



RESEARCH PAPER

Re-Emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan: A study of Socio-economic Impacts on Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the socioeconomic effects of the Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan on Pakistan, specifically with regard to commerce, refugee flows, and economic stability. The Taliban quickly reclaimed control of Afghanistan after the US withdrew in 2021, drastically changing the regional environment. Pakistan, Afghanistan's closest neighbour, has been directly impacted by societal pressures, disruptions in cross-border trade, and refugee movements. The study employs a qualitative research technique and draws from academic literature, government papers, policy assessments, scholar interviews, and pertinent media sources. This study examines how developments in Afghanistan inevitably affect Pakistan's socioeconomic sphere, especially after the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. This is due to the long and porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the shared language and cultural ties among border populations.

KEYWORDS Pakistan, Afghanistan, Taliban, TTP, US withdrawal, Socio-economic

Introduction

The biggest and most critical aspect of the Afghan crisis is the influx and prolonged stay of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The millions of Afghan refugees have put an extraordinary strain on Pakistan's society, economy, education and health systems, which have been severely affected. A large number of Afghan refugees claim that the Pashtun belt of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is their homeland, meaning they do not recognize the Durand Line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Religion is a powerful and prominent aspect of every society. The Taliban have been a powerful group in Afghanistan and the Taliban's religious beliefs and their own interpretation of those beliefs are causing religious extremism in Afghan society and affecting Pakistan's society as well. Along with the social impacts, Pakistan's economy has also come under severe pressure due to the continuous and prolonged Afghan conflict. Some scholars are of the opinion that the economic activities of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are beneficial for the Pakistani economy particularly in terms of grey economy as it is a source of business activity and income for many people but there is another aspect to it that is loss to government exchequer due to ineffective taxation (Afnan & Sultan, 2024; Muzaffar, et. al., 2019). The majority of the people in Pakistan live in the Punjab province, which has a very rich culture that is very different from the culture of Afghanistan. Under the influence of religious extremism, Afghan culture is also facing many challenges, and the same challenges are facing Pakistani society because religious extremism directly affects the socio economic outlook of a society.

Literature Review

Abbas, (2014) book "The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier" explores the Taliban's comeback following the September 11 attacks, with a special emphasis on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier as a major hub for extremism and militancy. Abbas contends that regional factors, especially the existence of safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas and the policies of regional governments, contributed to the Taliban's comeback. The study also examines the socio-political and theological elements that contribute to extremism, such as the function of madrassas, pervasive poverty, and shoddy governance.

Abbas, (2023) examines the causes of the Taliban's comeback, their tactics for taking back control, and the effects of their rule on Afghanistan and the surrounding area, especially Pakistan. The book emphasises Pakistan's complicated and historically tense relationship with the Taliban and how its prior support during the insurgency has led to political, economic, and security challenges within Pakistan. Abbas also issues a warning over the resurgence of militant groups like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, which pose a threat to Pakistan's internal stability.

In his book *Post-Taliban Afghanistan*, Riphenburg, (2004) explores the socioeconomic circumstances in Afghanistan following the US invasion, paying special attention to women's situation. According to the report, some societal shifts, such as women showing up in public without the traditional burqa in some urban areas, originally caught the world community off guard (Muzaffar, et al., 2021). The study, which draws on Janet Z. Giele's analysis, assesses women's status using variables like family structure, healthcare facilities, and fertility while also recognising more general areas where gender authority varies, such as education, governance, work, family life, health, culture, and fertility.

Saleem and Shoib , (2021) in their research "Afghanistan: Decades of collective trauma, ongoing humanitarian crises, Taliban rulers, and mental health of the displaced population" examined the dire humanitarian and psychological effects of the protracted war in Afghanistan. Nearly half of the approximately 30 million people living in Afghanistan suffer from trauma and psychological illnesses as a result of decades of war since the Soviet invasion. However, only 10% of the population has access to psychiatric treatment because of a poor healthcare system, and research shows that 34.5% of Afghan refugees in Iran also suffer from severe mental health issues.

Shabbir, Raza and Butt, (2022) wrote in Their study "The Re-Emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan and its Impacts on the Indo-Pak Geo-Strategic Politics" that the Taliban's quick takeover drastically altered regional strategic dynamics, especially the competition between India and Pakistan. Following the American invasion, India made significant investments in Afghanistan's development and the training of Afghan security forces; however, these investments were largely weakened following the U.S. exit and the return of the Taliban. India is still dubious despite the Taliban leadership's assurances that its development initiatives will continue because of Pakistan's longstanding connections to the Taliban.

