

# Afghanistan: Conflict & Crisis

○ Security & Violence

○ Ecological Threats

○ Positive Peace

○ Future Prospects





## **Quantifying Peace and its Benefits**

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IEP is headquartered in Sydney, with offices in New York, The Hague, Mexico City, Brussels and Harare. It works with a wide range of partners internationally and collaborates with intergovernmental organisations on measuring and communicating the economic value of peace.

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# Afghanistan report: Why conflict will most likely continue

**The recent fall of the government of President Ashraf Ghani and the second rise of the Taliban to power was stunning in its rapidity, but not surprising in its outcomes.**

Many of the underlying causes and drivers of instability and conflict in Afghanistan have existed for a long time and have been well recorded in IEP indices and registers, and these causes and drivers had shown exacerbation recently, making instability and conflict more likely. There is a long history of resource degradation leading to conflict and conflict further degrading the resources – a vicious cycle.

Our analysis is that these underlying causes and drivers of instability are likely to continue to frustrate efforts for peace and federalised governance in Afghanistan into the future with the Taliban likely to struggle with its own challenges to peace.

For the United States and its coalition partners, recent events in Afghanistan may be the closing of a chapter, but for the people of Afghanistan this is part of a continuum of conflict and crisis that will likely continue.

## Introduction:

On August 15, 2021 Taliban fighters entered the Afghan capital, Kabul and assumed control of the city and country.

It was the culmination of a Taliban military offensive that started in May 2021 and resulted in that force taking control of most of Afghanistan, including every major city.

For the last two decades an international effort has been made to fight the Taliban, a religious-based group who ruled the country from the mid-nineties until late 2001, and support a federal Afghan government, first headed by Hamid Karzai and then Ashraf Ghani.

Brown University's Costs of War study says United States federal expenditure on the war in Afghanistan, including past costs and future costs including interest and veterans care is roughly \$2.261 trillion.

This cost does not include international expenditure, with many partner countries contributing multi-billion dollar investments. These countries include Canada, Britain, France, Italy, Denmark, Poland, Australia, Germany and Spain.

This total expenditure means the international community has spent more than \$300 million a day on the war since 2001, or \$50,000 for each Afghan citizen currently living in the country.

This is more than 100 times the average Afghan's yearly income.

This massive expenditure has not resulted in stability nor security in Afghanistan.

At time of writing no governments had yet recognised the Taliban regime as the legitimate administrators of Afghanistan.

## Security and Violence:

The security situation in Afghanistan has been degrading steadily for a number of years.

According to the Global Peace Index 2021 Afghanistan is the world's least peaceful country, with the scope and intensity of the internal conflict in Afghanistan steadily increasing since at least 2014.

For the last ten years Afghanistan has been ranked as one of the three least peaceful nations on earth according to the GPI, and has been the least peaceful for the last four years.

Since the start of the GPI in 2008, Afghanistan has seen a degradation in eighteen of the Global Peace Index's indicators, with many being in the 'Safety and Security' category. This includes a 66.6% rise in violent crime, and a 33.7% rise in violent demonstration. Also notable is an 80.6% rise in the number of internal conflicts fought.

Only two indicators have shown an improvement since 2008: the number of deaths from external conflict and one relating to UN peacekeeper funding.

The start of 2021 was a particularly violent period in Afghanistan.

Attacks against US forces have dropped significantly since the United States signed a peace agreement with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar in February 2020, but attacks against Afghan security forces have been rising, with US estimates saying that since the Doha agreement, Afghan forces were losing at least 30-50 men each day (General Kenneth McKenzie, CENTCOM).

Civilian deaths have also been rising. A UN Report found that more women and children were killed and wounded in the first six months of 2021 than in any first six months of any year since the US started tracking such data in 2009.

The report also found that in the first six months of 2021, 32% of all civilian casualties were children.

