REHMAT AND MARYAM RESEARCHES
Lodhran | Islamabad

When Afghanistan-Iran Trade Masks Human Insecurity: Investigating Compromised De-Marginalisation of Farsiwan and Hazara under Taliban 2.0

Asfandyar Ayaz (Corresponding Author)
PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, Muslim Youth University Islamabad
Email: asfandyar.ayaz@hotmail.com
Dr. Muhammad Asim
Research Supervisor and Adjunct Faculty Member at the Muslim Youth University Islamabad, and Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Government Graduate College Asghar Mall, Rawalpindi

Abstract

Since the resurgence of the Taliban on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan has witnessed a reconfiguration of internal power dynamics, exhibited by deep human security issues -- specifically for ethnoreligious minorities who endured systemic exclusion under the Taliban's first regime. These insecurities, rather than curtailing solely from direct violence, are deeply rooted in structures of socio-political and economic inequality, associating with Galtung's (1969) theory of structural violence wherein deprivation becomes normalised through institutional silence and selective governance. In this context, the Iran-Afghanistan barter trade agreement --formally ratified on December 28, 2022 -- emerged as a fundamental mechanism that redefined the Taliban's stance towards the Hazara, affording them conditional developmental privileges in Hazarajat regions such as Bamyan, Daikundi and parts of Ghazni, in exchange for sustained trade access and geopolitical calm. Simultaneously, the Farsiwan communities of Herat and adjacent borderlands including Islam Qala, Injil and Guzara, have experienced a detailed de-marginalisation as facilitators of cross-border commerce, benefiting from Iran's strategic engagement in western Afghanistan. This emergent leniency has been tentatively noted in recent studies by Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer (2025), Gulejami & Zaheer (2025), and Darakhshan Afsari (2025), who highlight sectarian flexibility born of economic necessity rather than ideological reform. Methodologically, this study utilises a neo-colonial structural violence lens (Arian Sharifi, 2024), complemented by a synthesis of David Keen and Paul Collier's conflict economy thesis (called Keen-Collier Approach), wherein "each ethnic community attains variable political and economic rights based on its locational influence and satisfaction level", ultimately proposing that such arrangements may incubate a reimagined Afghan social contract grounded in decentralised, multicultural cosmopolitanism. Accordingly, this study is guided by research questions concerning how trade-induced exceptions reshape governance narratives and what policy instruments can institutionalise equitable inclusion in post-conflict state-building.

Introduction

Human insecurity, as conceptualised in critical security and peace studies, transcends the mere absence of military threats and encompasses a broader spectrum of vulnerabilities faced by individuals and communities in their socio-political and economic environments. It entails a persistent state of precarity arising from deprivation of basic needs, exclusion from civic participation, exposure to structural discrimination, and an absence of sustainable livelihood and dignity. The United Nations Development Programme (1994) defined human security as "freedom from fear and freedom from want", highlighting the indivisibility of security from development and rights (Jolly & Ray, 2006). This framework critiques state-centric security paradigms that prioritise territorial integrity over citizen well-being, and it reorients the discourse towards safeguarding marginalised populations. In contexts where authoritarian or ideological regimes prevail, such as in contemporary Afghanistan, human insecurity often assumes chronic and systemic forms. These manifest through the denial of access to education, healthcare, mobility and representational governance, particularly for religious and ethnic minorities. Importantly, human insecurity is not a transient condition but an entrenched reality produced and reproduced through institutional neglect, sectarian hierarchies, and exclusionary policies (Sinno, 2021) (Ali, 2024) (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025). Thus, it becomes academic necessity to examine human insecurity not merely as an outcome of conflict but as a structural condition within post-conflict governance frameworks.

Afghanistan illustrates a long and fraught history of institutionalised human insecurity, deeply rooted in the socio-political dominance of Pashtun tribal patriarchy and further exacerbated by successive waves of foreign intervention and state collapse. The consolidation of the Afghan state in the twentieth century, under monarchic and later republican regimes, consistently privileged ethnic Pashtuns in both administrative authority and cultural hegemony, often at the expense of minorities such as the Hazaras and Farsiwan[1] (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025). The Soviet invasion of 1979 and the subsequent Mujahideen insurgency further militarised ethnic divisions, while the post-2001 liberal state-building experiment, despite rhetorical inclusivity, failed to reverse long-standing asymmetries (Ghiasy, 2016). The re-emergence of the Taliban in 2021 reinstated a Sunni-Pashtun-centric governance model that, in its earlier iteration, had categorically persecuted Hazara s and marginalised Persian-speaking populations. Nonetheless, this historical continuum has also produced sites of resilience and adaptation, where minority groups steer structural repression through pragmatic alliances and borderland economic agency. Within this path, the evolving roles of the Farsiwan of Herat and the Hazara of central Afghanistan represent important shifts that challenge monolithic narratives of exclusion. Therefore, the case of Afghanistan gives a dynamic landscape in which to interrogate how historical patterns of insecurity meet with contemporary shifts in governance and regional diplomacy (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025).

