituted the principal sources of legitimacy and regulation. These norms emphasized honour, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and autonomy, and they were enforced through social sanctions rather than centralized coercion.

Regarding the patronage networks, I have found out that is constitute a fundamental barrier to effective state-building because they systematically undermine the development of impersonal, rule-based institutions. In patronage-based systems, political authority and resource distribution are organized through personalized relationships of loyalty between patrons and clients rather than through formal bureaucratic channels. As a result, access to state resources—such as public employment, security provision, or development aid—is contingent upon political allegiance, kinship, ethnic affiliation, or factional loyalty, rather than citizenship or legal entitlement.

In terms of customary law, I have shown that Islamic law (Sharia) emerged in parallel and as an overarching normative framework. However, Afghanistan never had a centralized religious hierarchy capable of enforcing a unified interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Instead, religious authority was distributed among local ulema, Sufi orders, madrasas, and village clerics, each embedded in a specific social and ethnic context.

This decentralization produced doctrinal diversity and localized interpretations of Islam, often blended with customary practices. The absence of a state-controlled religious establishment meant that *sharia* functioned less as a unified legal system and more as a flexible moral vocabulary that could be mobilized by different actors—state elites, tribal leaders, or insurgent movements—to legitimize competing claims to authority.

The formation of the Afghan state followed a pattern of limited centralization and indirect rule. In my study of this topic, I have found that, starting with the Durrani Empire, rulers relied on negotiated power with tribal elites, regional strongmen, and religious leaders rather than direct administrative intervention. The state's coercive and exploitative capacity remained shallow, especially in rural areas, which reinforced its reliance on non-state normative systems. This mode of governance institutionalized normative pluralism.

Rather than replacing local norms, the state selectively adapted to them, recognizing customary and religious authorities in exchange for loyalty, taxation, or military support. Over time, this pragmatic strategy reinforced fragmented sovereignty and prevented the emergence of a single legal-rational order. These dynamics generate strong incentives for political fragmentation. Elites benefit materially and politically from maintaining divided authority structures, as fragmentation enables them to monopolize localized power bases and extract rents without meaningful oversight. Consequently, dominant actors often resist institutional consolidation, fiscal centralization, and merit-based administration.

Years of fighting, starting from when the Soviets invaded and continuing through the international help after 2001, have really made things complicated with how people live by different rules. The local strongmen running things, rebels setting up their own courts, aid groups sorting out disagreements, and legal systems backed by other countries, all exist at the same time as traditional and religious ways of life. Each of these groups said they were legitimate for different reasons: some through force, others through faith, tradition, or because international groups said so. Instead of bringing things together, outside help often made this mix of rules even worse. They boosted up these separate systems without actually fixing the

deeper problems of why people didn't trust them in the first place. Looking at it this way, the Taliban coming to power can be seen as them trying to force one strict set of rules, based on their specific take on Islam, onto everyone, as a way to deal with what they saw as a mess of bad morals and broken systems. Basically, the different ways people in Afghanistan see what's right and wrong aren't just a temporary mess, but a long-standing issue. It's because of how things have always been: power spread out, the state's authority often debated, and its right to rule questioned. The government in Afghanistan hasn't usually been the one making the final call on rules; it's been just one player among many in a situation with lots of different viewpoints.

I have noted that this constant mix of ideas about what's right has a big impact on trying to build a strong country. It makes it tough to get everyone on the same legal page, messes with making government work more logically, and makes it harder for people to feel like they're part of one nation. However, it also means there's a built-in toughness and a way society holds together even when the government isn't really working well. In theoretical terms, a robust urban middle class is often associated with state-building through its support for bureaucratic rationalization, legal equality, taxation, and political participation. In Afghanistan, however, the urban middle class was unable to perform these functions effectively. Its dependence on external rents and state employment limited its capacity to demand accountability or to act as a counterweight to patrimonial governance.

Even though parts of the city's middle class backed things like the constitution, voting, and making government work better after 2001, their impact was mostly limited to groups funded by outside donors and city areas. The Taliban taking over again later really showed how weak this setup was: the middle class in the cities couldn't protect the system they had partly worked in and sort of stood behind. Their quick sidelining pointed out that there wasn't a strong base of people who really believed in and supported the modern Afghan state. I have concluded that the Afghan case demonstrates that the mere presence of an urban middle class is insufficient for successful state-building. In the absence of economic autonomy, demographic weight, social legitimacy, and organizational cohesion, Afghanistan’s urban middle class remained a politically fragile and socially isolated actor. Rather than serving as a stabilizing force for modern state institutions, it functioned as a dependent and vulnerable stratum whose fate was closely tied to the rise and collapse of externally supported state projects. This structural

weakness significantly contributed to the broader failure of Afghan state-building, reinforcing the dominance of patrimonialism, normative pluralism, and fragmented authority.

Chapter IV. Internal Illegitimacy and External Interference: Governance and Regional Dynamics in Afghanistan's State-Building Failure

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, my intention is to elaborate and scrutinize the interplay between weak internal legitimacy and persistent external interference that fundamentally obstructed Afghanistan's post-2001 state-building process. Furthermore, I demonstrate that at the domestic level, there is a widespread perception that the US-backed Afghan government lacked real legitimacy among rural communities and larger ethnic groups.

I explore and analyse the causes of the legitimacy deficit stemming from chronic governance failures, the consequences of pervasive corruption, the concentration of political and administrative power in Kabul, and the unwillingness – or inability – to accommodate the autonomy aspirations of Afghanistan's diverse ethnic electorate as a major factor in the ultimate failure of the modernization effort. I examine the reasons why the local population did not accept representative national institutions and why they viewed the government as an externally imposed and predatory structure, which clearly further weakened state authority and encouraged alternative forms of governance, including traditional councils and parallel insurgent administrations.

The Afghan society was and still is divided into smaller units (segments), often based on kinship or local communities, which have a high degree of autonomy. Therefore, the primary purpose of rights and obligations was to maintain a balance between segments, rather than to enforce a unified legal order directed from above. I will scrutinize the link between this power structure and the modern, centralized nation-state institutions, where sovereignty and the exercise of rights are under unified and central control throughout the state.

This chapter proceeds from the premise that Afghanistan's state-building trajectory can only be fully understood through an integrated analysis of domestic legitimacy crises and the distortive effects of international and regional interventions.

Across successive historical periods, Afghan governments have struggled to establish durable societal consent and normative authority. The state has frequently relied on coercion, patronage networks, and external resources rather than on inclusive governance, effective service provision, or a shared political narrative capable of generating broad-based legitimacy.

As a result, state authority remained shallow, contested, and unevenly distributed, particularly in peripheral regions. This structural illegitimacy rendered the Afghan state exceptionally vulnerable to manipulation, penetration, and substitution by external actors.

This chapter examines the collapse of the Afghan state-building project (2001–2021) by analysing the intersection of domestic legitimacy crises and external regional interference. The theoretical framework utilized integrates Joel Migdal's State-in-Society model with Francis Fukuyama's distinctions between state capacity and legitimacy to explain why two decades of international investment failed to produce a resilient political order. The central thesis of this chapter is that the Afghan state's disintegration was not merely a military defeat but the inevitable result of a profound normative discord. While the international community sought to construct a Weberian state based on rational-legal authority, this "image" of a centralized government was unable to penetrate the Migdal-style societal "mélange." In the rural periphery, the "rules of the game" continued to be dictated by traditional, tribal, and religious networks that the central state could neither co-opt nor replace.

The state-building effort was caught between two undermining forces during this time, such as external interference and internal illegitimacy.

The structural divide between a dispersed society and a highly centralized Kabul government. The state lost the fight for social control to local "strongmen" and the Taliban's shadow government because it was unable to provide basic justice or security, which was more in line with local customs.

The neighbouring states' regional security issues, particularly Pakistan's "strategic depth" strategy, which gave rebels the essential safe havens. The state was never able to obtain a monopoly on the rightful use of force because of this outside support.

By synthesizing these elements, this chapter argues that the 2021 collapse was the climax of a structural failure where the state's international "Image" finally succumbed to its fragmented "Practices."

From the academic perspective, Afghanistan serves as a primary case study in the "fragility trap," proving that state-building remains an impossible task when the internationalized norms of the intervening powers fail to bridge the fundamental divide with the social realities of the host nation.

Simultaneously, Afghanistan's geopolitical position as a strategic buffer and arena of great-power competition subjected it to continuous foreign intervention. The divergent security, ideological, and strategic interests of neighbouring states and global powers not only undermined the consolidation of sovereign authority but also reinforced domestic fragmentation. Selective external support, proxy warfare, and military interventions distorted institutional development and empowered non-state armed actors, thereby creating durable alternatives to state governance and legal authority.

This chapter, therefore, examines the mutually reinforcing relationship between internal illegitimacy and external interference, demonstrating how these dynamics jointly obstructed the emergence of a stable, autonomous, and socially embedded Afghan state. It argues that Afghanistan's state-building failure is not the outcome of isolated internal weaknesses or external pressures alone, but rather the product of their sustained interaction, which produced a self-reinforcing cycle of governance failure, dependency, and political fragmentation.

4.2. Internal Illegitimacy as a Structural Condition of Afghan Governance

From a theoretical standpoint, internal illegitimacy in Afghanistan reflects a persistent failure to establish what Max Weber defined as *legitimate domination*—that is, authority recognized as valid by those subject to it. Afghan state institutions have rarely succeeded in grounding their authority in any of Weber's ideal-typical sources of legitimacy (traditional, charismatic, or legal-rational). Instead, successive regimes oscillated between coercion, patronage, and externally sustained authority, none of which generated durable internal acceptance. In Afghanistan, legitimacy has historically been shallow, fragmented, and unevenly distributed across territory and social groups. Rather than emerging from a social contract rooted in shared norms and effective governance, state authority was often imposed from above and sustained through coercion, patronage, or external support.

The idea of internal illegitimacy as a "structural condition" implies that the Afghan state's failure from 2001 to 2021 was ingrained in the state-building project's architecture rather than being the result of transient mistakes or individual malfeasance. We can examine how the state became fundamentally isolated from the society it purported to rule by using the frameworks developed by Migdal & Fukuyama (2012).

A primary structural contradiction was that the Afghan state derived its survival not from domestic social contracts, but from international recognition and funding, i.e., the "Extraversion" of Legitimacy. To secure the billions in aid necessary for its existence, the state had to maintain a Weberian "Image"—performing rituals of democracy (elections, gender quotas, bureaucratic formalisms) that satisfied Western donors.

The state has no structural motive to bargain with its own population since it was not dependent on domestic taxes. As a result, there was a *"rentier"* relationship in which the government represented the international community instead of the Afghan *"mélange."*

Migdal's *state-in-society* framework offers a particularly useful lens for understanding Afghan governance. Migdal emphasizes that states compete with other social organizations for legitimacy and compliance, rather than monopolizing authority outright. (Migdal, 2012) Migdal, in his theory, adopted an approach that challenges the traditional, Weberian view that portrays the state as a monolithic, autonomous entity that stands "above" society. Instead, Migdal proposes that the state is an integral part of society, constantly shaped by and shaping the social forces around it.

Migdal sees society not as a uniform mass, not a monolithic block, but as a mixture of social organizations (families, clans, tribes, religious groups, and economic networks). Each of these groups has its own *"rules of the game"*—norms that determine how people should behave and to whom they owe allegiance. In Afghanistan, tribal structures, religious networks, warlord formations, and insurgent movements consistently outperformed the formal state in delivering order, justice, and predictability at the local level. As a result, the Afghan state never became the primary reference point for political loyalty; it remained merely one actor among many in a fragmented authority landscape.

Indeed, in the context of the Afghanistan state-building project between 2001 and 2021, Migdal's state-in-society framework explains why massive international investment failed to create a stable central government. During this period, the Taliban functioned as a "militant social force" that established parallel governance (shadow courts, tax systems) in rural areas, directly competing for social control. This period serves as a classic illustration of the "strong society versus weak state" dynamic as well.

Internal illegitimacy was structurally reinforced by a profound normative discord. The state attempted to impose a liberal-legal framework that was fundamentally at odds with the

"rules of the game" governing rural life. However, the central government's state courts were often seen as slow, culturally foreign, and corrupt.

The Taliban functioned as an alternative social organization that offered a "rule of law" based on local norms (Sharia and Pashtunwali). By providing a justice system that resonated with the community's moral code, the Taliban exercised a degree of "social control" that the central state, despite its superior resources, could never achieve.

This structural weakness was compounded by Afghanistan's deep normative pluralism. In connection with the central government's attempt at modernization, they operate alongside established legal and administrative institutions, including courts, electoral mechanisms, customary law, Islamic jurisprudence, and informal dispute resolution mechanisms. Rather than somehow integrating these normative systems into a coherent legitimacy framework, the state often attempted to suppress or bypass them. This strategy undermined the moral authority of formal institutions and reinforced perceptions of the state as alien and intrusive. In this sense, internal illegitimacy was not caused by the absence of governance, but by the misalignment between state authority and socially embedded norms of legitimacy.

Fukuyama's (2004) distinction between state capacity and state legitimacy further clarifies why Afghan governance remained fragile even when administrative structures expanded. Fukuyama defines state capacity (or strength) as the ability of a government to plan and execute policies and to enforce laws cleanly and effectively.

While post-2001 Afghanistan exhibited modest gains in institutional capacity—ministries, security forces, electoral bodies—these gains were not matched by corresponding legitimacy. Rampant corruption, elite capture, and dependence on foreign military and financial support weakened the state's claim to autonomous authority. Consequently, citizens perceived the state less as a neutral provider of public goods and more as a predatory or externally controlled apparatus.

The legitimacy deficit was further strengthened by ethnic and factional exclusion, as discussed previously regarding the 2004 Constitution. Political authority remained centralized within limited elite coalitions, hindering the development of a unified national political community. In theoretical terms, the Afghan state failed to complete the transition from segmentary legitimacy, based on factional or ethnic loyalty, to national legitimacy grounded in inclusive political identity. This failure transformed state institutions into arenas of distributive conflict rather than instruments of collective governance, further eroding voluntary compliance.

In Migdal's view, a strong state capacity enables a government to penetrate the societal "mélange" and substitute local regulations with national laws. In the absence of this capability, a state may assert a broad range of functions but remain "weak" because it is unable to provide services or enforce regulations effectively. Fukuyama asserts that institutions must function not only in an administrative sense but also be regarded as legitimate by the society they serve. This aligns with Migdal's idea of "social control." A state may possess the ability to coerce (raw power), but without legitimacy, it will continually face challenges from social organizations (tribes, religious groups) that the populace trusts more than the government.

According to Fukuyama, between 2001 and 2021, the Afghan Republic attempted an ambitious scope of activities (e.g., modern education, centralized policing, and women's rights). However, it lacked the capacity to execute these functions cleanly, leading to corruption and reliance on local "strongmen" to bridge the gap. Internal illegitimacy thus operated as a self-reinforcing structural condition. Weak legitimacy reduced compliance and tax extraction, undermining state capacity; limited capacity, in turn, deepened popular distrust. This vicious cycle created an enabling environment for non-state actors, most notably the Taliban, to advance alternative legitimacy claims rooted in religious authority, swift justice provision, and opposition to a state widely perceived as corrupt and illegitimate.

As elaborated above, several factors contributed to this chronic legitimacy deficit. First, the Afghan state lacked the capacity to deliver basic public goods—security, justice, and welfare—on a nationwide scale. In rural and peripheral areas, local customary law *(urf)*, tribal structures, and religious authorities frequently outperformed the state in dispute resolution and social regulation. Second, repeated modernization attempts, from Amanullah Khan's reforms to post-2001 liberal state-building, were perceived as externally driven and culturally alien, reinforcing popular distrust toward central authority. Third, political power was rarely exercised in an inclusive manner; instead, it was monopolized by narrow elites whose rule depended on factional alliances rather than popular consent.

As a result, the Afghan state remained a formal shell: legally sovereign and internationally recognized yet socially embedded only in limited urban enclaves. This internal illegitimacy did not merely weaken governance; it fundamentally shaped how both domestic and external actors interacted with the state.

In sum, Afghan governance failure cannot be adequately explained by institutional weakness or external interference alone. Internal illegitimacy—understood as the absence of

socially grounded, nationally shared recognition of state authority—constituted a foundational constraint on state-building. Treating legitimacy as an endogenous and structural variable is therefore essential for explaining both the persistence of fragmented authority and the repeated collapse of Afghan state-building projects.

4.3. Governance without Consent: Patronage, Coercion, and Fragmented Authority

Governance without consent represents a structural mode of rule in which authority is exercised in the absence of broadly shared legitimacy, relying instead on patronage distribution, selective coercion, and continuous bargaining with competing powerholders. In Afghanistan, this governance model was not an episodic deviation, but a persistent condition rooted in the state's failure to transform social compliance into internalized legitimacy. As such, it constitutes a central explanatory factor in the repeated collapse of Afghan state-building efforts.

From a legitimacy-theoretical perspective, Afghan governance failed to meet Weberian criteria of legitimate domination.

Why did the post-2001 Afghan state remain a *"Wizard of Oz"* type of government: it appeared powerful on the outside but lacked substantive power on the inside? Barfield (2010) argues that Western state-builders relied on rational-legal (Weberian) legitimacy (constitution, elections), while in Afghan society, legitimacy continued to be based on traditional (tribal) and charismatic (religious/resistance) sources.

Authority was neither widely accepted as traditional, nor stabilized through charismatic leadership, nor institutionalized as legal-rational rule. Instead, the state substituted legitimacy with material inducements and force. This substitution produced short-term governability but undermined long-term institutional consolidation. Consent was not internalized; it was purchased, coerced, or temporarily negotiated.

Suhrke (2011) points out that international intervention attempted to create a "liberal order" that lacked an internal basis for legitimacy. He explains that the state could not function as a "Weberian state" because it did not have a real monopoly on the use of force, and its legitimacy came not from the people but from external donors (a rent-seeking state).

There are abundant explicit and implicit writings about the concept of state-building, which is genuinely an interdisciplinary topic encompassing social science, international

relations, political studies, economics, security studies, and developmental studies. Most of the time, state-building is considered an interventionist strategy that bureaucratically strengthens or restores institutions, in general, to activate the apparatus of a state, as the U.S. did in Iraq (Zoe, 2007). However, the tangible outcome of state-building in Afghanistan by the Western world was forming a centralised system that, in a multi-ethnic society such as Afghanistan, is still a problematic issue. From the governance perspective, the centralised system needs to be more cooperative to foster and pave the way for development. On the contrary, centralised state building and a rentier economy never allow capacities to rise, though the state has a massive dependency on foreign aid (Jennifer, 2019).

The U.S.'s early understanding was that establishing a stable government with some semblance of law, functioning security forces, a court, knowledgeable bureaucracy with a centralized structure might create coherence in a war-torn country. The U.S. policymakers assumed that establishing an overwhelming military dominance in the country and subduing all sources of power there could introduce democracy and democratic patterns in the country. However, the country's political and social needs did not crystallise before initiating the state-building process and democratisation. According to Acemoglu (2021), "In viewing nation-building as a top-down, 'state-first' process, US policymakers were following a venerable tradition in political science. The assumption is that if you can establish overwhelming military dominance over a territory and subdue all other power sources, you can then impose your will. Yet in most places, this theory is only half right, at best; and in Afghanistan, it was dead wrong." (Daron, 2021)

According to Daron Acemoglu's 2021 commentary, the US's top-down, "state-first" nation-building strategy in Afghanistan was essentially flawed and destined to fail because it placed too much emphasis on imposing institutions from above rather than empowering local society and fostering consent. This strategy echoed previous failures in Vietnam and resulted in a fragile state and collapse despite enormous resources. Ignoring local power structures, supporting corrupt elites, and failing to establish legitimacy were major mistakes that led to a "dead wrong" strategy that left a hollow state open to the Taliban.

Acemoglu posits that US policymakers wrongly believed overwhelming military force could build a strong state by simply subduing other power sources and imposing their will, a theory only half-right at best, and disastrous in Afghanistan. The massive inflow of resources from Western nations and the emphasis on state institutions unintentionally empowered corrupt

elites and undermined true local power, alienating the populace and making the state vulnerable. The strategy also failed to consider deep societal structures, ethnic divisions, and local realities, resulting in a gap between the imposed state and the people it was intended to govern.

Weigand (2022) noted in his research that while the international community has been pushing for Weberian procedural legitimacy (elections), the population has been more concerned with “performance-based” (order and security) and “moral” legitimacy, in which the Taliban have often been more successful. Moreover, he stated that the legitimacy in conflict zones hinges on "interactive dignity", how authorities treat ordinary people daily, emphasizing respect, fairness, and inclusion over services or elections. Based on extensive interviews, Weigand explores why local Afghans, from villagers to insurgents, perceive legitimacy through these personal interactions, offering a powerful, people-centric view of state-building challenges in Afghanistan and other war-torn areas.

To illustrate the state-building challenges in Afghanistan, the three crucial inner factors that disrupted and hindered the process in the country should be explained, as the insufficiencies of the government in Afghanistan have persisted since 1950. First, non-control over religious institutions easily changed into the hegemonic resource of terrorism and the Taliban that threatened the government for almost 30 years. According to Edwards (2010), the second factor was the lack of transparency in foreign aid, and the state was the (only pebble on the beach), meaning that the leadership could not ensure trust between the state and the people.

The third has been considered the weak governance system, except that, for the capital, the rural areas remained outside even minor development and state hegemony. This issue is not limited to only a single regime; however, throughout history, rural areas continued in their traditional way of life. Moreover, the governance thus became personalized and transactional rather than institutionalized. Ministries, security forces, and provincial administrations often functioned as vehicles of factional enrichment rather than as instruments of public authority. Corruption, clientelism, and parallel chains of command undermined bureaucratic coherence and eroded whatever residual legitimacy the state might have possessed.

Crucially, this pattern reinforced a self-perpetuating cycle: weak legitimacy encouraged patronage politics, while patronage further undermined legitimacy by confirming popular perceptions of the state as predatory, unjust, and externally dependent.

As per Barnett R. Rubin, the patronage functioned as the primary mechanism through which Afghan rulers attempted to compensate for weak legitimacy. (Barnett, 2002)

In the absence of a strong fiscal base and credible institutions, access to state resources, offices, contracts, security appointments, and rents became the principal currency of political loyalty. State institutions were thus absorbed into personalized networks of exchange rather than operating as impersonal bureaucratic structures.

This patronage-based governance fragmented authority in two ways. Horizontally, ministries, security agencies, and provincial administrations became extensions of competing elite coalitions. Vertically, central authority remained dependent on local intermediaries—warlords, tribal leaders, and powerbrokers—who retained autonomous control over coercion and social compliance. Loyalty to the state was therefore conditional and reversible, contingent on continued access to material benefits rather than normative commitment. Coercion constituted the second pillar of governance without consent, yet it remained fundamentally fragmented. The Afghan state never achieved a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Instead, coercive power was dispersed among militias, paramilitary forces, private security actors, and insurgent groups. Even when state coercion expanded—most notably after 2001—it was frequently perceived as externally imposed, predatory, or selectively applied.

The reliance on coercion in the absence of legitimacy produced a negative feedback loop. Rather than generating compliance, state violence reinforced popular distrust and resistance, strengthening alternative authorities that promised protection, justice, or moral order. In this sense, coercion did not compensate for the lack of consent; it actively deepened the legitimacy deficit. The interaction of patronage and coercion generated a condition of fragmented authority best understood as *competitive governance*. Afghanistan was not characterized by state absence, but by the coexistence of multiple governing actors exercising overlapping functions of taxation, adjudication, and security provision. Tribal councils (*jirgas*), religious authorities, warlords, criminal networks, and insurgent movements often commanded greater local legitimacy than formal state institutions.

The Afghan case reveals a clear causal mechanism linking governance without consent to state failure:

1. Low legitimacy prevents voluntary compliance and revenue extraction.
2. Patronage substitutes for legitimacy, fragmenting institutions and incentivizing elite capture.
3. Selective coercion compensates for weak authority but deepens societal alienation.

4. Fragmented authority enables alternative governance providers to outcompete the state.
5. State capacity erodes, further undermining legitimacy and reinforcing dependence on patronage and coercion.

This self-reinforcing cycle locked Afghan governance into a low-legitimacy equilibrium from which institutional consolidation became increasingly unlikely.

While Afghanistan exhibits extreme manifestations of governance without consent, similar dynamics are observable in other fragile states. In Somalia, governance has long relied on clan-based patronage and negotiated authority, resulting in enduring fragmentation despite external state-building efforts. In Iraq after 2003, sectarian patronage networks and coercive fragmentation undermined national legitimacy, producing parallel systems of authority. South Sudan similarly illustrates how patronage-driven governance and militarized coercion can substitute for consent while hollowing out state institutions.

In conclusion, the governance without consent in Afghanistan was neither accidental nor temporary. It represented a structurally embedded mode of rule shaped by internal illegitimacy, normative pluralism, and fragmented authority. Patronage and coercion allowed the state to function at a minimal level but prevented the emergence of a shared political community and durable institutional authority. As a result, Afghan governance remained perpetually vulnerable to collapse and displacement by actors capable of mobilizing alternative, if exclusionary, claims to legitimacy. As a conclusion, the Afghan state-building imposed by the US-led coalition failed because the pursuit of the Weberian “rational-legal” model ignored the “mélange” nature of Afghan society and the alternative sources of legitimacy of local power centres (warlords, tribal leaders).

4.4. External Interference and the Internationalization of Afghan Politics

Afghanistan’s internal illegitimacy made it exceptionally vulnerable to external interference. Its geopolitical position—bordering Pakistan, Iran, Central Asia, and historically situated at the crossroads of great-power competition—transformed the country into a regional security arena rather than a consolidated sovereign state.

External actors consistently pursued their own strategic objectives by cultivating Afghan proxies. Pakistan’s security establishment viewed Afghanistan primarily through the lens of strategic depth, supporting Islamist networks that could counter Indian influence. Iran engaged

selectively with ethnic and sectarian groups to secure its western flank. Gulf states provided ideological and financial support to religious institutions, while the Soviet Union and later the United States attempted large-scale state-building and security sector reform projects aligned with their global agendas.

In this subsection, I explore and analyse, through the concept of *"External Interventions and the Internationalization of Normative Dispute,"* the primary political framework and context that aims to understand the problem of why the world was and remains divided on the issue of the perception of the Taliban-led Afghan government. This refers to how global powers project their own conflicting values (norms) onto Afghanistan, how regional actors (Pakistan, India, China) influence local governance issues, and how Afghan domestic politics has become a diplomatic conflict zone.

Before the Taliban takeover, the international intervention (2001–2021) was driven by the liberal peacebuilding norm. This approach was based on the assumption that lasting peace could only be achieved by transforming Afghanistan into a Western-style, democratic state based on the rule of law. The goal of this strategy was the transformation of a conflict-ridden society into a stable, peaceful state by transplanting the institutions and values of liberal democracy.

In Afghanistan during the Western allied countries' state-building project (2001–2021), this framework was the primary "normative engine" behind the Western intervention. It is based on four fundamental pillars.

Above all, in the creation of democratic governance based on political liberalism, which arose from the conviction that legitimacy can be derived from the "consent of the governed", and this gives true legitimacy to the government. They intended to establish a system where power rests with the people, exercised directly or through representatives, governed by principles like participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, and respect for rights, ensuring open, responsive, and just government by the consent of the governed. The ambitious goal was to create a system where the state serves its citizens by articulating interests, managing resources, and exercising power in a way that promotes stability, equity, and sustainable development. Of course, the operation of the system was also conceived according to Western values, i.e., citizens can be enabled to choose their representatives through free and fair elections.

A system of checks and balances must be established in the state power structure, in order for the different branches of power to limit and control each other's power in order to prevent abuses. Moreover, the public institutions, political parties, and supervisory bodies operate ethically and efficiently.

