

The political instrumentalization of ethnic divisions and affiliations in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

Instrumentalisasi politik perpecahan dan afiliasi etnis di Afghanistan (2001–2021)

Mohammad Ayub Mirdad^{1*}, Bagong Suyanto², & Muhammad Umer Hayat³

¹Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga

²Departement of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga

³Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bahria University

Address: ^{1,2}Jalan Dharmawangsa Dalam Selatan, Surabaya - 60286, East Java, Indonesia

³Shangrilla Rd, E-8/1 E 8/1 E-8, Islamabad, Pakistan

E-mail: ayub.mirdad@fisip.unair.ac.id

Article History: Received 3 July 2025; Accepted 6 October 2025; Published Online 28 November 2025

Abstract

The political instrumentalization of ethnicity is not a new issue and dates back to the time when the country's name changed from Khorasan to Afghanistan. The ethnic divisions deepened during the presidencies of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. This article delves into the intricate dynamics of ethnic divisions and their political instrumentalization in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. While a lot of research has examined Afghanistan's ethnic landscape, limited attention has been paid to how post-2001 leaders mobilized ethnic identities to entrench political power. Focusing on Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani's administrations, both from the Pashtun ethnic group, this study draws on Weale and Diamond's theories of ethnic favoritism, dominance, and undemocratic leadership. Using a qualitative approach through document analysis and literature review, this study found that both leaders leveraged their ethnic identity to consolidate power and influence policymaking. Pashtuns were systematically favored in key governmental appointments, often at the expense of other major ethnic groups such as Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. This political exclusion has deepened interethnic mistrust and fragmented the national fabric. By highlighting the long-term consequences of ethnic favoritism, this study contributes to ongoing debates on identity politics and governance in post-conflict states.

Keywords: ethnic favoritism; identity politics; post-2001 Afghanistan; political exclusion; Pashtun dominance

Abstrak

Instrumentasi politik etnis bukanlah isu baru dan sudah ada sejak perubahan nama negara dari Khorasan menjadi Afghanistan. Perpecahan etnis semakin dalam selama masa kepresidenan Hamid Karzai dan Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai. Artikel ini menyelidiki dinamika rumit perpecahan etnis dan instrumentalisasi politik mereka di Afghanistan dari tahun 2001 hingga 2021. Sementara banyak penelitian telah meneliti lanskap etnis Afghanistan, perhatian terbatas telah diberikan pada bagaimana para pemimpin pasca-2001 memobilisasi identitas etnis untuk memperkuat kekuasaan politik. Berfokus pada pemerintahan Hamid Karzai dan Ashraf Ghani, keduanya dari kelompok etnis Pashtun, penelitian ini mengacu pada teori Weale dan Diamond tentang favoritisme etnis, dominasi, dan kepemimpinan yang tidak demokratis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui analisis dokumen dan tinjauan pustaka, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kedua pemimpin memanfaatkan identitas etnis mereka untuk mengonsolidasikan kekuasaan dan memengaruhi pembuatan kebijakan. Pashtun secara teratur diunggulkan dalam penunjukan pemerintah utama, seringkali dengan mengorbankan kelompok etnis besar lainnya seperti Tajik, Hazara, dan Uzbek. Pengecualian politik ini memperdalam ketidakpercayaan antaretnis dan memecah belah tatanan nasional. Dengan menyoroti konsekuensi jangka panjang dari favoritisme etnis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan yang sedang berlangsung tentang politik identitas dan pemerintahan di negara-negara pascakonflik.

Kata kunci: favoritisme etnis; politik identitas; Afghanistan pasca-2001; eksklusi politik; dominasi Pashtun

Introduction

The political instrumentalization of ethnicity in Afghanistan has been a deeply entrenched and complex phenomenon that has had a profound impact on the country's political landscape. Afghanistan is a diverse nation with numerous ethnic groups, each possessing distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical identities

(Barfield 2023). Throughout its tumultuous history, ethnicity has been manipulated by political leaders as a means to consolidate power, secure support, and advance their political agendas (Giustozzi 2009). Understanding the dynamics and consequences of this instrumentalization is critical to comprehend the challenges faced by Afghanistan in its pursuit of stability, unity, and inclusive governance. Ethnicity has long been a salient factor in Afghan society, with Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and other groups constituting the country's ethnic mosaic (Gibbs 1995). The instrumentalization of ethnicity involves exploiting these divisions for political gain, often exacerbating tensions and perpetuating deep-seated rivalries (Khazeni 2006). This manipulation occurs through various mechanisms, including ethnic favoritism in policymaking, appointments to key positions, and the formation of political alliances along ethnic lines (Sharan 2013).

During the presidencies of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, the instrumentalization of ethnicity became a prominent feature of Afghan politics (Barfield 2023). Karzai, himself a Pashtun, faced accusations of favoring his ethnic group, which strained relations with other ethnic groups, particularly the Tajiks and Hazaras (Giustozzi 2009). Ghani, also a Pashtun, confronted allegations of promoting Pashtun-centric policies and appointments, leading to heightened ethnic tensions and a sense of exclusion among non-Pashtun groups (Sharan 2013). The central problem is that successive political leaders instrumentalized ethnic identities to consolidate power, which deepened societal fragmentation, eroded democratic legitimacy, and obstructed inclusive state-building in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021. The consequences of the political instrumentalization of ethnicity in Afghanistan have been far-reaching. It has deepened ethnic divisions, eroded trust in the government, and hindered the establishment of a unified national identity (Gibbs 1995). It has impeded efforts to build inclusive governance structures that adequately represent and address the needs of all ethnic groups. The instrumentalization of ethnicity has also created fertile ground for extremist and separatist ideologies to take root, further destabilizing the country (Khazeni 2006).

Recent studies over the past five years further emphasize how ethnicity continues to shape Afghanistan's politics. For example, Sahara & Sahar (2021) demonstrate how the 2014 presidential campaign manipulated ethnic identities to reinforce political divisions. Nurkulov (2020) analyzes how Uzbek leaders shaped political security dynamics, influencing governance and conflict outcomes. Kargar & Hasin (2024) apply political liberalism to show how ethnic power imbalances have undermined institutional legitimacy since 2001. Similarly, Ishtiaq et al. (2024) found that ethnic fragmentation continues to impede political stability and inclusive governance in the post-2001 era. Addressing the challenges posed by the political instrumentalization of ethnicity requires a comprehensive understanding of Afghanistan's historical, cultural, and social dynamics (Childress 2005).