At this stage, the concept of neo-colonial structural violence gives an academically strengthen lens through which to interpret the selective toleration and emergent inclusion of historically marginalised groups under Taliban 2.0. Structural violence, as formulated by Johan Galtung (1969), refers to harm inflicted not through direct physical means but via institutional arrangements that prevent individuals

---

[1] Noted that not every Persian or Dari speaking person follows Twelver-Islam, but various surveys also mention their beliefs encircling also towards Sunni-Deobandi Islam, Salafi Islam, Ismaili-Islam and somewhat Sikhism.

from realising their full potential (Galtung, Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, 1969). When this violence is rooted within global systems of economic dependency, cultural subjugation and indirect political control -- particularly in post-colonial societies -- it assumes a neo-colonial character (Farmer, 2004). Neo-colonial structural violence thus denotes the perpetuation of colonial-era asymmetries through the manipulation of local elites, economic entrapment and selective developmentalism, often under the guise of sovereign governance. In Afghanistan, this manifests through barter-based trade deals, donor-dependent reconstruction and ethnic instrumentalisation in governance, where minority communities are granted conditional privileges in exchange for geopolitical stability (Ali, 2024). The Iran-Afghanistan barter trade agreement of December 2022 exemplifies such a mechanism, whereby the Taliban permit limited development in Hazara regions to maintain essential economic lifelines with Iran. Consequently, such arrangements blur the lines between inclusion and manipulation, raising critical questions about agency, equity and the nature of political belonging. By situating the Farsiwan and Hazara experience within this framework, this study highlights how marginality is not merely a fixed position but a negotiable condition shaped by economic necessity and regional diplomacy (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025).

Despite increasing interest in Afghanistan's post-2021 political economy, academic engagement remains limited in explaining the Taliban's growing approach toward specific minorities, specifically the detailed de-marginalisation of the Farsiwan and Hazara communities. The core research question of this study -- how and why have the Farsiwan and Hazara experienced partial inclusion under Taliban 2.0, despite the regime's foundational sectarian ideology? -- remains under-explored within both policy literature and academic inquiry. Existing analyses tend to generalise Taliban governance as uniformly repressive toward minorities, thereby overlooking emergent patterns of pragmatic toleration shaped by cross-border trade dynamics and geopolitical interdependencies. Moreover, the connection between structural violence and regional economic diplomacy as a mechanism of minority inclusion has not been comprehensively theorised in the Afghan context. This gap necessitates an inquiry that blends structural violence theory with conflict economy frameworks, such as those developed by Paul Collier and David Keen, which suggest that ethnic inclusion is often calibrated according to a group's utility within wartime or post-war economies. Consequently, the present study aims to bridge this analytical gap by tracing how economic arrangements with Iran and regional realpolitik have catalysed new forms of conditional belonging for Farsiwan and Hazara populations. This theoretical and empirical inquiry sets the stage for a subsequent review of literature, mapping the current state of academic debate and identifying spaces where this research contributes innovative perceptions.

Literature Review

This study identifies only three academic works published in 2025 that meaningfully assist in exploring how trade masks human insecurity within Taliban-governed Afghanistan, specifically with regard to the Farsiwan and Hazara communities.

The first of these is "*Barter, Borders and Bargains: Dr. Rahim Fakhrizadeh Explains Taliban's Calculated Leniency Toward Farsiwan and Hazaras*" by Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer (2025), an in-depth interview exploring the Taliban's transactional tolerance in exchange for economic survival through barter diplomacy. This work thoroughly shows how the Taliban's strategic dependency on Iranian trade corridors and commodities resulted in the informal empowerment of the Hazara and Farsiwan populations in Bamyan, Daikundi and Herat. However, while this piece highlights the mechanisms of barter-driven pragmatism, it

falls short of explicitly theorising how such trade arrangements obscure deeper human security deficits -- such as lack of legal recognition, education access and structural autonomy -- within the broader framework of neocolonial structural violence. This gap is precisely where the present study positions itself; by questioning not just how these communities survive, but whether their limited economic incorporation masks the persistence of socio-political marginalisation.

The second relevant source is "*Bartered Boundaries and Fluid Belonging: Dr. Akram Zaheer in Conversation with Zoheda Gulejami on Iran-Afghanistan Trade, Governance and Inclusion*" by Zaheer & Gulejami (2025). This interview explores how transactional flexibility has allowed the Farsiwan and Hazara to direct Taliban governance through negotiated economic functions. The analysis successfully identifies borderland trade zones such as Islam Qala, Zaranj and Farah as key nodes of conditional tolerance where communities are pragmatically included in governance networks for logistical efficiency. Yet, the limitation of this work lies in its lack of engagement with broader theoretical lenses, particularly regarding the systemic silencing of minority voices under conflict capitalism and external diplomatic bargains. It does not fully address how such temporary inclusion remains vulnerable to reversal, or how human security remains unguaranteed in the absence of institutional protection. This study seeks to fill that void by embedding its analysis in the Keen-Collier framework to interrogate whether trade merely delays, rather than resolves, systemic exclusion.

The third and most structurally relevant contribution comes from "*Coerced Accommodation: Why the Taliban Facilitated the Hazara through a Collierian Lens*" by Darakhshan Afsari (2025). This piece applies Paul Collier's political economy of conflict to analyse the Taliban's coercive tolerance of the Hazara as an economic survival strategy, detailing how barter exchanges with Iran necessitated the Taliban's economic dependency on Hazara-dominated regions. Afsari articulates well how conflict elites prioritise economic flows over ideological purity in order to stabilise rent-extraction systems. Nonetheless, the article treats economic pragmatism as a sufficient form of inclusion, without questioning whether such arrangements genuinely advance rights-based governance or whether they perpetuate a neocolonial dependency model driven by Iran's regional interests. What remains unaddressed -- and what this study seeks to confront -- is whether these trade-induced spaces of inclusion are constructed on the terms of external actors, thereby marginalising local agency and masking insecurity through the illusion of empowerment. Thus, this research extends the Collierian framework by integrating structural violence analysis to reveal the concealed inequities within these transactional arrangements.