The other key pillar was the enforcement and observance of Universal Human Rights. The central element of this model was the protection of individual liberties over collective or religious mandates, which was a huge challenge in a deeply religious society. Consequently, in a post-Taliban regime, the promotion of women's rights to education, work, and political participation emerged as an unquestionable benchmark for the democratic organization of the state. Rather than compensating for internal weakness, these interventions deepened fragmentation. External resources flowed around, rather than through, Afghan state institutions, empowering non-state armed actors and reinforcing parallel governance structures. The result was not state consolidation, but externally sustained pluralism of authority. Pakistan's role was the most decisive external factor in undermining the state-building attempt between 2001 and 2021. For Islamabad, Afghanistan is not an independent sovereign state, but an arena for an existential struggle against India. The Pakistani "strategic depth" doctrine encapsulated the military theory that Pakistan could not win a full-scale war against India, and therefore used Afghanistan (and Afghan territories) as "depth" to which it could retreat, establish a strong base there, and launch attacks from there, thereby increasing India's resource allocation and the costs of the conflict, which also explains the acceptance of Afghan refugees. The Pakistani military, particularly during the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, developed the so-called doctrine of *"strategic depth."*

The Pakistani *"strategic depth"* doctrine was a military theory that Pakistan could not win a full-scale war against India, and therefore used Afghanistan (and Afghan territories) as a "depth" to which it could retreat, establish a strong base there, and launch attacks from there, thereby increasing the division of Indian resources and the costs of the conflict, which also explains the reception of Afghan refugees. Pakistan invested in turning its western flank with Afghanistan into its strategic depth to use Afghan land and Kabul as a strategic bulwark against India, while India lived in terror of a two-front conflict with its two nuclear neighbours. To safeguard its military resources and leadership from India's more powerful conventional forces, Pakistan sought to use Afghanistan as a backup region or operational area in the event of a military confrontation. In addition to countering India's military and numerical dominance by

establishing a buffer zone in Afghanistan, this policy sought to lessen Pakistan's physical vulnerability, its lack of geographical depth due to its narrow, elongated shape.

The *"strategic depth"* military theory is that if India attacks Pakistan, Pakistani forces can retreat to Afghanistan (the *"strategic depth"*), where they can regroup and resume fighting, so they don't have to fight on all fronts at once. The reason behind this is the unfavourable geopolitical, geostrategic configuration of Pakistan. Afghanistan, Iran, and India are the three nations that border Pakistan internationally. Additionally, it has a 438-kilometer border with China in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan and India are 2,430 and 3,323 kilometres, respectively.

Pakistan would have an active front line spanning 5,753 km if its eastern front with India and its western front with Afghanistan were both active. Pakistan must also protect its 959-kilometer border with Iran since the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) continues to pose a threat. Additionally, Pakistan must protect its 1,046 km of southern coastline in the event of an ongoing conflict with India. When US special troops entered Pakistan from the Western front in 2011 for Operation Neptune Spear to kill Osama Bin Laden, Islamabad was unable to detect the invasion, exposing this sole focus on the Eastern front and systematic disregard of the Western front.

For a nation the size of Pakistan, defending a frontline that is almost 8,000 kilometres long is an enormous undertaking. For comparison, the maximum width of Pakistan is roughly 1,125 km (700 miles) from east to west. From the Hindu Kush mountain range to the Arabian Sea, the nation's maximum length from north to south is roughly 1,875 km (1,165 miles). Pakistan has always under-resourced the western front by deploying the majority of its forces (about 70–80%) along the Line of Control (LoC) and international boundary with India. During the Soviet invasion, when millions of Afghan refugees lived in Pakistan, the Taliban movement was born. There are still thousands of such exiles and Taliban supporters living in Pakistan. In addition, the Pashtuns, who live on both sides of the Durand Line—the de facto border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, have close ties with the Taliban. (See Annex 11).

This is one of the reasons why the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is porous, difficult to control, and entirely artificial. For the Pashtuns, it is a non-existent line that divides families, clans, and tribes. As Sumit Ahlawat noted (2025), because of this reason, the Pashtuns and the Taliban do not recognize this international border. For ethnic and ideological reasons,

a large portion of the population of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province could support the Taliban in any fight with Pakistan. (Sumit, 2025)

The essence of the Pakistani doctrine was to meet the so-called two-front threat. The Pakistani high command believed that Pakistan could not deal with India and a possible internal insurgency at the same time, and therefore, Afghanistan was vital for strategic manoeuvring. The Pakistani *"double game"* happened in parallel with American military presence reduction.

Iran's involvement in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 was a complicated combination of supporting the post-Taliban government, fostering trade and economic ties (Chabahar Port), participating politically, and secretly supporting the Taliban to counter U.S. influence and protect Shia interests by giving them weapons and intelligence. This resulted in a "ambiguous" dual-track strategy to maintain influence and stability while undermining Western objectives. Between 2001 and 2021, Iran's complicated stance toward the Hazaras was influenced by both cold geopolitical goals and religious solidarity. Although Tehran has claimed to be the Hazara's protector, its assistance has frequently been used as a means of achieving its own regional objectives.

Iran has invested millions of dollars in infrastructure, road construction, and energy supplies, particularly in the central and northern regions inhabited by the Hazaras. He also funded schools, mosques, and media channels to strengthen Shiite religious and Persian cultural identity. The exact total amount of Iran's investments in Afghanistan for the period 2001–2022 is not available as a single official figure, but economic relations have reached the order of billions of dollars, primarily in the areas of trade and infrastructure. According to Nusrat (2025), by 2017, Iran had become Afghanistan's largest trading partner, covering about 22% of the market.

Tehran has invested significant amounts in the development of infrastructure in the western provinces (e.g., Herat). Key projects included the Khaf-Herat railway line and the development of the Chabahar port in southern Iran, which provided Afghanistan with an alternative sea outlet, bypassing Pakistan. Iran maintained communication with all parties, attended international conferences, initially backed the new Afghan government, and invited Taliban delegations to negotiations in early 2021. Following the 2001 US invasion, Iran initially helped the United States oust the Taliban.

It participated in the *Bonn Conference* that established the new Afghan state and provided intelligence support to the Northern Alliance. However, this policy changed in George W. Bush

included Iran in the *"axis of evil"* in 2002; Tehran changed its strategy. According to the Institute for the Study of War (2009), the relationship between Iran, the Afghan central government, and the Taliban has been controversial and complex, with much evidence suggesting that Iran provided indirect and limited support to the Taliban insurgency between 2001 and 2021.

Starting around 2005, Iran began secretly providing weapons, training, and financial support to the Taliban. The goal was to “bait” American forces in Afghanistan, thereby preventing the United States from turning its military presence against Iran. The most serious and controversial aspect of the support for the Hazara community was the creation of the Liwa Fatemiyoun (Fatemiyun Brigade). This unit, also known as "Afghan Hezbollah," was officially established in 2013 under the command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and fought in Syria having troops between 10000 and 20000. From 2001 to 2021, Russia's role in Afghanistan changed from initial support for the U.S.-led effort to combat terrorism to strategic manoeuvring, with a primary focus on regional stability, counter-narcotics, and preventing extremist spillover into Central Asia. As Diana Janse noted (2025), at the same time, Russia cautiously engaged with the post-Taliban government and later the Taliban themselves, striking a balance between cooperation and deep suspicion stemming from the legacy of the Soviet-Afghan War and concerns about a new security void. (Janse, 2021), Russian interest in Afghanistan. SCEEUS Report, No.1, 2021). In addition to providing intelligence and logistical support through Central Asian facilities, Russia backed the U.S.-led invasion after 9/11, viewing it as a means of eliminating threats like Al-Qaeda and stabilizing the region.

After 2004, Russian-Afghan relations deteriorated, and from 2014 onwards, they completely favoured the Taliban and conducted negotiations with them. Both Iran and Russia feared a permanent American military presence in the region, which overrode their ideological aversion to the Taliban. Russia, on the other hand, was not afraid of American military burdens and was even content with the situation in which the American-led coalition was using incredible financial resources, thereby depleting their economic potential and committing a large amount of military hardware to the armed conflict.

All other players in the region (Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia) considered illiberal or authoritarian models of stability, while the international world (UN, NATO/EU, democratic Asian nations) attempted to promote liberal-democratic values. Instead of using Weberian rational-legal standards, neighbouring governments evaluated the Kabul government based on

its capacity to ensure security and stop the flow of drugs or refugees. Due to the failure of Western-style state-building to achieve goals, regional powers steadily distanced themselves from Kabul and struck alternative, frequently unofficial agreements with local forces, including the Taliban.

4.5.The impact of the American shift in focus on state-building in Afghanistan

The shift of American focus to the Iraq War (2003–2004) fundamentally undermined state-building attempts in Afghanistan, which contemporary analyses consider to be one of the mission's most critical strategic errors. The shift of American focus to the Iraq War (2003–2004) fundamentally undermined attempts at state-building in Afghanistan, which contemporary analysts consider one of the mission's most critical strategic errors.

One feature of this shift in priority was the state-building strategy in Afghanistan, the so-called *"Light Footprint"* strategy. The Bush administration, including Pentagon leaders, fearing that Afghanistan would be too much of a drain on resources from the Iraqi invasion, deliberately limited the presence in Afghanistan. This prevented the central government from effectively extending its authority beyond Kabul, leaving much of the country under the influence of local warlords and the Taliban.

In 2004, President George W. Bush decided partial withdrawal from Afghanistan because the U.S. focus shifted heavily towards Iraq, though troops remained in Afghanistan to combat remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, with early efforts to build Afghan security forces under President Karzai, but the situation remained unstable, leading to gradual escalations rather than withdrawals in that period. The *"redeployment"* of American troops from Afghanistan to Iraq was not a single, one-time move, but a strategic shift in priorities, focusing resources, attention, and fresh units on the invasion of Iraq.

The security vacuum created by the partial withdrawal led to the infiltration and resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who had already made up for their losses. The most trained intelligence and special forces were transferred to Iraq, which allowed the Taliban to reorganize and wage guerrilla warfare from 2004 onwards. In the weak security environment, subsequent reconstruction programs (building schools, roads) often became targets of attacks.

The most highly trained counterterrorism units (e.g., CIA teams and special forces) that had specialized in the hunt for Osama bin Laden were redirected to the preparations in Iraq.

According to Belasco (2004) significant portion of surveillance drones, satellite capabilities, and analytical resources were redeployed to scout Iraqi targets.

According to another report of Belasco (2006), the distribution of war spending also clearly reflects the shift in emphasis: in 2004, the United States spent an average of $6.4 billion per month on Iraq, compared with just $1.3 billion on Afghanistan. In 2004, the United States spent five times as much on the Iraq war as it did on Afghanistan. Economic reconstruction in Afghanistan has thus remained slow and underfunded, preventing the development of a sustainable state infrastructure.

As a result, the Taliban get a “golden opportunity” for infiltration into Afghanistan.

In 2004, the United States spent five times as much on the Iraq theatre as it did on Afghanistan. Economic reconstruction in Afghanistan remained slow and underfunded, preventing the development of a sustainable state infrastructure.

Although there were successes in 2004 (such as the adoption of a constitution and the first presidential election), the division of strategic attention gave the Taliban a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to undermine the central government's stabilization efforts, and the Karzai government's inability to establish independently functioning institutions ultimately led to its collapse in 2021.

4.6.The Post-2001 State-Building Project and Its Contradictions

The international intervention after 2001 sought to construct a centralized, democratic, and liberal Afghan state. While formally ambitious, this project reproduced many historical patterns of illegitimacy. Political institutions were rapidly transplanted without sufficient social embedding, while security and governance depended overwhelmingly on foreign military presence and financial aid.

Elections, constitutionalism, and bureaucratic reforms existed largely in form rather than substance. For much of the population, the post-2001 state appeared less as a national authority than as an extension of foreign power, mediated through corrupt local elites. The reliance on warlords as partners in counterinsurgency further compromised legitimacy and normalized impunity. This externally underwritten governance model generated dependency rather than autonomy. When international support declined, the Afghan state proved incapable of sustaining its authority, revealing the hollow core of externally engineered legitimacy.

At its core, the post-2001 project prioritized the rapid construction of formal institutions—a constitution, elections, ministries, courts, and national security forces—on the assumption that institutional form would generate political order and legitimacy. However, these institutions were largely transplanted rather than organically negotiated. They reflected external models of legal-rational authority that remained weakly embedded in Afghan social realities characterized by normative pluralism, localized authority, and historically negotiated governance. As a result, formal institutions often functioned symbolically rather than substantively. Elections failed to generate durable political consent, courts struggled to compete with customary and religious dispute-resolution mechanisms, and bureaucratic expansion did not translate into effective service delivery. The contradiction lay in the expectation that legitimacy would follow institutionalization, despite the absence of shared normative foundations.

According to Rubin (1992), “Like the elites of other rentier states, the old regime was hardly accountable to the state's citizens: there was little taxation and little representation. Its policies were aimed at expanding the state and the modern sector it controlled and at redistributing some of its revenues to obtain loyalty through patron-client relations. These policies created a bureaucratic class that lived (or aspired to live) in Kabul. This city developed upper and middle classes with Westernised or semi-Westernised lifestyles. The state's development policies did not improve the standard of living of the rural masses or provide them with a reliable and just administration”. (Rubin, 1992, p. 82)

Thus, the unbalanced development has two challenges. The first challenge to consider is the rough terrain of the country that needs enormous fiscal capability to build schools, clinics, and cater to living situations. The second has been the corrupt, irresponsible government that often endeavoured to convince the capital’s inhabitants only for political purposes. The rural areas, however, have been self-sufficient. Absence of interference by the government throughout history caused segregation of the central government from a high proportion of citizens and rural communities. Rural deprivation and living based on livestock shortages in rural development programmes in Afghanistan caused a cultural gap in the administrative sense between rural and urban people.

Thirdly, rural areas remained unaware of the patterns and elements upon which state formation is based, and political culture, nationalism, and social responsibility. Thus, Afghanistan experts and researchers often suggest a decentralised system to cover the rural

areas and allow the rural dwellers to find affinity with the government, one way or another. (Zhang, 2019)

A second contradiction emerged from the project's emphasis on strong centralization. The 2004 Constitution established a highly centralized presidential system, concentrating executive power in Kabul. This design conflicted sharply with Afghanistan's historically decentralized and negotiated patterns of authority. Rather than integrating local governance structures into the state, centralization incentivized elite competition for control over the centre, intensifying patronage politics and factionalism.

As I see, Afghanistan's 2004 constitution established one of the world's most centralized presidential administrations. The Western belief that a powerful central authority could modernize society and provide peace to the countryside served as the foundation for this paradigm. However, as I pointed out, this arrangement totally disregarded Afghanistan's historical reality, which is that authority has always been split between the court in Kabul and independent rural villages.

Afghan society is extremely ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously divided. Afghan society, as a *"mélange"*, clans, warlords, religious leaders, and ethnic groups, resists centralization, yet the central government has addressed it in a homogenous manner. These forces have formed into unofficial networks outside the state (or corrupting the state from within) because the formal constitutional framework does not permit local autonomy (a constitutional defect).

The central state was compelled to negotiate with regional *"strongmen"* (warlords) because it lacked a Weberian monopoly on violence. As a result, the mediated state became a phenomenon. To appease the warlords, Kabul appointed local leaders who pledged allegiance but used public funds to establish their own private armies and economic interests. Because citizens faced corrupt local petty kings who acted in the name of the state but in their personal interests rather than in an impartial rule of law, this dynamic further undermined the legitimacy of the state.

Centralization without local consent weakened both vertical accountability and administrative effectiveness. Provincial and district officials were often perceived as agents of distant elite networks rather than representatives of local communities. This further eroded trust in state authority and reinforced the appeal of non-state governance providers.

The scale of external involvement constituted another fundamental contradiction. While international assistance enabled rapid institutional expansion, it simultaneously undermined the state's claim to autonomous authority. Dependence on foreign military protection and financial flows limited domestic accountability and distorted incentive structures. Afghan political elites were often more responsive to international patrons than to their own constituencies.

Moreover, external resources fuelled corruption and rent-seeking, transforming state institutions into vehicles for elite enrichment. Rather than strengthening state-society relations, international aid frequently reinforced governance without consent by expanding patronage networks and insulating political actors from societal pressures.

The prioritization of security over political legitimacy represented another core contradiction. Counterinsurgency strategies emphasized rapid expansion of security forces and territorial control, often at the expense of governance quality and accountability. The militarization of state-building blurred the line between protection and coercion, reinforcing perceptions of the state as violent, predatory, or externally imposed.

Security forces themselves became fragmented and politicized, embedded within patronage networks and dependent on foreign support. Instead of consolidating a monopoly over the use of force, the post-2001 project reproduced fragmented coercive authority, weakening the state's legitimacy and capacity simultaneously.

The post-2001 political order formally promoted inclusion through power-sharing arrangements and electoral competition. In practice, however, inclusion often took the form of elite incorporation rather than societal integration. Warlords, militia leaders, and factional strongmen were absorbed into state institutions without being transformed by them.
This strategy stabilized the political order temporarily but hollowed out institutional integrity. State offices became instruments of negotiated authority rather than rule-based governance. Inclusion without integration thus reproduced the very conditions—patronage, fragmentation, and governance without consent—that undermined long-term state consolidation.

The cumulative effect of these contradictions was the emergence of a state that was institutionally dense but politically shallow. Formal sovereignty coexisted with weak internal legitimacy, limited administrative reach, and contested authority. The Afghan state possessed the outward trappings of modern governance but lacked the social foundations necessary for resilience.

This structural imbalance proved fatal once external support declined. Without internalized legitimacy, fiscal autonomy, or monopolized coercive authority, state institutions rapidly collapsed under insurgent pressure. The Taliban's ability to present itself as an alternative moral and governance order—despite its coercive practices—was inseparable from the contradictions embedded in the post-2001 state-building project.

The failure of the post-2001 state-building project in Afghanistan cannot be explained by insufficient resources or poor implementation alone. It resulted from a set of inherent contradictions: liberal institutions without social foundations, centralization without consent, inclusion without integration, and security without legitimacy. These contradictions entrenched governance without consent and internal illegitimacy as structural features of Afghan governance, ultimately rendering the state unsustainable.

It is evident from post-collapse evaluations in 2021, such as reports from SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction), that strict centralization imposed on a fractured population has resulted in instability rather than stability. Weberian legitimacy cannot be attained by a state that does not provide decentralized power structures and does not acknowledge the diversity of the social *"mélange."* It can be stated that Afghanistan serves as a warning about the failure of technocratic state-building when the structural fragmentation of the political scene is not addressed.

The table No. 3 summarizes the internal contradictions of the post-2001 Afghan state-building project, analysed through the theoretical lenses of Joel Migdal (State in Society), Francis Fukuyama (Capacity vs. Scope), and Weberian legitimacy. (Midgal, Joel (2004); Fukuyama, Francis (2004) State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century)

From an academic perspective, these structural contradictions underscore why the "image" of the state cannot survive without external enforcement. Moreover, these contradictions highlight the *"Wizard of Oz"* effect: the project maintained the image of a powerful modern state for international audiences but lacked the internal social control and legitimacy to function independently.

Table No. 3: Internal contradictions of the post-2001 Afghan state-building project

Category	Goal (Image)	Reality (Practice)	Consequence
Politics	Extreme centralization centred in Kabul.	Fragmented landscape; local power centres.	Rural provinces are alienated from the centre.
Legitimacy	Rational-legal (Elections & Constitution).	Traditional & religious (Sharia, Jirga).	Normative discord: the state felt "alien."
Capacity	Wide Scope (Ambitious state functions).	Low Strength (Corruption, aid dependency).	State overstretches; functional failure.
Society	Unified community of modern citizens.	Social "mélange" (Autonomous clans).	Failure to penetrate local social rules.
Regional	Sovereign, independent nation-state.	Regional chessboard (Intervening neighbours).	Insurgent sanctuaries (Safe havens) remained.
Security	State monopoly on violence (ANA).	Militarized market; paid loyalties.	The system collapsed once foreign aid stopped.

4.7.Main sources of fragility in the Pashtun inhabited area, the link between the Taliban and Tribalism

On 15th August 2001, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan after a long period, in fact, a 20-year battle with the “democratic regime” supported by the world community. The collapse of power into Taliban hands in Afghanistan attracted the attention of most political science scholars regarding modern state-building in Afghanistan. The fragility and the collapse of the state in Afghanistan are considered a tribal challenge that restricted Afghanistan’s progress toward a developed state by others proclaiming a modern nation-state (Chang, Lee,

Pengtao, Geng, and Zang, 2022). Power hedging and faith fetters: The Factors of tribe and Religion in Afghanistan's State Building.

Roughly fifty ethnicities have been recognised in Afghanistan; however, only fourteen have been recognised officially by the constitution, and the four ethnicities are the major ethnic groups in the country: Hazara, Uzbek, Tajik, and Pashtuns, who are all the most active groups in the political arena. The Pashtuns preserved their tribal values officially in the county. On the other hand, the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara left behind their tribal values and attitudes towards government. However, the Pashtuns preserved tribal values in both political and social ways of life (Bordas, 2015, p. 123). In the Pashtun tribal form, Khan, the one who is landlord, and *Malik,* who is one step further away than 'khan', are a privileged circle that leads the Jirgas' gathering. However, among Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara, tribal values and rules in either social or political arenas do not exist (Shahrani, 2013, pp. 24 - 25; Glatzer, 2002, pp. 5 - 9). Religious values come after tribal values in the political dialogue, though the politics of Afghanistan, in general, has been influenced by ethnic and tribal perceptions as well as ethnicity, comprising a stable pillar of political competition in the country. The Khan and the elder of the tribe, called *Spinger* by the Pashtun, play nearly an official role among the Pashtun community. All regimes throughout history to solve conflict and exert official rule, have leaned on tribal elders. Since the formation of modern Afghanistan, Abdul Rahman in 1983 tried to stabilise his authority by paying the men and women to be tribal leaders. According to Faiz Mohamad Katib, Afghanistan was in such awful economic circumstances that Abdul Rahman made decisions regarding tribal leaders' and aristocrats' monthly payments (BBC, Ayub Arwin).

One of the main sources of fragility in Pashtun-inhabited areas is the segmentary tribal structure and weak central authority. Pashtun society is historically organized along segmentary lineage systems, in which loyalty is primarily owed to kin, clan (*khel*), and tribe (*qawm*) rather than to an abstract state. Authority is decentralized and situational, emerging through tribal councils (*jirgas*) and charismatic or coercive leadership rather than institutionalized governance.

This social structure inherently resists durable centralization. Attempts by the Afghan state—whether monarchical, republican, communist, or post-2001—to impose uniform authority have repeatedly been perceived as external impositions, undermining legitimacy in Pashtun regions. The result has been chronic state penetration failure and governance vacuums.

The tribal elders had had a considerable role in the management of the fundamental project in rural areas and were used as coordinators between the government and rural communities. Furthermore, the tribes' leaders and aristocrats could hold a Jirga for conflict resolution in rural areas. This role has been preserved by the government throughout history. At the same time, the tribal leader, landlord, and elder of the people, who held a traditional position among the people, had tangible roles in terms of state-building in Afghanistan. As Dinino and Carte noted (2010) "Although tribal leadership is decentralised and diffuse, tribal identities can still be mobilised by charismatic leaders. It is often the case, however, that those individuals who can mobilize tribes into cohesive political movements gain positions in strictly non-tribal organisations. Such leaders emerge as heads of political parties, business groups, or armed factions." (Dininio & Carter, 2010)

The second factor working against the democratization attempt is the relationship between Pashtunwali and normative pluralism. The Pashtun code (*Pashtunwali*)—centred on honor (*nang*), hospitality (*Melmasthia*), revenge (*Badal*), and asylum (*Nanawatay*)—constitutes a parallel normative order that frequently clashes with both Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and state law.

The Taliban represent the pure tribal segment of Pashtun society in Afghanistan that follows the fundamental tribal principles of Pashtunwali: *Nang, Melmasthia, Badal, Turburwali, Jirga, nanawati* - these principles are not written, rather they are unwritten law that the elders, by word of mouth, use to preserve the Pashtunwali principles. However, these principles embodied in Sharia and Islami 'Jirga' 'Shura Olama' mean religious leaders' decisions concerning the group's fate and political issues. (Mohiuddin, 2016; Zahid, 2013). According to Thomas Ruttig (2010), "There are no permanently fixed places on the Pashtun genealogical tree and no eternal unchanging tribal institutions. Much of what is told about them is myths and idealised versions of a golden past that probably never existed in a pure form, and not across the Pashtun areas in the same way." (Rutting, Thomas (2010)

Rutting in his thematic report also noted that "the versions of Pashtunwali differ by locale. They are locally called *nirkh,* which means price and refers to the different prices used to settle blood feuds, i.e., '*Badal'*, which means exchange." (Ruttig, Thomas (2010) The Taliban on the one hand accommodates single ethnic principles or tribal values in the country and on the other hand, they accommodate the 'Sharia' law and speak of the 'Islamic Emirate system' or the Emirate political system of Islam, whereas the abhorrent and nonhumanitarian approach of the

Taliban against the non-Pashtun ethnicities shows an ethnic rift in the country, rather associated with Islamic Fundamentalism or Islamic radicalism. In the tribal vision of the Taliban, Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara ethnic groups are somehow condemned for being an open society, more enlightened than the closed society of the Pashtun. Taliban and their governance are based on two values: tribal values and their view of themselves as superior to the rest of ethnicities, as throughout history, the Pashtun leaders enslaved Hazaras and suppressed ethnicities.

The society of Afghanistan and ethnicities unconsciously categorised the Pashtuns as possessing the Taliban and tribal identity. When mentioning Pashtun, everyone thinks of the Taliban. When mentioning Hazaras, people think of an enlightened ethnic. The society of Afghanistan, according to the Taliban, is strongly inclined towards Paganism and false Western social manners, though, in the twenty years of Western allies' countries' presence in Afghanistan, the society's manners have changed to Western manners. In reality, the Afghan society's manners ought to be changed to Islamic and should steer the people towards an Islamic lifestyle. This argument rather relies on a more precise point of view of Sharia than any other rational sources. Rather, it relies on a tribal perspective regarding women.

Normative pluralism in Pashtun-inhabited areas constitutes a major source of fragility by preventing the consolidation of a single, authoritative legal and moral order. The coexistence of state law, Islamic jurisprudence, and the customary code of *Pashtunwali* systematically undermines the state's claim to a monopoly over legitimate rulemaking and dispute resolution. In practice, this pluralism delegitimizes formal judicial institutions, which are widely perceived as corrupt, distant, and culturally alien, while customary mechanisms such as *jirgas* retain greater social credibility. Moreover, the moral imperatives embedded in *Pashtunwali* often override state-defined security priorities. Principles such as *Nanawatay* (the obligation to grant asylum) and *Badal* (revenge) can compel individuals and communities to protect insurgents or resist cooperation with state authorities, even when such actions expose them to collective punishment or military retaliation.

As a result, governance in these areas becomes fragmented and situational, allowing insurgent actors such as the Taliban to exploit normative ambiguity by selectively enforcing Islamic law while tacitly accommodating or instrumentalizing tribal customs, thereby further eroding state legitimacy and deepening structural fragility.

The differences between the closed society and the open society in Afghanistan relate to ethnicities and the worldview of each ethnicity (Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, and Uzbek), varying

from each other, though they belong to different cultures, and each has its own worldview of modern phenomena. Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks also use the same method as Pashtuns to hold gatherings for conflict resolution in rural areas. However, there is no precise cultural code to be observed in and named *Jirga* as the Pashtuns do. *Begs, Arbabs, and Khan* are common words for those who locally have natural authority in the sub-regions and hold gatherings (*Shura*), and these concepts are common almost in all ethnicities, with, however, different approaches and visions (The International Legal Foundation, 2004). The feature of the closed society that the Taliban represent is "A herd or a tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys, and common distress." (Balcerczyk, 2018; Ibrahimi, 2019, p. 47)

The Taliban strategically selectively Islamized Pashtunwali, presenting themselves as enforcers of order while tolerating or instrumentalizing tribal norms when politically expedient. Tribalism and Islamic fundamentalism converge in times of resistance, where religious identity often becomes a rallying point against foreign influence. This was evident during the Soviet-Afghan war, where tribal leaders and Islamic fighters, known as Mujahideen, united to resist Soviet forces (Roy, 1986). The Taliban, emerging after the Soviet withdrawal, utilized similar strategies, appealing to both tribal and religious sentiments to gain support against perceived foreign and un-Islamic influences. (Marsden, 2002)

Although tribalism in Pashtun society traditionally fragments political authority and reinforces parochial loyalties, the Taliban were able to partially transcend these constraints by articulating a supra-tribal Islamic identity. As Giustozzi (2008) noted, this identity enabled the movement to neutralize inter-tribal rivalries by subordinating lineage-based affiliations to a shared religious framework, thereby facilitating collective action across otherwise competing tribal groups.