Economic Impacts

According to the data compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan based on the Federal Bureau of Revenue, in the fiscal year 2017-18, the bilateral trade

between Pakistan and Afghanistan was more than 1750 million US dollars. In the fiscal year 2018-19, the volume of bilateral trade was more than worth of 1828 million dollars. The bilateral trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan during 2019-2020 was more than 1330 million dollars. In the fiscal year 2020-21, the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan was more than 1596 million dollars. In the fiscal year 2021-22, the two countries traded more than 1668 million dollars, in 2022-23 more than 1846 million dollars and in 2023-24 more than 1603 million dollars (MoFA, 2026).

Table 1
Trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan

Fiscal year	Imports	Exports	Total	Balance
2017-18	450.05	1300.33	1750.38	850.28
2018-19	557.70	1270.41	1828.11	712.71
2019-20	472.53	857.49	1330.02	384.96
2020-21	577.49	1018.53	1596.02	441.04
2021-22	801.09	867.12	1,668.21	66.03
2022-23	892.84	953.99	1846.83	61.15
2023-24	538.60	1,064.84	1603.44	526.24

(MoFA, 2026)

It is worth noting that no data on bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is available after the fiscal year 2023-24, while trade has completely ceased due to the closure of the border between the two countries since October 2025. On the other hand, the World Bank website only provides data on bilateral trade between the two countries up to 2019. The main reason for this is the lack of international recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the lack of an integrated banking system (WITS (World Bank), 2020).

In fact, after the August 2021, Afghanistan's differences with Pakistan increased so much due to its support for the TTP and the incidents of border infiltration by others increased so much that Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan in October 2025 (France 24, 2025; Muzaffar, et. al., 2021). In the last week of February 2026, Pakistan announced that it had attacked the bases of the TTP and other terrorist organizations inside Afghanistan. After that, an open war started between the two countries after Afghanistan's regular attack on Pakistan (Lamb & Janjua, 2026).

The influx of Afghan refugees towards Pakistan has resulted in animosity between the refugees and the local population, as well as competition between the locals for resources such as food, water, and livelihood. This has had detrimental effects on health, education, and the local population's demand for proper treatment, which has caused resentment and anger (Anwar, Hassan, & Kakar, 2021; Bibi, et. al., 2023).

Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa both have poorer populations than Sindh or Punjab. These provinces' employment has been impacted by the massive migration of Afghan refugees, which has had an impact on their economic situation. In order to obtain accommodation, Afghan migrants have agreed to labour for less money than locals. Due to the increased demand for necessities brought on by the refugee inflow, local residents are beginning to experience inflation (Anwar, Hassan, & Kakar, 2021, p. 129).

It is said that Afghan refugees' business activities boost Pakistan's economy, yet there is more to this story. According to Professor Dr. Ijaz Khatak Afghan refugees are not burden on Pakistani economy. He said in his interview with the researcher;

“As far as the concern of economy, I think afghan refugees are not burden on Pakistan because international community is helping via UNHCR to take care afghan refugees. Many refugees are receiving foreign remittances from their family members in Europe or USA. Afghan refugees spend this amount in Pakistan which is the positive contribution in Pakistani economy. I think final calculation of this debit credit is in favour of Pakistan” (Dr. Khatak, 2024).

According to research conducted by the Afghan Analysts Network, Afghan traders in different Pakistani cities do not pay any taxes to the Pakistani government; as a result, their production costs are cheaper, and their earnings are higher than those of local businesspeople. Because of this, even though they are billionaires, they are not subject to taxes, whereas local investors or businessmen suffer losses, which makes businesspeople and the business community anxious. (Roehrs, 2015)

Terrorist assaults have escalated in Pakistan since August 2021. Attacks on labour and commercial operations have heightened tensions between Punjab and Balochistan. Near the Chamalang Coalfield in the Duki area of Balochistan, on November 4, 2024, terrorists set fire to trucks transporting coal from Balochistan to Punjab and opened fire, gravely injuring the truck drivers. Al Jazeera released a thorough documentary on the attacks that claimed the lives of 70 Punjabi residents in a single week on August 28, 2024. Al Jazeera released a thorough documentary on the attacks that claimed the lives of 70 Punjabi residents in a single week on August 28, 2024 (Hussain A. , 2024).

Any capitalist, regardless of nation or society, avoids trading or investing in areas where there is uncertainty because of instability, unrest, or terrorism. The first significant BLA-related occurrence in the region that received international media coverage was the martyrdom of eighteen soldiers in a BLA attack in Kalat on January 31, 2025 (Mehmood, 2025). Economic hardship and social discontent are inevitable in such circumstances.

Pakistan has frequently blocked the Pakistan-Afghan border since the Taliban's comeback in Afghanistan in an effort to stop terrorist activities and reduce smuggling (RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal, 2023). Due to inaction against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan militants living in Afghanistan, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been totally closed since October 2025 and is still closed as of 21st December 2025 (Khan T. , 2025). Afghan businesses and exporters suffer significant losses as a result of the border restriction, which causes the commodities coming from Afghanistan to rot. Furthermore, Pakistanis whose livelihoods depend on the availability of these food commodities experience economic uncertainty and suffering as a result of this circumstance (Herbert & Idris, 2024, p. 2) (Ghazi, 2017).