Historical Roots of Human Insecurity in Afghanistan

Human insecurity in Afghanistan did not emerge in isolation but is historically entangled with the consolidation of Pashtun tribal dominance in state-building processes from the late nineteenth century onwards. Amir Abdur Rahman Khan's centralisation policies between 1880 and 1901 relied on tribal hierarchies, forcibly relocating and suppressing non-Pashtun communities, particularly the Hazaras. Land dispossession, coerced migration and religious persecution became foundational tools of governance. This era laid the structural groundwork for future insecurity by implanting ethno-sectarian inequality into administrative and legal frameworks. Ethnic minorities were denied equal representation, access to state services and educational opportunities, as power remained consolidated within a Pashtun-Sunni elite (Rubin, 2001). Human security, in Johan Galtung's (1969) terms, was systematically undermined not through overt violence but through structural exclusion and the "institutionalised denial of potential" (Galtung, Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, 1969). The legacy of these policies endured into the

4

twentieth century, particularly under the monarchy and successive republican regimes. Despite limited modernisation efforts, no serious attempt was made to reverse these rooted hierarchies. As a result, Afghanistan entered the modern era with deep-seated inequalities and institutional neglect toward its non-Pashtun citizenry. The ethnicised logic of power ensured that insecurity was unevenly distributed and structurally imposed (Ghiasy, 2016).

The 1973 republican coup by President Daoud Khan ostensibly signalled a break from monarchical rule, but in practice, it reinforced Pashtun hegemony. While Daoud embraced a modernist agenda, he did so through an ethnic-nationalist lens, suppressing dissent from non-Pashtun groups and centralising authority further in Kabul. Persian-speaking and Twelver-Muslim communities remained politically marginal, especially the Farsiwan in Herat and the Hazaras in Hazarajat. Human rights and socio-economic development remained selectively accessible, with Daoud's economic reforms disproportionately favouring Pashtun-dominated provinces. The failure to establish inclusive national policies exacerbated structural violence, creating resentments that would later erupt into armed resistance (Rubin, 2001). International scholars such as Olivier Roy (2002) noted that Afghanistan's "nationalism was always ethnically coded", privileging Sunni-Pashtun narratives of statehood (Roy, 2002). These exclusionary practices intensified feelings of statelessness among minorities. Insecurity was now also psychological and symbolic, manifested through linguistic suppression and cultural marginalisation. Pashto was promoted as the language of the state, marginalising Persian (Dari) in schools and civil services. Thus, the republic merely repackaged monarchic repression under a veneer of technocratic reform (Roy, 2002).

The Soviet invasion of 1979 triggered a cataclysmic shift in the nature of insecurity, as violence moved from the structural to the spectacular. Entire villages were decimated, and ethnic militias became both agents and victims of state terror. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), though committed to land reform and literacy, was widely seen as foreign-backed and sectarian. Soviet airstrikes, scorched-earth tactics, and mass arrests created an environment of daily physical insecurity. Yet, structural violence continued under the guise of revolutionary transformation, targeting traditional societal hierarchies without building inclusive alternatives. Many Hazaras initially benefited from PDPA reforms, but these were undercut by their association with Soviet repression. Ethnic cleavages deepened as the Mujahideen -- predominantly Sunni-Pashtun factions -- mobilised around religious-nationalist slogans that excluded Twelver-Muslim groups (Rubin, 2001). Human security, in the UNDP's (1994) definition as "freedom from fear and want", became unattainable for most Afghans. Instead, fear, hunger and displacement became daily realities (Jolly & Ray, 2006). The Soviet decade institutionalised military violence while deepening the structural wounds left by prior regimes.

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the collapse of Najibullah's government led to Mujahideen factional warfare, which plunged Afghanistan into anarchy. Human insecurity now operated at multiple levels; physical safety, food availability, economic viability and ethno-sectarian coexistence all collapsed simultaneously. Power was divided among ethnic warlords who controlled fragmented territories, imposing arbitrary rule and perpetuating violence. The capital, Kabul, was turned into a battleground, with indiscriminate shelling killing thousands and displacing more (Rubin, 2001). Thomas Barfield (2010) notes that "this period erased the last vestiges of national governance", replacing it with hyper-localised tyranny (Barfield, 2010, pp. 164-190). Hazara areas were often under siege, while in Herat, the Farsiwan contended with economic blockades and political invisibility. Public services disintegrated and with no functioning state, local populations were left to negotiate survival through informal networks. Women and minorities bore the brunt of this collapse, as lawlessness enabled new forms of gender and sectarian

oppression. The absence of national institutions allowed structural violence to flourish, turning inequality into a matter of life and death (Barfield, 2010, pp. 164-190).