The people of Afghanistan have suffered through civil war and foreign interventions during the last half of the century. The destruction resulting from war has led to ethnic divisions and public breakdown, including the collapse of physical, economic, and administrative infrastructures throughout the country (Gibbs 1995). After the Taliban fell in 2001, an agreement was reached on the establishment of a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan at a meeting in Bonn, Germany (Bonn Agreement 2001). The Bonn Agreement sought "to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and foster national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability, and respect for human rights in the country." Sadly, there could not be enduring peace and stabilization for the country, which continued with two meetings in Bonn in 2001 and 2011, and other international conferences in Afghanistan. Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai's governments failed to achieve the commitments of the Bonn Agreement (2001) and the benchmarks set out in the agreement between the parties (Giustozzi 2009). Academics, policymakers, and experts on Afghanistan have always criticized and questioned the developments, reconstruction, sustainability, state-building, security, and many more critical issues (Khazeni 2006).

According to Yunespour's book "Identity Politics A Case Study of Afghanistan" published in 2011, Afghanistan can be seen as a representation of its diverse ethnic composition. It is important to acknowledge and comprehend Afghanistan as a society characterized by its varied population, including Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, and Uzbek individuals, and various other minority groups (Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady 1995). It is assumed that these ethnic groups share a common lineage, inhabit the same homeland, possess collective

memories, potentially follow the same religion, and experience a sense of ethnic unity (Smith & Hutchinson 1994). Each ethnic group member has many identities since they belong to ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic communities, according to Smith & Hutchinson (1994). Everyone in the country also describes themselves by a series of personal identities that reflect their relations, jobs, gender, and birth location (Smith & Hutchinson 1994). This feature of Afghanistan's ethnic groups is also discussed by Childress (2005). He said that every individual's identity has a character that leads to a sequence of dependence, such as "being a member of an Islamic community, a regional group member" (Childress 2005).

As with other ethnic communities, Afghan ethnic groups have no official legal duty or liability to belong to their corresponding groups. Nevertheless, their identities often generate common ties and define their connections with one another (Friese 2002). Within this self-perception, there exists a feeling of similarity and commonality among individuals within these ethnic groups, while simultaneously perceiving the differences and distinctness between themselves and those outside their perceived boundaries (Hobsbawm 1996, Friese 2002). Although each ethnic group has its own unique self-definition, their understanding of themselves may not necessarily correspond with how others perceive them (Bilgrami 2006).

Alcoff & Mohanty (2006) stated that ethnic and sectarian identities are relational and contextual in Afghanistan's ethnic groups. This defines identity as a vibrant notion that underlines the possibility of mobilizing the same identity for multiple reasons. For example, in 1994, when the Taliban took over Afghanistan's Kandahar Province, they employed their ethnic Pashtun identity to legitimize the Pashtun community and used the same identity to quench the opponents of other ethnic groups, especially those of the Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara. The context in which identities are used as political tools is essential for knowing the behavior of people or groups (Childress 2005, Alcoff & Mohanty 2006). In Afghanistan, due to the strong identification with ethnic identity, one can anticipate behaviors that differentiate individuals even within the same ethnic group. The significance of ethnic-based claims in Afghanistan lies in the understanding that identities are shaped by specific knowledge, encompassing historical, cultural, and political dimensions. It is crucial to comprehend the factors that have influenced and perpetuated identity politics in Afghanistan over time (Moya 2006).

The presence of multi-ethnic groups alone does not justify that the Afghan people depend upon ethnicity and sects to achieve their political goals, which is an essential shift to these forces. The reason for this is that identities are neutral because they are not inherently positive or negative but can be used in different contexts for different purposes. There are practical models of peaceful coexistence between distinct ethnic groups, as is evident in Sweden, or where they have come to the point of war violently in countries like Rwanda (Hintjens 2008), Kosovo (Duijzings 2000), Sudan (Idris 2005), and Iraq (Lawrence 2008). In Afghanistan, identity politics may indicate similarities to ethnic, sectarian, and linguistic groups with countries such as Sudan, Iraq, and Kosovo but "those elements must be investigated, documented, rather than assumed" (Barfield 2023). The state's ability is the main distinction between Sweden and a country such as Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a weak country in every respect but Sweden is a powerful state with a strong central authority. Saikal (2016) defines a powerful state as having the ability to penetrate society, control social relations, extract resources, and use resources in certain ways. Fukuyama (2004) offers an in-depth assessment of what he calls the "missing dimensions of states" to interpret these features. He differentiates between the scope and force of a state, in which the former includes the various tasks a state has to do, and the latter describes the state's ability to perform these tasks. Each state's necessary duties include providing security and order, protecting its sovereignty and domestic interests, respecting the rule of law, and meeting its population's fundamental requirements (Fukuyama 2004). All states have a similar scope but their ability to perform their necessary tasks is considerably different. Some are powerful in one continuum, while others are weak (Fukuyama 2004).

Sorensen (2004) defines a weak state, and he argues that, at the domestic level, their organizations are ineffective and that strong countries are constraining and influencing their policies at the global level. Local groups are seeking access to resources and foreign assistance funds. Sorensen's definition of the weak state is a clear example of Afghanistan's situation post-2001; the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

was weak locally and internationally. State-society relations were fragile because individuals understood that the government was one of the causes of plunder, threats, and exploitation (Sorensen 2004). A weak state cannot provide security and manage its finances and is subject to internal instability and external interference. People discover local networks to survive, whether they are their family, their kin, their tribes, their ethnic groups, or religious communities, instead of depending on the state bureaucracy.

While previous studies have primarily concentrated on isolated factors or the historical background of ethnic tensions in Afghanistan, this study takes a broader and more nuanced approach. It explores the multifaceted dynamics that have intensified ethnic divisions, including the political instrumentalization of ethnicity, the drivers of identity politics, and the complex role of ethnic identity in Afghanistan's state-building efforts after 2001. This article contributes to the literature on ethnic politics and post-conflict governance by illustrating how leadership-driven ethnocentrism undermines inclusive state-building. By focusing on the Karzai and Ghani administrations, it reveals how political exclusion based on ethnicity has eroded democratic legitimacy and weakened the national cohesion in Afghanistan.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. It carefully examines the realities and underlying causes of the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan over the past two decades (2001–2021). To ensure the systematic evaluation of relevant data, this study utilizes various appropriate techniques for the data collection, focusing on secondary sources. These include document analysis and a literature review of the previous research conducted by other scholars. The sources consist of published journal articles, e-books, research reports, and newspaper articles. In addition, documents and data released by local and international non-governmental organizations have also been included to enrich the analysis. By reviewing these materials, the study examines patterns of political behavior under the presidencies of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, with a focus on how ethnicity has influenced appointments, policymaking, and the public perception of legitimacy.