In addition to fostering positive and healthy social attitudes, tourism has a significant economic impact too. Pakistan and Afghanistan are geographically apart, but they have a shared history. People from Afghanistan have been travelling to Pakistan and India, or the United Subcontinent, for generations. Social relationships are just as vital as trade. Hazrat Ali Hajveri, also known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, the most well-known Sufi saint of the subcontinent and a revered figure among Sunni Muslims worldwide, moved to Lahore from Afghanistan (Hajwiri, 1936, p. 27).

There are other locations in Afghanistan that are very appealing and fascinating to tourists, such as the birthplace of Hazrat Ali Hajveri and a number of historic mosques and Sufi shrines. Additionally, a number of historic Buddhist sites, such as the well-known Buddha sculptures at Bamiyan, may attract visitors from all over the world.

Afghanistan has seen almost no tourism since the Soviet Union's intervention. Since the Taliban administration was reinstated, the situation has further changed. Similar to the old Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan, ancient shrines all around the nation are in danger of being destroyed because the Taliban, who are influenced by Saudi Salafi doctrine, view visiting Sufi shrines as an innovation, or a sin (Abouzeid, 2010).

The Taliban's rigid interpretation of Islam may discourage travellers looking for a more relaxed and tolerant vacation experience. Because of this, a number of nations occasionally issue travel advice cautioning their citizens against visiting Pakistan (Government of Canada, 2025) (U.S. Department of State, 2024).

Regarding Pakistan's treatment of Afghan refugees, there is a widespread belief that the country receives enormous sums of money from international organisations on behalf of these refugees, although this is untrue. Managing three million refugees is a difficult undertaking, costly, and demands administrative resources for which there is insufficient international support. Pakistan only gets funding for officially registered refugees, the true number of refugees in Pakistan was nearly twice as high prior to the repatriation of Afghan refugees. The Refugee International claimed that the United Nations demanded 384 million US dollar for Afghan refugees in Pakistan to implement Afghan Response Plan (ARP). However, a meagre amount of only 4.6 percent was given, according to a July 2023 study published by Refugees International (Cone & Khan, 2023, p. 13).

Threat to Nation State and Culture

Despite the worst riots and murders that occurred in the unified Punjab during the subcontinent's split, the people of Indian and Pakistani Punjab find solace and joy in their relationships and feelings with one another because of several similarities. The shared culture and civilisation is the sole cause. When individuals from the two places come together, they experience a unique connection, or at the very least, they are not strangers. This is amply demonstrated by the construction of the Kartarpur Corridor in Punjab, Pakistan that is also seen as good gesture by Indian Punjab. (Singh, 2021, p. 202).

In a similar vein, Pashtuns in Pakistan and Afghanistan's border regions are comfortable socialising with one another. Movement across this border has not historically been restricted or interfered with by the state (Hussain, Mahmood , Haider, Afzal, & Aleem, 2023, p. 47). Because of this, residents of these locations have no trouble conducting business or even getting married. The fact that we live in a nation-state era is the other side of this debate. Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations were never cordial (Idrees, 2024, p. 1). Due to shared interests, ties between the two nations were amicable during the first Afghan war. Due to the TTP, relations between the two nations have been quite tense since August 2021 (Bashir, 2023, p. 102). Afghanistan's Taliban government and population oppose Pakistan's desire to administer the country's border properly. They reject the Durand Line as Pakistan and Afghanistan's international border. Unofficially, Mullah Kalimullah claimed in a social media video that was later removed that Afghan nationals in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are in their own country. Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Taliban administration in Afghanistan, said that the statement of Mullah Kalimullah's did not represent the Taliban government's official stance when the researcher questioned him about it. He was not ready to recognize the Durand Line as an international border. He stated:

“This is not the position of the Islamic Emirate, these are the views of the Afghan people. It is possible that Pakistan also has similar views about us. A few days ago, the interim information minister of Balochistan, Jan Achakzai, also made some nasty remarks about Afghanistan. We consider his words as individual opinions because we do not consider Jan Achakzai’s opinion as the opinion of Pakistan. The Durand Line is not a recent issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, it has a long historical background. Both nations can resolve this issue. This is possible only when friendly relations are established between the two countries” (Mujahid, 2023).

Additionally, the researcher had the chance to interview some Afghan refugees who view Pakistan's Pakhtunkhwa province as a part of their native country Afghanistan. Ali Ahmad Zai (born in Pakistan), who currently resides in Manchester, UK, represents one such group. Fifteen years ago, Ali immigrated to the UK from Pakistan. In the early 1980s, Ali's parents left Kunduz. Ali claims that the Pashtuns' homeland is the region on both sides of the Durand Line. Afghan refugees cannot be forcibly removed by the Pakistani government (Zai, 2025).