The Taliban's rise in 1996 inaugurated a regime of ideological governance built upon religious authoritarianism and ethnic supremacism. Their regime, dominated by Sunni-Pashtun clerics, imposed a vision of Afghan identity that excluded Twelver-Muslim and Persian-speaking communities (Barfield, 2010, pp. 164-190). The Hazaras faced systematic persecution, culminating in the massacres of Mazar-i-Sharif (1998) and Yakaolang (2001), where thousands were executed based solely on sectarian affiliation. Farsiwan and other non-Pashtun minorities were barred from administrative roles, while cultural and linguistic practices were violently suppressed. Human Rights Watch (2001) documented these as acts of "sectarian cleansing", revealing that the Taliban not only failed to protect citizens but actively targeted them (HRW, 2001). Education, healthcare and economic opportunities for minorities were stripped away, leaving entire communities destitute. Women, particularly in minority regions, were denied access to public life, reinforcing Galtung's structural thesis that violence need not be visible to be deep (Galtung, Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, 1969). The regime's insistence on a singular Sunni-Pashtun order rendered others non-citizens. Human insecurity reached an existential peak, blending ideological repression with economic strangulation. Afghanistan became a theatre of religious apartheid masquerading as national unity (Barfield, 2010, pp. 164-190).

The US-led invasion in late 2001 introduced a new era of external intervention and donor-led state-building, marked by promises of inclusivity and democratic renewal. Initially, minority groups such as the Hazaras and Farsiwan found political openings within the Bonn process and subsequent constitutional settlement. The Hazara leader Karim Khalili became a vice-president, and the Persian language regained partial parity. However, inclusion remained symbolic rather than substantive, as power and resources were captured by Kabul-based elites (Barfield, 2010, p. 191). The US prioritised counterterrorism over institution-building, leading to what Antonio Giustozzi (2009) called the "militarisation of state formation" (Giustozzi, 2009). Provincial disparities remained untouched, and development funding was siphoned through corrupt patronage networks. Human security marginally improved in urban centres but declined in peripheral regions. Structural inequalities persisted, cloaked beneath a liberal discourse of reconstruction. The international community focused on elections and GDP growth, ignoring persistent social cleavages and localised suffering. Thus, the era of Western intervention provided neither comprehensive security nor meaningful reconciliation for minority groups (Barfield, 2010, pp. 191-192).

Despite the presence of a centralised government, the post-2001 order never dismantled the mechanisms of exclusion inherited from previous regimes. Pashtun nationalist narratives continued to dominate policy discourse, and minority rights were often used as political currency in elite bargaining (Barfield, 2010, pp. 192-193). The National Solidarity Programme (NSP), for instance, failed to penetrate deeply into Hazara and Farsiwan rural districts, where infrastructural neglect persisted. While educational enrolment improved nationally, minority areas saw fewer qualified teachers and lower access to secondary schooling. Structural violence thus mutated into development differentials, producing a technocratic façade of equality (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013). Paul Collier's (2008) conflict economy thesis becomes relevant here, suggesting that post-war governments often replicate wartime inequalities to stabilise elite control (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). The lack of economic integration for minority groups meant that poverty remained concentrated along ethnic lines. Joblessness, food insecurity and underrepresentation remained normalised for large segments of the population. By 2019, reports by SIGAR indicated that public trust in government had eroded even among those initially supportive of post-

Taliban reconstruction. A fragile state had become a divided state, breeding long-term insecurity through institutional blindness (Cloys & Sopko, 2019).

The Taliban's insurgency between 2015 and 2021 combined violent campaigns with strategic outreach to select communities, including certain Twelver-Muslim groups. This dual strategy of intimidation and inclusion aimed to weaken the government's multiethnic legitimacy. Taliban emissaries reportedly negotiated non-aggression pacts in some Hazara districts, particularly in Daikundi and Ghazni, offering safety in exchange for logistical support. Yet, these arrangements were always unstable and asymmetrical, reinforcing a mode of "conditional security" (Gulejami & Zaheer, 2025). As David Keen (2012) observed, war actors often create insecurity to later offer protection as influence[2]. The Taliban used this logic to penetrate areas previously resistant to their rule, presenting themselves as more efficient than Kabul's corrupt bureaucracies. However, women's rights, education access and mobility were systematically curtailed even in these "peaceful" districts. For the Farsiwan of Herat, cross-border trade offered some economic lifeline, but state neglect left them vulnerable to Taliban extortion. Human insecurity, in these instances, became decentralised -- rooted not only in ideology but in the absence of equitable state infrastructure. By 2021, the distinction between rebel and ruler had blurred, as insecurity became fixed in every layer of governance (Gulejami & Zaheer, 2025).

When the United States and NATO withdrew in 2021, they left behind a brittle state and a humanitarian time bomb. The collapse of Kabul in August 2021 was not merely a political transition but a revelation of how deeply insecurity had been woven into the national fabric (Ali, 2024). International donors froze assets, humanitarian aid dwindled and the Afghan economy contracted by over 30%, according to World Bank estimates. The Taliban, unprepared for the burdens of rule, reimposed old restrictions while facing a new crisis: legitimacy without recognition. Education bans, gender apartheid and press repression re-emerged, yet some minorities -- particularly the Hazaras -- were spared the worst violence due to emerging economic dependencies with Iran. These inconsistencies reveal how economic pragmatism is increasingly shaping governance under Taliban 2.0 (World-Bank, 2024). The barter trade agreement with Iran, for instance, created conditional stability in Hazarajat, though not equality. Structural insecurity remains, disguised beneath transactional peace. The absence of a formal social contract ensures that any security is temporary, fragile and contingent on regional interests (Gulejami & Zaheer, 2025).