In total, this study reviewed around 50–60 secondary sources but only those directly relevant to ethnic politics, governance practices, and state legitimacy in Afghanistan were used. The selection criteria emphasized credibility, relevance, and recency, with priority given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, reports from reputable international organizations, and reliable media outlets that addressed ethnic divisions and political developments during the Karzai and Ghani administrations. Some limitations existed in the data collection process, particularly the restricted access to primary sources from within Afghanistan due to security and political instability, as well as potential institutional or authorial biases in secondary documents. To address this, this study employed cross-verification across a broad range of materials to strengthen the validity of the analysis.

With these considerations in mind, this research is guided by the theoretical perspectives of David Weale and Larry Diamond on democracy and inclusive governance, which have helped to interpret the relationship between ethnocentrism and state fragility in post-2001 Afghanistan. Through the analysis, the study identifies how ethnic favoritism was institutionalized and how this process alienated large segments of the population away from the central government. The goal is to understand how political ethnocentrism contributed to governance failures and to draw conclusions that may inform future peacebuilding and state-building strategies in multi-ethnic societies like Afghanistan.

Results and Discussion

While previous studies have primarily focused on isolated factors or the historical background of ethnic tensions in Afghanistan, this study adopts a broader and more nuanced perspective. It examines how ethnic divisions have been intensified through the political instrumentalization of ethnicity, the emergence of identity politics, and the role of ethnic identity in post-2001 state-building. By focusing on the Karzai and Ghani administrations (see Table 1), this study shows how leadership-driven ethnocentrism and political exclusion based on ethnicity has eroded democratic legitimacy and weakened national cohesion. The results provide a detailed account of the dynamics of ethnic favoritism, domination, and exclusion, revealing the underlying mechanisms that have shaped Afghanistan's complex political landscape.

Table 1.
Ethnic favoritism and governance patterns in Afghanistan (2001–2021)

Presidency	Patterns of ethnic appointments	Impact on legitimacy	Public perception
Hamid Karzai (2001–2014)	During his administration, Tajik anti-Taliban leaders were assassinated, and gradually the majority of critical government posts were given to Pashtuns; non-Pashtuns were placed in symbolic positions with limited executive authority.	Created resentment among non-Pashtun groups, weakened inclusivity in governance.	Favoured Pashtuns; trust eroded among Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek.
Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (2014–2021)	Continued ethnic favouritism; gradual removal of non-Pashtuns from influential posts. Presidential elections (2014, 2019) politicized ethnicity and mobilized voters along ethnic lines.	Deepened divisions, reduced effectiveness of institutions, and heightened political instability.	Ethnically biased decisions; legitimacy undermined.

Source: Created by the author

To organize the discussion, this section is divided into four main sub-chapters: the reflection of Weale and Diamond's theories on Afghan politics, the political instrumentalization of ethnicity, the causes of identity politics in Afghanistan, and the role of identity in state-building post-2001. Each sub-chapter illustrates how political leaders and structural conditions have contributed to the current ethnic landscape in Afghanistan, clarifying how the findings relate to the study's research objectives.

The reflection of Weale and Diamond's Theory on the reality of Afghanistan

This article adopts the theory of favoritism, ethnic domination, and undemocratic leaders. After 2001, ethnicity played a significant role in government institutions, policymaking, and elections. After 2001, the Government was built and organized based on ethnicity, which led to the intensification of ethnic divisions in Afghanistan.

As Weale (1999) stated, a society consists of conflict and cooperation. In a society, people cooperate on various things to manage their daily affairs. It is a form of collaboration, like forming institutions that most people refer to. When specific institutions work in favor of certain people and against others, it will open the way for opposition based on ethnicity, tribe, language, and religion. According to this theory, the politicization of ethnicity and ethnic divisions occurs in a country when other ethnic groups do not get what they want; they try to achieve it through other means, such as the mobilization of people based on ethnicity and language. Based on this theory, this is the time when ethnic divisions and ethnic politicization begins. Although for the past 20 years, the head of the government in Afghanistan has been Pashtun, during that time, most critical governmental positions given to other ethnicities had only symbolic roles. The head of government gradually removed all non-Pashtuns working in critical governmental positions, such as non-Pashtuns appointed to positions that did not have executive authority.

Ethnic domination is also a factor in the politicization of ethnicity, resulting in ethnic divisions in Afghanistan. According to Weale (1999), democracy does not guarantee the presence of all ethnic groups in political decisions; most democracies favor the system of majority, which means that any ethnic group that forms the majority in a country will rule over other minorities. This type of system creates ethnic dominance among different ethnic groups. Ethnic power deprives other ethnic groups of participation in political decision-making. The political leaders of such societies try to politicize ethnicity to rule over others and continue their ethnic domination. This type of government is not democratic because the rights of other ethnic groups are ignored in such societies, and they do not play a significant role in any decision-making.

As mentioned above, ethnic dominance in Afghanistan is not a new phenomenon; its roots go back to the time of the establishment of Afghanistan. Due to the long war and insecurity, no census has been conducted by an impartial international or national organization in Afghanistan to show which ethnic group is the majority. Pashtuns claim they are the majority and have ruled Afghanistan for over two centuries. After 2001, there was ethnic dominance in Afghanistan, and a particular ethnic group (Pashtun) was at the head of the government. Other ethnic groups were symbolically present in the government but only one ethnic group made all of the important decisions.

Undemocratic leaders are also a factor in ethnic politicization and ethnic divisions. As Diamond (2006) stated, post-war or at-war societies governed by an undemocratic leader are another factor that creates ethnic divisions among people. This theory is suitable for Afghanistan. Since 2001, the United States and the international community have made great efforts to establish government institutions in Afghanistan. Still, history has proven that no matter how good the institutions are, the efforts will be futile if the leader is not democratic. As the author has mentioned above, an undemocratic leader in a post-war or at-war society politicizes ethnicity and uses it for his own interests. This situation happened from 2001 to 2021 during the presidential elections and appointments in government bodies in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan's presidential elections, especially the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, leaders highly politicized ethnicity and mobilized people based on their ethnic background to reach their political goals. This situation further deepened the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan.

Ethnic divisions, a lack of unity, a lack of coexistence, and a lack of respect for each other's rights, especially for minorities, lead to the politicization of ethnicity. As Diamond (1990) stated, ethnic divisions exist among nations but there must be a solution and mechanism to moderate them. According to the author, there are three ways to manage ethnic divisions and eliminate the politicization of ethnicity in Afghanistan: a decentralized system, minority rights, and equal distribution of power among all ethnic groups. Although during the last 20 years, Afghanistan had a highly centralized presidential system, the existence of such a system in a multi-ethnic society like Afghanistan is wrong, causing the escalation of ethnic divisions in Afghanistan. These ethnic divisions have politicized ethnicity in Afghanistan because there is no distribution of power and proportionality between ethnicities in the highly centralized government, and the rulers always use ethnicity to suppress and exclude others. These findings align with the research objectives by demonstrating how favoritism, ethnic domination, and undemocratic leadership have contributed to the politicization of ethnicity in Afghanistan. This analysis addresses the study's aim to explore the mechanisms through which ethnic divisions emerged and persisted in the post-2001 period.