Threat to Women Rights and Girls

Most people in Punjab province Hyderabad and Karachi, are not conservative. These regions have a higher education ratio than KPK and Balochistan (Govt of Pakistan, 2023-24, p. 166). Unlike in Pashtun society, women are not restricted from leaving their houses. Girls are attending educational institutions, colleges, and universities. They work for different organisations, do business, and teach at educational institutions. Here, women also have a relatively easy time playing their part in both provincial and national politics. Two notable examples of this are Maryam Nawaz Sharif, who is serving as Chief Minister of Punjab since Feb. 2024 (Ahmad, 2024), and former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2024).

In contrast, the majority of women are confined to their houses in the Pakistani regions of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which border Afghanistan. In contemporary Pashtun customs and culture, women's education is neglected and leaving the home is frowned upon. The Pashtun regions of Afghanistan have an even more intense culture. The border regions of Pakistan are similarly affected by Afghanistan's ban on girls attending school (Noreen, Khan, & Noreen, 2023). The young ladies may already be seen riding motorcycles on the streets in Punjab, Karachi, and Hyderabad, while such practice is rarely seen in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Arab News, 2024) (Hasan, 2023). Women were impacted by the rise in terrorist attacks in these regions since August 2021. Although some conservative religious beliefs have undoubtedly become more prevalent in Pakistan, however, the majority of Pakistani people are progressive and always talk about gender equality and support women's rights. Eight-year-old Aina Wazir from North Waziristan is a classic example in this regard. Aina Wazir is an orphan girl with unmatched and God-gifted cricketing talent whose father was martyred by terrorists. When a video of her playing cricket went viral on social media, Peshawar Zalmi owner Javed Afridi expressed his determination to provide her with the best training and include her in his team. But soon after that, the school teacher Zafran Wazir, who had made a video of her playing cricket and made it viral on social media, was abducted. After torturing Zafran Wazir, he was forced to record a video based on forgiveness. Immediately after that, Aina Wazir was shifted to an unidentified place and thus a matchless cricketing talent was wasted. Aina Wazir's example is that of a bud whose fragrance was crushed in the bud before it could spread in society (Mehmood, 2026).

Instability and Talibanization

Reemergence of Taliban has significantly impacted domestic politics of Pakistan. Before sending them back, around 1.7 million refugees out of 2.8 million were registered in Pakistan. Majority of them were reluctant to go back to Afghanistan, their homeland due to multiple reasons. The fact that Afghan migrants were not residing in designated locations posed another threat to Pakistan. There were many Afghan refugees dispersed throughout Pakistan.

According to the Chairman of NADRA, there have been instances in the past where Afghan refugees received computerised National Identity Cards (CNIC) from Pakistan (The Express Tribune, 2018). An Afghan refugee posing as the son of Zaytun Bibi, a Mansehra woman, was given a Pakistani identity card by NADRA officials, according to a report in Pakistan's esteemed Dawn newspaper. NADRA personnel threatened to put Zaytun Bibi in a fraud case and stopped her family's identity cards after she protested about it. The report claims that after the deception was exposed, the Afghan immigrant also threatened Zaytun Bibi (Dawn, 2012).

Fake identity cards were also used by several Afghan nationals to get Pakistani passports. Ten Afghan citizens were detained by British immigration authorities at London's Heathrow Airport in September 2014 for possessing fictitious Pakistani passports and British visas, according to a report published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The paper claims that British authorities complained to the Pakistani government about the attempt by Pakistani FIA officials to stifle the issue (UNHCR, 2023).

Once they have an identity card, Afghan immigrants can easily meddle in Pakistani politics. A person can register to vote and register by obtaining a Pakistani identity card. There have been allegations of illegal Afghan refugees attending Tehreek-e-Insaf protest demonstrations following Pakistan's national elections in 2024. As stated in a press release of Federal Ministry of Interior Pakistan;

“Throughout the protest march from Peshawar to Red Zone Islamabad, violent protestors of PTI aggressively engaged LEAs repeatedly using fire arms and all sorts of other weaponry including steel sling shots, stun grenades, tear gas shells and nail studded batons to force their way to Red Zone Islamabad. This violent protest was primarily orchestrated and logistically & financially sustained and supported by the resources of the government of KP. Alarming, PTI's protest included violent and trained miscreant elements including many illegal Afghan nationals who spearheaded the riots and violent activities throughout the march. These miscreants, employed as violent vanguard, comprised of approximately 1500 hard core fighters working directly under absconder and proclaimed offender.”