How Economy Coerced the Taliban 2.0 to Mask Human Insecurity?

The economic collapse that followed the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 imposed an unanticipated reconfiguration of their ideological rigidity, compelling strategic concessions towards marginalised communities. Bereft of formal international recognition and denied access to foreign reserves, the Taliban regime faced immediate paralysis in fiscal governance, forcing them to resort to barter diplomacy and informal trade corridors. Among these, the western provinces bordering Iran emerged as crucial lifelines, wherein the Farsiwan community -- historically marginalised Persian-speaking Twelver-Muslims -- were repositioned as indispensable economic interlocutors. In Herat and surrounding districts such as Guzara, Injil and Islam Qala, Farsiwan traders facilitated the import of fuel, wheat, medicine and construction material from Iran, becoming de facto brokers of regime sustainability. In return, the Taliban recalibrated their administrative stance, affording these communities unprecedented

---

[2] (Asim, Keen-Collier Approach within the Third Positionist School of Political Economy; A Way towards Removing Grievances in Ethnically Diverse Country like Pakistan, 2022)

leniency in governance, infrastructure access, and movement (Afsari, 2025). As Fakhrizadeh and Zaheer (2025) argue, this shift represents not ideological moderation but "transactional securitisation", wherein tolerance is exchanged for economic continuity. The Farsiwan, in this calculus, serve as economic buffers rather than political stakeholders -- co-opted not into the state's moral architecture, but into its survival strategy. Such coerced inclusion, while materially beneficial, masks underlying human insecurity by rendering it conditionally invisible (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025).

The Hazara, long subjected to structural and overt violence by successive regimes including the Taliban's first iteration, now find themselves at the intersection of economic utility and geopolitical diplomacy. Concentrated in central highland provinces such as Bamyan, Daikundi and parts of Ghazni, Hazara communities possess strategic value through their geographic control over roads and resources critical for the Iran-Afghanistan barter trade system. Their historical connection to Iranian clerical networks and transnational remittance channels further intensifies their economic importance. The Taliban's conditional toleration of Hazara-led NGOs, agricultural syndicates and educational initiatives in these regions has facilitated the appearance of developmental normalcy (Gulejami & Zaheer, 2025). However, as Darakhshan Afsari (2025) notes, such concessions are calibrated to ensure uninterrupted Iranian logistical corridors rather than genuine integration. Hazara participation in local governance remains tightly monitored, and their rights are suspended in a framework of discretionary tolerance. The paradox is that the same community previously subjected to genocidal violence is now instrumentalised for transnational trade. This strategic ambiguity effectively conceals human insecurity beneath a surface of barter-induced calm, making the Hazara both visible and expendable (Afsari, 2025).

The barter agreement signed between the Taliban and the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 2022 was a watershed moment in redefining Afghanistan's internal ethno-political configurations (Shahjamal, 2025). While the accord nominally pertained to exchange of goods -- oil, wheat, medicine for minerals and regional quietism -- it functionally empowered minority communities tied to these economic circuits. Iranian engagement in Hazarajat and Farsiwan regions became a shield against Taliban retribution, thereby fostering a new geography of conditional stability. In the absence of cash-based state budgets, the Taliban increasingly relied on these transborder economic ecosystems to meet even basic administrative functions. However, this dependency has rooted an informal hierarchy of securitisation, wherein only economically instrumental communities are spared the full brunt of sectarian repression. The resulting governance is not inclusive but asymmetrical -- extending protection based on logistical necessity rather than rights. This has created an unstable equilibrium where marginalisation is suspended, not dismantled. In the words of David Keen (2012), this amounts to a "war system in peace time", where violence is replaced by economic coercion (Keen, 2012).

Yet the Taliban's toleration exhibits a detailed geography of exception, as evidenced by their ambivalent stance towards the Pamiri Ismailis in Badakhshan province. While lacking a direct patron state akin to Iran for the Farsiwan or Hazara, the Pamiris benefit from an alternative form of shield; the international developmental prestige and quiet legitimacy of the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN). Rooted in Ismaili-Islam and guided by the spiritual leadership of the Agha Khan, the AKDN has cultivated an enduring institutional presence across education, health, agriculture and civil infrastructure in the transnational Pamir belt. In Afghanistan's north-eastern borderlands -- particularly in Faizabad and the Wakhan Corridor -- this developmental legacy has promoted a form of soft inclusion. Although the Taliban have imposed constraints on overt religious gatherings and curtailed cultural expression, they have allowed selective continuity of AKDN-administered welfare services. This cautious allowance appears to stem not from

doctrinal leniency, but from the regime's need to avoid diplomatic friction with neighbouring Tajikistan and Pakistan, where the Pamiris maintain significant cross-border kinship and developmental affiliations. Moreover, AKDN's global partnerships with Western and Islamic humanitarian bodies further deter the Taliban from dismantling its networks altogether[3]. Thus, while not economically integrated like the Farsiwan or Hazara, the Pamiris occupy a space of tacit toleration maintained through transnational humanitarian legitimacy.