The GPI 2021 reported that Afghanistan had the highest total number of deaths due to internal conflict of any nation. The index also reported that Afghanistan suffered one of the largest proportional economic costs due of violence in the world. It found that the economic cost of violence in Afghanistan was 40.3 percent of the total national GDP.

This made Afghanistan the third most affected country, with only Syria and South Sudan having a higher relative impact.



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The Lloyd's Register Foundation World Risk Poll, incorporated in the GPI 2021, found that 71% of people in Afghanistan saw violence as the greatest risk they face in their lives. This was the highest proportion of respondents from any nation.

The poll also found that 77% of people in Afghanistan feel they are less safe than they had been five years ago, with only Hong Kong and Lebanon reporting a larger proportion.

Over 52% per cent of poll respondents from Afghanistan said they or someone they knew personally had suffered serious harm from violent crime in the last 12 months. This was more than double the regional average, and made Afghanistan the only authoritarian country in the world with an experience of violence greater than 50%.

Pakistan had the next highest level of experience of violence in the region at 31%. Afghanistan's northern neighbour Turkmenistan has the lowest reported rate of experience of violence in the world at 1%.

**Positive Peace:**

Afghanistan had one of the lowest recorded levels of Positive Peace in the Positive Peace Index 2020. Of 163 countries analysed Afghanistan ranked 151, with poverty and external instability impacting the country's prospect for peace negatively, as well as low levels of education and high levels of corruption contributing.

The PPI 2020 reported that Afghanistan experienced deterioration in four of the eight major indicators of Positive Peace, from 2009 to 2019.

The most significant deterioration was in the level of human capital available in the country. In the PPI a human capital score

reflects the extent to which a society educates citizens and promotes the development of knowledge, thereby improving economic productivity, care for the young, political participation and social capital.

The PPI 2020 found that Afghanistan was ranked 157 of 163 countries when looking at available human capital. Only two nations, namely Syria and Niger, had seen a larger deterioration from 2009 to 2019.

Also showing deterioration from 2009 to 2019 were the indicators analysing Afghanistan's relationship with its neighbours (154 of 163 countries), how well the government was functioning (149 of 163) and levels of corruption in the country (138 of 163).

High levels of corruption have been cited as a significant driver of instability in Afghanistan.

Not only has corruption degraded trust in national and local institutions and affected the business environment, it has also degraded the Afghan Security Forces.

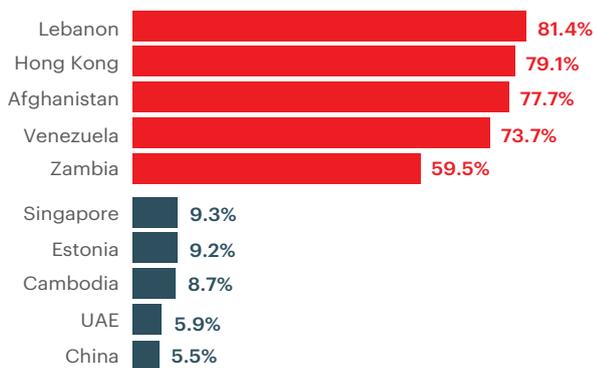
Before the fall of Kabul the Afghan security forces nominally had 300,000 soldiers and police officers but it's now been shown that many of these fighters were 'ghost soldiers,' existing only on paper.

The PPI 2020 found some improvements in Afghanistan from 2009-2019, with the largest improvement being in the *acceptance of the rights* of others, but it's unlikely these gains will be maintained with the Taliban in power.

The PPI 2020 reported poverty as a significant issue in Afghanistan, and one that has been worsening.