Press note added that;

“During this, a vehicle also ran over Rangers personnel performing duty at a check post in Islamabad, resulting in shahadat of three Rangers soldiers and critical injuries to five. Besides, during the violent protest, one policeman embraced shahadat and 232 LEAs personnel were also grievously injured by these miscreants. This violent mob not only attacked security forces but also set multiple police vehicles on fire, showcased fire arms, burnt trees and police tents, damaged properties and created terror among the common citizens.” (Ministry of Interior Government of Pakistan, 2024)

Although such accusations against rival political parties or governments for political purposes are not new in Pakistan, a prominent human rights organization has also verified the Interior Ministry's news release. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's fact-finding committee report on the PTI protest on November 26, 2024, "While the right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed, it must remain within the bounds of the law. Reports indicate that some protesters carried slingshots, tear gas shells, and firearms spotted on occasion." (HRCP, 2025, p. 13)

The commission's report did not address whether or whether Afghan civilians took part in the PTI protests, despite the fact-finding committee's harsh criticism of the government and other issues. This was neither confirmed nor denied by the committee. Additionally, the committee stayed mute on the source of the firearms and tear gas shells.

The regain of power by Taliban in Afghanistan encouraged them to think about establishing the similar style of government in Pakistan as of Afghanistan. In 2020, there were 6,000 TTP fighters in Afghanistan, according to a United Nations estimate. According to statistics, there have been more terrorist attacks and extortion events in Pakistan since August 2021, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The Pakistani government has attributed these incidents to the TTP leadership in Afghanistan (Akhtara & Ahmed, 2023, p. 286). Instead of responding appropriately to Pakistan's demand, the Afghan Taliban, demonstrating their lack of responsibility, suggested that Pakistan deal with the TTP on table (Sayed & Jadoon, 2022, p. 1).

Since discussions with the TTP were conducted during Imran Khan's tenure as prime minister, the TTP's morale was quite strong. Imran Khan has consistently shown sympathy for the TTP. Talks between the TTP and Pakistani government began shortly after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. Arif Alvi, then president of Pakistan claimed in September 2021 that the amnesty could be given to TTP if they would disarm themselves. (Sayed & Jadoon, 2022, p. 1). President Alvi's conditional offer was categorically rejected by the TTP. The TTP claims that their fight would go on until Pakistan adopts Islamic Sharia law. In a statement, the TTP said; "Pardon is usually offered to those who commit crimes, but we are quite proud of our struggle" (Mehsud, 2018).

In actuality, the Afghan Taliban had been mediating these talks for a considerable amount of time. The Pakistani government and the TTP then agreed to a short-term truce in November 2021 that would last until June 2022. In actuality, the Afghan Taliban had been mediating these talks for a considerable amount of time. The Pakistani government and the TTP then agreed to a short-term truce in November 2021 that would last until June 2022 (Sayed & Jadoon, 2022, p. 1).

Through a vote of no confidence, Pakistan's National Assembly overthrew Imran Khan's government a few months after the temporary ceasefire. The TTP was viewed differently by the new coalition government headed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Then, on August 7, a drone attack also killed Umar Khalid Khorasani, a crucial TTP leader and member of the negotiating delegation (Sayed & Jadoon, 2022, p. 1).

Drugs Trafficking

Drug trafficking has dual effects. On the one hand, it creates moral evils in society, which leads to the growth of crime in society. On the other hand, any type of trafficking adversely affects the economy of countries and also endangers legal trade.

Many Afghan families rely on poppy growing as their main source of income, and the opium trade has long been a successful industry in the area, according to the Global Organised Crime Index. Although the drug was outlawed in the 1990s by the Taliban, it has been widely grown there and is being smuggled to nearly every state in the world. More than three-quarters of the world's opium market is said to come from Afghanistan's opium production, which generates billions of dollars in income for the country each year. Approximately 80% of the world's opium users were supplied by Afghanistan, which generated 85% of the world's opium in 2020 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021, p. 4).

Opium poppy cultivation: Afghan farmers also make a significant living from the cultivation of opium poppies and cannabis. The Taliban claimed to have outlawed poppy farming in April 2022 after taking back control of the country (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023, p. 3). However, Dr. William Byrd, an expert on Afghanistan connected to the US Institute of Peace, questions whether this will be sufficient to put a stop to the drug trade (Byrd, 2023).

Organised crime networks are responsible for both the manufacture and trafficking of synthetic narcotics. This is made easier by dishonest public servants. In Afghanistan, drug use is also rising quickly. The usage of medications made locally is therefore a serious issue. K-tablets are one of the new illegal narcotics that the middle and higher classes in Afghanistan are consuming. Ephedra, a crucial wild plant that is used to produce methamphetamine, also comes from Afghanistan. Despite the Taliban's ban on ephedra manufacture, there are indications that meth labs continue to operate, and the local price of methamphetamine has decreased due to increased production (Global Organised Crime Index, 2023).