Political instrumentalization of ethnicity

In the past 20 years, ethnicity has become a political tool to achieve personal and political interests among Afghan leaders, which has led to ethnic divisions among the Afghan people. Ethnic diversity has its benefits and flaws. From one point of view, diversity in abilities, education, and funding can improve effectiveness by promoting business and innovation. Ethnic diversity, on the other hand, is often linked to the lousy delivery of public products, poor policies, war, civil conflicts, and hatred. Indeed, a significant amount of the literature reveals the adverse (but not consistently strong) effect of multiple elements of ethnolinguistic fragmentation on different aspects of economic growth, except for prosperous economies (Alesina & La Ferrara 2005).

It poses the question of why the political problem in Afghanistan is growing among ethnic groups. People have to look back to answer this query. At the end of the 19th century, the Afghan state was created by British India and Russia, adversarial colonial powers. The ruling Pashtun dynasty, enthroned by British India, favored the Pashtun elements in their sense of a nation-state. In addition to forming the Royal Family of the Pashtun, the primary factors why this Pashtun-biased nationalism was predominant at the time were that the Pashtun were comprised of many ethnic groups. Nevertheless, things have changed; due to the civil wars and the security situation in Afghanistan, there have been no accurate statistics to show which ethnic groups are the majority. However, Pashtuns have always considered themselves to be a superior ethnicity, which is one of the reasons why the ethnic groups in Afghanistan are fragmented. They want to always be in power, and other ethnicities are subdued and dominated.

Although the government policy implies the friendly distribution of resources among different regional leaders, tribal heads, and notables (Rubin 1992), it says that the state used ethnic models to control access to public goods and offices (Wimmer & Schetter 2003). In all areas, the Pashtuns have had an advantage and commanded the army. The Tajiks have marginalized the economic sector and education organizations. On the other hand, the Hazara, in all circumstances, have been marginalized. The land redistribution and resettlement that occurred during the twentieth century generally favored Pashtuns. Pashtun settlers received land in a good location and easy access to irrigation in the oases of northern Afghanistan (Anderson & Strand 1978), while the meadows in central Afghanistan were given to Pashtun nomads. Because the rulers have always been Pashtuns, the nation-state policy thus constituted an ethnic hierarchy, ethnic conflicts and demands for change to the state policy appear surprisingly rare. Because people did not have the right to protest at the time to defend their property, there was tension among the tribes over land in most parts of Afghanistan, which was undoubtedly a result of the ethnic policies of previous governments (Rubin 1992).

In addition, the categorization of ethnic groups was not considered to be the general framework for collective actions but remained a blurred concept for the Afghan people. There is, therefore, no political will by average Afghans to overcome the ethnic hierarchy that the state has established (Wimmer & Schetter 2003). This does not imply there was ethnic harmony in Afghanistan before the conflict. Conflicts at the local level can describe ethnicity as being a problem, particularly to do with land and water ownership rights. However, the social context, motivations, and political alliances were crucial variables in dispute labeling. For example, the Hazarajat conflicting parties are sometimes defined as the same as the Hazaras and Pashtun ethnic conflicts. It could also represent a sectarian conflict between Shiites and Sunnis, and sometimes a socioeconomic conflict between farmers and nomads (Wimmer & Schetter 2003). This has determined the condition in which this type of reasoning is present.

When the 1979 Afghan War broke out, ethnicity became a military-political force to be considered. Although communism versus Islam dominated the Cold War paradigm, the fighting sides increased their ethnic impulses to reinforce their place (Rubin 2009). The communist leaders expected to bring certain ethnic groups closer by raising their national status (Safi 2007). More importantly, the creation of militias based on ethnic affiliation, like the Uzbek militias of Abdul Rashid Dostum, is a renowned instance. Pakistan and Iran also used the ethnic potential of divisions in Afghanistan. Iran founded the Hizb-e Wahdat (Unity Party), which favored the Shiite Hazaras, based on Shiite loyalties. In the 1980s, the Jamiat-e Islami, the oldest movement of resistance, became a representative of the Tajiks. The Hizb-e Islami, which is widely backed by Pakistan, is a radical Islamist party representing the Pashtuns; the party has been at war with the Afghan Government since its inception. After the fall of the Taliban government, it is currently either directly or indirectly at war with the government. Hizb-e Islami has committed many atrocities since 2001 and has killed many Afghans in suicide attacks. Pakistan backed the Taliban, a radical Islamist group dominated by Pashtuns. Therefore, the five warring factions that have dominated military and political action in the last decade have received support from members of one of the four main ethnic groups (Rubin 2009).

Political parties have relied on ethnicity as the main justification for their political existence, as ideologies such as Islamic, communist, and royalist have lost popularity as a means of mobilizing the masses and addressing political demands. The leaders of these parties made their supporters aware of the social and economic disadvantages they faced, emphasizing their ethnic affiliations both in the past and present. They claimed that 'their own ethnic group' survival was endangered by 'other ethnic groups' aggressive behavior. The ethnic argument stimulates mutual fear, hate, and jealousy among the warring parties. The parties' demands on the state and society's financial and political assets were also based on ethnic affiliation. Therefore, all warring factions justified their political demands by referring to their ethnic group and territory (Wimmer & Schetter 2003).

In addition, ethnicity was used to justify its military activities. Kabul has frequently been subject to ethnic cleansing and ethnocide during the Taliban regime; the majority of non-Pashtuns, especially Tajiks, were imprisoned and tortured by the Taliban without having committed any crime. The only reason people were tortured was that they were not Pashtun and initially, they were from the northern provinces of Afghanistan.

In Shamali (northern Kabul), where almost all of its people are of the Tajik ethnicity, all of their gardens were burned down, their homes were burned, and most of the people were killed or forced to leave their houses. The Taliban looted their homes and belongings. This happened during the Taliban regime between 1996 to 2001. During the Taliban regime in the Hazarajat between 1998 and 2001, the Taliban carried out genocide and killed the innocent people of the Hazaras; the only reason for killing them was because they were Shiites and non-Pashtuns. In northern Afghanistan, especially in the Mazar-e-Sharif province, since 1997 during the Taliban regime, many innocent people have been killed, and the only reason was that they were of a different ethnicity (Saikal 2012). This section illustrates how political leaders have instrumentalized ethnicity to achieve personal and political goals, deepening the divisions among Afghan communities. It directly supports the study's objective of analyzing the drivers of identity politics and the interplay between leadership actions and ethnic fragmentation.