The broader geopolitical landscape of the Pamir massif -- encompassing Afghanistan's Badakhshan, Pakistan's Gilgit and Chitral districts, Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan, and China's Tashkurgan County -- binds the Pamiri Ismailis into a civilisational corridor distinguished by shared linguistic heritage, religious pluralism and cosmopolitan institutionalism. Across this topography, the AKDN operates as a cultural and developmental unifier, mitigating state fragility and promoting non-militant progress. Inside Afghanistan, this socio-cultural cohesion has earned the Pamiris a marginal, yet stable, exception within Taliban rule. Their geographic remoteness, coupled with a tradition of civic orderliness and absence of militant agitation, renders them low-risk subjects for the regime. Furthermore, their reputation for academic and institutional excellence, particularly in education and rural development, associates with non-threatening modalities of local governance. Still, this precarious tolerance remains extrinsic -- rooted in international optics and regional sensitivities rather than intrinsic Taliban policy. While less vulnerable than other unconnected minorities, the Pamiris continue to face restrictions on religious leadership, transnational movement and institutional autonomy, reminding observers that their inclusion, too, is strategic and contingent[4].

Ultimately, the Taliban's evolving governance stance reflects a shift from ideological absolutism to coerced pragmatism, where economic and developmental instruments delineate the borders of toleration. For the Farsiwan and Hazara, proximity to Iran's logistical and religious infrastructure enables conditional inclusion through barter diplomacy and geopolitical influence. For the Pamiris, global developmental legitimacy through AKDN, and their symbolic linkages to regional civil society, provide a quieter but discernible space of functional autonomy. Yet across all cases, inclusion is instrumental, not normative -- it is permitted insofar as it stabilises fragile administrative zones, sustains cross-border quietism and alleviates basic welfare burdens (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025). As Paul Collier (2007) suggested, fragile regimes prioritise utility over ideology when state capacity is weak and legitimacy is externally contested (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). Afghanistan under Taliban 2.0 represents this dynamic; a mosaic of partial accommodations that mask enduring structural violence beneath the veneer of strategic toleration. This calibrated coexistence does not resolve human insecurity -- it repackages it within economic and developmental exceptions, revealing the transactional nature of governance in post-conflict states (Ali, 2024).

Policy Recommendations

In light of the Keen-Collier framework, which theorises that post-conflict actors recalibrate governance based on ethnic utility and satisfaction levels within conflict economies, there is a critical imperative to institutionalise a new social contract in Afghanistan. Such a contract must acknowledge the de facto decentralisation emerging under Taliban 2.0 and translate selective toleration into inclusive policy. Rather

---

[3] (Asim, The Correlation between Socio-Economic Development and the Peace Building in Badakhshan Region: A Case Study of Pamiri Ethnic Community around Durand Line, 2018)

[4] ibid

than viewing the Farsiwan, Hazara or Pamiri exemptions as anomalies, they should be positioned as models of pragmatic coexistence. According to Darakhshan Afsari (2025), the Taliban's facilitation of Hazara development in Hazarajat was not an ideological shift but a "coerced economic concession" (Afsari, 2025). This logic, if systematised, could form the bedrock of a federalised governance model, accommodating the demands of ethnic peripheries while preserving central authority. If economic necessity already coerces toleration, then codifying such arrangements into administrative decentralisation would reduce ad hoc governance and enhance predictability. This reoriented governance could serve as a bridge between the Keen-Collier conflict economy thesis and political settlement theory, encouraging a durable internal peace.

Equally important is the replication and institutional endorsement of the Agha Khan Development Network's (AKDN) community-based model across other ethnic constituencies. The AKDN's success among the Pamiris has demonstrated that long-term investments in education, health and cultural sustainability promote a form of soft power capable of buffering marginalised groups from systemic violence[5]. As noted by Gulejami and Zaheer (2025), the Taliban's toleration of AKDN initiatives in Badakhshan is less about religious leniency and more about recognising development as a stabilising mechanism (Gulejami & Zaheer, 2025). This paradigm offers immense replicative potential among Afghan Tajiks in Takhar, Uzbeks in Faryab, Turkmen in Jowzjan, and even non-insurgent Pashtun populations in eastern provinces such as Nangarhar and Kunar. By allowing or encouraging culturally resonant, non-militant institutions to operate, the Taliban could offload developmental burdens while boosting regional legitimacy. The international recognition of AKDN -- with its partnerships with UNESCO, UNDP and EU bodies -- also illustrates how globally networked civil society can provide soft corridors to economic assistance without jeopardising sovereignty narratives.

For such pluralistic development to flourish, policy instruments must be devised to formalise ethno-regional economic diplomacy. The Iran-Afghanistan barter agreement of December 2022 set a precedent where trade-induced leniency produced tangible infrastructural gains in marginalised areas (Shahjamal, 2025). Building on this, bilateral agreements with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan could be extended to Afghan regions sharing cultural and linguistic affinity with their northern neighbours. As Fakhrizadeh and Zaheer (2025) argue, conditional de-marginalisation rooted in economic logic remains the most viable non-violent strategy for governance recalibration under Taliban 2.0 (Fakhrizadeh & Zaheer, 2025). This also suggests that regional integration, if conducted through barter and welfare-oriented trade rather than extractive contracts, can induce flexible governance without threatening the regime's ideological coherence. The Taliban, while retaining symbolic centralisation, would benefit from devolved development linked to cross-border cultural commerce.