Afghanistan is one of the biggest producers of drugs, sources of chemicals, and money launderers in the world, according to the US Department of State (US Department of State, 2017). Major drug trafficking networks with origins in Afghanistan and other nations are particularly linked to Pakistan. Because of this, drug traffickers are always searching for ways to extend their current routes. Furthermore, heroin is being trafficked southward via Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to enter Iraq and travel to the Middle East. Furthermore, opium production in Afghanistan is quickly displacing and competing with opium produced and consumed in East and Southeast Asia, according to narcotics interdiction data (Pakistan Customs, 2015, p. 2).

Pakistan, Tajikistan and Iran have been the main destinations for the transportation of illegal drugs from Afghanistan since long. The majority of opium is thought to come from the Helmand and Kandahar districts, and Pakistan has Afghanistan's longest border. As a result, networks based in Pakistan ship drugs to ports and other land/sea crossings over the Durand Line, where they are subsequently provided to customers in Africa, Persian Gulf, Asia and Eastern and Western Europe (Fazli, 2022, p. 2).

Global drug cartels use Pakistan's geography as a transit route for drug trafficking across international borders, according to a policy analysis conducted by the National Initiative Against Organised Crime, Pakistan. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan exclusively goes via Pakistan. Afghanistan continues to be the world's biggest opium producer and opium poppy grower, according to a 2018 research. (National Initiative against Organized Crime, 2020, p. 2).

According to Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) officials, precursor chemicals are most likely transported to Pakistan via China, India, Central Asia, and the United Arab Emirates. Mislabeled acetic anhydride containers account for a portion of the cargo in the Afghan transit trade, according to Pakistani law enforcement agencies (National Initiative against Organized Crime, 2020, p. 3).

However, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghanistan's opium output fell in 2023 compared to 2022; however, observations suggest that it might rise in 2024 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, p. 16). According to a November 2024 UNODC study, Afghanistan's opium poppy production rose by 19% in 2024 over 2023. (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, p. 17).

In retrospect, the crossing of the Pakistan-Afghan border by individuals from both nations is a historic occurrence. For generations, there was no force or power to regulate cross-border activity. In an interview with researcher, Dr. Ijaz Khan Khattak, a former chairman and professor of the University of Peshawar's Department of International Relations, described this incident!

“society and its elements are common on Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan must address this issue via border management but under a concrete and gradual policy. Few years back I suggested on a platform that Pakistan should start to regulate the border gradually. Entry in Pakistan can be allowed on Afghan identity card or on arrival visa for the sake of system. Just in few years Pakistan will be able to implement an appropriate border management and people will follow the proper visa system. Pakistan should make it possible gradual with the help of strong diplomatic efforts with the Taliban” (Dr. Khatak, 2024).

Unfortunately, smuggling is the only source of revenue in the region where Afghanistan borders the Pakistani province of Balochistan. A group of students from Chaman attending Government College University in Faisalabad informed the researcher about this. Chaman is a hub for illicit commerce and products smuggling. This suggests that smuggling has a long history along the Chaman border. But the region has become a free market for the smuggling of goods from other nations, particularly Afghanistan. The group's spokesperson, Ibrahim, expressed dissatisfaction over the stringent procedures implemented to prevent smuggling at the Chaman border, which has jeopardised the livelihood of the local population, as a result of decisions made by the federal government and the military leadership (Ibrahim, 2024).

Both the border's flexibility and the lack of stringent security measures contributed to the smuggling channel's growth over time. It is well known that the region's complicated legal and economic circumstances have forced most people to turn to smuggling in order to survive because there aren't enough legal options for income in the area (Afridi, 2023).

Smuggling is a usual activity for the people living in bordering areas since the state or any provincial government has neglected to provide legal means of education, development, and employment since Pakistan's founding. As a result, people in these areas have begun to view smuggling as their legitimate right rather than an illegal enterprise. According to Dr. Ijaz Ahmed Khattak, a professor;

“it is very important for the people to have a relationship with the state, that it is not just a political act or a matter but a psychological reality. Due to this, ownership of the state is born among the people. When the state does not reach the people, when the state does not have any constructive and welfare intervention in their lives, how can they have any relationship with the state?”. (Dr. Khatak, 2024)

Additionally, the expansion of unofficial marketplaces and the prevailing belief among certain segments of the populace that smuggling is acceptable will promote criminal activity (Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade, p. 3). Afghanistan has taken no significant steps to stop smuggling, particularly since the US withdrawal.