Causes of identity politics in Afghanistan

One of the essential factors that has deepened the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan in the last 20 years is the weak government. Scholars on Afghanistan have concluded that Afghanistan is a weak state or has a weak central authority (Fukuyama & Ikenberry 2006, Maley 2020, Barfield 2023). Maley (2020), for example, concentrated on the dominant relations between the rulers and the ruled, and the weak legitimacy of the former in the perception of the latter (Maley 2020). To meet the fundamental security needs of its people, Fukuyama & Ikenberry (2006) addressed the restricted range and depth of Afghanistan's central power. Afghanistan's weak government has cleared the way for external interference and influenced the affairs of the country by both regional and global powers (Saikal 2012, Barfield 2023). Rubin (1992) used the term 'state' as a whole to represent the weakness of Afghanistan's government which, from one viewpoint, relied on external aid and showed a lack of ability to use its despotic/coercion and infrastructural power properly (Rubin 1992).

Due to the weak central government, the citizens depend on their local network for security and survival. Political rivalries prevail among local networks such as the tribe, clan, and religion, with the probability of powerful ties between the state and nation being reduced to a great extent (Sorensen 2004). In a society like this, a moral economy grows in the country where a person does not depend on government organizations for survival but looks to help from family members, tribes, and clans to find employment and pay any college charges and daily living costs. The moral system is strengthened and provides social security (to the individuals) where there is a lack of state welfare programs (Sorensen 2004).

Sorensen (2004) sums up the influence of a weak central state by stating that neither the community of citizenship nor the community of sentiments is developing in the country. Society and the state have weak social, legal, and political ties, and a domestic identity has not developed. Instead, ethnic identities in society are increasingly important (Sorensen 2004). Accordingly, the Afghanistan government's weak capacity to carry out the functions as it is required to do is at the core of developing identity-based political measures.

Afghanistan's weak central state has resulted in an increasing poverty culture. Afghanistan is impoverished economically but also has a prevalent culture of poverty. This culture of poverty has both material and immaterial dimensions. Materially, it shows in the rural and urban populations facing deep income disparities between the elites and the masses. Socially, people are separate from government institutions; they feel hopeless, desperate, and frightened, and often feel marginalized, discriminated against, and silenced. They are opposed to the structures of the state, rarely trust the police, and have a specific capacity for rebellion and incitement in anti-current-order political activities (Caplovitz 1968).

Sorensen (2004) states that the weak countries' policies are affected, limited, and directed by foreign powers. One of the dominant characteristics of its political history is the external manipulation of the fragmented culture of Afghanistan. Many scholars on Afghanistan have documented the particular interests and intervention of several worldwide powers, such as Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States, as well as numerous regional actors including the interventions by Iran, Pakistan, and others. The geostrategic location of Afghanistan in Central Asia is considered to be the leading cause of outside intervention in most of these literary works (Farah 2001, Coleman 2002, Crews & Tarzi 2009, Maley 2020).

The weak central state and extensive culture of poverty have led the Afghans to engage in political activities wholly rooted in their ethnicities, sectarianism, and tribal identity. The development of identity politics is a vibrant approach in Afghanistan with two interrelated phases: before and after the collapse of the Taliban regime (1996-2001).

Before the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Taliban never accommodated other ethnic groups except for their own in the government, which shows ethnic supremacy and hatred against other ethnicities. During the Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001, all government departments were under the control of the Taliban. Besides that, the Taliban always ignored the wishes of the people, disrespected religious minorities, imprisoned and tortured non-Pashtuns, etc. The atrocities that the Taliban committed deepened the divisions and increased the ethnic hatred in Afghanistan. This political stand-off is recent, albeit historically repeated. After the Taliban regime, from 2001 to 2021, both presidents (Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai) were Pashtuns. The Afghanistan national anthem and monetary unit were all in the Pashto language. The imposition of the word "Afghan" is not always acceptable to non-Pashtuns because they believe that "Afghan" is synonymous with Pashtun. Karzai and Ahmadzai did not always pay attention to the wishes of the non-Pashtun people. This factor has also caused the fragmentation and bitter divisions between the ethnicities in Afghanistan over the last 20 years.

Identity in state-building post-2001

Afghanistan had a golden chance for state building after 2001. Unfortunately, instead of building government institutions based on merit, they divided it based on ethnicity and identity, which increased the ethnic divisions among the people. Much of the political growth in post-Taliban Afghanistan has been influenced by the power relations between ethnic and sectarian groups. Eventually, after the intervention of the United States in late 2001, the longstanding inter-ethnic factional conflict in Afghanistan ended. The Taliban government had its authority taken away. The United States-backed Northern Alliance played a crucial role in defeating the Taliban; the coalition, which was predominantly non-Pashtun, also seized power after the Taliban's defeat in 2001 (Maley 2020). Smaller ethnic groups were marginalized, and the Taliban were ignored entirely (Simonsen 2006). When the Taliban government collapsed, the question of who should be Afghanistan's next leader became essential because it needed an internal political resolution between multiple ethnicities and sectarian groups, as well as an external consensus between worldwide powers and neighboring Afghan countries (Simonsen 2006).

It proved to be challenging to bring together different Afghan groups while being essential to ensuring an internal process of state-building. Due to decades of conflict and war, these groups could not come together to discuss the country's issues and the future government, so they needed external mediation. Realizing this problem and with the support of the United States, the United Nations (UN) appointed Lakhdar Brahimi to represent the U.N. with an 'extended mandate that includes the overall authority for the United Nations humanitarian and political efforts in Afghanistan' (United Nations 2001). A series of meetings were held between the different factions in Afghanistan, which was a landmark in the establishment of a prominent political settlement between the Afghan representatives in the Bonn Conference (the Conference) in 2001. The Conference symbolized the first significant move toward state-building in Afghanistan as it made room for dialog and affected the Afghan representatives' later policy resolutions. This agreement set the basis for the country's new political arrangements. Even though the Taliban was isolated since they had received a lack of international recognition, they became dissatisfied. Mullah Omar (the founder of the Taliban who died in 2013 in Pakistan) also recognized criticism as being even more complex than the military approach to the Taliban movement.

The United Nations held the Conference with solid support from the United States and its partners (Singh 2008). It brought together various ethnic and sectarian groups from Afghanistan, like the Rome Group of King Zahir, the Northern Alliance, and the Peshawar group of Pir Gailani. Delegates from the Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbeks, headed by Yunus Qanooni, were sent by the Northern Alliance for the Conference. Their leader (Northern Alliance), Burhanuddin Rabbani, was the official President of Afghanistan and did not take part in the Bonn Conference, Burhanuddin Rabbani also insisted that any decision on Afghanistan's future must be made inside the country (Farnsworth 2001). The group, which was from

Rome, was a Pashtun group and faithful to Zahir Shah (the former king of Afghanistan), highlighting the influence of the Durrani tribe in Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. The attendance of these groups at the Conference underlines the continuity of identity politics between ethnicity and sectarianism, and the manifestation of the external interference in Afghanistan's society and politics.