By grounding their authority in an ostensibly universalist interpretation of Islam rather than in tribal genealogy, the Taliban were able to intervene in disputes that would normally be confined to lineage politics, presenting themselves as impartial arbiters and enforcers of order. At the same time, this supra-tribal framework legitimized the use of coercion beyond traditional tribal boundaries, allowing the movement to discipline communities and individuals irrespective of their specific tribal affiliations.

Crucially, the Taliban leadership emerged primarily from trans local madrasa networks, as Zahab & Roy (2004), rather than from established tribal elites such as maliks or khans, which

enabled them to challenge traditional authority structures while still mobilizing fighters embedded in tribal society.

This combination produced a paradoxical organizational form in which the Taliban were ideologically hostile to tribalism yet operationally dependent on tribal recruitment and social networks. As a result, the movement functioned as a hybrid actor, simultaneously embedded in Pashtun tribal society and capable of transcending it, thereby overcoming one of the principal sources of political fragmentation in Pashtun-inhabited areas.

Scholars argue that tribal networks, which prioritize kinship and community over centralized governance, are crucial in mobilizing support for fundamentalist agendas (Ahmed, 1980). In Afghanistan, where the centralized government has historically struggled to exert control, fundamentalist groups often find it easier to align with decentralized tribal structures to further their influence.

Tribalism in Afghanistan often aligns with a conservative interpretation of Islam, which reinforces the traditional social order, including gender roles and community authority. (Dupree, 1973) Fundamentalist groups leverage this cultural conservatism, emphasizing Sharia law in a way that resonates with tribal values and norms, thus strengthening their position. The relationship between tribal customs (Pashtunwali among Pashtun tribes) and Islamic law creates a dual system where religious law is perceived as compatible with and supportive of traditional tribal practices. (Ahmed & Boase, 2004) This alignment allows fundamentalist groups to operate within tribal regions without fundamentally disrupting the social order, thereby embedding themselves into the community fabric.

The convergence of tribalism and Islamic fundamentalism presents challenges to state-building and governance. The Afghan central government has historically struggled to exert influence over tribal areas, where allegiance is often to local leaders rather than the state. (Rubin, 2002) Fundamentalist groups like the Taliban capitalize on this fragmentation, positioning themselves as defenders of both Islam and tribal autonomy against external intervention.

The spatial distribution of Pashtun tribes across the Afghan–Pakistani border has constituted a persistent source of fragility by undermining the territorial and administrative coherence of the Afghan state. The Durand Line, drawn without regard to tribal geography, divided kinship networks, migration routes, and economic spaces, but it failed to sever social and political ties among Pashtun communities on either side of the border. Consequently,

borders in Pashtun-inhabited areas have remained porous, facilitating sustained cross-border movement of people, goods, and armed actors. These transnational tribal continuities have significantly weakened Afghan state sovereignty by limiting the state's capacity to control territory, regulate mobility, and enforce security policies in frontier regions. For the Taliban, this environment provided critical strategic advantages, including access to cross-border sanctuaries, recruitment pools embedded in kinship networks, and logistical depth beyond the reach of Afghan and international forces. Tilly (1985) noted that tribal loyalties rooted in lineage, honour, and reciprocal obligation frequently outweighed allegiance to the nation-state, particularly where the state was perceived as predatory, corrupt, or externally imposed.

This imbalance reinforced chronic fragility in border governance and allowed the Taliban to sustain insurgent operations over extended periods, transforming tribal geography into a structural asset for rebellion rather than a constraint.

The Afghan state's attempts to centralize power have often been met with resistance from tribal groups who see such efforts as threats to their autonomy and way of life. Fundamentalist groups tap into these sentiments, portraying themselves as more legitimate representatives of Afghan Islamic and tribal identity (Johnson & Leslie, 2004).

Therefore, a responsible government never finds the chance to build a nation-state based on democratic values in Afghanistan. Most authors ascribe this question to external factors and countries involved in the competition in Afghanistan and the region. However, what has threatened nation-state building in Afghanistan has been a single ethnic totalitarian approach toward gaining political power in the country and defining themselves as the superior ethnic group over the rest of the ethnicities. Tribalism in most multicultural and modern states assumes an evil concept that has been inimical to progress and development. The term initially stems from the Latin *'tribes'* and did not refer to a group of people with a common interest; rather, at the time it was used in the political area of public administration in ancient Rome. However, the uses of the term 'tribe' in the modern era and 'tribalism' can be particularly traced back to European colonialist anthropology (Ojiaku, 1972; Rogers, 2019). According to Davis, "What is held to be Democracy or rule of the people above all is what results from the sort of justice that is agreed to be democratic, which is all having equal shares based on number." In addition, Davis noted that "under a democratic system, there is 'election to all offices from and among all,' with most offices 'of short duration". (Davis, 2020, p. 44)

According to Fukuyama, the birthplace and cradle of pluralism in Europe is fracturing into segments where all rifts originate from tribalism by right-wing parties in Europe and the U.S., as democracy and its values patronize the state. The right wing in Europe intimidates the tribal vision in society, which has caused nationalities and minorities to redefine their identity and pay attention to the phenomenon that has been discussed already. This redefinition and paying attention to the U.S. minorities happened in the U.S., and blacks and Indians consider themselves as a separate segment and a marginalised tribe.

The transfer of power has been through elections; however, a tribal vision still influences power. Conflict and the miserable failure of democracy and elections in Afghanistan have not been due to external factors as often as authors claim, thereby ignoring the chance of a multicultural, democratic society such as Indian society with numerous sects, religions, and ethnicities living peacefully together. Secondly, the worldview differences held by ethnicities in the account of the development and state, the Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks welcomed democracy, development, and modern patterns for reforming and evolution of their society, however, on the one hand, regional and global hegemonies harboured the Pashtuns and considered them as the dominant ethnicity in Afghanistan, powerfully propagated by the Pashtun diaspora in the U.S. of America. The U.S. democratisation in Afghanistan was based on the erroneous calculation that Pashtuns are the major ethnicity of Afghanistan. Thus, apparently, they ought to be in power. This perception has been supported by a centralised regime dealing with the Afghan American Diaspora, Hamed Karzai, and Ashraf Ghani. Both presidents from the Afghan American diaspora, despite their academic background and living based on democratic values in democratic countries, did not plan to build a state to embed all ethnicities to live in tranquillity and unity in Afghanistan, and vice versa, the heavily emphasized *Afghani-yat* (Afghan-ness), which ended badly among a multiethnic society. The second point, which negatively created stereotypes among ethnicities, was the diaspora raising tribal autocracy in the historical chart of democracy imposed on the non-Pashtun ethnicity, which even marginalised the Uzbeks, the Hazara, and the Tajik leaders. (Kauser, 2014)

The convergence of tribalism and Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan has significantly shaped its sociopolitical landscape. Tribal identities often intersect with religious beliefs, creating a complex network of loyalties that can both support and undermine governance. While tribal leaders can wield significant influence over their communities, Islamic fundamentalist movements, such as the Taliban, have exploited tribal structures to gain legitimacy and control. This interaction can lead to a reinforced conservative social order,

where tribal customs and Islamic law blend, complicating efforts for modern governance and Tribalism is often affiliated with Pashtuns in Afghanistan. Except for Pashtuns, the rest of the nationalities do not live based on tribal values and rules.

Hazara, Tajik, Uzbek, and other ethnicities are urbanised and quit the values of tribal mindsets. However, Pashtuns live based on tribal codes and principles and have taken any chance of development in the country throughout history. Clarification of the concept as well as its influence on state-building and nation-building processes in Afghanistan, first, needs to define 'tribalism'.

What is tribalism, and how does it threaten democracy? How has it been a hurdle for development and modern phenomena? Although in other chapters, ethnic rivalry as a predominant hurdle of state-building and nation-building has been discussed, another angle in Afghanistan that matters is tribalism from both religious and ethnic perspectives. Afghanistan is a multicultural society and has different languages and social structures. Tribalism supports religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan due to three interrelated factors:

1. *Social Structure:* Tribal identities often dictate social organization and governance, making tribal leaders influential in community decisions, including religious matters. Shared Values: Tribes typically uphold conservative values that align with fundamentalist interpretations of Islam, creating a natural alliance between tribal customs and religious beliefs.

2. *Conflict and Resistance:* In times of conflict, tribal affiliations provide a sense of security and belonging, making fundamentalist groups like the Taliban appealing as they promise to defend tribal and religious identity.

3. *Legitimacy:* Religious leaders may use tribal structures to gain legitimacy, reinforcing the authority of both tribal and religious institutions.

In Afghanistan, tribalism is a central aspect of identity, shaping loyalty and governance structures at the local level. (Barfield, 2010) Islamic fundamentalist groups, particularly the Taliban, have strategically aligned with tribal leaders to gain grassroots support. This relationship is symbiotic: while tribal leaders gain protection and access to broader networks, fundamentalist groups benefit from the tribes' legitimacy and local influence. (Giustozzi, 2008) The social structure of tribalism often promotes values such as honour, hospitality, and loyalty—values that fundamentalist groups co-opt and frame within an Islamic context to legitimize their authority and maintain social cohesion. (Edwards, 1996) Fragility in Pashtun-

inhabited areas is not simply a product of tribalism but of the misalignment between tribal social organization and modern state structures. The Taliban emerged as a political-military actor capable of exploiting this misalignment by embedding itself within tribal society while transcending it ideologically.

In this sense, the Taliban are best understood not as a purely tribal movement, but as a hybrid insurgent order that transformed Pashtun tribal norms into instruments of state substitution and rebellion.

4.8. The Fallacy of the "Rentier" State

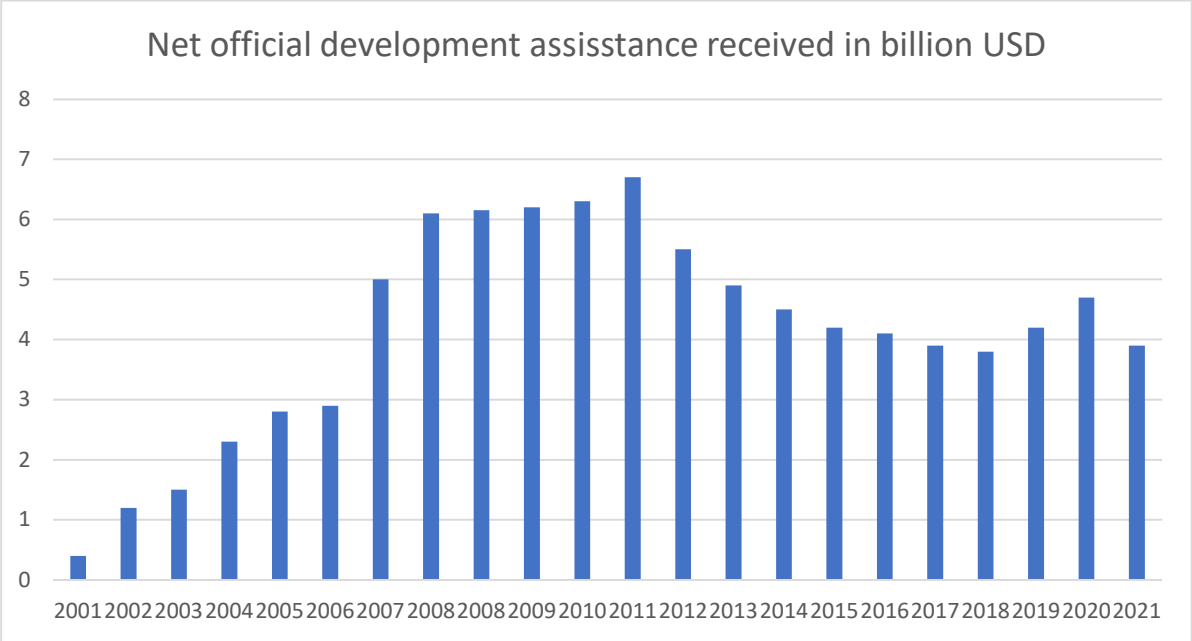
There are different definitions of rentier states; however, there are two prominent definitions. A rentier economy refers to governments that provide their expenditures through external factors, not having sufficient domestic income. A rentier economy refers to states whose resources are provided by natural resources; thus, both are called rentier states. The rentier economy corrupts the state if not well managed, as Afghanistan often enjoyed rent; however, it never could develop the economic and development sector to create long-term opportunities to run the economy of the state. Rentierism in Afghanistan has had a negative consequence, too. The rent was spent on political rivalries with each other, instead of being used for development and state capacity building. (Ahmadian & Farzli, 2011) According to Suhrke (2013, p. 145), “First, the massive aid-and-war economy created a rentier-state condition”.

The financial resources received as aid did not encourage the central government to develop and build local economic capabilities. This practically prevented the development of a long-term sustainable local ownership and entrepreneurial class and the establishment of ownership relations. As Suhrke noted (2023) “This feature, in turn, collided with aspirations for a democratic polity. With foreign patrons providing vital economic and military resources, the government had few incentives to develop long-term bargains with its own people”. (Suhrke, 2013). As the 2023 Kardan University report points out (Stanakzai, 2023), the Afghan budget consisted of an operational (e.g., salaries) and a development component. Donors contributed to both components, but due to corruption and inefficiency, aid was often channelled directly to NGOs outside the budget. A 2019 World Bank report found that 75% of government spending was funded by aid from international partners. A 2008 British parliamentary report found that 90% of public spending came from international aid, and

foreign aid accounted for about 40% of GDP. This data underscored the almost complete dependence of the Afghan state on external aid for its financing and functioning. (World Bank, Open Knowledge Repository Publication: Afghanistan Development Update, June 2019: Building Confidence Amid Uncertainty.) In 2008, the Centre for Applied Policy Research at Munich University found that 90% of public spending came from international aid. This report also finds that 40-60% of the country's GDP came from opium production because the government was unable to find an alternative for farmers to replace poppy production. (Centre for Applied Policy Research at Munich University, BTI 2008, Afghanistan Country Report).

After the Taliban came to power in 2021, Western countries stopped providing aid, which made it immediately impossible to finance government spending. The ratio of aid to GDP has varied since 2001, but it has been relatively high. According to analyses, foreign aid accounted for about 40% of the gross national product (GNP) during the Western-backed Afghan government. The following figure illustrates the net official development assistance, the data based on the World Bank database (2023). (World Bank Open Data (2023) Net official development assistance and official aid received (current US$) – Afghanistan)

Figure No. 3: Net official development 2001-2021 [7]



Since 1956, Afghanistan has had 40% of foreign support in diverse areas. The military sector was supported by the Soviet Union, the U.S. gave support in education, the economy,

[7] Note: These figures do not include aid to NGOs or direct US military aid, the latter of which was USD 15.3 billion in 2011, for example.

agriculture, and engineering, as well as France and West Germany in law-making and technology. In fact, enough support, but the history of rentierism and Afghanistan as an aid-independent state goes back two centuries, coinciding with the reigns of Durrani rulers such as Shah Shuja (1809-1818) and Dost Mohamad Khan, who then enjoyed the extensive British stipend. However, just at the beginning of the twentieth century, the competitive support between major powers prolonged the rentier state by supporting and stabilising internal fragility in Afghanistan as Abdul Rahman (1880-1901) received nearly 1.2 million Indian rupees to consolidate the government and for internal control, and through that aid, he could enforce taxes on the people. The Musahiban regimes (1929-1978) also enjoyed British aid that enabled the re-establishment of the army. The Daud regime (1973-1977), as well as the Communist regime, was extremely dependent on foreign aid, as it is presented in Table No.4 by Isar, Sarajuddin (2014).

Table No. 4: Domestic revenue vs. expenditure 1973-2005

Year	Total (million Afs)	Domestic Revenue (% of total expenditure)
1973	11,318	63
1977	24,326	61
1979	30,173	52
1982	42,112	71
2004 - 05	41,952	31

One of the main reasons that Afghanistan has become a rent-consuming state is an internal factor in the first step, and it can be said that unearned revenue without taxes and labour corrupted the political figures, as well as the state system, and was enjoyed by opportunist circles. Individually the political figures have also always attempted to gain foreign financial and political support to dominate and force their political rivals to succumb and to maintain domestic political authority; however, sequentially, with each up and down in political areas, the coming of a new regime has destroyed the relative infrastructure of all controls, and each administration has demanded foreign aid which it was accustomed to receive and support its regime by means of foreign relations and support from external factors. Political rivalries and ethnic divisions in Afghanistan have led the government to demand rent and lobby for foreign aid to be granted.

Although the political structure in Afghanistan has been flawed, competition has been based only on political authority and ethnic domination in the political arena. Thus, despite

deficiencies in terms of law, institutional areas, autocracy, and shortfalls of rationale and bureaucracy, the political factions and individuals have endeavoured to maintain political authority and have reached out to outside resources to maintain the political domain. Internal rivalries with an ethnic core have made Afghanistan always dependent on foreign aid. According to their origin, rents can be divided into different groups, such as economic, political, social, and informational rents.

Political rent: the formation of political rents is one of the consequences of political corruption in any society, and whenever the government and powerful political parties that decide on and distribute the sources of wealth and power, in doing so, they discriminate between different individuals and groups of society, and in fact, political influencers intend to give a privilege to a particular person or group by taking competitors out of the field to facilitate this.

Social rent: Having certain privileges that are not available to them outside of certain people's individual qualifications and inherent merits is considered social rent. Social rents indicate that ineligible individuals or groups enjoy social privileges they do not deserve, and they lead to wealth accumulation among a small number of people. Social inclusion allowances take place in various forms. Sometimes, people get opportunities by taking advantage of their jobs, sometimes by having kinship relationships or being in a particular organisation or group, or sometimes by political influence in passing certain laws that have general applicability and can create social endpoints for some people, such as roads, factories, dams, and other things that lead to a rise in land prices.

Informational rent: Early and exclusive access to economic information in the field of commercial, monetary, foreign exchange, stock market' 'finance, and development plans is the origin of one of the most important types of rents called informational rent. This means that some individuals with early acquisition of various information about the impending changes in laws and regulations, new policies and decisions, reforms in certain areas, and comprehensive urban maps use this information for their own personal benefit and achieve great wealth. This clever access to the right information itself leads to unhealthy economic competition in the capital market.

For 20 years, the West's efforts to preserve democracy in Afghanistan failed with a rentier economy; however, the government in Afghanistan did not take advantage of Western aid, and also did not inherit a sovereign, accountable government. As the previous chapter clarified the

roots of state-building failure and corruption within the state that spoiled the democracy and any modern pattern with a historical lineage, however, another part considered significant in the field of state-building in Afghanistan is "rentier state building" and a rentier state and democracy.

Despite efforts to build capacity and enablement of the state institution, and the bureaucratisation and strengthening of key institutions to support democracy in the country, however, the country needed a fair responsible management of aid to change a functional state, and reverse the rentier economy state approach, making changes to an autocratic regime because the nation does not pay taxes and the government does not fully consider itself responsible to the nation. Furthermore, there is a weak commitment regarding the social contract between the state and the nation. As Ibrahimi (2019, p. 41) states: “Rentier states derive most of their income from rents rather than taxes and citizens”.

According to Ibrahimi (2019) “this practice gives citizens little leverage to hold the government accountable and enter into a ‘social contract’, on the one hand, and turn the state into a network of actors who aim to rule through new patrimonial and clientele systems, on the other.” Moreover, he noted “some of the weakest rentier states are predatory states.” (Ibrahimi, 2019, p. 42) Democratisation and preservation of democratic patterns and values through rentierism is a vein attempt, as Verkoren & Kamphuis (2013) quote that “trying to turn rentier states into Western-style democracies is futile because the structure of the economy creates strong incentives for patronage-based rule. This is not only because of the predominance of rents, but also because informal economic activities (not taxed) make up a major part of the economy in many developing countries. In some cases, introducing institutions from a liberal market democracy might even destroy delicate balances of power among elites and lead to violent internal conflict” (Verkoren & Kamphuis, 2013, p. 508).

4.9. Summary

The failure of state-building in Afghanistan is the result of a "deadly synergy" between a government that failed to win the hearts of its people and external powers that prioritized geopolitical interests over sustainable local governance.

The lack of internal legitimacy was one of the outstanding weaknesses. Within this, systemic corruption should be highlighted. Between 2001 and 2021, the Republic of Afghanistan suffered from massive embezzlement and the phenomenon of “ghost soldiers,”

“ghost police,” and “ghost teachers,” which emptied the army, law enforcement, and education, and discredited the state apparatus from within.

The Bush administration's decision to shift the emphasis of its Middle East policy from Afghanistan to Iraq, in line with the "War on Terror" doctrine, can be interpreted as a serious strategic mistake. After all, this military move, a shift in geopolitical emphasis, on the one hand, gave the Taliban the opportunity to exploit the power vacuum in Afghanistan, and on the other hand, later discredited the slogan of the war on terror among Arab states and, not only would democratic states have been established through a domino effect, but it also created some of the conditions for the emergence of the Islamic State.

The convergence between tribalism and fundamentalism in Afghanistan seems that both phenomena support each other, and there is no rift between these values. In other definitions, tribalism and fundamentalism have had permanent associations that, according to findings, are the two fundamental challenges rooted in Afghanistan that both nurtured each other’s values as opposed to modern values such as democracy, secularism, and the state as a rational mechanism.

Another fundamental problem was the urban-rural divide. State-building efforts were concentrated in Kabul, failing to reach the conservative rural heartlands. This allowed the Taliban to present themselves as the "authentic" Afghan alternative (even though it was extremely brutal) to a foreign-imposed system.

Another essential, vitally important problem was the trap of dependence on external intervention. The Afghan state was a "rentier state," where 75% of public spending was funded by foreign donors. When this funding vanished in 2021, the economy and state services collapsed instantly. International actors prioritized counterterrorism (hunting insurgents) over building a functioning justice system or a self-sustaining economy.

The political perspective is that leadership in a centralised political system has been under the control of Pashtuns as a tribal community that lives based on tribal values preserved officially in the country, the norms of which could strengthen radical patterns. Secularism as a rational concept has been condemned from both fundamentalist and tribalist perspectives and is also considered an alien phenomenon. These concepts of believers have increased in society under political figures and populism, and both have been an object by external factors. Following Fukuyama’s logic (as elaborated in his „State-Building: Governance and World

Order in the 21st Century"), the state was caught in a structural negative feedback loop. There were three distinct reasons for this.

1. First, the state had low legitimacy. Low legitimacy meant that the country's residents did not voluntarily obey the law or pay taxes, especially in Pashtun-populated areas.
2. Secondly, the state had low levels of capability and capacity. This lack of capability and capacity resulted from the state's inability to mobilize the population or exploit resources.
3. The consequence of all this was that Karzai's centralized government tried to enforce its presence by paying off warlords and using its own military and police force, i.e. by a kind of coercion, wherever its power had reached and the police forces did not exist only on paper, and it was forced to constantly rely on the presence of foreign armies, especially the air force of Western states. All this together further weakened its already low level of legitimacy.

Fragility in Pashtun-inhabited areas is not simply a product of tribalism but of the misalignment between tribal social organization and modern state structures.

In Pashtun-majority areas, fragility stems from a mismatch between tribal social structures and modern government systems rather than just tribalism. By blending into tribal life while intellectually surpassing it, the Taliban became a political-military force capable of exploiting this mismatch. In this context, the Taliban are best understood as a hybrid insurgent regime that transformed Pashtun traditional norms into tools of rebellion and alternative governance instead of being purely a tribal organization.

Fragility in Pashtun-inhabited areas cannot be adequately explained by reference to tribalism alone; rather, it emerges from a structural misalignment between the social organization of Pashtun tribal society and the institutional logic of the modern centralized state. Pashtun social order is historically rooted in decentralized, kinship-based authority, situational leadership, and customary norms that privilege autonomy, reciprocity, and honour over bureaucratic hierarchy and territorial sovereignty.

By contrast, the modern state presupposes fixed borders, impersonal rule, codified law, and the monopolization of coercion. In Afghanistan, repeated attempts to impose these state structures—whether through royal centralization, revolutionary modernization, or externally supported state-building projects—failed to reconcile these fundamentally divergent logics of

authority. Instead of producing integration, state expansion often generated resistance, evasion, and parallel systems of governance, thereby institutionalizing fragility rather than overcoming it.

Within this context, the Taliban emerged as a political-military actor uniquely positioned to exploit the gap between tribal society and the state. Unlike traditional tribal elites, whose authority was confined to specific lineages and territories, the Taliban derived legitimacy from an ostensibly universalist Islamic framework that could transcend tribal segmentation while remaining intelligible and resonant within Pashtun society. Their leadership, largely socialized in trans local madrasa networks rather than tribal hierarchies, was able to challenge existing power structures without being fully absorbed into them.

This allowed the movement to mobilize across tribal boundaries, suppress inter-tribal rivalries, and impose discipline in ways that tribal mechanisms alone could not achieve. At the same time, the Taliban embedded themselves deeply within local communities by selectively accommodating customary norms, kinship obligations, and local power relations, thereby avoiding the perception of total cultural rupture that had undermined previous state-building efforts.

As a result, the Taliban cannot be accurately characterized as a purely tribal movement, nor as a conventional ideological insurgency detached from local social structures. Instead, they functioned as a hybrid insurgent order that combined elements of religious universalism, coercive organization, and localized social embeddedness. By appropriating Pashtun tribal norms—such as dispute mediation, protection, and moral regulation—and rearticulating them through an Islamic legal framework, the Taliban effectively transformed these norms into instruments of state substitution. Their courts, enforcement mechanisms, and taxation practices did not merely coexist with tribal structures but reconfigured them, offering a form of governance that appeared more predictable, less corrupt, and more authoritative than that of the Afghan state. In doing so, the Taliban converted the structural weaknesses of both tribal society and the state into sources of political leverage.

Ultimately, this hybrid character explains both the resilience of the Taliban and the persistence of fragility in Pashtun-inhabited areas. The movement thrived not because it resolved the contradiction between tribal autonomy and state authority, but because it institutionalized that contradiction in a form that marginalized the state while maintaining social order at the local level. Fragility, therefore, should be understood not as a temporary condition

arising from conflict or underdevelopment, but as a durable structural outcome of unresolved tensions between competing systems of authority. The Taliban's success lay in their ability to occupy this space of misalignment, transforming it into a stable—if coercive—alternative political order that rendered conventional state-building efforts both ineffective and illegitimate.

The *"Afghan Model"* of state-building failed because it was top-down and foreign-funded, creating a government that was accountable to international donors rather than its own citizens. As of 2025, the country has transitioned from a failed democratic experiment to a fragile autocratic state integrated into the regional security framework of Eurasia.

4.10. Hypothesis testing

Using a research method based on the Comparative Matrix of True-False Statements, I conducted a comparative analysis of the content elements in the summary that contained the scientific results obtained from the research conducted in Chapter 3 and the hypotheses developed to achieve the scientific goals of the chapter.

My Hypothesis Nr5 (H5) (Lack of Legitimacy and Governance) formulated as follows: The unpopularity and lack of legitimacy of the American-supported central government at the local level were directly related to poor governance, high levels of state corruption, and the centralization of the state that failed to respect the autonomy rights of diverse ethnic groups.

H5 contains four distinct logical elements.

A. Poor governance;

B., High levels of state corruption;

C., Over-centralization;

D., Local illegitimacy;

Poor governance (A) + corruption (B) + over-centralization (C) → local illegitimacy (D). This makes H5 a conjunctural causal hypothesis, not a single factor claim. To determine whether H5 is true or false, I constructed a True-False comparison matrix.

Relationship	A	B	C	D
A	—	True	True	True
B	False	—	True	True
C	False	True	—	True
D	False	False	False	—

All constituent logical elements of H5 and the proposed causal relationship are empirically supported; consequently, H5 is fully confirmed (True).

H6 (External) formulated as follows: Neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan, actively undermined the creation of an efficient and strong Afghan government by providing sanctuaries for radical Islamic groups and the Taliban in border areas (FATA/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), thereby preventing stability.

The H6 also consists of four statements.