Afghanistan has witnessed a sharp rise in the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine, another lethal substance, in addition to the poppy trade. Abdul Wadud Market having an area of 250 square-meter in the southwest of Afghanistan is a hotspot for methamphetamine, according to satellite photos from 2022. Ephedra prices actually dropped from \$1.80 per kilogramme to \$0.63 per kilogramme by early November 2018 due to the excess supply. Costs, however, surged after the Taliban secretly outlawed the factory in December 2022. Above all, however, it benefited producers of meth and ephedrine by boosting their earnings, which in turn increased funds going to the Taliban, who penalised anyone found in possession of ephedra (Stone, 2022).

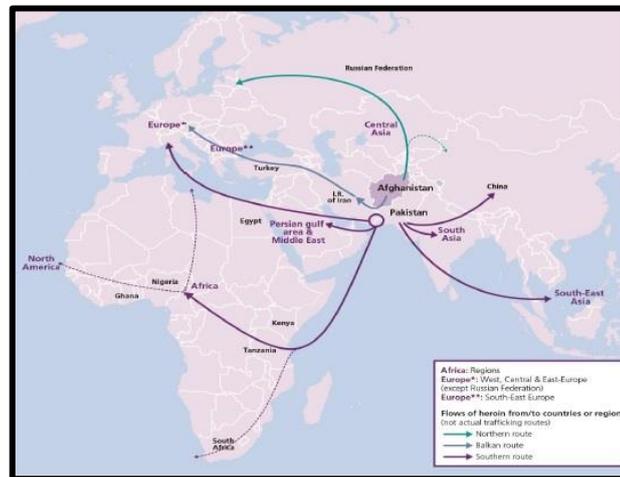
David Mansfield, an expert on the Afghan drug trade and an independent consultant on illicit economies, said in an interview with Rupert Stone that “both photographs and reports from the ground suggest widespread cultivation, particularly in the southwest, with the potential for a large harvest in 2022” (Stone, 2022).

An individual carrying 1,382 kg of drugs, including 255 kg of ice, 260 kg of heroin, and 867 kg of morphine, was apprehended by the Anti-Narcotics Force in Qila Saifullah on May 9, 2022. The smuggler intended to use Gwadar to carry these drugs overseas (APP, 2022). On May 27, 2022, the Pakistan Navy found over 4,500 kg of narcotics in the North Arabian Sea. The drugs that were confiscated were worth roughly \$6.7 million on the global market (The Nation, 2022). The Narcotics Control Wing of Sindh Excise Department has carried out five significant operations in different areas of Rohri and Karachi in a single day, and the same number of smugglers were apprehended in July. 7 kg of ice methamphetamine, 59 kg of hashish, and 1 kg of heroin were found during the aforementioned operations (The Express Tribune, 2024). Four individuals, two of whom were dressed as SSG Pakistan Army commandos, were detained by Multan Police on May 13, 2024, for transporting 140 kilograms of hashish. From Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the drugs were being transported into Multan (Chaudhry, 2024). Between July 2022 and June 2023, the Ministry of Narcotics Control Pakistan apprehended 1568 drug smugglers in 1596 instances and confiscated about 153372 kilogrammes of alcohol and drugs (Government of Pakistan Ministry of Narcotics Control, 2024, p. 27).

In October 2025, Pakistani naval authorities seized drugs worth \$972 in the Arabian Sea. In November, Pakistan Navy troops supporting a Saudi-led multinational task force seized 2,000 kilograms of methamphetamine. Similarly, in the first week of December 2025, Pakistan Navy ship Yamama conducted a major anti-smuggling operation. During this operation, 1,500 kilograms of hashish worth \$3 million was seized (Khan N. , 2025).

If we look at the map below, issued by National Initiative against Organized Crime Pakistan, there is no other country from which drugs could be smuggled into Pakistan.

Drug Smuggling Routes from Afghanistan



(National Initiative against Organized Crime, 2020, p. 7)

ANF Seizure Data from July 2022 to Jun 2023

Table No. 2
Total cases were 1596 in which 1568 persons were arrested

No	Captured Items	Kgs/ Lits	No	Captured Items	Kgs/ Lits
1	TabS Intoxicated	1.534	16	Liquor	19.000
2	HCL	25409.500	17	H2SO4	2579.000
3	AA	1425.000	18	Ketamine	644.846
4	TabS Alprazolam	11.774	19	TabS Rorpam	0.035
5	TabS Tramadol	90.000	20	TabS Rochi-2	2.888
6	TabS Retalin	1.683	21	TabS Clonazepam	4.380
7	TabS Valium 10mg	58.300	22	TabS Diazepam	3.692
8	TabS Xanax	238.368	23	TabS Aximax	22.810
9	Meth (Ice)	4477.912	24	TabS Ecstasy	6.754
10	Amph (Ice)	180.717	25	Poppy Straw	49.000
11	Opium	42961.410	26	Morphine	2249.800
12	Heroin	8600.468	27	Hashish	61601.835
13	Crystal	67.665	28	Cocaine	10.259
14	Cannabis/ Marijuana	16.460	29	Other Substance	2561.802
15	Weed	75.681		Total (Kgs / Lits)	153372.573

(Ministry of Narcotics Control, 2023, p. 27)

All of the information above is based on samples that law enforcement agencies have measured and recorded.