The Bonn Agreement established the foundations of an interim administration in Afghanistan (Maley 2020). This agreement was not a peace accord because the Afghan representatives were not at war at the time. Instead, it was a possible roadmap to re-establishing the interim authority of Afghan representatives at the Conference. The content of the agreement focused on four issues. The first issue was appreciation being given to the Afghan Mujahidin (Northern Alliance) regarding their resistance against the Soviet Union and against the Taliban. Second, was that power should be transferred to a new interim authority by President Burhanuddin Rabbani. The third focus was on a sustainable transition process, specifically on strengthening the institutions of the Afghan state. To support the structure of the Transitional Authority and the formulation of a new constitution for Afghanistan, the decision to establish an emergency Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) was approved at the Conference (Singh 2008). Finally, at the Bonn Conference itself, the international community was called upon to assist Afghanistan in creating and training Afghan security forces (The Bonn Agreement 2001, Childress 2005, Maley 2020).

The selection process for interim administration members was a complex undertaking. The consensus among Afghans and representatives from other nations was that a Pashtun should assume the role of president in the interim administration. This agreement reflects the historical dominance of the Pashtun ethnic group in Afghanistan. There were differing opinions regarding which Pashtun candidate the majority of Afghan representatives could trust. One potential candidate was Abdul Haq, a Pashtun who was perceived as capable of unifying the Pashtuns against Mullah Omar. Another possible candidate, Abdul Sattar Sirat, represented the historical dominance of the Durrani tribe in Afghanistan and remained loyal to King Zahir. Sirat criticized the Mujahidin and the Northern Alliance for their move to Kabul and their control over the Presidential Palace. Ultimately, Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun from the Durrani tribe, was appointed as the head of the interim government (Maley 2020). The remaining members of the administration mainly consisted of former Mujahidin fighters from Afghanistan, while Tajik ethnic representatives took charge of crucial ministries such as defense, interior affairs, foreign affairs, and the intelligence service (Keane 2016).

The Mujahidin's praises and the Tajik dominance in the main ministries had a major impact on the political progress that followed. The failure of the delegates in the Bonn Agreement to acknowledge the destructive actions of various Mujahidin groups during the civil war in Afghanistan in the early 1990s was evident in their praise of said groups. This omission prevented a meaningful process of peace and justice reconciliation, which could have allowed society to reflect on past failures and ensure political accountability (Wilson 2001). Like any society in transition, Afghanistan still needed to confront its memories of hatred, conflict, and war in order to achieve justice (De Brito et al. 2001). The Afghan delegates and the international community prioritized peace over justice by commending the Afghan Mujahidin's role in the Bonn Agreement, as noted by Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations envoy to Afghanistan (Edwards 2011). Such a concentration on peace without a process to guarantee justice proved to be an enormous defect in state-building. It put previous offenders in an advantageous position over the victims. In particular, the Mujahidin's praise in the Bonn Agreement barred any significant effort when it came to achieving national political reconciliation.

Mujahidin's praise led to a divided administration (Childress 2005). It split the Afghan technocrats with the Mujahidin on an ideological front. Afghan technocrats, who had long been absent from the country, followed a rational-legal legitimacy emphasizing their skills. In contrast, Mujahidin's legitimacy had its roots in the resistances against the Soviet Union and the Taliban (Childress 2005, Maley 2020). The technocrats tried to play an important part because they saw themselves as a community of Afghan people with the abilities and expertise to develop government organizations. The Mujahidin always defended their commitment to the war against the Soviet Union and the Taliban, and highly criticized the Afghan technocrats who had spent a long time in the West. This split of the members relates to the identity politics perspective regarding the contradiction between the subjective and objective

features of groups. The Tajik ethnic group dominated the ministries, and the split within the members was exacerbated. For the majority of Pashtuns, including Karzai and the other Pashtun technocrats, the domination of Tajiks was unacceptable (Keane 2016). Pashtuns from the south and east felt marginalized by the interim administration, and consolidated their tribal networks to achieve their political goals. In early 2001, Afghanistan experienced an unprecedented event where the majority of Tajiks were running state institutions and the Pashtuns did not have a leading role. Karzai himself was a Pashtun and the head of government but it was unacceptable for Karzai and other Pashtuns that Tajiks were at the forefront of most key ministries. The situation changed gradually, where most Tajiks were ousted, and Tajik anti-Taliban commanders were assassinated.

After the interim government held elections in which Hamid Karzai was re-elected as president, he began to remove the influence of Tajiks in the government. The reason for this was the Pashtun domination, which has historical roots, and the various pressures from the Pashtun parties on him to take critical ministries from the Tajiks. Karzai gradually removed the Tajiks from power, and anti-Taliban Tajik figures were mysteriously assassinated during Hamid Karzai's place in power. This continued until Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai became the president in a fraudulent election. Ashraf Ghani was an anti-Tajik figure and a Pashtun nationalist, and he completely removed the Tajiks and other ethnic groups from power. The reason for this was the continuation of the Pashtun ethnic group's historical domination in Afghanistan which resulted in a deepened division among the ethnicities in the country.

The exclusion of the Taliban from the Bonn conference led to the widespread grievance and revival of the Taliban in 2003 (Keane 2016). In 2001 when the Taliban regime fell, it was widely believed that the Taliban had been defeated and that the international community, including Afghan representatives at the Bonn Conference, saw no need to include the Taliban in state-building. The exclusion of the Taliban opened up an opportunity for them in Pakistan and in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan to reorganize their group.

The Taliban reorganized members and fighters in Pakistan to stop the Afghan state-building process (Childress 2005). Their ongoing pressure on the Government of Afghanistan and terrorist attacks against the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) sides led by the US and NATO changed the Afghan Government's stance. The Taliban insurgency continues and threatens the lives of Afghans and the existence of the Afghan state (Childress 2005, Fukuyama & Ikenberry 2006, Goodson 2014, Maley 2020). The Taliban's continuing attacks on both Afghans and foreigners show the weakness of the Kabul government's ability to ensure security and stabilization.

In the post-2001 era, it is Pashtunism's desire for domination that relates to when the Taliban tried to mobilize the Pashtun people by emphasizing that the Pashtuns have been marginalized, mainly during the first period of Karzai's rule. This was often considered to be dominated by northerners or non-Pashtuns. The ethnic imbalance that the Pashtuns claimed later changed in favor of the Pashtuns but the Taliban continued to beat the drum of Pashtun identity. Over time, the Taliban adopted a similar strategy in northern Afghanistan, where the majority are Tajiks and the Pashtuns are a minority (Rubin 2010).