A., External interference;

B., Pakistani sanctuary provision ;

C., Insurgent resilience;

D., Afghan state instability;

The logical flow of H6 can be expressed as:

External interference (X_1) + Pakistani sanctuary provision (X_2) → insurgent resilience (M) → Afghan state instability (Y)

Statement	**Content**	**Empirical Observation (Afghanistan, post-2001)**	**True / False**	**Analytical Justification**
A	External interference	Neighbouring states intervened in Afghan conflict dynamics	**True**	Regional actors influenced security outcomes beyond Afghan control
B	Pakistani sanctuary provision	Taliban and affiliated groups operated from FATA/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	**True**	Cross-border safe havens enabled regrouping and protection

Statement	Content	Empirical Observation (Afghanistan, post-2001)	True / False	Analytical Justification
C	Insurgent resilience	Taliban sustained operations despite military pressure	**True**	Insurgency regenerated forces, leadership, and logistics
D	Afghan state instability	The Afghan government failed to achieve durable stability	**True**	Persistent violence and governance collapse indicate instability
A → B	Interference took the form of sanctuaries	Pakistani involvement was not merely diplomatic	**True**	Sanctuary provision was the dominant mechanism
B → C	Sanctuaries enabled resilience	Insurgents retreated, trained, and re-infiltrated	**True**	Safe havens were critical for survival
C → D	Resilience produced instability	Insurgency prevented state consolidation	**True**	Persistent conflict undermined governance
A → D	External interference alone caused instability	Internal factors also mattered	**False**	External interference was necessary but not sufficient

H6: Confirmed (True, because the evidence strongly supports the claim that external destabilization, particularly by Pakistan, constituted a major structural obstacle to Afghan state-building. The provision of:

- Physical sanctuaries in FATA/Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Logistical, financial, and ideological support networks
- Strategic depth for insurgent regrouping and training

prevented the Afghan state from achieving territorial control and security consolidation. This external interference systematically undermined internal stabilization efforts, rendering governance reforms insufficient on their own.

The hypothesis H5 and H6 correctly identifies internal legitimacy deficits as a direct outcome of governance failure. Empirically, the American-supported Afghan government suffered from:

- Systemic corruption, driven by aid dependence and patronage politics

- Over-centralization, which conflicted with Afghanistan's historically decentralized and ethnically diverse political order
- Weak service delivery and accountability, particularly in rural areas

These factors reinforced the perception of the state as externally imposed and socially alien, validating the causal link between governance quality and legitimacy. The hypotheses H5 and H6 are therefore empirically supported.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Afghanistan's governance crisis was shaped by the intersection of internal illegitimacy and external interference. The Afghan state remained trapped between a society it could not meaningfully integrate and an international environment that continuously instrumentalized its weakness.

I concluded that any future state-building effort that does not address this dual constraint by prioritizing legitimacy, social, and cultural traditions is doomed to failure. Most of the constitutions from Zahir Shah to Dr. Najibullah emphasised democracy and equality, but in reality, their political approach varied and had not changed toward the ethnicities, though equality in a multi-ethnic society can be achieved by allowing space for other ethnicities.

In the modern international system, the post-2001 state-building project in Afghanistan was one of the most ambitious attempts to reestablish state power with outside assistance. The project, which was based on liberal peacebuilding concepts, aimed to quickly create democratic processes, centralized institutions, and a cutting-edge security force that could exercise power throughout Afghanistan. In the end, these attempts failed to create a genuine, independent, and durable Afghan state despite hitherto unheard-of levels of foreign military, financial, and technical support. This failure was caused by several fundamental inconsistencies in the post-2001 project's design and execution.

In essence, the regional dynamics funded Afghanistan's *"parallel state-building."* According to Migdal's paradigm, this indicates that the central state battled both the exterior social and military networks upheld by neighbouring nations as well as the internal social *"mélange."* Therefore, the failure of state-building resulted from both an internal institutional weakness and a regional political game in which the establishment of a powerful, sovereign, and Western-friendly Afghan state went against the interests of its neighbours.

From the perspective of the chapter subject, namely “Internal Illegitimacy and External Interference: Governance and Regional Dynamics in Afghanistan’s State-Building Failure”, the 2021 collapse was the logical conclusion of a system where illegitimacy was the baseline. The centralized, democratic state existed as an international legal fiction that lacked the *"capillary power"* to reach into the Afghan society. It was a "weak state" facing a "strong society", where the formal institutions remained a hollow shell. In the end, the state did not "lose" its legitimacy; it never structurally possessed it, as it was built on a foundation that prioritized international norms over local social integration.

The collapse of state-building in Afghanistan serves as a definitive case study on how the intersection of internal illegitimacy and external interference creates a cycle of state fragility.

The primary cause of failure was the creation of a government that was accountable to international donors rather than its own citizens. By relying on foreign aid for over 75% of its budget, the pre-2021 administration lacked the incentive to build a genuine social contract with the Afghan people. This "external interference"—even when well-intentioned—prevented the emergence of an organic, self-sustaining political system, leading to a state that vanished the moment foreign support was withdrawn.

Governance cannot be sustained by military force or foreign mandates alone. The internal illegitimacy of the republican era (driven by corruption and the urban-rural divide) has been replaced in 2026 by a different form of illegitimacy under the Taliban. While the current regime maintains territorial control, its exclusion of women, ethnic minorities, and diverse political voices creates a "stability of fear" rather than a "stability of consent." Without internal inclusivity, the Afghan state remains prone to future cycles of insurgency.

Afghanistan’s state-building failure proves that sovereignty and democracy cannot be imported. A state built on external interference is inherently fragile, and a government lacking internal legitimacy is inherently temporary. The tragedy of Afghanistan is that it remains a "pawn" in regional dynamics, where the survival of the regime is tied more to foreign security interests than to the welfare and representation of its own people.

By the end of 2025, the regional political dynamics will focus on containing and, if possible, eliminating ISIS-K active in Afghanistan. The regional intervention of neighbours – specifically Russia, China, and Iran – has never been focused on helping to build a democratic state, but on ensuring their own security and/or on the opportunity to exploit raw material

resources. Russia's official recognition of the Taliban in 2025, as well as Chinese economic agreements and pragmatic agreements, highlight that regional powers prioritize the suppression of groups like ISIS-K and the acquisition of economic benefits over the internal rights of the Afghan population.

Chapter V: The Self-Reinforcing Failure Loop: How Interconnected Structural Weaknesses Doomed Afghanistan's State-Building Project

5.1. Introduction

After toppling the Taliban regime (2001) in Afghanistan by the U.S., state-building, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and ensuring peace began in the country. Over a long period of the war, the country was vehemently ruined by the civil war and the Taliban's retrogressive, tyrannical regime. State-building was considered the country's key element; most Afghan refugees returned home from neighbouring countries and pinned hopes for a secure and prosperous Afghanistan.

However, step by step, all hopes for peace and prosperity changed to despair; though one way or another, the Taliban reemerged and dispatched a new approach, such as suicide attacks, bomb blasts in public among the masses, terrorising key political figures, annihilating schools, clinics, and entire fundamental projects. Such an inhuman approach created a big challenge for the country, which ultimately, by 15 August 2021, took power, and the state collapsed. Afghanistan, before 15 August 2021, was still a fragile country with no stable government to overcome challenges such as poverty and the war against terrorism. Thus, a vicious phenomenon, fundamentalism, and the Taliban had been a significant challenge in the country; in addition, poverty was another segment of state weakness, which was the outcome of the continual war in the country that hampered the development process and economy for several decades; however, fundamentalism is not the outcome of a weak economy. As Siddique quotes Fukuyama: "Poverty is not the proximate cause of terrorism: The organisers of the 9/11 terror plot came from relatively well-off backgrounds; instantly bin Laden, however, became a recruit of violent Islamism not in their native countries" (Sediqiue, 2012; Maria, 2015).

Except for the U.S. intervention purpose in Afghanistan, the aid for strengthening a united and democratic state was a crucial opportunity for building a state with democratic values in the country. The main factor that the US support for "state-building" failed in Afghanistan was the weakness and disability of the central government structure, which, except for the capital, could not expand its authority in the rural areas. In other words, basic failure roots can be affiliate to the governance system. One of the hurdles that led the state-building process to fail was terrorism and the influence of fundamentalist circles in society, that society both urban and rural societies were influenced by them.

The core element of my research proves that Afghanistan's state-building failure cannot be adequately explained by isolated deficiencies in governance, security, or economic development. Rather, it emerged from a self-reinforcing failure loop in which multiple structural weaknesses interacted cumulatively, producing a system of negative feedback that steadily eroded state capacity, legitimacy, and social cohesion.

These weaknesses—historical under institutionalization, normative pluralism, ethnic and tribal fragmentation, external intervention, and the political economy of violence—did not merely coexist; they mutually amplified one another, creating a dynamic in which every attempted remedy inadvertently deepened the underlying pathology. State-building efforts thus became trapped in a cycle where interventions designed to strengthen the state systematically reproduced the very conditions that undermined it.

5.2. Applying the "multi-level modernization deficit" (MLMD) model to demonstrate the self-reinforcing failure loop

As I have elaborated, explained, and pointed out in previous chapters, the failure of the democratic centralized state-building project between 2001 and 2021 was due to several factors, interacting in a complex way. In my opinion, the complex system of relationships among these factors can be described and characterized as a system of mutually reinforcing, reinforcing (positive) feedback loops, in which structural weaknesses mutually reinforce each other over time.

Instead of this system of relationships converging towards some level of equilibrium or institutional consolidation, the system exhibits path-dependent fragility, where each intervention feeds back into the conditions that necessitate further intervention.

The Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model posits that the success of state-building is not determined solely by political decisions or external factors, but by the interaction of three interrelated dimensions of social modernization: lack of urban bourgeoisie, cultural-normative modernization, and institutional modernization. The model argues that the Afghan state-building project failed because these three dimensions did not develop in synchrony; instead, they moved in divergent and mutually weakening directions. This phenomenon can be conceptualized as a multi-level modernization deficit.

The model assumes that the success of state-building is not determined solely by political decisions or external factors, but by three interrelated dimensions of social modernization, which are:

1. Dimension: Lack of Civil Society and Urban Bourgeoisie;

2. Dimension: Cultural-Normative Modernization – Lack of Secularization;

3. Dimension: Institutional Modernization – State-Building Attempts ("Imported State");

The centralized democratic state-building in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 failed because the three modernization dimensions did not develop synchronously, but rather "disintegrated", moving in mutually weakening directions. We can call this a multi-level modernization deficit.

5.3. First Dimension of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model: Social Modernization – Lack of Civil Society and Urban Bourgeoisie

Social modernization in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021 remained shallow and fragile, largely because it lacked the social foundations that historically sustain modernization processes: a rooted civil society and an autonomous urban bourgeoisie. Although the post-2001 period witnessed significant institutional reconstruction, social change did not penetrate deeply into Afghan society. Instead, modernization unfolded in a fragmented, externally supported, and urban-centred manner, leaving the broader social structure largely intact and ultimately unable to sustain the republican order.

In classical modernization theory, as described by Lipset (1959), Lerner (1958), and Huntington (1968), the social change is driven not only by state reforms but by transformations in social relations, class structures, and civic life.

Lipset argues that economic development (wealth, industrialization, urbanization, and education) is a crucial prerequisite for stable democracy, making it more likely for wealthier, developed nations to sustain democratic systems by fostering a larger middle class, greater political participation, and higher legitimacy, thereby reducing revolutionary pressures and extremism.

Huntington argued that economic development and social mobilization do not automatically lead to stable democracy. Instead, if the demand for political participation outpaces the development of political institutions, the result is "political decay"—characterized by instability, violence, and military coups. Huntington famously stated that the most important political distinction between countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. Strong, adaptable, and complex institutions are necessary to maintain order.

Lipset worked out the so-called „Linear Model of Development". He proposed a specific sequence for modernization:

1. *Urbanization:* People move to cities.
2. *Literacy:* Urban living requires and promotes education.
3. *Media Exposure:* Literate urbanites consume media.
4. *Political Participation:* This process eventually leads to voting and democratic engagement.

The emergence of civil society and an economically independent bourgeoisie has historically played a decisive role in mediating between state and society, promoting rule-based governance, and embedding modern norms such as citizenship, legal equality, and political participation. In Afghanistan, however, decades of conflict had destroyed urban social strata, weakened trust-based associations, and prevented the formation of stable class identities. The post-2001 reconstruction effort attempted to rebuild institutions without first reconstructing these social foundations.

Civil society expanded rapidly after 2001, particularly in urban centres, but its development was largely donor-driven rather than organically rooted. In accordance with Safi's and Krishnamurty's data (2025, pp. 48-57), by 2020, Afghanistan had over 7,000 registered civil society organizations, which included around 1,700 domestic NGOs, about 200 international NGOs, and thousands of associations such as social organizations, foundations, and unions.

In addition, informal groups like community development councils and village shuras numbered over 20,000. Thousands of non-governmental organizations, media outlets, and advocacy groups emerged, yet most depended heavily on foreign funding and operated within project-based frameworks shaped by international priorities. As a result, civil society often functioned as an extension of the aid economy rather than as an autonomous sphere of social

organization. Its legitimacy was limited, especially outside major cities, where rural communities continued to rely on traditional structures such as kinship networks, tribal councils, and religious authorities. The urban concentration of civic activity reinforced a sharp social divide between cities and the countryside, preventing civil society from becoming a nationwide force capable of integrating diverse social groups into a shared political community.

Persistent insecurity further constrained civic participation. Activists, journalists, and women's organizations were frequently targeted by insurgents and criminal networks, while conservative social norms restricted associational life beyond family and religious institutions. These conditions hindered the emergence of durable social networks based on trust and voluntary participation. Consequently, civil society remained fragile and highly vulnerable to political change, as demonstrated by its rapid collapse following the Taliban's return to power in 2021.

Parallel to the weakness of civil society was the absence of a strong urban bourgeoisie, as I already presented in the subchapters 1.8 and 1.9, which can act as an agent of modernization. Rather than fostering a productive middle class, the post-2001 political economy produced a rentier elite tied to foreign aid, state contracts, and patronage networks. Wealth accumulation was often linked to political connections, war economies, or informal trade, rather than industrial production or entrepreneurial innovation. This elite had little incentive to promote the rule of law, institutional accountability, or long-term social investment, as its economic position depended on instability and external rents rather than predictable governance.

Afghanistan's limited industrialization and weak private sector further undermined the formation of an autonomous middle class. Urban professionals such as civil servants, teachers, journalists, and NGO employees did emerge, but their livelihoods were largely dependent on international funding. This economic dependency prevented them from developing a coherent class identity or exerting sustained political influence. Moreover, chronic insecurity, corruption, and uncertainty encouraged widespread emigration among educated Afghans, resulting in significant brain drain and further weakening the potential carriers of social modernization.

The consequences of these structural deficiencies were profound. Modern social norms, including expanded media freedom, women's education, and civic participation, existed primarily in urban enclaves and lacked deep societal internalization. For many Afghans, these changes appeared externally imposed rather than organically evolved, reinforcing scepticism

and resistance. The Afghan state, lacking a strong social base, remained dependent on international military and financial support for its survival. Institutions functioned in a personalized and clientelist manner, and legitimacy was derived more from external backing than from embedded social consent.

The rapid collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2021 exposed the limits of modernization without social carriers. In the absence of a civil society capable of mobilizing collective resistance or a bourgeoisie with a vested interest in defending institutional continuity, the state disintegrated with minimal societal pushback. This outcome underscores a central insight of comparative historical sociology: sustainable modernization requires not only formal institutions but also social classes and civic networks that can anchor those institutions within society.

Afghanistan lacked a strong or autonomous urban middle class, resulting in minimal tax bases and limited civic loyalty to the state. Social networks remained embedded in clan, tribal, and patronage systems, leaving no independent civil society to mediate between citizens and the state. Political participation was personal rather than civic, relying on loyalty to local leaders rather than institutions. The social foundations for modern state-building were absent, leaving the Afghan state "floating" above society without broad societal legitimacy or support.

In conclusion, Afghanistan's experience between 2001 and 2021 illustrates the failure of externally driven modernization in the absence of supportive social structures.

The lack of a rooted civil society and an autonomous urban bourgeoisie meant that social modernization remained superficial, uneven, and reversible. While institutional forms of modernity were introduced, the underlying social relations necessary to sustain them were never fully transformed. The Afghan case thus serves as a cautionary example of the limits of state-building and modernization efforts that neglect the social dimension of political development.

5.4. Second Dimension of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model: Cultural-Normative Modernization – Lack of Secularization

The failure of cultural–normative modernization constitutes one of the most structurally decisive elements in Afghanistan's state-building collapse. In the context of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model, secularization does not denote the decline of religious belief as such, but rather the institutional differentiation between religious authority and political power, as well as the emergence of a shared, state-centred source of normative legitimacy. In Afghanistan, this differentiation never consolidated, resulting in a persistent condition of normative competition in which religious institutions, actors, and discourses consistently enjoyed greater social legitimacy than the modern state.

From a theoretical perspective, this outcome aligns with Taylor's (2007) conception of secularization as a transformation in the conditions of belief rather than a simple erosion of religiosity.

Taylor's conception of secularization refers to a qualitative transformation in the conditions of belief and legitimacy, not simply to a decline in religiosity.

In "*A Secular Age"* (2007), Taylor argues that secularization should not be understood primarily as religion disappearing from society (what he calls *subtraction stories*). Instead, he identifies secularization as a shift in how belief is structured, experienced, and authorized in modern societies.

At its core, Taylor's concept has three analytically distinct meanings, of which the third is the most important for your argument:

First, secularization can mean the institutional differentiation of spheres, whereby religious institutions lose direct control over politics, law, and the state. This is the classic church–state separation.

Second, it can refer to the decline of religious practice or belief in society, a sociological indicator often emphasized in modernization theory.

Third, and most crucially for Afghanistan, secularization means a transformation in the conditions of belief. In a secular age, belief in God is no longer axiomatic or socially mandatory; it becomes one option among others. Political authority, moral order, and social legitimacy are

no longer grounded automatically in religious truth, but in immanent, this-worldly frameworks such as law, citizenship, popular sovereignty, or constitutionalism.

Under this third meaning, a society can remain deeply religious and still be "secular" in Taylor's sense, provided that political legitimacy is not derived from religious authority and religious belief is no longer the exclusive foundation of moral order.

Applied to Afghanistan, Taylor's framework helps explain why state-building failed at the normative level. Afghan society did not undergo a shift in the conditions of belief that would allow political authority to be justified independently of Islam. Religious legitimacy remained the primary moral reference point, while the state appeared normatively secondary, instrumental, or foreign. As a result, secular institutions lacked moral resonance, and political authority remained vulnerable to religious counter-claims—most effectively articulated by the Taliban.

In short, Taylor's concept of secularization explains failure not as "too much religion," but as the absence of a differentiated, autonomous source of political legitimacy. This makes it particularly well-suited for your Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model, where the problem is not belief itself, but the lack of normative differentiation between religion and the state.

In Afghanistan, the conditions under which political authority could be perceived as legitimate remained fundamentally religious and moral rather than legal-rational. The state failed to establish itself as the primary moral reference point for society, and instead appeared as an externally imposed, culturally alien structure whose norms lacked ethical resonance. Consequently, obedience to state law was rarely internalized as a moral obligation, but rather experienced as contingent, instrumental, or coercive.

This normative weakness was exacerbated by the historical embeddedness of Islamic authority in Afghan social life. Religious scholars, local clerics, and madrasa networks possessed deep-rooted legitimacy derived from their role in education, dispute resolution, and moral regulation—functions that the state was either unable or unwilling to perform consistently. As Berger's (1967) work on pluralism suggests, in societies where multiple normative systems coexist without a dominant integrative framework, legitimacy becomes fragmented and situational.

Berger, in his classic works (1967), argues that societies construct a *"plausibility structure"*—a set of social institutions, norms, and practices that make certain beliefs believable

and authoritative. Religion functions as the central organizing system in many societies because it provides both cosmological meaning and a moral framework for social life.

Berger emphasizes that religion is fundamentally a social product: it is created and maintained through collective human activity, yet it presents itself as independent, objective, and cosmic. Central to his framework is the relationship between *nomos,* the socially constructed order, and *cosmos*, the universe as a meaningful totality. In political terms, the sacred canopy bridges these dimensions by embedding political and social institutions within a moral and cosmically sanctioned framework. This connection enhances state legitimacy by providing citizens with a shared symbolic and ethical rationale for authority, reducing social fragmentation, and creating mechanisms for conflict mediation. The sacred canopy, therefore, is not only a religious phenomenon but also a critical instrument through which societies stabilize political order and cultivate a sense of collective identity.

However, Berger also recognizes the vulnerabilities of the sacred canopy in modern, pluralistic, and contested societies. Competing ideological or religious frameworks can fragment the shared symbolic order, undermine the perceived legitimacy of political institutions and generate social and political instability. In fragile or conflict-affected states, such as Afghanistan, the absence of a cohesive sacred canopy contributes to the erosion of political authority, weakens governance structures, and limits the capacity of the state to foster legitimacy and social cohesion. Understanding Berger's sacred canopy in this context highlights the profound interdependence between religion, societal meaning-making, and political authority, demonstrating that effective state-building requires attention not only to material and institutional structures but also to the symbolic frameworks that sustain collective legitimacy and social order.

The theoretical frameworks of Berger and Taylor provide complementary tools for understanding the challenges of state-building in Afghanistan, a society marked by ethnic, tribal, and religious diversity. Berger's concept of the *"sacred canopy"* is particularly relevant for analysing the role of religion in sustaining social cohesion and legitimizing authority in Afghan society. In Berger's terms, religion functions as a symbolic framework that shelters communities from existential uncertainty, provides moral guidance, and legitimizes social and political institutions. In Afghanistan, Islam historically performed this function, linking governance, customary law, and communal identity into a coherent social order. However, the fragmentation of religious authority—through competing sects, localized interpretations of

Islam, and insurgent ideologies such as those propagated by the Taliban—has weakened the protective and integrative functions of the sacred canopy. The result is a society in which political authority is persistently contested, legitimacy is fragile, and collective moral frameworks are difficult to maintain. Berger's analysis explains why the absence of a cohesive symbolic and moral order undermines institutional stability and contributes to persistent state fragility.

Taylor's framework further illuminates the Afghan case by emphasizing the transformation of the conditions of belief in modern and pluralistic contexts. While Berger focuses on the social function of religion, Taylor analyses the historical and cultural processes that make belief contested and contingent. In Afghanistan, the coexistence of multiple interpretations of Islam, regional tribal norms, and imported ideologies creates a complex "pluralistic moral landscape" in which legitimacy cannot rely solely on religious authority. Taylor's notion of the "immanent frame" is particularly useful for understanding how the Afghan population navigates competing sources of meaning: traditional religious authorities, militant Islamist movements, and secular modernist projects imposed by international actors all present alternative claims to truth and legitimacy. In this context, belief and allegiance are no longer automatically anchored to a single moral or religious order, producing the *"cross-pressures"* that Taylor describes and complicating efforts to establish a shared national identity or stable governance.

Combining Berger and Taylor, it becomes clear that Afghanistan's state-building failures are rooted in both the social and existential dimensions of fragmentation. Berger explains how the erosion of the sacred canopy undermines the social legitimacy of political institutions and weakens communal cohesion, while Taylor explains why competing moral and ideological frameworks prevent the restoration of a shared symbolic order. Together, these theories highlight the dual challenge faced by Afghan state-builders: they must construct functional institutions while simultaneously negotiating a fragmented and contested moral and religious landscape. The interplay of ethnic diversity, tribal loyalties, and pluralistic religious interpretation ensures that the creation of a unified national framework, both symbolically and politically, remains profoundly difficult, illustrating the enduring relevance of Berger's and Taylor's insights for understanding the nexus of religion, meaning, and governance in fragile states.

In Afghanistan, this pluralism did not produce tolerance or differentiation, but rather persistent contestation between state law, sharia, and customary norms, with the state occupying the weakest position in this hierarchy.

The dual legal order—combining formal state law with Islamic jurisprudence—further entrenched normative incoherence. Rather than integrating religious norms into a coherent constitutional framework, Afghan governments oscillated between symbolic Islamization and externally driven legal reforms. This ambiguity prevented the emergence of a predictable and authoritative legal system. Courts were widely perceived as corrupt, slow, and illegitimate, whereas religious or insurgent courts appeared morally grounded, swift, and socially intelligible. As a result, legal authority became detached from the state and re-embedded in religious structures, undermining the state's claim to normative sovereignty.

The Taliban's rise must be understood within this context of normative competition rather than as a purely military or ideological phenomenon. The movement derived its strength not primarily from coercion, but from its ability to monopolize religious legitimacy and present itself as the authentic guardian of Islamic order. By framing their authority in moral and religious terms, the Taliban transformed state weakness into moral failure, portraying secular governance as corrupt, impious, and foreign. This strategy resonates with Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities, which emphasizes that modernization does not necessarily produce secularization, but may instead generate counter-modern religious movements that challenge Western institutional models.

Crucially, the lack of secularization also prevented the emergence of a civic political identity. Without a clear separation between religious and political authority, political loyalty remained embedded in moral and communal frameworks rather than abstract citizenship. Political disagreement easily assumed theological dimensions, rendering compromise illegitimate and institutional pluralism fragile. These dynamic undermined democratic procedures, weakened constitutionalism, and facilitated the moral delegitimization of the state by religious actors. In this sense, the Afghan state did not merely fail to secularize; it failed to redefine political authority in non-religious terms altogether.

Within the broader failure loop, the absence of cultural–normative modernization reinforced deficits in both social and institutional modernization. Weak secular legitimacy intensified reliance on patronage and coercion, further eroding institutional trust. At the same time, the dominance of religious authority constrained the development of autonomous civil

society, as moral regulation remained embedded in traditional and clerical hierarchies. Thus, the lack of secularization functioned not as an isolated cultural trait but as a systemic constraint that distorted the entire modernization process. The centralized democratic state-building project aiming at a modern Afghan state was outcompeted normatively by religious institutions and the Taliban's legitimacy narratives, limiting its capacity to assert authority and enforce law.

In sum, Afghanistan's state-building failure cannot be fully understood without recognizing the centrality of cultural–normative modernization and the unresolved question of secular authority. The state collapsed not only because it lacked coercive or administrative capacity, but because it never succeeded in becoming the primary moral and normative reference point of society. In the absence of secularized legitimacy, institutional reforms remained hollow, social modernization stalled, and the Taliban's religious counter-order emerged as a structurally credible alternative. This confirms the core claim of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model: that unsynchronized modernization across social, cultural, and institutional dimensions generates a self-reinforcing trajectory of state failure.

5.5. Third Dimension of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit model: Institutional Modernization – State Building Attempts (Imported State)

Institutional Modernization represents the third dimension of the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit (MLMD) model, focusing on the formal construction of state institutions in contexts where centralized governance and bureaucratic traditions are historically weak or fragmented. In Afghanistan, such efforts are often described as the creation of an "imported state," wherein administrative structures, legal codes, and mechanisms of governance are introduced based on external models of the modern nation-state rather than evolving organically from local socio-political structures. These attempts, typically emphasizing centralized authority, rule of law, taxation, conscription, and bureaucratic rationality, reflect a technical and normative vision of modern governance. Yet, in societies marked by entrenched tribal, ethnic, and religious hierarchies, such externally designed institutions often encounter deep resistance or fail to achieve legitimacy among local populations. Historical examples, from Amanullah Khan's early twentieth-century reforms to the post-2001 international state-building projects (as I elaborated and highlighted in subchapter 1.7), demonstrate how the imported state often remains partially functional, highly dependent on external support, and vulnerable to fragmentation, insurgency, or corruption.

The international community introduced modern Western-style institutions, including parliaments, constitutions, courts, and ministries. These institutions, however, were poorly aligned with traditional social structures and local legitimacy principles. The state became dependent on external financing and the American military presence.

Institutional modernization does not occur in isolation; it is deeply intertwined with social and normative dimensions of modernization. The lack of a robust civil society, urban bourgeoisie, and cohesive social networks limits the capacity of modern institutions to anchor themselves in society. Citizens and local elites may lack incentives to comply with or internalize newly imposed administrative norms when loyalty continues to be oriented toward kinship, tribal structures, or religious authorities. Similarly, persistent normative pluralism and localized moral orders undermine the perceived legitimacy of imported state institutions, as competing moral frameworks provide alternative sources of authority and social regulation. In this sense, institutional modernization reflects a dual challenge: it is both a technical endeavour to construct bureaucratic structures and a socio-cultural process requiring alignment between formal institutions and local patterns of meaning, legitimacy, and authority. (North, 1990) conceptualizes institutions as the fundamental determinants of economic and political performance.