Because of their shared ethnicity and culture, the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa initially did not oppose to the entrance of Afghan refugees. The locals were aware that the high number of Afghan refugees in the area were causing instability and discontent in their community when their settlement conflicted with local interests. However, the Balochi population in the province of Balochistan was in danger of becoming a minority due to the enormous number of Afghan refugees living there. For this reason, nationalist Baloch still call for the return of Afghan refugees (Anwar, Hassan, & Kakar, 2021).

Polio in Pakistan

Polio is such a deadly disease of children that the child who suffers from it becomes disabled for life. This disability not only becomes a burden for the child but also a challenge for his/her family and society. Pakistan has been making tireless efforts to eradicate this deadly disease since 1994. Even now, four hundred thousand trained workers are continuously making efforts to eradicate polio in Pakistan (National Emergency Operations Centre, Islamabad, 2025). During the last anti-polio campaign of the year 2025, more than 4.2 million children across the country have been vaccinated against polio (Daily Dawn, 2025). On the other hand, Taliban suspended polio eradication campaign in Afghanistan in September 2024 (Gavi, 2024). After that the Taliban imposed ban on door to door campaign for polio vaccination (Global Polio Eradication Initiative, 2025). At the same time, there are attacks on workers participating in the polio eradication campaign under the Taliban ideology in different areas of Pakistan in general and bordering areas of former tribal areas in particular.

As of right now, Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two states across the globe where the type 1 virus causing the polio has not been completely eliminated. Unfortunately, polio has not been completely eradicated in Pakistan despite years of sporadic administration of polio drops to children up to the age of five (WHO, 2023). The main cause of Pakistan's failure to eradicate polio is Afghanistan. Due to ignorance-based social attitudes and religious fatwas opposing the polio vaccine in Afghan society, efforts to eradicate the disease are failing. Mosque imams who are required to be knowledgeable claim that the polio vaccine is un-Islamic and causes infertility. The innocent people are frightened by such fatwas. Polio teams are feeling more vulnerable since the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan (Wahid, Kumari, & Mohammed, 2023, p. 184).

One of the main factors contributing to the development of polio in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in Karachi, is the unrestricted movement of Afghan refugees. The total elimination of the illness is further hampered by attacks on polio vaccination workers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Karachi, as well as the ensuing dread in society. Since January 2024, attacks on Pakistani polio vaccination workers have killed over 200 persons, according to an estimate (Faizan, Rehman, & Mughal, 2023, p. 2).

Conclusion

It is an established fact that Pakistan has suffered losses in many areas due to the Afghan conflict. Pakistani society is basically a modern society, especially in the urban areas of Punjab and Sindh, but the social fabric has been badly affected in the areas bordering Afghanistan in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The reason for this has been the long-standing problem of Afghanistan. For this reason, religious extremism has also entered Pakistan, especially in the Pakistani areas bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan has also suffered a lot of economic losses due to the lack of border management on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has to suffer huge economic losses due to free movement across the border, where smuggling occurs. Drug smuggling not only promotes crime in the society but also promotes illegal sources of wealth. For these reasons, equal economic opportunities in the society become uncertain. Another major impact of drug smuggling is that it also affects Pakistan's global image. In short, Pakistan is facing negative impacts in social and economic sectors due to the establishment of the Taliban government after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Despite the mediation efforts of Qatar and Turkey, the Pakistan-Afghanistan talks in Doha and Istanbul have failed (Daily Dawn, 2025), (Khan S. , 2025). Now only time will tell when the Afghan

crisis normalizes, and economic activities will reach their peak after peace is established in the region.

Recommendations

The Pakistan-Afghanistan border should have an effective border management system. In order to create a long-term border management system, Pakistan may think about designating this territory as a buffer zone or integrating it through international mediation following the conflict that started on February 26, 2026, during which Pakistan claimed to have driven back Afghan Taliban forces and taken control of a sizable portion of Afghan territory. Furthermore, Pakistan may impose stringent and efficient restrictions for Afghan transit commerce and create a thorough framework for mutually beneficial commercial relations because Afghanistan is a landlocked nation that depends heavily on Pakistan for its imports and exports.

To combat extremism and terrorism in the long run, the Pakistani government should also support employment-oriented technical and vocational training as well as contemporary education in the border regions. To lessen radicalisation and improve social cohesiveness in Pakistani society, it is also crucial to rid the curriculum of violent and extremist religious tendencies while encouraging sports and cultural activities, especially among young people.

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