Moreover, these community-level arrangements must be nested within a coherent national development framework aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[6]. While Taliban 2.0 has remained publicly ambivalent about the SDGs, the indirect adoption of SDG-aligned policies -- such as infrastructure, water access and food security -- has occurred via Iranian and AKDN engagements. Institutionalising such practices under a national coordination platform would not only systematise resource flow but also render Afghanistan eligible for multilateral humanitarian financing. As Arian Sharifi

---

[5] (Asim, The Correlation between Socio-Economic Development and the Peace Building in Badakhshan Region: A Case Study of Pamiri Ethnic Community around Durand Line, 2018)
[6] (UN, 2015)

(2024) rightly argues, the masking of structural violence can only be overcome through institutional equity mechanisms that transcend barter's informality. Formalising the economic privileges extended to ethnic communities and integrating them into regional development compacts would anchor Afghanistan within global development norms while maintaining its sovereignty (Sharifi, 2024). This dual alignment -- ethnic accommodation domestically and international compatibility externally -- gives a pathway from coerced resilience to strategic governance.

Significantly, the Taliban must adopt a stance of active facilitation rather than mere passive toleration of such initiatives. For example, granting local councils in ethnic-majority provinces partial authority over NGO registration, trade licensing and infrastructural planning would enhance bureaucratic ownership and reduce ethnic grievance. Such decentralisation, as seen in the functional autonomy in Hazara areas, creates space for local accountability without secessionist risk. In regions like Herat, Badakhshan and Faryab, where local elites possess cultural capital and economic leverage, institutional flexibility could catalyse endogenous growth. Collier (2008) suggests that conflict actors, once in power, require instruments of internal legitimacy to maintain peace dividends (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). For Taliban 2.0, this legitimacy could emerge from devolved economic autonomy tied to ethno-cultural identity, turning Afghanistan's ethnic diversity from a liability into an asset.

Finally, the new social contract must be predicated upon multicultural cosmopolitanism -- not as an ideological end but as an economic necessity. The Taliban's future legitimacy, both domestically and regionally, depends on transforming selective exceptions into structured inclusion. Multicultural development models, shaped by AKDN and supplemented through Keen-Collier dynamics, offer a roadmap for conflict-to-peace transitions grounded in trade, welfare, and civil inclusion. Institutionalising barter arrangements that embed ethnic actors into cross-border economic flows will reduce resistance and increase social cohesion. Moreover, such models make the Taliban less dependent on humanitarian aid and more integrated into regional trade blocs. In the long term, this recalibration of governance from sectarian rigidity to economic pluralism could elevate Afghanistan from isolation to recognition, from repression to regulation, and from survivalism to structured statecraft.

Conclusion

"*In fragile states, the line between governance and survival is often drawn by those who control access to bread, not ballots*". (Paul Collier, 2008).

The Taliban's coerced accommodation of the Farsiwan and Hazara communities, as well as the conditional leniency shown toward Pamiris through the AKDN's transnational welfare ethos, illustrates a paradigm where human insecurity is not alleviated through ethical reform but masked by economic pragmatism. Within the Keen-Collier framework, trade becomes both the mask and mechanism of fragile peace, as barter diplomacy coerces ideological regimes to adopt performative pluralism. However, such inclusion remains selectively deployed, exposing the deep entrenchment of neo-colonial structural violence where ethnicity is valued not for civic parity but for commercial influence. The findings affirm that Taliban 2.0's governance narrative has shifted not towards democratic consolidation but toward transactional tolerance shaped by regional interdependencies, cross-border affiliations and developmental utility. It is thus essential for post-conflict reconstruction to institutionalise these informal arrangements into a new social contract that embraces multicultural cosmopolitanism, decentralised authority and SDG-aligned infrastructure as vehicles of long-term stability. Ultimately, if Afghanistan is to transcend its cycles of

repression and relapse, it must reimagine inclusion not as benevolence but as a civic guarantee -- earned not through proximity to power but through the promise of equitable dignity.

References

Afsari, D. (2025, July 03). *Coerced Accommodation: Why the Taliban Facilitated the Hazara through a Collierian Lens*. Retrieved from Rehmat and Maryam Researches: http://rmrpublishers.org/coerced-accommodation-why-the-taliban-facilitated-the-hazara-through-a-collierian-lens/

Ali, U. (2024, July 16). *Afghanistan's Ethnic Faultlines Under Taliban Rule*. Retrieved from Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research: https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/politics-governance/afghanistans-ethnic-faultlines-under-taliban-rule/

Asim, D. M. (2018). The Correlation between Socio-Economic Development and the Peace Building in Badakhshan Region: A Case Study of Pamiri Ethnic Community around Durand Line. *The Dynamics of Change in Pakistan – Afghanistan Region: Politics, (Dis) integration and Reformation in the Borderland.* Baragali Summer Campus of University of Peshawar: Henns Siedel Foundation and University of Peshawar.

Asim, D. M. (2022). Keen-Collier Approach within the Third Positionist School of Political Economy; A Way towards Removing Grievances in Ethnically Diverse Country like Pakistan. *International Conference on Nation-Building in Pakistan; Prospects and Challenges.* Islamabad: Iqbal International Institute for Research & Dialogue, Quaid-e-Azam Auditorium, Islamic International University Islamabad (Pakistan).