In the context of identity formation and identity politics, Sawyer (2006) emphasized the role of symbolic power. With this concept in mind, since 2001, some ethnic groups in Afghanistan have attempted to create a hero from their ethnic group who is symbolically powered to unite them. For the Tajiks, it is Ahmad Shah Massoud, for Hazaras, Abdul Ali Mazari, for Pashtuns Najibullah, and other past kings are also considered heroes, respectively. In Afghanistan, hero production has the potential to unite members of every ethnic group. However, it strengthens and exacerbates social divisions because most of these heroes are not legitimized at the national level. Most writers and so-called intellectuals in Afghanistan have devoted their time and energy to producing their ethnic heroes and writing histories from their ethnic perspective. It is noteworthy that the only national hero of Afghanistan is Ahmad Shah Massoud, nicknamed a national hero by Hamid Karzai, the ex-president of Afghanistan. Ahmad Shah Massoud fought against the Soviet invasion and against terrorism, especially the Taliban, and was assassinated by two Arab terrorists in 2001.

The findings illustrate how ethnic favoritism, domination, and political exclusion in Afghanistan reflects Weale's (1999) idea that societies involve both cooperation and conflict. Diamond's (2006) theory further explains how undemocratic leadership in post-conflict settings intensifies ethnic tensions and undermines inclusive state-building. Together, these theories show that Afghanistan's post-2001 governance, elections, and identity politics were shaped by leadership-driven ethnocentrism and weak institutions, offering insights into how leadership and institutional design affect national cohesion and democratic legitimacy in multi-ethnic, post-conflict contexts.

Conclusion

Afghanistan is a multiethnic country where ethnic identity has long shaped the political landscape. While ethnic diversity is a common feature of many states, in Afghanistan, divisions between major groups such as Pashtuns and Tajiks, alongside other minorities, have been historically entrenched and politically manipulated. These divisions deepened following the Soviet withdrawal and the eruption of civil war. Subsequent regimes, including that of the Taliban, have exploited ethnicity to consolidate power, particularly through Pashtun nationalist ideologies. This manipulation of ethnic identity has not only undermined national solidarity but also enabled the Taliban to mobilize support among marginalized rural Pashtun populations.

Between 2001 and 2021, the Karzai and Ghani administrations failed to address these underlying ethnic tensions. Instead, they reinforced them through exclusionary governance and ethnically based appointments. The research findings clearly show that ethnicity remained the core axis of political power during this period. Government institutions were shaped not by meritocracy or citizenship-based representation but by ethnic affiliations. This pattern of exclusivity and favoritism contributed significantly to state fragility and opened the door for the Taliban's resurgence.

This study reveals that the political instrumentalization of ethnicity by Afghan leaders systematically reinforced ethnic divisions rather than mitigating them. It highlights how exclusionary governance, ethnic favoritism in appointments, and leadership-driven ethnocentrism has undermined democratic legitimacy and weakened national cohesion. Another new finding is the role of symbolic hero production in consolidating ethnic identity which, while uniting specific groups, has further exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions. The findings are directly derived from an analysis of the political appointments, presidential elections, governance structures, and historical patterns of ethnic domination in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. By focusing on these empirical data points, this study answers the research objectives by showing how ethnicity was politicized, how identity politics emerged, and how leadership decisions have affected inter-ethnic relations and state-building efforts. Ultimately, ethnic division continues to pose a fundamental challenge to stability, governance, and national unity in Afghanistan. Addressing this challenge requires a genuine commitment to inclusive governance, citizen-centered politics, and the dismantling of ethnicity as a tool of power.

This study has limitations, including its focus on the 2001–2021 period and reliance on secondary sources, which may not capture all ongoing political developments. Nevertheless, it contributes to understanding ethnic politics and state fragility in post-conflict Afghanistan. Practical implications include guiding policymakers and international actors on promoting inclusive governance, avoiding ethnically biased appointments, and supporting strategies to reduce inter-ethnic tensions to strengthen national cohesion and prevent future conflict.

References

- Alcoff LM & Mohanty SP (2006) Reconsidering identity politics: An introduction. In: *Identity politics reconsidered*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403983398_1.
- Alesina A & La Ferrara E (2005) Ethnic diversity and economic performance. *Journal of economic literature* 43 (3):762-800. <https://doi.org/10.1257/002205105774431243>.

- Anderson JW & Strand RF (1978) Ethnic processes and intergroup relations in contemporary Afghanistan. Papers Presented at the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association at New York City. Afghanistan Council, The Asia Society New York. https://doi.org/10.2458/azu_acku_pamphlet_ds354_5_a53_1978.
- Anwar-ul-Haq Ahady (1995) The decline of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan. *Asian Survey*, 621-634. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645419>.
- Barfield T (2023) *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691248059>.
- Bilgrami A (2006) Notes toward the definition of identity. *Daedalus* 135 (4):5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1162/daed.2006.135.4.5>.
- Bonn Agreement (2001) Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions. Bonn Agreement. <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/9444>.
- Caplovitz D (1968) La Vida: A Puerto Rican family in the culture of poverty—San Juan and New York by Oscar Lewis (Review). *American Sociological Review* 33 (1):144-146. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2092258>.
- Childress FJ (2005) Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present. In: Dorronsoro G (trans). John King. New York: Columbia University Press. 370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2006.tb00020.x>.
- Coleman J (2002) Taliban: Islam, oil and the new great game in Central Asia. *European Business Review* 14 (3):202. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ebv.2002.05414cab.007>.
- Crews RD & Tarzi A (ed) (2009) *The Taliban and The Crisis of Afghanistan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v27i4.1289>.
- De Brito AB, Enríquez CG, & Aguilar P (ed) (2001) *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies*. Oxford: OUP Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199240906.001.0001>.
- Diamond L (2006) Promoting democracy in post-conflict and failed states lessons and challenges. *Taiwan journal of democracy* 2 (2):93-115. <https://doi.org/10.29654/TJD.200612.0005>.
- Diamond LJ (1990) Three paradoxes of democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 1 (3):48-60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1990.0047>.
- Duijzings G (2000) Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo. New York: Columbia University Press. 12-13. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0048-721x\(03\)00048-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0048-721x(03)00048-4).
- Edwards LM (2011) State-building in Afghanistan: a case showing the limits? *International review of the Red Cross* 92 (880):967-991. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383111000099>.
- Farah CE (2001) The Taliban: War, religion & the new order in Afghanistan by Peter Marsden. *Digest of Middle East Studies* 10 (2):50-52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1949-3606.2001.tb00413.x>.
- Farnsworth E (2001) Afghan alternatives. PBS News, 9 October. [Accessed 28 March 2025]. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/afghan-alternatives>.
- Friese H (ed) (2002) *Identities: Time, Difference and Boundaries* (vol 2). New York: Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.3167/9781571814746>.
- Fukuyama F (2004) The imperative of state-building. *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2):17-31. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0026>.
- Fukuyama F & Ikenberry GJ (2006) Nation-building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq. *Foreign Affairs* 85 (3):152. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031980>.
- Gibbs DN (1995) The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and collapse in the international system by Barnett R. Rubin. New Haven: Yale University Press 1995. 378. *American Political Science Review* 89 (4):1048-1049. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2082598>.
- Giustozzi A (2009) The eye of the storm: cities in the vortex of Afghanistan's civil wars. *Crisis States Research Centre Working Papers Series 2* (62). Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, London. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/28123>.
- Goodson LP (2014) The new great game: Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan after 2014. *Asia policy* 17 (1):33-39. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2014.0019>.
- Hasin BA (2024) The impact of ethnicity on the political structure of Afghanistan with the approach of political liberalism by John Rawls (2001–2022). *Baharestan Scientific Research Quarterly Journal* 1 (2):33-54. <https://doi.org/10.61438/bsrqj.v1i2.66>.