He, with Wallis & Weingast (2009), defines institutions as the formal and informal "rules of the game" that structure human interaction. In the natural state, powerful individuals or factions (the military, religious leaders, etc.) are given exclusive access to economic resources or organizations. Because an outbreak of violence would disrupt these profits, the elites have a direct incentive to maintain peace with one another. In the open access order, the competition is open to all citizens. If one group tries to seize power or rents, other citizens can freely form rival organizations to oppose them. Limited access orders—typical of fragile and developing states—restrict political and economic opportunities to elites in order to maintain stability through patronage and rent distribution.

Open access orders, by contrast, are characterized by impersonal rules, broad political participation, and competitive markets. Transitioning from a limited to an open access order requires not only institutional reform but profound changes in elite incentives, social norms, and belief systems. This transition is rare, slow, and highly contingent on historical conditions.

These include formal rules such as constitutions, laws, and regulations, as well as informal constraints such as norms, customs, traditions, and belief systems. Institutions reduce

uncertainty by shaping expectations and incentives, thereby enabling or constraining political and economic behaviour. Crucially, North distinguishes institutions from organizations: while institutions are the rules, organizations are the players operating within those rules.

A central element of North's theory is that institutional quality matters more than formal institutional design. Societies may adopt constitutions, bureaucracies, and legal frameworks that resemble those of successful states, yet fail to achieve development or stability if these institutions are not embedded in supportive informal norms and belief systems. This insight directly challenges technocratic and externally imposed state-building models, as North argues that institutional effectiveness depends on historical path dependence and cultural legitimacy. Institutions evolve incrementally and are deeply shaped by past power relations, distributional conflicts, and belief systems, making rapid or externally driven institutional transplantation highly problematic.

North further emphasizes the role of beliefs and legitimacy in sustaining institutions. Political and economic institutions persist not only because they are enforced, but because key actors believe them to be legitimate or beneficial. When formal rules conflict with informal norms, enforcement costs rise, compliance declines, and institutional performance deteriorates. This dynamic is particularly visible in fragile or post-conflict states, where imported legal and administrative frameworks often coexist uneasily with customary law, kinship structures, or religious authority. In such contexts, institutions may exist on paper but fail to function in practice, producing what North describes as institutional inefficiency and persistent underdevelopment.

In sum, Douglass North's theory provides a powerful framework for understanding why formal institutional modernization alone is insufficient for successful state-building. Institutions must be socially embedded, normatively legitimate, and aligned with prevailing belief systems. This insight directly underpins models such as the Multi-Level Modernization Deficit (MLMD), as North's work explains why deficits in social and normative modernization systematically undermine institutional modernization, particularly in cases of "imported states" like Afghanistan.

Within the MLMD model, Institutional Modernization is therefore best understood as part of an interdependent system alongside Social Modernization and Normative Modernization. Social Modernization provides the societal foundations, urban bourgeoisie, civic networks, and educational infrastructures necessary for sustaining institutional capacity.

Normative Modernization ensures a shared moral and cultural framework capable of legitimizing centralized authority and mediating pluralistic tensions. The failure to develop either dimension creates a structural gap, leaving formal institutions disconnected from social realities and unable to enforce coherent governance.

In Afghanistan, this interplay helps explain why repeated state-building attempts, despite significant external support and technical sophistication, have failed to produce durable, cohesive governance structures. The imported state remains fragile because institutional modernization cannot succeed without parallel advances in social cohesion and normative integration, illustrating the multidimensional and mutually reinforcing nature of the modernization deficit.

A conceptual diagram of the MLMD model can represent this interaction: the three dimensions, i.e., Social Modernization, Normative Modernization, and Institutional Modernization, form interconnected nodes, indicating the dependency of Institutional Modernization on social foundations and normative legitimacy. Weaknesses in any dimension amplify state fragility, while progress in all three is necessary to achieve sustainable state-building. While the formal structures of a modern state existed on paper, they were weakly rooted in society and failed to function effectively at the local level.

5.6. Interaction of the Three Dimensions as Central Component of the Model

The central component of this model lies in the Interaction of the Three Dimensions, which explains the systemic failure of state-building when institutional, normative, and structural elements are misaligned.

The first dimension involves the Lack of Social Modernization leading to Weak Institutional Development. The absence of a professional, merit-based bureaucracy produced widespread corruption, the phenomenon of “ghost soldiers, teachers, policemen” (as I elaborated in subchapter 3.7), and the entrenchment of informal patronage networks. Without a robust, tax-paying middle class to provide a domestic revenue base, the state was unable to become self-sustaining. Furthermore, the lack of civil society oversight allowed governmental abuses to proliferate without accountability, undermining the functional capacity of the administration.

The second dimension concerns the Lack of Secularization and the resulting Normative Competition Between the State and Religious Institutions. In this environment, the Taliban gained stronger symbolic and social legitimacy by framing their authority through religion. Because state law appeared foreign and inaccessible to much of the population, citizens frequently preferred the perceived efficiency and cultural familiarity of Taliban courts. This allowed religious leaders to override state authority, reinforcing a permanent normative disadvantage for secular institutions and preventing the state from establishing a moral monopoly on justice.

The third dimension is the Imported State Model, which resulted in Dysfunctional Modernization. Externally imposed institutions were fundamentally misaligned with the existing social and normative structures of the country. Consequently, the state functioned less as a sovereign, independent authority and more as a donor-funded project. Its survival depended almost entirely on international financial and military support rather than domestic legitimacy or local social contracts, making the entire system fragile and prone to collapse once external assistance was withdrawn.

5.7. Modelling the Failure Loop

The Core Proposition of the Model, also referred to as the *"Failure Loop"*, describes a self-reinforcing negative spiral produced by the interaction of the four dimensions:

1. Lack of social modernization leads to weak institutions and subsequently corruption. The absence of a strong civil society, a professional bureaucracy, and a robust middle class prevents the development of effective, accountable state institutions, resulting in widespread corruption and patronage.
2. Corruption results in declining state legitimacy, which in turn strengthens religious authority. As the state is perceived as predatory and ineffective due to corruption, citizens withdraw their support and turn to alternative, culturally embedded institutions, often religious ones, which gain greater moral and social standing.
3. Strong religious authority further weakens the secular state, leading to distorted modernization. The parallel power structure provided by religious authorities can veto or undermine state initiatives. This environment prevents the implementation of

genuinely secular and inclusive modernizing reforms, resulting in a fractured and ineffective governance system.

4. Distorted modernization fails to produce a viable middle class, leading to a continued absence of social modernization. The lack of genuine economic and political modernization means that a self-sustaining, tax-paying middle class cannot emerge. This failure reinforces the initial condition of absent social modernization, perpetuating the entire failure loop.

In other words, the Afghan state-building project failed because the misalignment of multiple dimensions of modernization created an endogenous, self-reinforcing failure loop.

As you can see in the Annex 12 diagram, the three dimensions interact to produce a self-reinforcing negative spiral.

This causal loop diagram illustrates a reinforcing feedback mechanism through which deficits in social, normative, and institutional modernization mutually reproduce state fragility. Weak social modernization undermines normative integration, which erodes institutional legitimacy and state effectiveness. Institutional weakness increases reliance on informal power structures, further fragmenting society and reinforcing the original social modernization deficit. The loop is endogenous and self-sustaining, requiring no external shock to persist.

In the above-mentioned Casual Loop Diagram, all causal links are marked with a positive polarity (+), indicating that an increase in one variable produces an increase in the connected variable *in the same direction* (or, conversely, a decrease produces a decrease). This does not mean the outcomes are normatively positive; rather, it reflects reinforcing causality.

The diagram starts with the lack of social modernization, then.
(+) --> Weak institutions
(+) --> Corruption
*(+)** --> Declining state legitimacy
*(+)** --> Strengthening of religious authority
*(+)** --> Weakening of the secular state
*(+)** --> Distorted modernization
*(+)** --> Failure to produce a middle class
*(+)** --> Continued absence of social modernization (which reinforces the starting variable)

These variables are linked through reinforcing loops (R) rather than balancing loops (B), which explains the persistence and deepening of failure.

R1: *The Multi-Level Modernization Deficit Loop*

An increase in the social modernization deficit (weak middle class, absence of civil society) positively reinforces the institutional modernization deficit, as the absence of a tax-paying bourgeoisie, professional bureaucracy, and civic oversight increases corruption, patronage, and aid dependence (+).

The institutional deficit, in turn, reinforces the cultural–normative modernization deficit, since weak and externally dependent state institutions lack the legitimacy and authority to compete with religious norms and actors (+). The strengthening of religious authority and the absence of secularization further undermine social modernization by discouraging autonomous civic organization, reinforcing traditional and communal loyalties over civic identities (+). This closes the loop by reproducing and deepening the original social modernization deficit.

Because all links are reinforcing, the system lacks an internal balancing mechanism capable of stabilizing state-building outcomes.

The *"Failure Loop"* is a Reinforcing Loop (R), as every link has a positive polarity (+), meaning the variables all move in the same direction, amplifying the initial condition of underdevelopment.

- An *increase* in the "Lack of social modernization" leads to an *increase* in "Weak institutions".
- An *increase* in "Weak institutions" leads to an *increase* in "Corruption".
- An *increase* in "Corruption" leads to an *increase* in "Declining state legitimacy".
- An *increase* in "Declining state legitimacy" leads to an *increase* in "Strengthening of religious authority".
- An *increase* in "Strengthening of religious authority" leads to an *increase* in "Weakening of the secular state".
- An *increase* in "Weakening of the secular state" leads to an *increase* in "Distorted modernization".
- An *increase* in "Distorted modernization" leads to an *increase* in "Failure to produce a middle class".
- An *increase* in "Failure to produce a middle class" leads back to an *increase* in the "Lack of social modernization", thus completing and reinforcing the negative spiral.

Why does this Failure Loop model serve as a key analytical point?

In a causal loop diagram, a reinforcing feedback loop is represented without a countervailing balancing loop (B). This explains why:

- Institutional reform alone fails
- Elections and constitutions do not consolidate legitimacy
- Security gains collapse once external support is withdrawn

Any partial intervention strengthens at least one other deficit, which then feeds back negatively into the system as a whole

The model can be reduced to the interaction of the following core variables:

1. State institutional capacity
2. State legitimacy
3. Normative coherence (unity of legal-moral order)
4. Ethnic and tribal fragmentation
5. Patronage and rent-seeking
6. External intervention and aid dependence
7. Insecurity and violence
8. Insurgent governance capacity (Taliban)

Explanation of the diagram (The "Logic of Polarity")

(+) Polarity: Each step in the model has positive feedback. This does not mean "good", but rather that an increase in one factor (e.g., an increase in corruption) directly increases the next factor (a decrease/lack of legitimacy).

Reinforcing Loop R1: Institutional Weakness–Legitimacy Erosion Loop

Weak state institutions reduce the state's ability to deliver security, justice, and public goods. This erodes popular legitimacy, which in turn diminishes compliance, tax extraction, and societal cooperation. Reduced resources further weaken institutional capacity, completing a self-reinforcing cycle.

Causal logic of reinforcing loop R1:

Lower institutional capacity → lower legitimacy → lower compliance/resources → even lower institutional capacity.

Lower institutional capacity undermines the state's ability to deliver public goods and enforce rules, which in turn erodes political and social legitimacy. Diminished legitimacy reduces citizens' willingness to comply with laws, pay taxes, or cooperate with state authorities, thereby constraining the state's access to financial, administrative, and coercive resources. This depletion of resources further weakens institutional capacity, reinforcing a self-perpetuating downward spiral of state fragility.

Reinforcing Loop R2: Normative Pluralism–Authority Fragmentation Loop

Low institutional capacity prevents the state from enforcing a unified legal order, sustaining normative pluralism. Competing legal systems undermine the state's claim to authoritative rule-making, fragment authority, and further weaken institutional reach.

Causal logic of the reinforcing loop R2:
Weak institutions → persistence of normative pluralism → fragmented authority → weakened institutional penetration.

Weak state institutions are unable to impose a unified legal and normative order, allowing normative pluralism—characterized by the coexistence of state law, customary practices, and religious norms—to persist. This persistence of multiple, competing normative frameworks fragments political and social authority, as different actors derive legitimacy from different rule systems. Fragmented authority, in turn, limits the state's capacity to penetrate society, enforce rules uniformly, and extend administrative control, thereby further weakening institutional effectiveness.

Reinforcing Loop R3: Fragmentation–Patronage–Corruption Loop

Ethnic and tribal fragmentation incentivizes elites to rely on patronage networks rather than programmatic governance. Patronage erodes bureaucratic professionalism and accountability, increasing corruption and further fragmenting authority along factional lines.

Causal logic of the reinforcing loop R3:
Fragmentation → patronage politics → corruption → delegitimization of the state → deeper fragmentation

Political and social fragmentation fosters patronage-based modes of governance, as fragmented authority structures incentivize elites to rely on personalized networks rather than impersonal, rule-based institutions. Patronage politics, in turn, normalizes corruption by subordinating public office to private or factional interests. Widespread corruption erodes the

legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens, weakening trust in formal institutions and compliance with state authority. This process of delegitimization further deepens fragmentation, thereby reinforcing a self-sustaining cycle of state weakness.

Reinforcing Loop R4: External Intervention–Dependency Loop

Low state capacity and high insecurity trigger external intervention and aid inflows. While temporarily boosting capacity, external resources substitute for domestic extraction and accountability, reinforcing elite rent-seeking and institutional dependency. This weakens long-term capacity, ensuring continued reliance on intervention.

Causal logic of the reinforcing loop R4:
Weak state → external intervention → aid dependence of the military forces → reduced accountability → weaker state

A weak state invites external intervention, as international actors seek to compensate for limited domestic governance capacity through security assistance, financial aid, and administrative support. Sustained external involvement often generates aid dependence, whereby state functions and budgets become reliant on foreign resources rather than domestic extraction. Aid dependence weakens internal accountability mechanisms by shifting the principal–agent relationship away from citizens and toward external donors. The resulting erosion of accountability further undermines state capacity and legitimacy, thereby reproducing and intensifying the original condition of state weakness.

Reinforcing Loop R5: Insecurity–Political Economy of Violence Loop

Insecurity incentivizes armed entrepreneurship and rents extraction through violence. These actors' profit from instability and resist institutional consolidation. Continued violence justifies further militarization and external intervention, perpetuating insecurity.

Causal logic of the reinforcing loop R5:
Insecurity → war economy → elite incentives for instability → continued insecurity.

Persistent insecurity gives rise to a war economy in which violence, smuggling, protection rackets, and illicit trade become central sources of income. Within this context, political and military elites develop material and strategic incentives to maintain instability, as continued conflict sustains their access to rents and power. These elite incentives undermine peace-building and institutional consolidation, thereby perpetuating insecurity and locking the system into a self-reinforcing cycle of conflict.

Reinforcing Loop R6: Insurgent Substitution Loop (Taliban)

State weakness and normative incoherence create space for insurgent governance. Taliban courts and enforcement increase their legitimacy relative to the state, further delegitimizing state institutions and accelerating state withdrawal from contested areas.

Causal logic of the reinforced loop R6:

State failure → insurgent governance → increased insurgent legitimacy → deeper state failure

State failure creates governance vacuums in which insurgent actors assume quasi-governmental functions, including dispute resolution, taxation, security provision, and welfare distribution. Through the provision of these services, insurgent organizations acquire social acceptance and political legitimacy among local populations. Increased insurgent legitimacy enhances their capacity to mobilize resources, recruit fighters, and exercise territorial control, thereby further undermining the authority, capacity, and legitimacy of the state. This process deepens state failure and locks the system into a self-reinforcing cycle of competitive governance.

At the core of the system lies weak state capacity, which undermines the state's ability to deliver public goods, enforce rules, and monopolize authority. Reduced institutional performance erodes state legitimacy, lowering citizen compliance, tax extraction, and cooperation. The resulting shortage of resources further diminishes institutional capacity, constituting a reinforcing legitimacy–capacity loop (R1).

Weak institutions are simultaneously unable to impose a unified normative order, allowing normative pluralism to persist. Competing legal, customary, and religious frameworks fragment authority and limit institutional penetration into society. This fragmentation further weakens state capacity, forming a reinforcing fragmentation–penetration loop (R2).

Political fragmentation incentivizes patronage politics, as elites rely on personalized networks rather than impersonal institutions. Patronage normalizes corruption, which delegitimizes the state and deepens social and political fragmentation. This dynamic constitutes a reinforcing patronage–delegitimating loop (R3).

State weakness also invites external intervention, as international actors substitute for domestic governance through aid, security assistance, and administrative support. Sustained intervention generates aid dependence, shifting accountability away from citizens toward

external donors. Reduced internal accountability further weakens state capacity, producing a reinforcing aid-accountability loop (R4).

Concurrently, weak state control and legitimacy contribute to persistent insecurity, enabling the emergence of a war economy based on illicit trade, violence, and protection rents. Elites embedded in this war economy develop incentives to preserve instability, actively undermining peace-building and institutional consolidation. Continued elite-driven instability reproduces insecurity, forming a reinforcing insecurity-war–war economy loop (R5).

Crucially, these loops are mutually reinforcing insecurity intensifies fragmentation; fragmentation facilitates patronage and corruption; corruption undermines legitimacy; legitimacy loss weakens state capacity; and weak capacity sustains insecurity. The result is a self-reinforcing, multi-loop system of institutional decay, in which no single intervention point is sufficient to reverse the trajectory.

5.8. Summary

Following the U.S.-led removal of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan entered a period of state-building, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and attempts to establish lasting peace. Decades of civil war and the Taliban's authoritarian, regressive rule had left the country deeply devastated. In this context, state-building was regarded as central to the country's recovery, prompting many Afghan refugees to return from neighbouring countries with hopes for a secure and prosperous future.

However, these aspirations gradually gave way to disappointment. Despite international efforts, the Taliban regrouped and adopted new tactics, including suicide attacks, bombings in public spaces, targeted assassinations of political figures, and the destruction of schools, clinics, and other essential infrastructure. This campaign of violence posed severe challenges to the state and, by 15 August 2021, culminated in the Taliban's seizure of power and the collapse of the Afghan government. Prior to this date, Afghanistan remained a fragile state, lacking a stable government capable of addressing persistent issues such as poverty and terrorism.

In the fifth chapter, I sought to answer the fundamental question of how interconnected structural weaknesses doomed Afghanistan's state-building project to failure, and through what components the undermining of the modernization attempt took effect.

To answer the above question, I applied the *"multi-level modernization deficit"* (MLMD) model, which showed that the components responsible for the failure of state-building interacted with each other in a self-perpetuating failure loop, operated in a multi-level modernization deficit system, and resulted in the failure of the modernization attempt.

As the first dimension of the multi-level modernization deficit model, I explored, presented, and identified the fundamental component of the social modernization deficit, the lack of civil society and urban citizenship.

Regarding the second dimension of this multi-level modernization deficit model, I identified the problem of the separation of religion and society, i.e., the lack of secularization, as the determining factor of cultural-normative modernization.

Finally, in exploring the third dimension of the multi-level modernization deficit model, I described and identified the determining factor of institutional modernization that can be described with the concept of the imported state model.

After the internal structural analysis of the above dimensions and the discovery and identification of the factors that make state-building aimed at creating a modern state impossible, I also conducted an analysis of the interaction of the three dimensions as the central element of the model.

In the rest of this chapter, I have shown that institutional modernization does not unfold in isolation but is structurally embedded in broader processes of social and normative modernization. The lack of a strong civil society, urban citizenship, and cohesive social networks limits the ability of modern institutions to become socially embedded and to function effectively. In such situations, citizens and local elites often lack incentives to adhere to or internalize newly introduced administrative norms, especially when primary loyalty remains to kinship ties, tribal structures, or religious authorities.

At the same time, persistent normative pluralism and localized moral orders erode the perceived legitimacy of imported state institutions, as competing normative frameworks continue to provide alternative sources of authority, social regulation, and dispute resolution. Institutional modernization, therefore, entails a dual challenge: it is not merely a technical project of constructing bureaucratic capacity, but also a socio-cultural process that requires alignment between formal institutional arrangements and prevailing patterns of meaning, legitimacy, and authority. The core proposition of the model, referred to as the "failure loop,"

describes a self-reinforcing negative spiral generated by the interaction of the three dimensions of modernization. The absence of social modernization leads initially to weak institutional development and the proliferation of corruption. Without a strong civil society, a professional bureaucracy, or a robust middle class, the state lacks the capacity to establish effective and accountable institutions, resulting in pervasive patronage and rent-seeking practices. Widespread corruption, in turn, erodes state legitimacy and encourages the strengthening of religious authority. As state institutions come to be perceived as predatory, inefficient, and disconnected from social needs, citizens increasingly withdraw their support and seek legitimacy, justice, and social order through alternative, culturally embedded institutions—most notably religious ones—which consequently acquire enhanced moral and social authority.

The consolidation of religious authority further undermines the secular state and contributes to a pattern of distorted modernization. Religious actors, operating as a parallel power structure, are often able to veto, obstruct, or delegitimize state initiatives. This dynamic constrains the implementation of genuinely secular, inclusive, and institutionalized reforms, producing fragmented governance and reinforcing institutional weakness.

Distorted modernization, in turn, fails to generate the economic and political conditions necessary for the emergence of a viable, self-sustaining middle class. In the absence of genuine modernization, a tax-paying and politically engaged middle class cannot develop, thereby perpetuating the lack of social modernization that initiated the cycle.

In sum, the failure of the Afghan state-building project can be attributed to the misalignment across multiple dimensions of modernization, which together produced an endogenous and self-reinforcing failure loop.

5.9. Hypothesis testing

Using a research method based on the True-False Statements Comparison Matrix, I performed a comparative analysis of the content elements of the summary that contained the scientific results obtained based on the research conducted in the fifth chapter and the hypotheses developed to achieve the chapter's scientific goals.

My Hypothesis Nr7 (H7) (Cumulative Failure) formulated as follows: H7 (The collective, interconnected failure of social, cultural, and institutional modernization dimensions—as described in the hypotheses—created a self-perpetuating "failure loop" that doomed the

international state-building project despite immense financial and human investment. Indeed, this H7 consists of ten different statements, which have detailed explanations and the True-False Comprehension Matrix presented in Annex 13.

The True–False Comprehension Statements for H7 (Cumulative Failure) stand as follows: The hypothesis argues that failure occurred in only one domain of modernization (False – H7 emphasizes multiple domains: social, cultural, and institutional). Social, cultural, and institutional modernization failures are described as interconnected (True–H7 explicitly describes these failures as interlinked, creating systemic effects). The failures operated independently rather than reinforcing one another (False – H7 describes a self-reinforcing "failure loop," not independent failures).

The hypothesis proposes the existence of a self-perpetuating "failure loop" (True – the core claim of H7 is that failures amplified each other over time). The failure loop contributed directly to the collapse of the international state-building project (True – H7 argues that this cumulative failure doomed the project despite resources). Financial and human investments were minimal and therefore not central to the argument (False – H7 notes that massive investments occurred but were insufficient due to systemic failure).

The hypothesis suggests that greater investment alone could have guaranteed success (False – H7 highlights structural and cumulative causes, so funding alone would not have prevented failure). The international state-building project failed despite substantial financial and human investment (True–H7 stresses that the project failed despite significant investment). The hypothesis emphasizes cumulative and systemic failure rather than isolated policy mistakes (True – H7 frames failure as systemic, not as the result of isolated errors). The outcome was portrayed as avoidable once the failure loop was established (False – H7 implies that once the failure loop was in motion, the project was essentially doomed).

No	Statement	Answer
1	The hypothesis argues that failure occurred in only one domain of modernization.	**False**
2	Social, cultural, and institutional modernization failures are described as interconnected.	**True**
3	The failures operated independently rather than reinforcing one another.	**False**
4	The hypothesis proposes the existence of a self-perpetuating "failure loop."	**True**
5	The failure loop contributed directly to the collapse of the international state-building project.	**True**
6	Financial and human investments were minimal and therefore not central to the argument.	**False**

7	The hypothesis suggests that greater investment alone could have guaranteed success.	**False**
8	The international state-building project failed despite substantial financial and human investment.	**True**
9	The hypothesis emphasizes cumulative and systemic failure rather than isolated policy mistakes.	**True**
10	The outcome was portrayed as avoidable once the failure loop was established.	**False**

5.10. Conclusion

Within the MLMD framework, Institutional Modernization is best conceptualized as one component of an interdependent triad alongside Social Modernization and Normative Modernization.

Social Modernization supplies the structural and societal prerequisites for institutional capacity, including an urban bourgeoisie, dense civic networks, and educational infrastructures. Normative Modernization, in turn, provides a shared moral and cultural framework that legitimizes centralized authority and facilitates the management of pluralism. Deficiencies in either dimension generate structural discontinuities, resulting in formal institutions that are weakly embedded in society and incapable of exercising coherent governance. The Afghan case illustrates the consequences of this imbalance. Despite substantial external assistance and technically sophisticated state-building initiatives, repeated efforts have failed to yield durable and cohesive governance structures. The persistence of institutional fragility reflects the absence of corresponding advances in social cohesion and normative integration, underscoring the multidimensional and mutually reinforcing nature of the modernization deficit.

This dynamic can be illustrated conceptually through the MLMD model, in which Social, Normative, and Institutional Modernization are represented as interconnected nodes. Institutional Modernization is contingent upon both social foundations and normative legitimacy; weaknesses in any single dimension exacerbate state fragility, while sustained progress across all three is a necessary condition for durable state-building.

In this chapter, I have examined the complex dynamics of state-building in Afghanistan through the lens of a multidimensional deficit model. The analysis demonstrates that factors such as social fragmentation, cultural resistance to externally supported modernization, institutional inadequacy, recurrent government failures, and the influence of regional interventions did not operate in isolation. Rather, these elements interacted in a mutually reinforcing manner, creating a self-perpetuating “failure loop” that systematically eroded the

effectiveness of international state-building efforts. Social divisions and weak civic structures limited the capacity of formal institutions to embed themselves in society, while persistent cultural and normative resistance undermined the legitimacy of externally promoted reforms. At the same time, institutional weaknesses and governance deficits compounded these challenges, allowing local power structures and informal networks to fill the vacuum. The interplay of these factors produced a cumulative effect, wherein each dimension of weakness reinforced the others, ultimately stalling the progress of state-building initiatives and perpetuating Afghanistan's fragility despite extensive international support.

Regarding my hypothesis H7, I found that it confirmed that the failure of state-building was realized as a cumulative, interconnected, and self-reinforcing process, which could not be stopped despite enormous human and material sacrifices and investments, and was enforced in a model where a series of isolated or correctable errors did not prevail, but was a completely self-exciting process.

Summary of Results

The modern history of Afghanistan is marked by the repeated failure of state and nation-building, manifested in persistent state weakness, fragility, and periodic collapse. The roots of this problem date back to the establishment of the modern Afghan state in 1880, when the state structure was artificially constructed around an Afghan identity, largely ignoring the country's deep ethnic, tribal, and social divisions. From the outset, state-building was undermined by structural deficiencies and legitimacy issues.

This study has demonstrated that the empirically identifiable causes of state-building failure in Afghanistan are not discrete or independent phenomena, but rather interconnected manifestations of a single, overarching structural condition. The persistent inability to consolidate political authority, deliver public administrative services, and establish institutional legitimacy ultimately derives from the extreme and historically entrenched underdevelopment of the Afghan state.

The experience of Afghanistan demonstrates the profound challenges inherent in externally driven state- and nation-building projects, particularly in societies marked by deep historical, cultural, and social complexity. Over the past century, and especially during the international intervention following 2001, efforts to establish a centralized, legitimate, and cohesive Afghan state repeatedly faltered due to the interaction of structural, social, and geopolitical factors. Historical legacies of fragmented governance, entrenched local power networks, and colonial and foreign interventions created persistent institutional weaknesses.

The post-1880 regimes were characterized by highly despotic governance, with a power structure that attempted to modernize the country through a top-down approach and uneven treatment of ethnic groups. Although multiple reforms were attempted, they failed to create inclusive, institutionalized political systems. The reasons behind the reforms' failures were often elite-driven processes lacking broad societal support and thus did not foster a durable political culture or national cohesion. The absence of a shared identity and value system—the foundation of nation-building—further intensified the state's legitimacy crisis.

While external factors, particularly regional interventions and great-power interests, are often emphasized in explanations of state collapse, Afghanistan's internal dynamics played a primary role. The dominance of tribal structures, the rise of fundamentalism, the political marginalization of ethnic groups, and institutional inefficiency consistently fuelled resistance

to reformist, non-tribal governments. These factors generated a self-reinforcing cycle of failure, obstructing sustainable state development.