Barfield, T. J. (2010). *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Beath, A., Christia, F., & Enikolopov, R. (2013). *Randomized impact evaluation of Afghanistan's national solidarity programme.* Washington DC: World Bank Group.

Cloys, R., & Sopko, J. F. (2019). *2019 HIGH-RISK LIST*. Retrieved from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction: https://www.sigar.mil/Portals/147/Files/Reports/High-Risk-List/High-Risk-List-2019.pdf

Collier, P., Hoeffler, A., & Söderbom, M. (2008). Post-Conflict Risks. *Journal of Peace Research*, 461-478.

Fakhrizadeh, D. R., & Zaheer, D. A. (2025, July 02). *Barter, Borders, and Bargains: Dr. Rahim Fakhrizadeh Explains Taliban's Calculated Leniency Toward Farsiwan and Hazaras*. Retrieved from Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum: https://pakiranintellectualsforum.wordpress.com/2025/07/02/barter-borders-and-bargains-dr-rahim-fakhrizadeh-explains-talibans-calculated-leniency-toward-farsiwan-and-hazaras/

Farmer, P. (2004). An Anthropology of Structural Violence. *Current Anthropology*, 305-325.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 167-191. Retrieved from https://www2.kobe-u.ac.jp/~alexroni/IPD%202015%20readings/IPD%202015_7/Galtung_Violence,%20Peace,%20and%20Peace%20Research.pdf

Ghiasy, R. (2016). *Development and human security in Afghanistan*. Retrieved from Relief and Development in Dangerous Places: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRIYB16c09sIV.pdf

Giustozzi, A. (2009). *Empires of mud: wars and warlords of Afghanistan.* London: Hurst Publishers. Retrieved from https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/25587/

Gulejami, Z., & Zaheer, D. A. (2025, July). *Bartered Boundaries and Fluid Belonging: Dr. Akram Zaheer in Conversation with Zoheda Gulejami on Iran-Afghanistan Trade, Governance, and Inclusion*. Retrieved from Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum: https://pakiranintellectualsforum.wordpress.com/2025/07/03/bartered-boundaries-and-fluid-belonging-dr-akram-zaheer-in-conversation-with-zoheda-gulejami-on-iran-afghanistan-trade-governance-and-inclusion/

Hassani, M., Arezo, A., Haideri, F., & Asim, M. (2023). Why Afghan Women are Approaching Iranian Society? A Critical Study. *Insights of Pakistan, Iran and the Caucasus Studies*, 45-51.

HRW. (2001). *AFGHANISTAN: HUMANITY DENIED.* Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan3/afgwrd1001.pdf

Jolly, R., & Ray, D. B. (2006). *The Human Security Framework 1994 and National Human Development Reports.* Human Development Report Office (UNDP). Retrieved from https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/human-security.human-security

Keen, D. (2012). *Greed and grievance in civil war.* Wiley Online Library. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01100.x

Otoide, J., & Aigbokhan, A. (2023, April 01). A Link between Neocolonial Hegemony and Structural Violence in Africa of the 21st Century. Retrieved from https://journals.co.za/doi/full/10.62250/nsuk.2023.31.1.101-108

Roy, O. (2002, January). *Islamic Radicalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Retrieved from Refworld: https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/writenet/2002/en/30459

Rubin, B. (2001, November 01). *Afghanistan and Threats to Human Security*. Retrieved from Social Science Research Council: https://items.ssrc.org/after-september-11/afghanistan-and-threats-to-human-security/

Schnabel, D. A. (2008). *Appendix 2C. The human security approach to direct and structural violence*. Retrieved from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2008/02/appendix2C

Shahjamal, D. N. (2025, July 04). *Bartered Necessity: A Case Study of Iran-Afghanistan Unofficial Barter Trade Agreement (2022)*. Retrieved from Pak-Iran Intellectuals Forum: https://pakiranintellectualsforum.wordpress.com/2025/07/04/bartered-necessity-a-case-study-of-iran-afghanistan-unofficial-barter-trade-agreement-2022/

Sharifi, A. (2024). Afghanistan's Ill-fated National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism. *The RUSI Journal*, 64-74. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2023.2278351

Sinno, A. (2021, October 25). *How ethnic and religious divides in Afghanistan are contributing to violence against minorities*. Retrieved from The Conversation: https://theconversation.com/how-ethnic-and-religious-divides-in-afghanistan-are-contributing-to-violence-against-minorities-168059

Smith, K. (2007, December 22). *Pierre Bourdieu – Challenging Symbolic Violence and the Naturalisation of Power Relations*. Retrieved from E-International Relations: https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/181

Tadjbakhsh, S. (2013, May 23). *Human security in developing world*. Retrieved from Kapuscinski Lectures: https://kapuscinskilectures.eu/lecture/human-security-in-developing-world/

Tadjbakhsh, S., & Chenoy, A. (2007). *Human Security: Concepts and Implications.* Oxon and New York: Routledge.

UN. (2015). *THE 17 GOALS.* United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York. Retrieved from https://sdgs.un.org/goals

World-Bank. (2024, December). *AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENT UPDATE*. Retrieved from World Bank: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/126f9684f0c7ff20248c0c7bf45ccccd-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Development-Update-December-2024-Final.pdf