- Hintjens H (2008) Post-genocide identity politics in Rwanda. *Ethnicities* 8 (1):5-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796807087017>.
- Hobsbawm E (1996) Identity politics and the Left. *New Left Review* (217):38-47. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i217/articles/eric-hobsbawm-identity-politics-and-the-left.pdf>.
- Hutchinson J & Smith AD (ed) (1994) *Nationalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Idris A (2005) *Conflict and Politics of Identity in Sudan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403981073>.
- Ishtiaq T, Asghar A, Raza S, & Khan Achakzai N (2024) Fragmented identities: The impact of ethnic divides on Afghanistan's political instability. *Journal of Management Practices, Humanities and Social Sciences* 8 (3):154-163. <https://doi.org/10.33152/jmphss-8.3.14>.
- Keane C (2016) Nation-building and the Afghan state. In: *US nation-building in Afghanistan*. London: Routledge. 35-60. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315548623-3>.
- Khazeni A (2006) Modern Afghanistan: A history of struggle and survival by Amin Saikal. *Iranian Studies* 39 (4):561-564. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021086200022374>.
- Lawrence A (2008) Iraq in fragments: The occupation and its legacy by Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala. *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (3):582-583. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592708081759>.
- Maley W (2020) *The Afghanistan Wars*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4039-1840-6>.
- Moya PM (2006) What's identity got to do with it? Mobilizing identities in the multicultural classroom. In: *Identity Politics Reconsidered*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 96-117. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403983398_7.
- Nurkulov N (2020) Historic roots and impact of ethnic Uzbeks on political circumstances in Afghanistan. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science* 20 (F6):19-29. <https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/3398>.
- Rubin A (2010) Taliban driven from Afghan District. *New York Times*, 1 June. [Accessed 25 May]. <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/world/asia/02kabul.html>.
- Rubin BR (1992) Political elites in Afghanistan: Rentier state building, rentier state wrecking. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1):77-99. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800061102>.
- Rubin BR (2009) Afghanistan: From Holy War to Civil War by Olivier Roy. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1):123-125. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800064412>.
- Safi N (2007) Soviet military tactics in Afghanistan. *Central Asian Survey* 5 (1):61-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634938608400547>.
- Sahar A & Sahar A (2021) Ethnic politics and political violence in post-2001 Afghanistan: the 2014 presidential election. *Terrorism and political violence* 33 (8):1692-1712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2019.1642199>.
- Saikal A (2012) Afghanistan: The status of the Shi'ite Hazara minority. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32 (1):80-87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2012.665623>.
- Saikal A (2016) *Weak States, Strong Societies Power and Authority in the New World Order*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755621811>.
- Sawyer P (2006) Identity as calling: Martin Luther King on War. In: *Identity Politics Reconsidered*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. 69-77. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403983398_5.
- Sharan T (2013) The dynamics of informal political networks and statehood in post-2001 Afghanistan: a case study of the 2010–2011 special election court crisis. *Central Asian Survey* 32 (3):336-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2013.843301>.
- Simonsen SG (2006) Ethnicising Afghanistan?: inclusion and exclusion in post-Bonn institution building. *Third World Quarterly* 25 (4):707-729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590410001678942>.
- Singh KR (2008) Post-War Afghanistan: Reconstructing a failed state. *Strategic Analysis* 28 (4):546-560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160408450158>.
- Sørensen G (2004) Nationhood and identity: Community beyond the State?. In: *The Transformation of the State* (pp. 83-102). Palgrave: London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-21533-7_5.
- The Bonn Agreement (2001) Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions. *Government - Afghan Bonn Agreement*. [Accessed 20 May 2025]. <http://www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>.
- United Nations (2001) Lakhdar Brahimi Appointed Special Representative for Afghanistan. United Nations. [Accessed 20 May 2025]. <https://press.un.org/en/2001/afg160.doc.htm>.

- Weale A (1999) Introduction: Democracy and political theory. In: Democracy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27291-4_1.
- Wilson RA (2001) Justice and legitimacy in the South African transition. The politics of memory: Transitional justice in democratizing societies 190-217. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199240906.003.0007>.
- Wimmer A & Schetter C (2003) Putting state-formation first: Some recommendations for reconstruction and peace-making in Afghanistan. Journal of International Development: The Journal of the Development Studies Association 15 (5):525-539. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1002>.
- Yunespour AR (2011) Identity politics: A case study of Afghanistan. Thesis, University of Sydney, Camperdown Sydney. <http://hdl.handle.net/2123/8263>.

Authors Biographies

Mohammad Ayub Mirdad is a lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga. His research interests focus on international conflict and peace, non-traditional security issues, and globalization studies.

Bagong Suyanto is a professor of sociology at Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia. His academic work focuses on poverty, inequality, children's rights, youth issues, and development studies. He has published over 26 books and numerous journal articles, and has received multiple research grants from national institutions. Recognized as one of Indonesia's leading social scientists.

Muhammad Umer Hayat is a professor. He earned his PhD with distinction from the University of Toulouse, France, and also holds a Master's in International Politics from France and a Master's in International Relations from Pakistan. Dr Hayat has published more than 30 research papers in national and international research journals. Dr. Hayat has held various high-level positions at different institutions like Head of the Department, Director Quality Assurance. After serving as different committee and activities like Quality Assurance, MS and PhD Admissions, In-Charge of Departmental Admissions, PGP Coordinator at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Currently he is serving as Director Post Graduate Programs at Bahria University Head office looking after Post Graduate admissions, research, thesis evaluations, process of the local and foreign evaluations and completion of the programs. His research interests include ethnonational politics and religio-political challenges, blue economy and political economy of Pakistan.