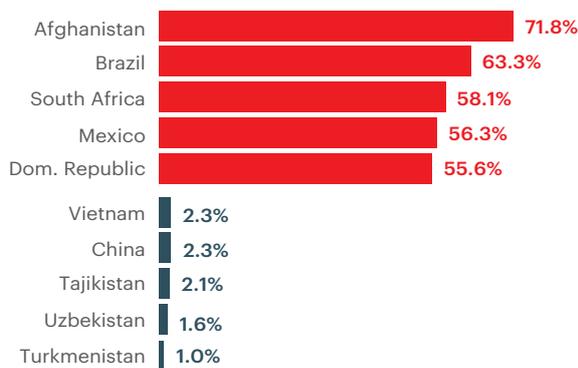
**FEELINGS OF SAFETY**

% who feel less safe than five years ago



**GREATEST RISK**

% who feel violence is the greatest risk to safety



Source: World Risk Poll, IEP calculations

## What is Positive Peace?



Positive Peace is defined as the *attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies*. These same factors also lead to many other positive outcomes which society feels are important. Higher levels of Positive Peace are statistically linked to higher GDP growth, better environmental outcomes, higher measures of well-being, better developmental outcomes and stronger resilience.

Positive Peace as a term was first introduced in the 1960's by sociologist Johan Galtung and has historically been understood qualitatively based on idealistic or moral concepts of a peaceful society. The distinguishing feature of IEP's work on Positive Peace is that it is empirically derived. Statistical analysis was used to identify the common characteristics of the world's most peaceful countries. It therefore forms an important evidence base to understand Positive Peace and avoids subjective value judgements.

This process allowed the development of the Positive Peace Index (PPI), which consists of eight Pillars, each containing three statistical indicators. This provides a baseline measure of the effectiveness of a country's capabilities to build and maintain peace. It also provides a measure for policymakers, researchers and

corporations to use for effective intervention design, monitoring and evaluation.

To construct the PPI nearly 25,000 national datasets, indexes and attitudinal surveys were statistically compared to the internal measures of the Global Peace Index to determine which factors had the highest statistical correlations. Indicators were then qualitatively assessed and where multiple variables measured similar phenomena, the least significant were dropped. The remaining factors were clustered using statistical techniques into the eight Pillars of Positive Peace. Three indicators were selected for each Pillar which represents distinct but complementary conceptual aspects. The index was constructed with the weights for the indicators being assigned according to the strength of the correlation coefficient to the GPI Internal Peace score. This empirical approach to the construction of the index means it is free from pre-established biases or value judgements.

Positive Peace can be used as the basis for empirically measuring a country's resilience. It can also measure fragility and help predict the likelihood of conflict, violence and instability.

## Ecological Threats

A number of significant ecological threats have hindered the prospect of peace in Afghanistan, and many of these threats will likely continue to hinder peace in the future.

Some of these ecological issues relate to climate and climate change, some to geography and many relate to poor resource management and exacerbating human effects.

Deforestation has been a significant issue in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion of 1979. According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) evergreen trees, predominantly oak and pine, covered as much as five percent of Afghanistan in 1979, but roughly half of those trees are now gone.

Fires lit during combat, deliberate deforestation to deny habitat for fighters and timber smuggling have contributed to the loss, but the primary driver is habitat construction and heating for Afghanistan's fast growing population, which has ballooned from 13.2 million in 1979 to an estimated 40 million now.

Resources have long been a driver of conflict in Afghanistan, with water being the most contentious.

In 2013 the UNEP produced a report that found that 70-80% of Afghans are directly dependent on natural resources for income and sustenance, meaning farming, animal husbandry and artisanal mining.

Access to arable land and water for agricultural purposes has created or exacerbated conflict in Afghanistan for many generations and was a major driver of the insurgency against the governments of Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani.

A landlocked country, Afghanistan could have adequate rainfall from snowdrifts for all agricultural output were that water capably captured and managed, but war, corruption, and malaise have meant that much of Afghanistan's water becomes unusable, or flows out of the country.

Even in Afghanistan's major cities drinking water is not readily available to many people.