Pakistan's strategic "double game," in which it simultaneously engaged diplomatically while covertly supporting insurgent groups, significantly undermined Afghan state-building efforts. By backing select militant factions and exploiting ethnic and tribal divisions, Pakistan exacerbated internal conflict and weakened the authority of central institutions. This approach not only perpetuated cycles of violence but also complicated peace processes and entrenched Afghanistan's dependency on external actors, limiting the country's political sovereignty. Ultimately, Pakistan's dual policies amplified state fragility and contributed to the long-term challenges of governance and national cohesion.

The radicalization of Islam in Afghanistan was closely linked to the proliferation of madrasas, particularly those adhering to the Deobandi tradition, which promoted a conservative interpretation of Islam and shaped the ideological framework of the Taliban. This process was reinforced by socio-political exclusion, weak state institutions, and the intertwining of Pashtunwali customs with fundamentalist ideologies, creating fertile ground for militant mobilization. The 1979–1989 Soviet occupation further exacerbated instability, intensifying militarization and producing a generation of armed actors embedded within ideological and tribal networks. The occupation undermined state legitimacy, fragmented Afghan society along ethnic and factional lines, and fostered long-term grievances that contributed to cycles of insurgency and facilitated the rise of transnational militant networks. Together, these factors highlight the interplay of internal vulnerabilities and external interventions in shaping Afghanistan's persistent state fragility and ideological radicalization.

Cultural and normative systems, including the hybridization of tribal customs and Islamic law, conflicted with attempts to impose secular, Western-style institutions. Ethnic hierarchies and exclusion further undermined legitimacy and the capacity for inclusive governance, while external actors exploited and exacerbated these divisions, sustaining instability and empowering insurgent networks.

These factors, as the preceding chapters have illustrated, did not operate in isolation. Rather, they created a self-reinforcing cycle—a "failure loop"—in which each structural or political weakness amplified others, rendering reforms ineffective and preventing the emergence of sustainable institutions. The Afghan case thus underscores the limits of conventional state-building approaches that rely primarily on external funding, top-down

institution building, and military enforcement. It also highlights the critical importance of legitimacy, local ownership, and the alignment of reforms with deeply rooted social norms and cultural realities. The Islamic beliefs upheld by the Taliban have been significantly shaped by influences from Pakistan. While the Taliban adheres to a radical interpretation of Islam, elements of Pashtun tribal traditions are also evident. The presence of Afghan refugees in the madrassas operated by Jamiat-e Ulema-i Islam in Pakistan introduces a distinct combination of Islamic doctrines and Pashtun cultural values. Consequently, neither contemporary Deobandi scholars nor the practical aspects of everyday life endorse the type of Islam practiced by the Taliban.

From a broader theoretical perspective, Afghanistan exemplifies the intersection of historical legacies, normative constraints, ethnic fragmentation, and regional geopolitics in shaping state fragility. The lessons drawn extend beyond Afghanistan: they caution policymakers and scholars about the risks of oversimplifying complex socio-political systems, and they emphasize the necessity of designing interventions that are contextually informed, socially embedded, and politically inclusive. While the collapse of the Afghan state after 2021 was dramatic, it was neither unexpected nor inevitable; rather, it was the culmination of longstanding structural dynamics that consistently undermined both domestic legitimacy and external attempts at modernization.

In conclusion, the Afghan case serves as a stark reminder that successful state- and nation-building requires more than resources, military power, or externally imposed institutional frameworks. It requires a careful engagement with local histories, cultural systems, and social hierarchies, as well as sustained efforts to foster inclusive political orders capable of absorbing diversity rather than suppressing it. Without such alignment between external objectives and internal realities, even the most ambitious reconstruction projects are likely to encounter the same pattern of fragility, resistance, and eventual collapse that has characterized Afghanistan for over a century.

Summarized Conclusions

Afghanistan's state-building failure cannot be attributed to short-term crises or isolated policy errors; it is rooted in persistent structural, historical, and socio-cultural incongruities. The tension between localized authority and centralized ambition has been a defining feature of Afghan political development. Traditional governance relied on tribal councils (jirgas), local elders (maliks), and religious leaders to mediate disputes, while the state historically exercised limited coercive power, especially in rural areas. These decentralized practices created a normative pluralism deeply embedded in society, whereby multiple, competing sources of authority coexisted, often independent of the central state. Over time, this system fostered hybrid governance structures in which formal state institutions, customary norms, and religious authority intersected and frequently competed.

The post-2001 state-building project, led by the United States and international partners, sought to rapidly construct a centralized, liberal-democratic state with modern institutions, market reforms, and a professional security apparatus. Despite unprecedented levels of financial, military, and technical support, these efforts largely failed to establish a durable and legitimate Afghan state. Central institutions, such as the presidency, parliament, and judiciary, were modelled on Western templates and heavily reliant on foreign expertise. Many Afghans perceived these structures as externally imposed and disconnected from local realities. Deep-rooted ethnic, tribal, and religious loyalties, combined with the country's fragmented geography, constrained the central government's authority, leaving vast portions of the country under local or insurgent control.

This disconnect produced a dual legitimacy problem: modern institutions existed on paper but lacked resonance with societal norms, while local authorities, often informal or religiously sanctioned, maintained substantial legitimacy among populations. Patronage networks further undermined the development of impersonal, rule-based governance. Access to state resources—employment, development aid, and security—depended on personal loyalty, kinship, or factional allegiance rather than citizenship or legal entitlement. These networks entrenched fragmented sovereignty and created incentives for elites to resist institutional consolidation and fiscal centralization. Consequently, externally designed institutions operated within a weak and contested governance space, limiting their ability to enforce rules or deliver public goods effectively.

Socio-cultural factors played an equally decisive role. Afghanistan's normative pluralism includes customary law (*ʿurf*), Pashtunwali codes, and decentralized Islamic jurisprudence administered by local ulema, Sufi orders, and village clerics. Religious authority was never centralized, producing doctrinal diversity and localized interpretations of Islam that coexisted with traditional norms. Efforts to impose uniform legal or administrative frameworks were often perceived as intrusive, undermining both legitimacy and compliance. Externally promoted liberal-democratic norms, including gender equality, market reforms, and bureaucratic rationalization, frequently conflicted with entrenched local practices and moral frameworks, exacerbating societal alienation from state institutions.

The Afghan urban middle class, though theoretically a stabilizing force in state-building, was structurally constrained. Emerging primarily through bureaucratic employment, military service, education, and foreign aid–supported sectors, it lacked the economic independence, social legitimacy, and demographic weight necessary to demand accountability or counter patrimonial governance. While segments of the middle class engaged with democratic reforms and the constitution post-2001, their influence was largely confined to donor-funded urban enclaves, leaving the broader population under the sway of local elites and insurgent actors. This limitation highlighted the inadequacy of relying on urban elites as the primary agents of social and institutional modernization.

Regional and international factors further complicated state-building. Neighbouring states, including Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and China, often pursued strategic objectives that conflicted with the development of a strong, sovereign Afghan state, supporting parallel power structures, insurgent networks, or economic leverage rather than democratic consolidation. Pakistan played a decisive role in shaping the Taliban and sustaining its operational capacities.

The teaching of the Deobandi Islamic school, a combination of Pashtun customary law, in religious schools in Pakistan contributed greatly to the development of Taliban radicalism and provided an inexhaustible human resource in the fight against the central government in Kabul.

Without Pakistan active military, intelligence support, most probably, the Taliban cannot succeed in destabilizing the central government in Afghanistan. I have pointed out that the madrasa networks and the Deobandi school served as sources of Taliban Radicalism and played a crucial role in the failure of the modernization effort of Afghan society, and it was one of the major obstacles to the Afghan State Modernization project.

Historical legacies shaped these dynamics. Afghanistan's political and social structures evolved through indirect rule, negotiated power with local elites, and reliance on non-state normative systems. Previous state modernization attempts, from the Durrani Empire through the 20th century under Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and King Amanullah, produced limited bureaucratic and professional classes concentrated in urban centres, but these reforms never reached rural areas. State authority remained weak, and governance largely depended on the co-optation of local power holders. This historical context explains why externally imposed centralization and liberal-democratic institutions faced persistent resistance: they lacked organic roots in society and clashed with long-standing traditions of governance and social organization.

I have pointed out that the Soviet occupation and the USSR-supported communist regime had a cumulative effect on the further fragmentation of Afghan society.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government's dependence on foreign aid—over 75% of its budget—produced incentives to prioritize donor priorities over citizen interests, inhibiting the formation of an organic social contract. This reliance created a government accountable to external actors rather than its own population, which collapsed swiftly once international support withdrew.

From a theoretical perspective, the Multidimensional Deficit Model (MLMD) provides a useful framework for understanding Afghanistan's state-building failure. Institutional Modernization, Social Modernization, and Normative Modernization constitute an interdependent triad. In Afghanistan, deficiencies in social cohesion, civic infrastructure, and a robust urban middle class limited the societal foundation necessary for effective institutions. Persistent normative pluralism and localized moral orders undermined the legitimacy of externally imposed reforms, while institutional weaknesses—exacerbated by corruption, insecurity, and fragmented authority—prevented the consolidation of coherent governance. The interaction of these dimensions produced a self-reinforcing "failure loop," in which weaknesses in one domain amplified deficits in others, systematically undermining the sustainability of state-building efforts despite substantial international intervention.

The post-2001 failure thus reflects a cumulative interaction of internal illegitimacy and external interference. The state lacked both the societal base and legitimacy necessary for durable governance, while international actors often instrumentalized its weakness to pursue strategic objectives. Regional politics reinforced Afghanistan's fragility, producing a contested

and militarized environment that undermined both institutional and normative consolidation. As Roy (2019) describes, Afghanistan exemplifies “the archetype of the non-state country”: formal institutions exist, but the social content necessary to sustain them is absent.

To achieve the goals of my scientific research, I set up seven hypotheses, which I examined and verified one by one after elaborating the chapters of my thesis. I compared the content of the theses using my "True-False" comparison matrix, and the results of the comparative analysis were presented in tables and illustrated in a graphical system. I presented their summarized results at the end of each chapter. The confirmation of the hypotheses H1-H7, showing a summarized positivity, clearly proves the correct direction of my research. The confirmed hypotheses supported and helped to formulate my new scientific results.

During and because of the positive validation of my hypotheses, I came to four main conclusions.

Firstly, the social fragmentation, cultural resistance to externally driven modernization, institutional weaknesses, recurrent government failures, and regional interventions did not exist in isolation. Instead, they interacted in a mutually reinforcing manner, generating a self-perpetuating “failure loop” that gradually undermined all dimensions of state-building. Fragmented social structures limited the reach and effectiveness of formal institutions, while cultural and normative resistance weakened public legitimacy and compliance with externally introduced reforms. Institutional incompetence and governance failures further compounded these challenges, leaving space for local powerholders and informal networks to fill the vacuum. Simultaneously, regional actors, pursuing their own strategic interests, often exacerbated existing tensions rather than facilitating coherent state development. The cumulative effect of these intertwined dynamics created a cycle in which weaknesses in one domain amplified vulnerabilities in others, progressively eroding the capacity of international interventions to achieve sustainable, cohesive, and legitimate state structures.

Secondly, in analysing the empirically observable causes of Afghanistan’s state-building failure, I have emphasized that these factors cannot be understood as independent or isolated variables. Rather, they point to a shared structural origin, rooted in the profound underdevelopment of the Afghan state. Social fragmentation, institutional weakness, governance failures, normative pluralism, and regional interference are not merely separate obstacles; they represent different expressions of the same underlying condition.

Each of these phenomena, whether it is the inability of central institutions to extend authority beyond urban centres, the persistence of localized normative systems, or the interference of neighbouring states, can be traced back to the foundational deficit of state capacity and legitimacy. In this sense, the multiplicity of identifiable causes does not indicate complexity for its own sake, but rather reflects the structural depth of the problem and but point to a common structural theoretical, practical origin: a weak and ultimately underdeveloped state generates vulnerabilities across all social, institutional, and political dimensions, producing a cascade of failures that collectively undermine efforts at sustainable governance.

As a third major conclusion, in my research, I have shown and demonstrated that the overly centralized approach to state-building, characterized by a constitutional framework that failed to grant meaningful autonomy or political recognition to non-Pashtun ethnic groups—such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens—played a significant role in undermining the success of Afghanistan's state-building efforts. This exclusionary structure not only weakened the legitimacy and inclusivity of central institutions but also constrained opportunities for these groups to participate meaningfully in governance and political decision-making. As a result, the state remained disconnected from large segments of the population, galvanizing social and political fragmentation. At the same time, these structural exclusions rendered the broader nation-building project ineffective, as efforts to cultivate a cohesive national identity and shared civic allegiance were continually hampered by the marginalization of key ethnic constituencies.

Based on my research, I have demonstrated that the Pakistani government's sustained pro-Taliban policy, combined with the Bush administration's decision to withdraw a portion of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2003, created conditions that directly undermined the democratic state-building model. These external actions not only weakened the security and operational capacity of Afghan institutions but also provided the Taliban and other insurgent actors with strategic opportunities to consolidate influence and challenge central authority. By destabilizing the emerging political and military structures, these interventions critically contributed to the erosion of legitimacy, hindered the development of functional governance, and ultimately played a decisive role in the failure of state-building efforts in Afghanistan. In effect, the interplay between regional support for insurgent groups and premature international disengagement reinforced existing structural vulnerabilities, amplifying the fragility of the post-2001 Afghan state.

In conclusion, Afghanistan's state-building failure highlights the limitations of externally driven nation-building in contexts marked by historical fragmentation, normative pluralism, and regional interference. Sustainable governance requires institutions that are socially anchored, culturally legitimate, and locally adaptable. Efforts to impose top-down Western models, without integration of indigenous traditions, norms, and governance practices, are prone to collapse. The Afghan experience demonstrates that legitimacy, social cohesion, and alignment with historical and cultural realities are prerequisites for successful state formation—conditions that were systematically absent in post-2001 Afghanistan, ultimately producing persistent fragility and the return of the Taliban in 2021.

New scientific results

Through my research, I have demonstrated that the 2001-2021 state-building model was a critical flaw, imposing a highly centralized, Western-style democratic model on a country with a historical foundation in decentralized, tribal autonomy.

Furthermore, I have proven that this state model completely lacked social roots, meaning that institutions such as the parliament and the constitution did not develop from Afghan social dynamics, but were imported models. In my research, I have also noted that the state model experiment was not self-sustaining; the system was maintained artificially. The state budget and security forces were almost 100% dependent on foreign aid. As soon as international support ceased, the "greenhouse state" immediately collapsed because it had no internal economic engine.

In my study, I have uncovered and demonstrated that the state-building model used from 2001 to 2021 contained a major flaw by imposing a highly centralized, Western-style democratic system on a nation with a history of decentralized, tribal governance. Furthermore, I have shown that this model lacked any social foundation, which meant that institutions like the parliament and constitution did not emerge from Afghan social dynamics but were instead externally imposed frameworks. In addition, my research indicates that the experiment with this state model was not sustainable on its own; it relied heavily on artificial support. The state's budget and security forces were nearly entirely funded by foreign assistance. Once international backing was withdrawn, the "greenhouse state" promptly fell apart because it lacked any internal economic drivers.

During my thesis, I pointed out the connections between systemic corruption and loss of legitimacy, and I revealed that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001–2021) was unable to build a functioning state due to pervasive corruption. The patronage system was a huge drain on resources. Most of the international aid was directed to local warlords and political elites, so it never reached the population. In addition, a security vacuum was created, and the state, with security forces that often only existed on a par, was unable to provide the most basic public good – security. This led to the population viewing the government as ineffective and "predatory", which drove many towards the Taliban.

One of the main vectors of my research was to demonstrate the failure of nation-building, since in Afghanistan, state-building (establishment of institutions) took place without successful nation-building (creation of a unified identity).

The country is characterized by extreme ethnic division. The Pashtuns traditionally strive for dominance, which has created deep-rooted distrust on the part of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, which has understandably prevented the formation of a cohesive national identity. The attempt at modernization and democratic state-building has left a rural-urban divide within Afghan society. A somewhat modernized, westernized urban elite has emerged in cities like Kabul, while the rural population (where the majority live) has remained attached to traditional and radical values. The Taliban have successfully exploited this cultural difference.

In addition, I have also explored the dual nature of Pakistani politics, which, on the one hand, has shown an alliance with the US-Wang, while on the other hand, with the support of the Taliban, they have played an active destabilizing role in Afghanistan.

This has enabled the Taliban to wage a long-term war of attrition that the central government has not been able to successfully fight. I have demonstrated that Afghanistan's state-building failure emerged not from isolated shortcomings, but from a tightly interwoven set of structural weaknesses that continually reproduced and reinforced one another.

By drawing conclusions from each chapter and examining the claims of my hypotheses, I was able to create new research results that have not yet been established by other researchers.

New Scientific result No. 1: I convincingly demonstrated that social fragmentation, cultural resistance to externally supported modernization, institutional incompetence, government failures, and regional intervention did not operate independently of each other, but formed a self-perpetuating "failure loop" that gradually undermined all aspects of state-building operated by international efforts.

While individually exploring the reasons for the failed state-building effort led by international forces between 2001 and 2021, by using the Three-Dimensional Modernization Deficit Model I concluded that, without denying that the various factors played an unequal role and often overlapped and, as I stated above, formed a mutually reinforcing nuclear loop, they actually fed from a common root, namely the extremely underdeveloped level of sovereignty of the Afghan state. This is the basic idea of my second new scientific result.

New Scientific result No. 2: In analysing the empirically identifiable causes of the failure of state-building in Afghanistan, I highlighted and demonstrated that these factors are not independent variables, but point to a common structural origin, traceable to a single factor,

namely the extreme underdevelopment of the Afghan state, and all the revealed causes are manifestations of this.

The reasons for the failure of the Western-led state-building model can be formulated in general and within a broader framework, such as the internal reason that an "artificial" state, devoid of either social embeddedness or traditions, was created and imposed on the country.

These Western-style democratic institutions have always been a “strange body” in the traditional tribal systems of rural areas. Only limited signs of modernization were observable, such as the presence of bourgeois values and class, developed agriculture, urbanization, and the existence of a business sector.

Through my research, I have demonstrated that the 2001-2021 state-building model was a critical flaw, imposing a highly centralized, Western-style democratic model on a country with a historical foundation in decentralized, tribal autonomy, where modernization efforts consistently failed during the history of the country.

Furthermore, I have proven that this new political and government model completely lacked social roots, meaning that democratic institutions such as political pluralism, elections, power sharing (separation of legislation, execution, and jurisdiction), constitutionalism, etc., did not develop from Afghan social dynamics, but were imported models. People, especially in rural areas, do not understand democracy, but more trust local customary law, and their own tribal jurisdiction, the jirga.

I have uncovered and demonstrated, too, that the state-building model used from 2001 to 2021 contained a major flaw by imposing a highly centralized, unitary Western-style democratic system on a population with a history of decentralized, tribal governance. Furthermore, I have shown that this model lacked any social foundation, which meant that Western-style democratic institutions were not deeply rooted in the Afghan society but were instead an externally imposed framework.

In my research, I revealed that the 2004 constitution, while indeed laying down the legal framework for a democratic state, also foreshadowed the possibility of state-building failure in several respects. Namely, on the one hand, it attempted to resolve the tension between a developed rule of law framework and Islam deeply embedded in society with a compromise solution. The name of the country also reflects this: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The constitution provided the framework for a strong presidential system, with the president serving as both head of state and head of government. While acknowledging the country's ethnic and linguistic diversity, it made Dari an official language alongside Pashto, without granting any autonomous rights to the provinces or ethnic groups. This exclusionary policy has increased distrust of the Pashtuns and increased the feeling of exclusion among a significant part of the population (Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmens). Based upon the above-mentioned research outcomes, I have formulated my third new scientific result.

New Scientific Result No. 3: In my research, I have revealed and demonstrated that the exclusionary nature of the overly centralized state-building concept (the constitution did not provide autonomous rights for non-Pashtun ethnic groups, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, and Turkmens) significantly contributed to the failure of state-building and, at the same time, made the success of the nation-building experiment impossible.

I explored and analysed the impact of the regional actor, Pakistan, on the Afghan state-building efforts. I found that Pakistan was playing a political double game that was understandable from its own perspective but nevertheless implemented at the state level. I pointed out that without Pakistani support, the Taliban would not have been able to sustain the insurgency and undermine the Western model of state-building. However, by 2025, it became clear that this “victory” had also resulted in a serious security and diplomatic crisis for Pakistan.

I revealed that in 2001, the so-called Quetta Shura (the Taliban leadership council) was formed in the city of Quetta, which directed military operations in southern Afghanistan. Refugee camps and residential areas around Quetta served as a haven for fighters to train Taliban fighters. North and South Waziristan (FATA) have become a base for radical militants. Not only the Afghan Taliban but also members of al-Qaeda have operated training camps here.

In addition, I also explored the geopolitical background of Pakistan's double game, showing that for Islamabad, supporting the Taliban was a means to curb India's influence in Afghanistan.

This created a political situation where, while officially an ally of the US in the fight against terrorism and receiving significant financial support, it secretly supported the Taliban, hoping that its own puppet government could be established in Afghanistan. At the same time, I also mapped out and pointed out that the US policy shift in 2003, which made the invasion of Iraq a priority, manifested itself as a strategic mistake and a golden opportunity for the Taliban.

The Bush administration's decision to reduce American forces in Afghanistan and launch the invasion of Iraq on flimsy grounds proved fatal to the state-building project, as it allowed the Taliban to gradually infiltrate Afghan territory. Pakistan's double-dealing policy and American strategic error combined to provide an opportunity for the Taliban.

New Scientific result No. 4: Based upon my research, I proved that the Pakistani government's pro-Taliban policy and the Bush administration's decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan in 2003 culminated in and provided an opportunity to undermine the democratic state-building model and thus played a decisive role in the state-building failure.

Recommendations

Afghanistan, as a multi-ethnic country that gained its independence from the British in 1919, is still considered one of the most underdeveloped nations in the world. This research explains the flawed approach to state-nation building, which has led to the weakness, fragility, and collapse of the state, as well as the failure to develop nationalism in Afghanistan. Based on this, the following recommendations are proposed to establish a strong and national government that can fill historical gaps in the future.

The failure of state-building in Afghanistan suggests that international interventions must prioritize local legitimacy over the direct imposition of foreign institutional models.

Future efforts should focus on creating a decentralized political framework that respects indigenous power structures and cultural norms rather than forcing a highly centralized Western-style bureaucracy onto a fragmented society. Strategic planning must move away from short-term, donor-driven cycles toward long-term sustainability, ensuring that local security forces and administrative bodies can operate independently without permanent foreign logistical support.

Furthermore, economic aid must be coupled with rigorous, independent oversight to prevent the systemic corruption that delegitimizes emerging governments, while diplomatic efforts must ensure that all significant local and regional stakeholders are included in the political settlement from the very beginning to prevent renewed insurgency.

Overall, the most critical recommendation is that nation-building cannot be successfully engineered from the outside without a genuine domestic consensus and an institutional design that reflects the lived reality of the population. My practical proposal, once Afghanistan has again a chance to democratize the country, would be:

1- Religious institutions that promote religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan, including madrassas, should gradually undergo reforms and adopt an educational curriculum. Religious institutions have held society hostage and have fostered a culture of lawlessness. People tend to adhere more to customary laws recommended by these institutions rather than formal state laws.

2- Local governance plays a crucial role in providing public services, fostering economic development, and maintaining security. Given Afghanistan's multi-ethnic structure and complex geography, a strong local governance system could have a positive impact on

stability and social growth. However, Afghanistan has faced significant challenges in local governance, including excessive centralization, corruption, lack of sufficient resources, and weak local institutions. This research also highlights that the absence of effective local governance has been a major shortcoming of past governments. Weak states have failed to enforce the law in rural Afghanistan, leaving rural populations deprived of even the most basic rights.

Practical applicability of the research results

My PhD thesis is titled "The Failure of State and Nation Building in Afghanistan," has some completely new research results, and of course, not surprisingly, I have reinforced some of the already identified research outcomes by respected scholars and subject matter experts.

From my perspective, my new scientific research results could be applied to the strategic planning of international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO, or the European Union for future stabilization missions.

My recommendations can also be applied in preventive diplomacy, as this avoids the political mistake of excluding relevant political or religious groups from reconciliation, demobilization, disarmament, and integration processes (as the Taliban were excluded in 2001), which in the long run provides fertile ground for armed insurgency.

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List of related publications of Afzal Mohmed Osmani

Title	Type	Language	Journals and Years of Publication
1- The US State-Building Failure in Afghanistan	Research paper	English	*European Scientific Journal, ESJ Vol 17 No 33 (2021): ESJ Humanities*
2- Multiethnic society and lack of political culture in Afghanistan	Research Paper	English	*Journal of Politics and Law, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2023)*
3- Sub-Nationalism and Nationalism: the dilemma of power and ethnicity in Afghanistan	Research paper	English	*Beijing Law Review* Vol 14 No.2 , June 5, 2023
4- Tribalism and Fundamentalism: The Two Fundamental Hurdles of Democracy after 2001 in Afghanistan	Research paper	English	*Beijing Law Review Vol 13 No.2 June 30, 2022*

ANNEX 1: Scholarly Perspectives on the Failure of State-Building in Afghanistan

Scholar / School of Thought	Main Argument	Key Evidence / Claims	Critiques of This Perspective
Barnett Rubin (State Formation / Political Economy)[8]	Failure is rooted in the *historical weakness* of Afghan state institutions and the fragmented political order.	The Afghan ruler's authority was always limited; tribal autonomy was strong; the modern bureaucratic state was never consolidated.	Underplays the role of international actors and insurgent networks.
Antonio Giustozzi (Insurgency & Warlordism)[9]	Warlords, militias, and local powerbrokers undermined state-building.	Post-2001 warlords co-opted into government; patronage and armed groups eroded state legitimacy.	Does not fully explain why the central government couldn't discipline warlords.
Thomas Barfield (Anthropological / Historical)[10]	Afghan governance has historically been based on *negotiated authority* rather than centralized control.	Kabul's legitimacy always required tribal bargains; foreign-imposed centralization fails.	Risks of portraying Afghan society as static may overlook modernizing forces.
David Kilcullen (COIN Strategist)[11]	The counterinsurgency approach was misaligned; military dominance overshadowed political reconciliation.	Overemphasis on kinetic operations; insufficient local buy-in; Taliban gained legitimacy.	COIN perspective downplays governance failures and corruption.
Sarah Chayes (Corruption & Governance)[12]	Systemic corruption—and predatory governance—was the central cause of collapse.	Elites captured aid, police extorted locals, judiciary failed; the public turned to Taliban courts.	Critics say corruption was a symptom, not the root cause—linked to larger structural issues.

[8] Barnett Rubin: Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History, (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics) 2012. Princeton University Press, ISBN 0691154414
[9] Antonio Giustozzi: Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan, Columbia University Press**,** 2009. ISBN: 0231700806.
[10] Thomas Barfield: Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics) 2012. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0691154411
[11] David John Kilcullen: The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One (2009) Oxford University Press, ISBN 0195368347
[12] Sarah Chayes**:** The Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security. 2015.Norton Publisher ISBN 9780393352283

Scholar / School of Thought	Main Argument	Key Evidence / Claims	Critiques of This Perspective
Vanda Felbab-Brown (Illicit Economies)[13]	Criminal and opium economies hollowed out the state and strengthened insurgents.	Drug trade funded militias and Taliban; government actors complicit; institutions delegitimized.	Focusing on drugs may overlook political drivers and external interventions.
Ahmed Rashid (Regional Politics & Pakistan's Role[14])	Pakistan's support for the Taliban critically undermined Afghan state-building.	Safe havens, ISI backing, logistical support; Taliban resurgence linked to cross-border sanctuaries.	Places heavy blame on Pakistan and may underplay Afghan internal issues.
Francis Fukuyama (State Capacity Theory) [15]	The West tried to build a *modern, capable state* too quickly in an environment with low capacity.	Institutional engineering outpaced local institutions; rapid democratization failed.	Some argue that a focus on "capacity" ignores power struggles and insurgency dynamics.
Roland Paris (Liberal Peacebuilding Critique[16])	Liberal-democratic institutions were imposed too rapidly ("institutionalization before liberalization").	Elections are too fast; weak institutions are captured by elites; reforms lack time to mature.	Not specific to the Afghan context; may generalize across cases.
Maliha Chishti (Postcolonial / Critical Scholars)[17]	Western interventions imposed external models incompatible with Afghan society.	"State-building" served geopolitical goals, not local needs; it reinforced dependency.	It can underplay internal Afghan actors' agency and responsibility.