In 2017 the Afghan Minister of Urban Development found that more than 70% of Kabul's population didn't have access to safe drinking water. A John Hopkins University study published in the same year found that demand for water in the Kabul basin, where more than a third of the Afghan population lives, will likely grow six-fold in the next forty years. (<https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/water-crisis-in-kabul-could-be-severe-if-not-addressed/>)

A secondary effect of this in Afghan cities has been plastic pollution, with discarded water bottles collecting in drainage systems.

The IEP's Ecological Threat Register 2021, which uses comprehensive ecological data to assess national ability to cope with extreme ecological shocks, now and into the future, found Afghanistan had the highest overall score on the 2021 ETR.

This means Afghanistan is the country least able to cope with the ecological shocks it experiences and will experience.

All 34 of Afghanistan's sub-national administrations receive an extremely high ETR score. The average of a country's sub-national entities is used to calculate the national score.

Afghanistan scores extremely poorly in all five indicators of the 2021 ETR; its highest average score is *water risk*. Overall, seven of the 34 sub-national entities score a max score indicating extreme *water risk*, while another 23 entities score extremely high.

The 2021 ETR also identifies that all of Afghanistan's sub-national entities are experiencing severe *food risk*. Afghanistan faces substantial impacts from natural disasters and climate change, hindering prospects for peace and development in the country. Climate change poses a threat to Afghanistan's natural resources, and the continuation of floods and droughts is expected to impact agricultural productivity and output. The ongoing conflict has also undermined Afghanistan's capacity to cope with ecological threats, with natural disasters adding stress to an already weak system of governance.

Resource scarcity highlights the vulnerability of countries and regions to increasing environmental stress. The domain includes *food insecurity*, *water scarcity* and *population growth*. The ten countries with the highest score on the Resource Scarcity domain are displayed in the table.

### Future Prospects:

The prospects of peace in Afghanistan will continue to be low, even if the Taliban achieves a comprehensive military victory across Afghanistan and institutes a comprehensive, authoritarian and unified federal government. This can be seen from the recent attacks by Islamic State, which will now run an insurgency of its own against the Taliban.

## ETR rank by Resource Scarcity Domain, 2021

Niger's rapid population growth coupled with its current food and water risks result in it being ranked the lowest on the resource scarcity domain.

| COUNTRY      | RESOURCE SCARCITY RANK |
|--------------|------------------------|
| Niger        | 178                    |
| Afghanistan  | 177                    |
| Yemen        | 176                    |
| Malawi       | 175                    |
| Burundi      | 174                    |
| Eritrea      | 173                    |
| Uganda       | 172                    |
| Burkina Faso | 171                    |
| Benin        | 170                    |
| Rwanda       | 169                    |

Ecological stressors have underpinned conflict in Afghanistan in the past and these will continue to be stressors in the future. Conflict and ecological degradation form a vicious cycle, one which has probably been underway for at least the past 50 years.

These ecological stressors will further exacerbate economic issues that have also been driving conflict in Afghanistan.

It's been estimated that the Afghan central bank has \$9 billion in reserves, but little of that money is physically inside Afghanistan. Retrieving that money will be difficult for the Taliban who have long had international financial sanctions levied on them.

A depreciation of the Afghan currency the Afghani is likely now, and inflation is already rising across the country.

In 2010 the US government estimated that Afghanistan had at least \$1 trillion of untapped mineral deposits, with lithium and copper deposits being particularly abundant. These reserves stayed largely unexploited from 2010 to 2021, primarily due to the security situation in Afghanistan.

It's unlikely the security situation will improve enough for these minerals to be mined in the short and possibly medium term.

The Taliban will be heavily dependent on foreign aid as the ruling power in Afghanistan for years to come if it wishes to offer even the most basic services to its people. It is estimated that 70% to 80% of the government's income came from foreign aid.

There are fears that, to pay for the administration of the country, the Taliban may further embrace opium poppy farming in Afghanistan, something that was banned during their time in government before 2001 and then officially embraced when operating as an insurgent group.

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