[13] Vanda Felbab-Brown: Organized Crime, Illicit Economies, Civil Violence and International Order. MIT Press, 2017. Daedalus, Fall 2017, Vol. 146, No. 4, Civil Wars & Global Disorder: Threats & Opportunities (Fall 2017), pp. 98-111; Afghanistan Affectations How to Break Political-Criminal Alliances in Contexts of Transition. United Nations University Centre for Policy Research Crime-Conflict Nexus Series: No 8 April 2017. pp 3-26

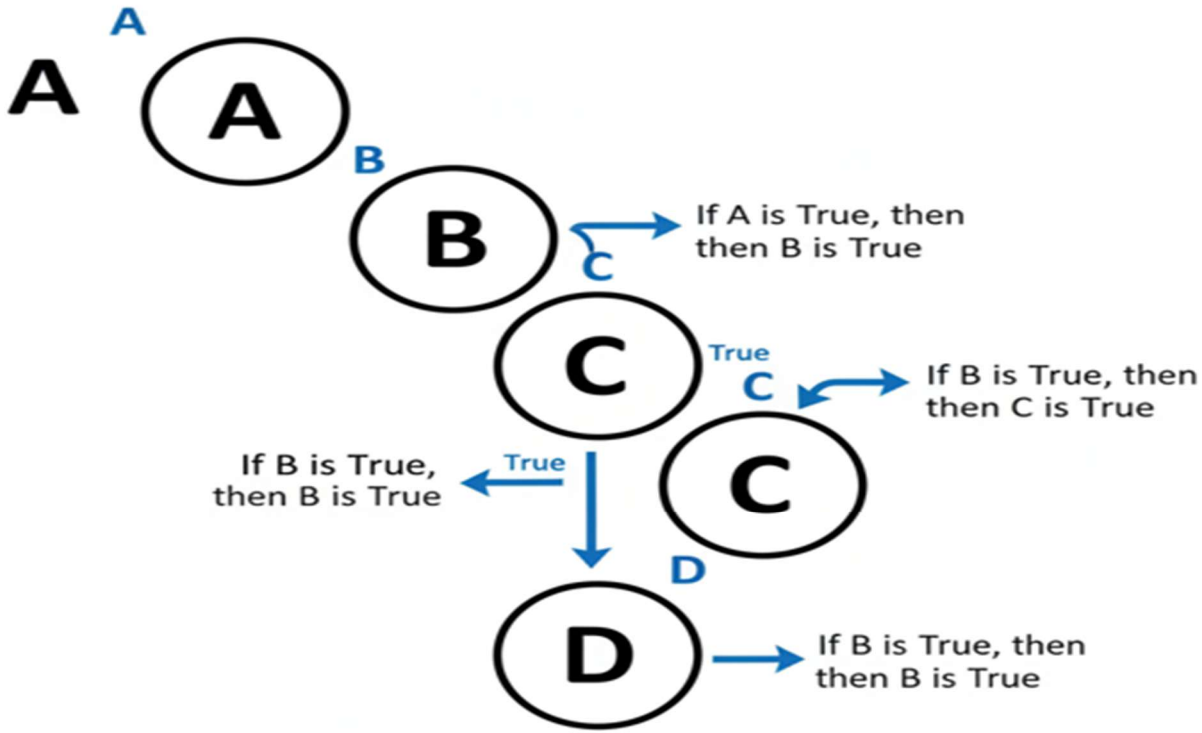
[14] Ahmed Rashid: Descent into Chaos, The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Penguin Publishing Group, (2008), ISBN 978-0143115571

[15] Francis Fukuyama: State-building: governance and world order in the twenty-first century, Cornell University Press, NY. 2004. ISBN: 1-86197-781-6. "Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, 2014, ISBN: 9780374227357,

[16] Roland Paris: Afghanistan: What Went Wrong? Perspectives on Politics, Vol. 11, No. 2. (2013), American Political Science Association. ISSN: 1537-592 pp. 538-548

[17] Maliha Chishti's dissertation (Post-Conflict Afghanistan: "A Post-Colonial Critique", 2014) University of Toronto.

ANNEX 2: Visual graphs of H1's and H2's results of the comparative matrix
H1



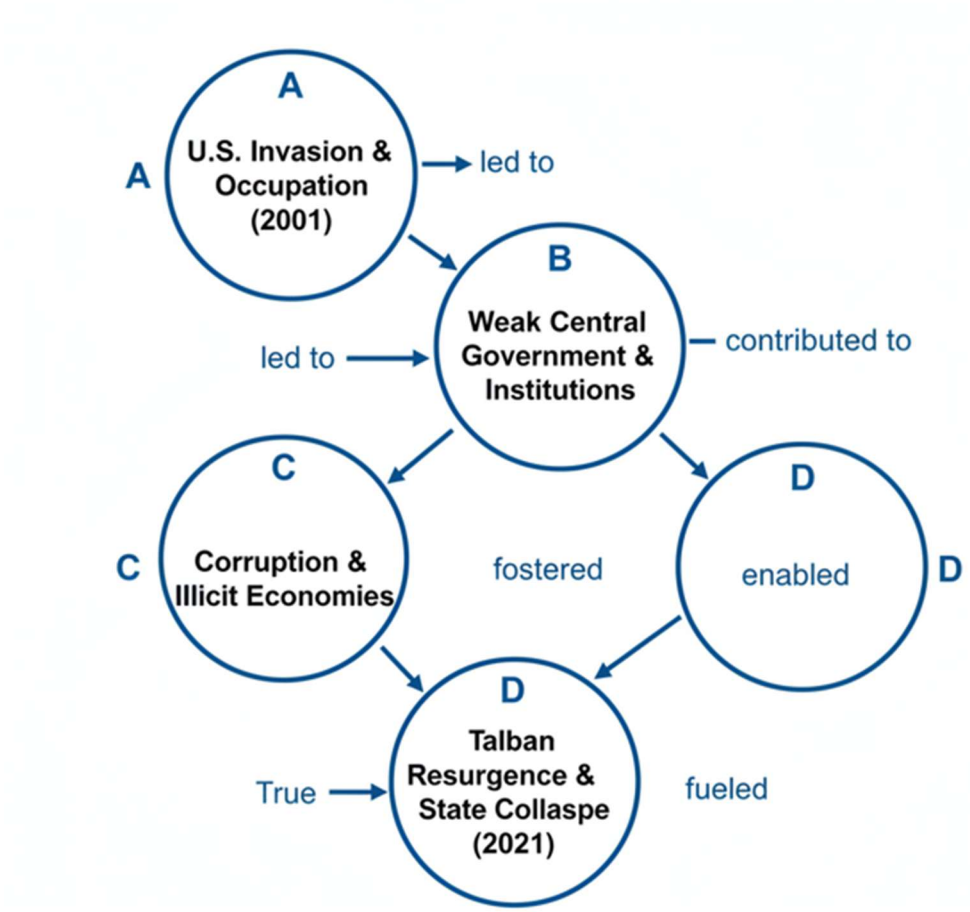
LOGICAL RELATIONS: AFGHANISTAN HISTORICAL STATEMENTS

A: British Empire failed to conquer Afghaistan dirct European colonisal (1800s)

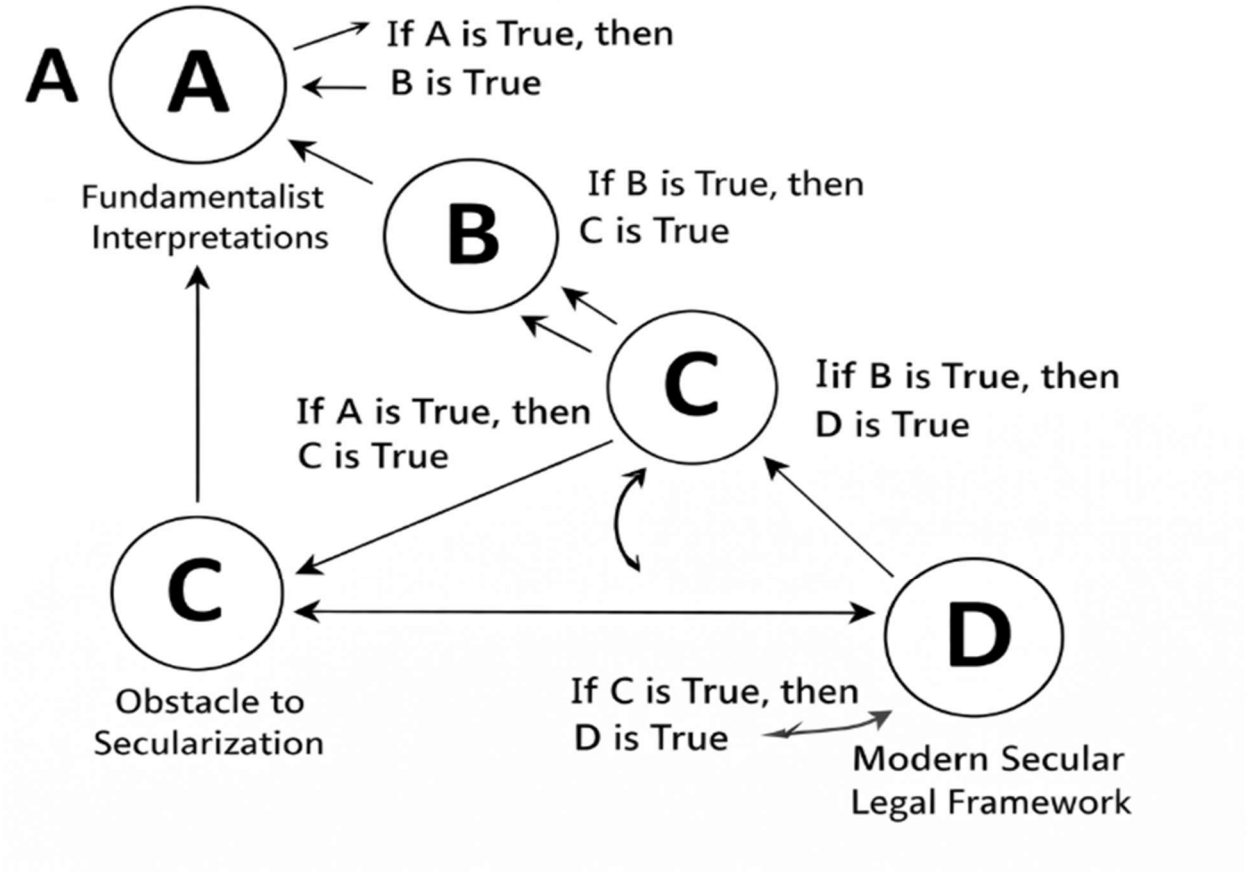
B: Afghanistan maintained independence from direct Europeal interrfeence

C: Afghanistan experienced periods of internal conflict and Modern borders of Aghanistan were established by 1900

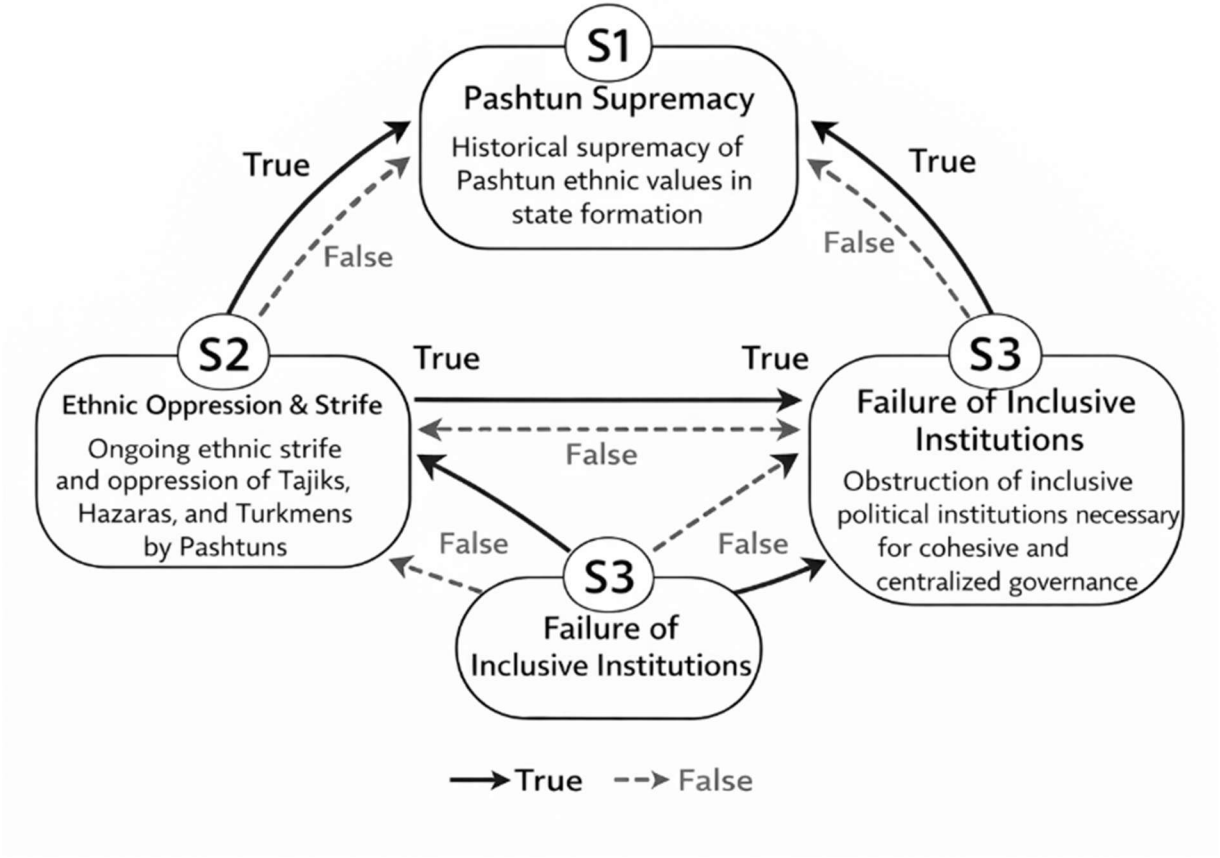
H2


A
U.S. Invasion & Occupation (2001)
A
led to
B
Weak Central Government & Institutions
led to
contributed to
C
Corruption & Illicit Economies
C
fostered
D
enabled
D
D
Talban Resurgence & State Collaspe (2021)
True
fueled

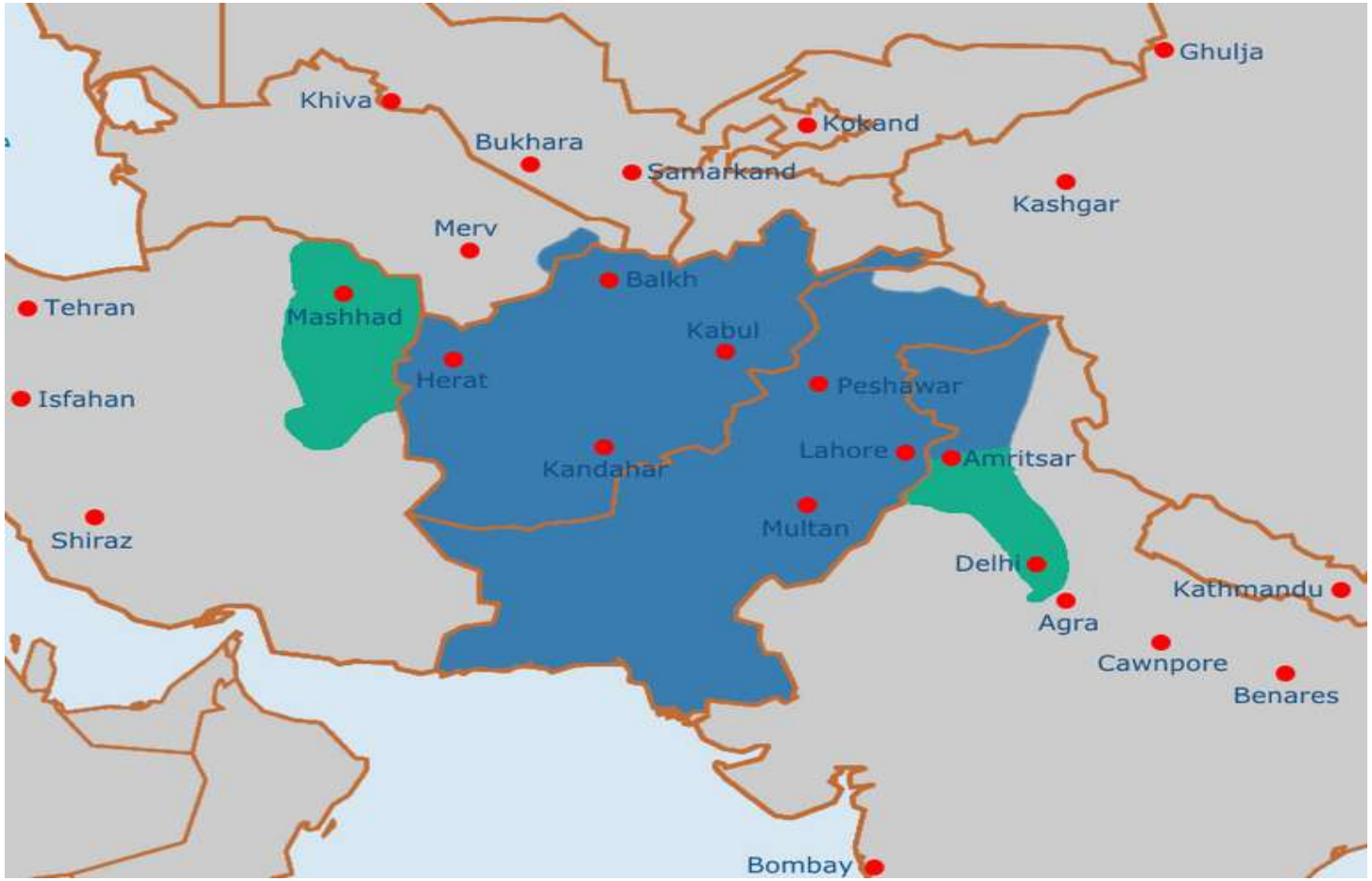
H3


A
A
If A is True, then
B is True
Fundamentalist
Interpretations
B
If B is True, then
C is True
C
Iif B is True, then
D is True
If A is True, then
C is True
C
D
Obstacle to
Secularization
If C is True, then
D is True
Modern Secular
Legal Framework

H4


S1
Pashtun Supremacy
Historical supremacy of Pashtun ethnic values in state formation
True
False
True
False
S2
Ethnic Oppression & Strife
Ongoing ethnic strife and oppression of Tajiks, Hazaras, and Turkmens by Pashtuns
True
True
False
S3
Failure of Inclusive Institutions
Obstruction of inclusive political institutions necessary for cohesive and centralized governance
False
False
S3
Failure of Inclusive Institutions
True
False

ANNEX 3: The Durrani Empire at its peak around the late 18th century[18]



[18] Joseph E. Schwartzberg *Historical Atlas of South Asia* (The Association for Asian Studies Reference Series, No. 2) Oxford University Press, 1993. ISBN 978-0195068696

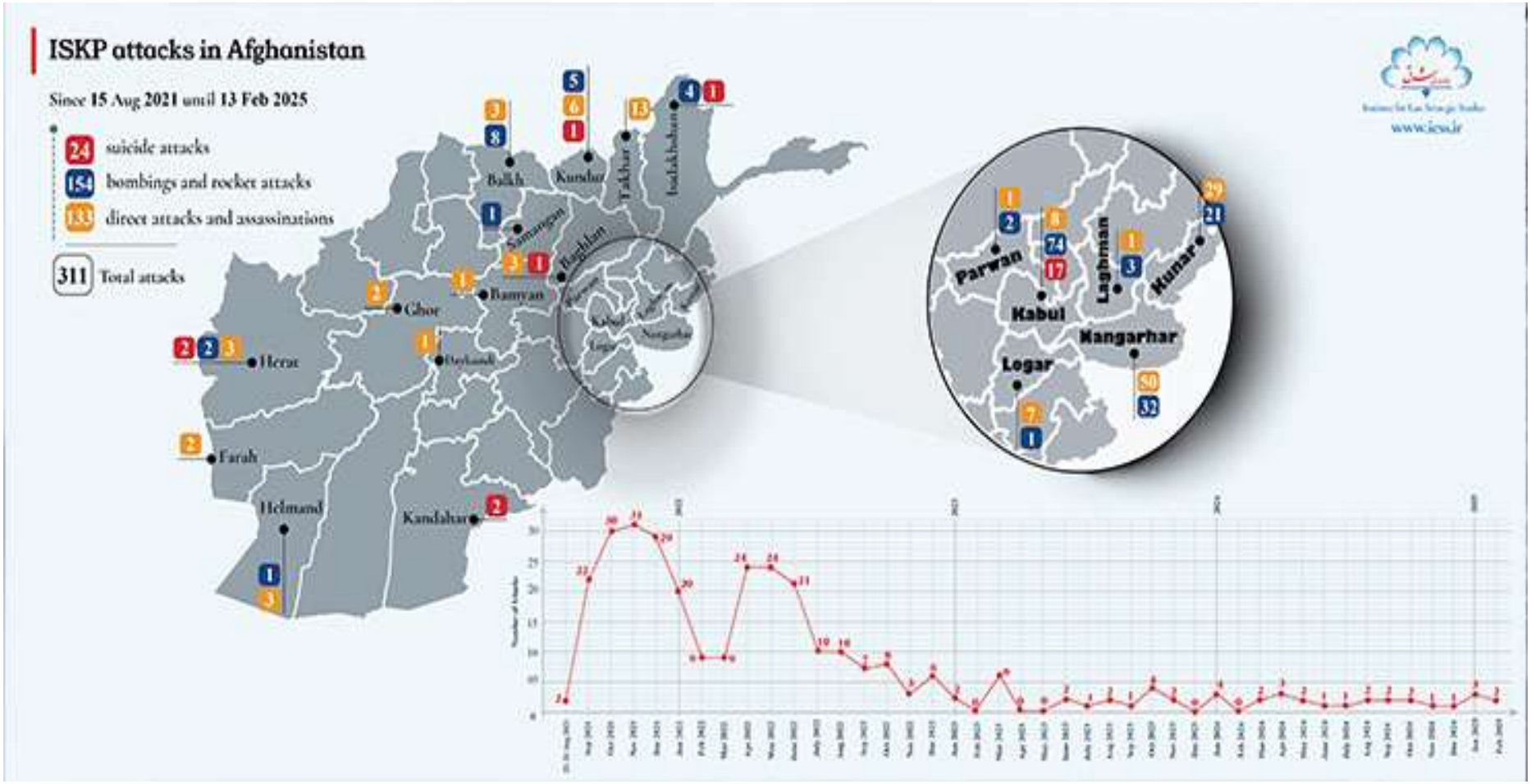
ANNEX 4: Consequences of the communist takeover

Sector	Size / Share (approx.)	PDPA policy	Outcome
Banking	5 major banks, <1 % of GDP	Full nationalization	Credit collapse, commercial paralysis
Mining	~10–12 active mines (Cu, Fe, coal, gas)[19]	Placed under state control, Soviet help	Output ↓ 30–40 % by 1979
Industry	50–60 industrial plants (<13 % of GDP)	Centralization, collectivization	Production decline
Urban middle class	5–7 % of the total population	Economic marginalization	Flight, opposition, exile[20]

[19] Louis Dupree (1973) Afghanistan, Oxford University Press, ISBN:0195776348, pp 546-602

[20] Amin Saikal (2006) Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival, Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 9781845113162, pp 189-195

ANNEX 5: Terrorist attacks by the Islamic State in Afghanistan[21] and Comparative Table of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban



[21] https://www.iess.ir/en/event/2821/

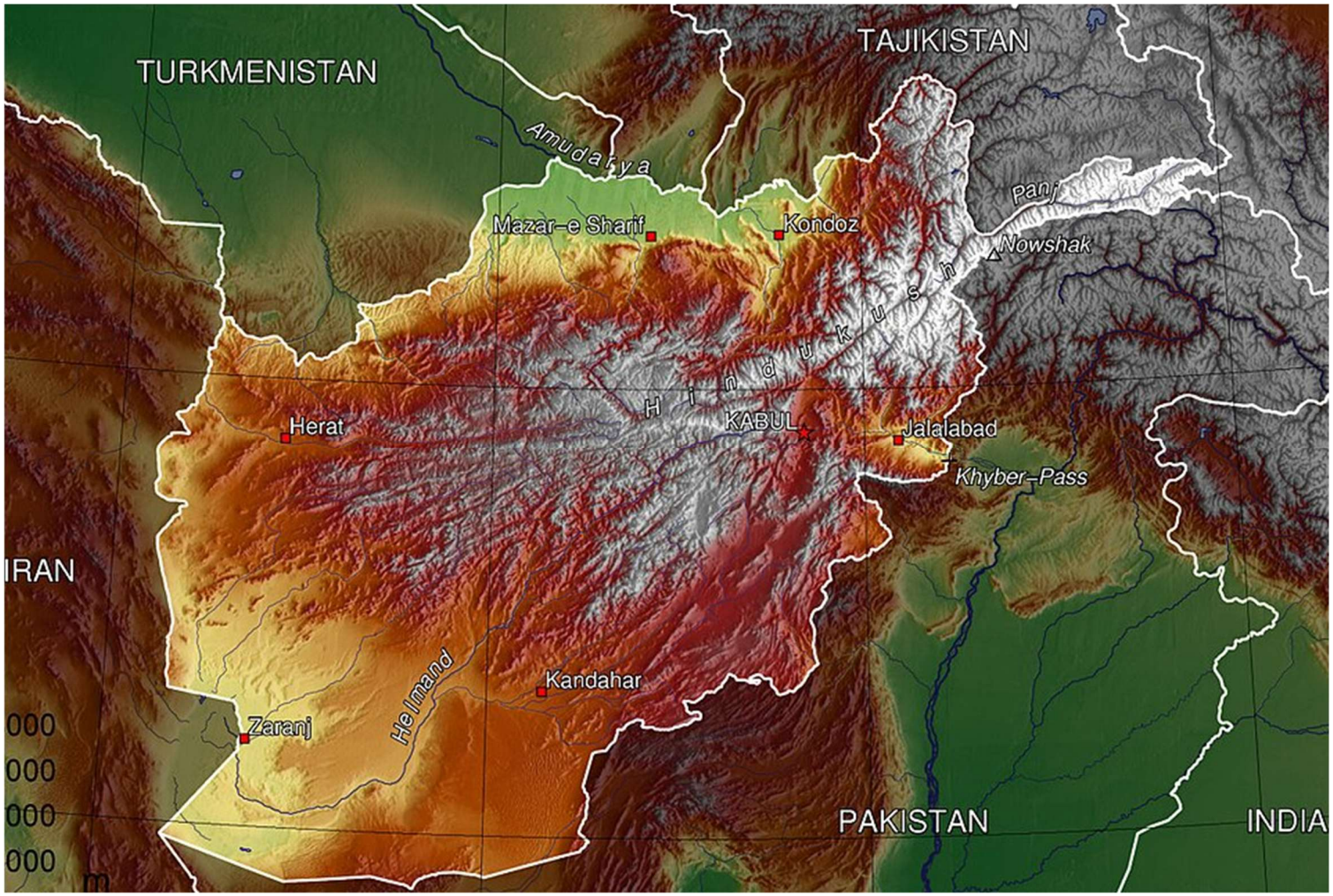
Comparative Table: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban

Aspects	Al-Qaeda[22]	ISIS (Islamic State)[23]	Taliban[24]
Origins	Founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri after the Soviet-Afghan war.	Emerged from Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in the early 2000s; declared a "caliphate" in 2014.	Founded in 1994 in southern Afghanistan under Mullah Omar amid the Afghan civil war.
Core Ideology	Global jihadism seeks to unite Muslims under a single *ummah* through a decentralized jihad.	Global jihadism with apocalyptic and sectarian (anti-Shia) elements; aims to establish a transnational caliphate immediately.	Deobandi Islam and Pashtun nationalism; focuses on local Islamic governance in Afghanistan (a national rather than global project).
Goal / Political Vision	Establish a global caliphate *over time* by fighting the "far enemy" (the West, especially the U.S.).	Immediate establishment of a caliphate through territorial conquest and puritanical enforcement of Sharia.	Establish the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," implementing strict Sharia locally.
Interpretation of Islam	Sunni Salafi-jihadist, influenced by Wahhabism.	Ultra-Salafi-jihadist; extreme literalism and takfir (excommunication of other Muslims).	Deobandi Sunni (a South Asian Islamic reform tradition), combined with tribal–Pashtun customs (*Pashtunwali*).

[22] Lia, Brynjar. *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri*. Columbia University Press, 2008.
[23] Gerges, Fawaz A. *The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction.* Princeton University Press, 2016.
[24] Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia.* Yale University Press, 2000.

Aspects	Al-Qaeda[22]	ISIS (Islamic State)[23]	Taliban[24]
Attitude toward Other Muslims	Condemns Shia and "apostate" regimes but sometimes cooperates tactically with non-Salafis.	Extremely sectarian; considers Shia, Sufis, and even non-conforming Sunnis as apostates to be exterminated.	Less sectarian: generally pragmatic toward other Sunni groups, but represses minorities (Shia Hazaras, etc.).
Scope of Jihad	Global — against the West and "apostate" Muslim governments.	Global and total annihilation of all opposition and immediate global expansion.	Primarily national — directed at controlling Afghanistan and resisting foreign occupation.
Political Strategy	Dispersed network of affiliates (AQAP, AQIM, al-Shabaab, etc.); long-term insurgency and ideological influence.	Centralized state structure (2014–2019), focused on capturing and administering territory.	Insurgent movement centred in Afghanistan; uses diplomacy and negotiation (e.g., Doha Agreement 2020).
Relationship with Each Other	Parent organization to ISIS (before the split). Now bitter rivals.	Broke away from Al-Qaeda in 2013–2014; rivals both Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.	Historically of Al-Qaeda has historically had; pragmatic relationship but has clashed with ISIS-K (Khorasan Province).
Current Presence (as of 2024)	Active in the Sahel, Yemen, Somalia, and Syria. Central core weakened.	Remnants active in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (ISIS-K).	Governs Afghanistan since 2021; internationally isolated but consolidating local power.

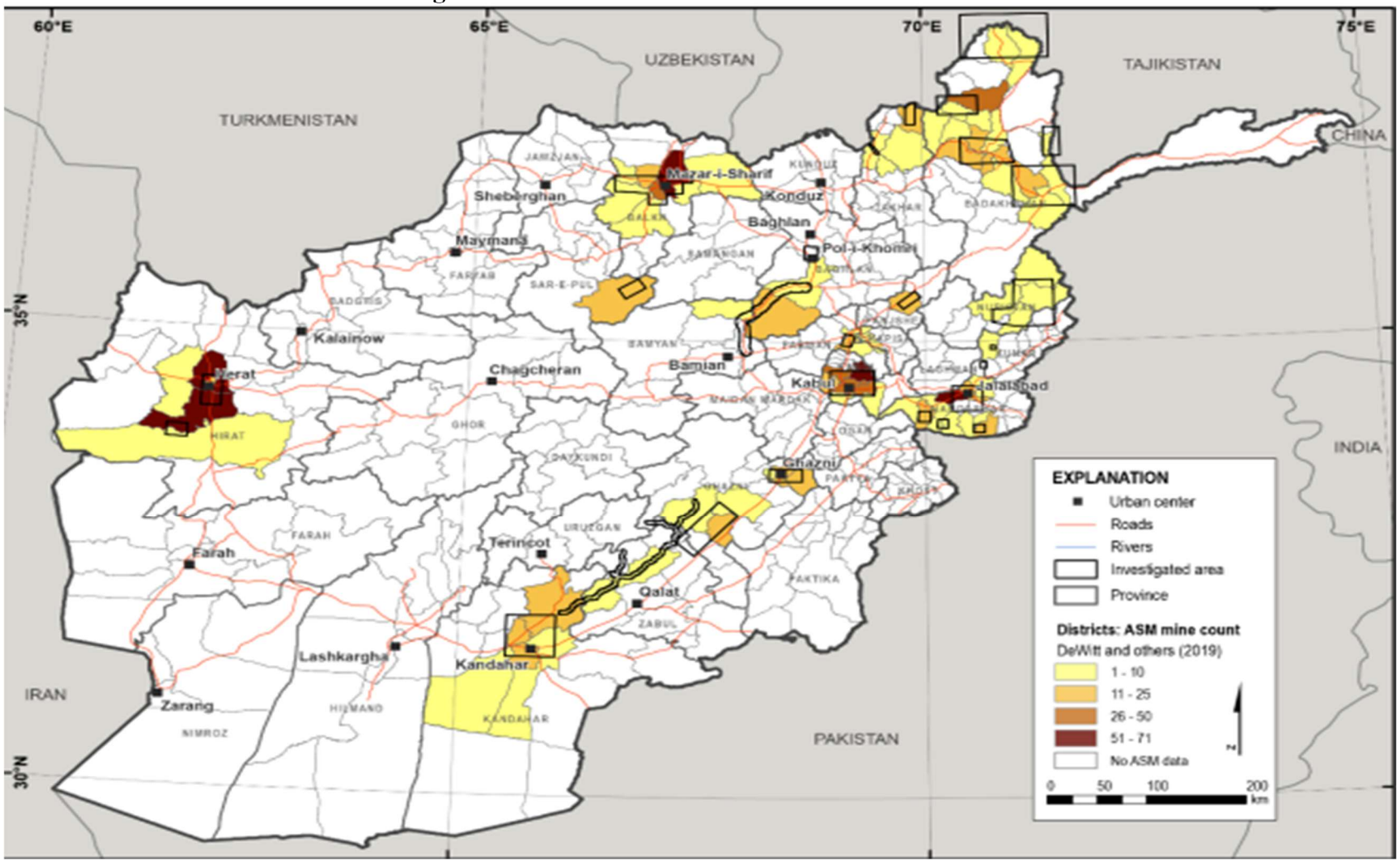
ANNEX 6: Geography of Afghanistan and the arable permanent crops in Afghanistan[25]



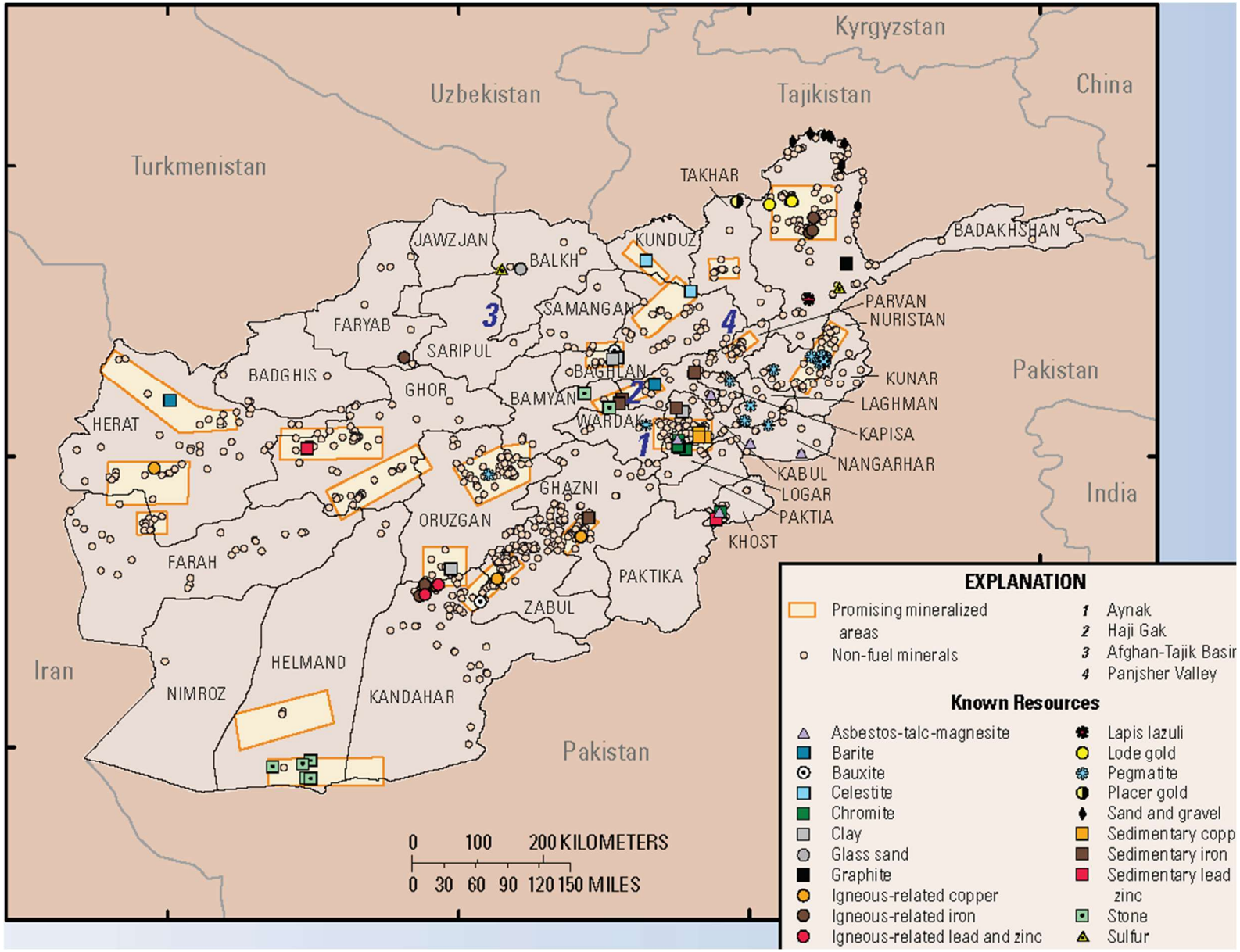
[25] https://www.cawater-info.net/afghanistan/afg4_e.htm



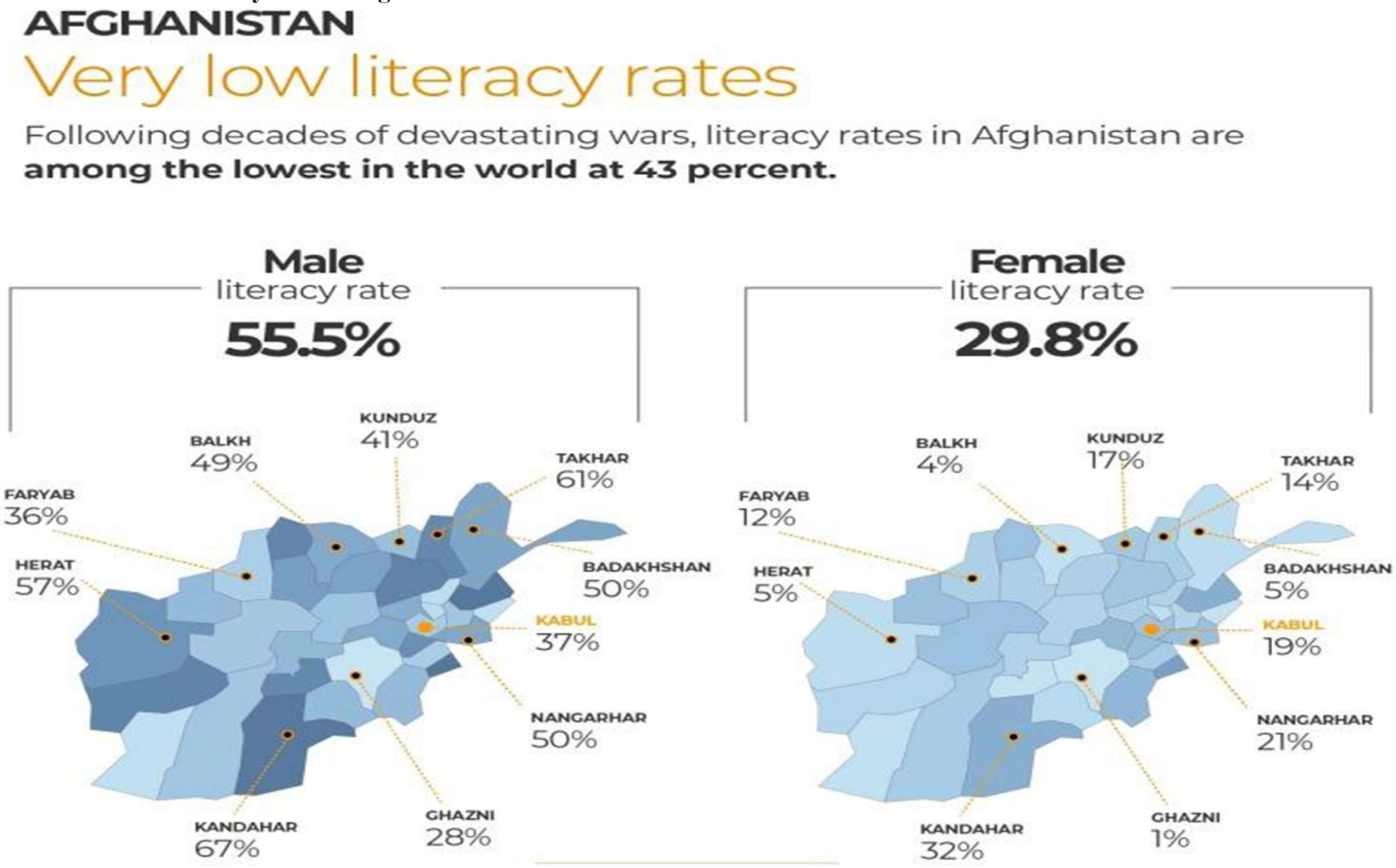
ANNEX 7: Industrial activities in Afghanistan[26]



[26] https://www.usgs.gov/media/images/map-afghanistan-mineralized-areas

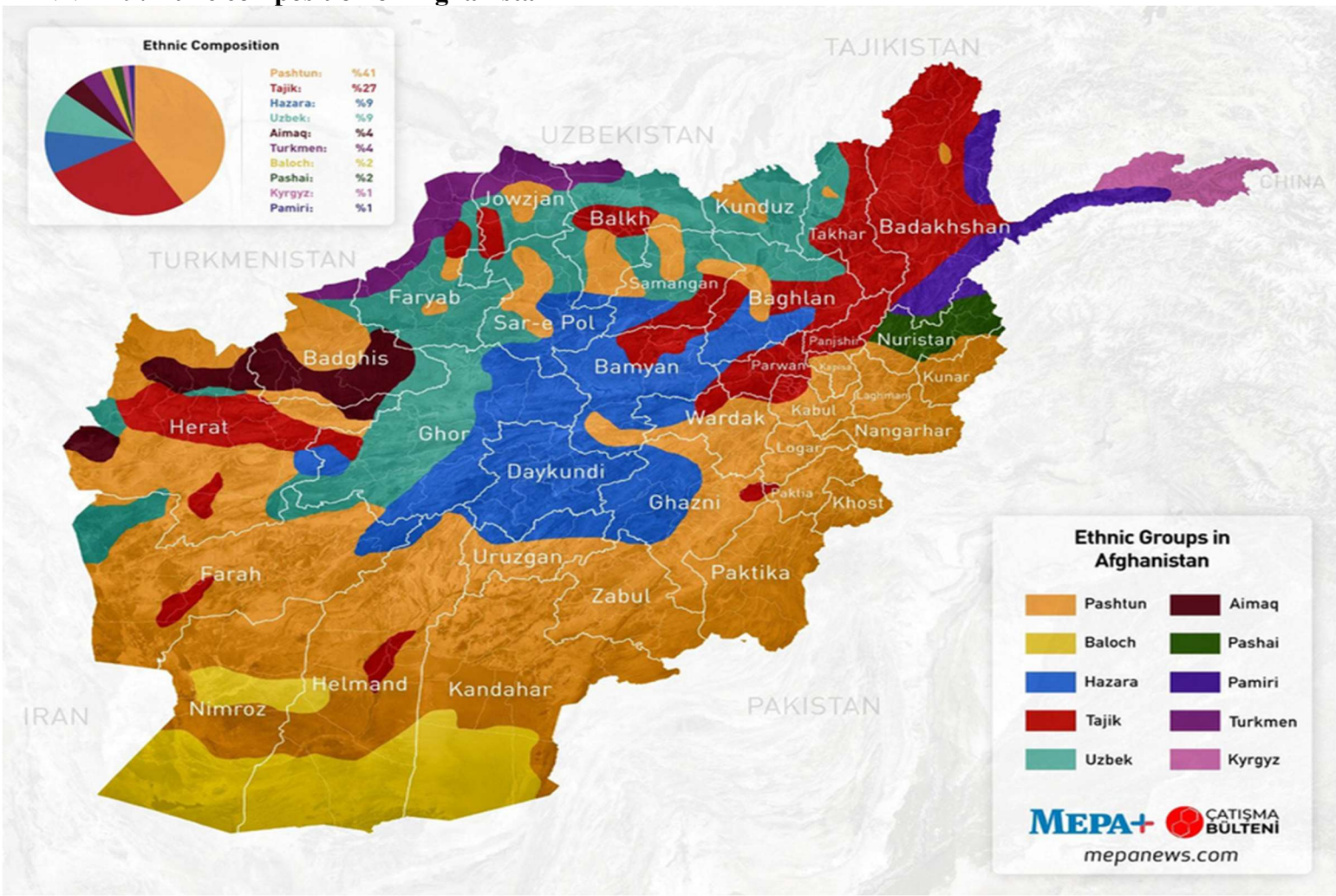

Kyrgyzstan
Uzbekistan
Tajikistan
China
Turkmenistan
Pakistan
India
Iran
Pakistan
TAKHAR
BADAKHSHAN
JAWZJAN
BALKH
KUNDUZ
PARVAN
NURISTAN
FARYAB
SAMANGAN
SARIPUL
BAGHLAN
KUNAR
BADGHIS
GHOR
BAMYAN
LAGHMAN
WARDAK
HERAT
KAPISA
NANGARHAR
KABUL
GHAZNI
LOGAR
PAKTIA
ORUZGAN
KHOST
FARAH
PAKTIKA
ZABUL
HELMAND
NIMROZ
KANDAHAR
1
2
3
4
0 100 200 KILOMETERS
0 30 60 90 120 150 MILES
EXPLANATION
Promising mineralized areas
Non-fuel minerals
1 Aynak
2 Haji Gak
3 Afghan-Tajik Basin
4 Panjsher Valley
Known Resources
Asbestos-talc-magnesite
Barite
Bauxite
Celestite
Chromite
Clay
Glass sand
Graphite
Igneous-related copper
Igneous-related iron
Igneous-related lead and zinc
Lapis lazuli
Lode gold
Pegmatite
Placer gold
Sand and gravel
Sedimentary copp
Sedimentary iron
Sedimentary lead zinc
Stone
Sulfur

ANNEX 8: Literacy rate in Afghanistan[27]



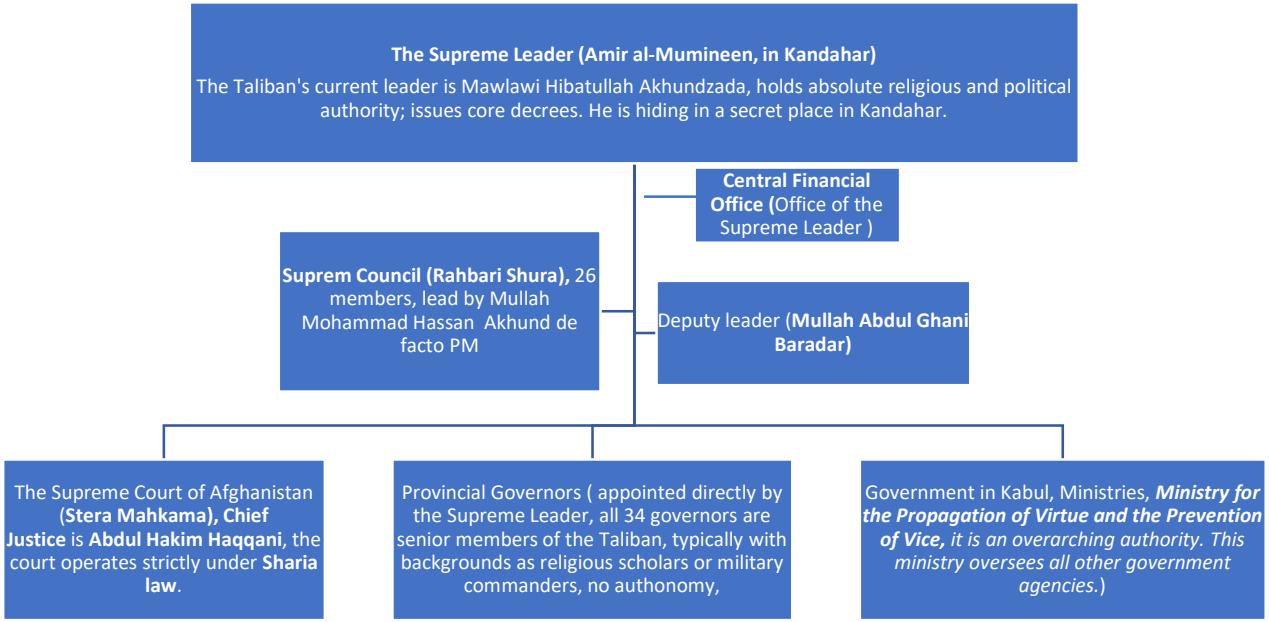
[27] https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/p387l8/afghanistan_literacy_rate/

ANNEX 9: Ethic composition of Afghanistan[28]



[28] https://www.mepanews.com/afghanistan-ethnic-groups-map-26786h.htm

ANNEX 10: Taliban governmental structure after 2022[29]



[29] Muhammed Ashraf Siddiqui: 6 Major Figures To Lead Taliban Through Critical Process. https://asiantelegraphqatar.com/current-affairs/6-major-figures-to-lead-taliban-through-critical-process/#:~:text=Leadership%20Council:%20Highest%20governing%20body.%20All%20military,military%2C%20intelligence%2C%20and%20political%20and%20economic%20affairs.

Under the Principal Government

Districts (*Wuleswali*)

448 districts, led by a **District Governor** (often a military commander or cleric) and a District Police Chief. Each district office now hosts five specific Taliban directorates: *Ushr* (agricultural tax), *Zakat* (charity tax), *Virtue and Vice*, *State Justice*, and *Martyrs/Disabled Affairs*

Municipalities (*Sharwali*)

160 municipalities, appointed directly by the central government, only Taliban loyalists

Villages (*Qarya*)

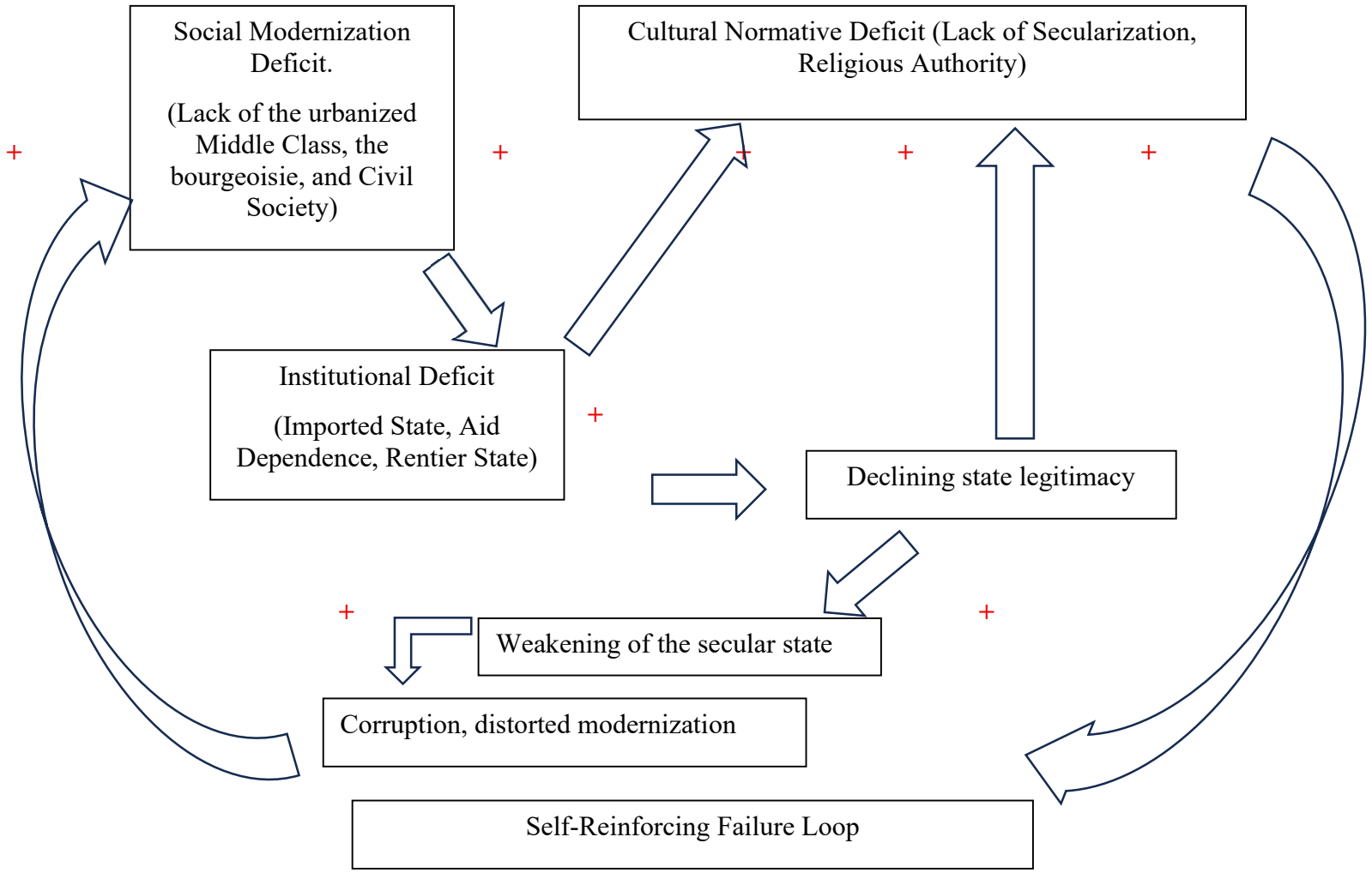
The smallest unit of governance. There are roughly **45,000 villages** in Afghanistan, village elders still egsist, but Taliban replaced or supplemented Village Ulemma Coucil, religious schoolars, ensure Sharia and tax

ANNEX 11: Durand Line and the Pashtun population[30]



[30] https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/durand-line/

ANNEX 12: Endogenous Reinforcing Failure Loop in the MLMD Model



ANNEX 13: H7 Hypothesis' statements, evaluations, and justifications

No.	Statement	Answer	Justification
1	The hypothesis argues that failure occurred in only one domain of modernization.	False	H7 emphasizes multiple domains (social, cultural, institutional) that fail together.
2	Social, cultural, and institutional modernization failures are described as interconnected.	True	H7 explicitly describes these failures as interlinked, creating systemic effects.
3	The failures operated independently rather than reinforcing one another.	False	H7 describes a self-reinforcing "failure loop", not independent failures.
4	The hypothesis proposes the existence of a self-perpetuating "failure loop."	True	The core claim of H7 is that failures amplified each other over time.
5	The failure loop contributed directly to the collapse of the international state-building project.	True	H7 argues that this cumulative failure doomed the project despite resources.
6	Financial and human investments were minimal and therefore not central to the argument.	False	H7 notes that massive investments occurred but were insufficient due to systemic failure.
7	The hypothesis suggests that greater investment alone could have guaranteed success.	False	H7 highlights structural and cumulative causes, so funding alone would not have prevented failure.
8	The international state-building project failed despite substantial financial and human investment.	True	H7 stresses that the project failed in spite of significant investment.
9	The hypothesis emphasizes cumulative and systemic failure rather than isolated policy mistakes.	True	H7 frames failure as systemic, not as the result of isolated errors.
10	The outcome was portrayed as avoidable once the failure loop was established.	False	H7 implies that once the failure loop was in motion, the project was essentially doomed.