




Analysis of Internal Conflicts in Afghanistan from the Perspective of Ethnic Elites in the Last Two Decades

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Afghanistan has witnessed unprecedented internal wars, terrorist attacks, and insecurity over the past two decades, which have plunged the country into the depths of political turmoil. These conflicts have inflicted significant damage on the country's political structure and people's livelihoods, affecting society, political, social, economic, and cultural relations, and have also caused negative impacts on regional security and economy, especially for neighboring countries. This applied research, from the perspective of the intellectual elites of society, aims to investigate the fundamental causes, effects, and complexities of internal and external factors contributing to Afghanistan's internal conflicts during the last two decades. The research method employed is descriptive-explanatory, utilizing a deductive strategy and inspired by the theory of ethnic elite competition. It seeks to explore the influence of variables such as ethnic nationalism, deprivation, the state, and competition among regional and transregional powers in internal conflicts. The data collection tool used is a questionnaire, and the statistical population consists of intellectual elites from Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek ethnic groups. The sample size for this study is 400 intellectual elites selected through random sampling. The research initially lacked hypotheses, as the results were obtained after entering data through SPSS software and then applying linear regression calculations. The findings indicate a significant correlation between ethnic nationalism ($r = 73\%$), the state ($r = 152\%$), relative deprivation ($r = 52\%$), and the competition of regional and transregional powers ($r = 126\%$) with social conflicts. Moreover, the most crucial factor in the continuation of internal conflicts in Afghanistan is the monopolization of government by the dominant ethnic group. Ethnic elites, given their societal influence, can act both as agents of conflict escalation and as facilitators of peace.

Keywords: Afghanistan, internal conflicts, ethnic elites, deprivation, state, regional powers, international system, ethnic nationalism.

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1. Introduction

The geopolitical and geostrategic position of Afghanistan has significantly elevated its importance in colonial conflicts and rivalries. Over the past two centuries, Afghanistan has consistently

attracted the attention of global powers as a stage for conflicts and colonial endeavors. The country has acted as a "backyard" for global powers, serving as a strategic point. Unlike other countries in the region, Afghanistan has faced political, cultural, and economic erosion (Vaezi,



2002), largely influenced by colonizers, which have shaped its identity and geography (Rahimi, 2008).

One of the most significant challenges to Afghanistan's development, stability, and establishment of an inclusive government has been the occurrence of widespread conflicts. The continuation of these conflicts has plunged Afghanistan into political turmoil, creating harmful effects on the political structure and on political, social, and cultural relations. Surprisingly, even during the rule of the National Unity Government, with the presence of tens of thousands of foreign military forces—whose fundamental mission was declared to be the protection of security, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the fight against terrorism—the conflicts and violence have not only continued but have intensified. Today, every inch of Afghanistan is soaked in blood. The instability, disruption of reconstruction efforts, increased drug cultivation and trafficking, reorganization and renewed confidence of opposition groups, administrative corruption, lack of security, and increasing poverty, coupled with the widespread and heavy conflicts in Afghanistan, have not only devastating domestic impacts but also transnational, regional, and even international effects.

Given that Afghanistan offers a unique opportunity to study national and international conflicts in various ways, and considering that the regional role of these conflicts has largely been overlooked in scientific studies, it is crucial to theoretically and scientifically achieve a better understanding of the factors and roots of Afghanistan's internal conflicts. Analyzing the factors contributing to internal conflicts in Afghanistan, particularly in the period following September 11, 2001, is an essential step toward understanding this issue. In light of the key points mentioned above, which outline the general topic of the research, the researcher aims to narrow the scope of the topic to transform it into a suitable research question. In other words, this study is organized around the main issue discussed above to ensure that it is presented methodically, with coherence, purposefulness, and practical application. Therefore, the following question arises: What are the most important factors contributing to internal conflicts in Afghanistan from the perspective of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek ethnic elites in the past two decades?

In the 1980s, Cold War rivalries turned Afghanistan into a battlefield for a hot war. The Soviet Red Army's

invasion of Afghanistan intensified at the end of 1989. For a decade, Afghanistan became a battleground for the primary actors of the Cold War. On one side was the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc of Eastern Europe, providing military support to the leftist government of the People's Democratic Party. On the other side was the capitalist bloc, led by the United States and its Western allies and Islamic countries. This war lasted for one and a half decades, and the instability resulting from that period continues to this day, further fracturing Afghanistan and deepening ethnic and linguistic divisions (Andishmand, 2014).

After the Cold War, the people of Afghanistan believed that the West, after their victory over the Soviet Union, would continue supporting Afghanistan and reward them by contributing to reconstruction and state-building. However, in reality, Afghanistan was suddenly forgotten by the West and the United States. This abandonment created a power vacuum with three major consequences for Afghans: dependence on neighboring and regional powers, the outbreak of civil wars, and the emergence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda (Rahimi, 2013).

In the 21st century, Afghanistan once again became the focus of global attention and political discourse. This time, in addition to internal factors driving intragroup conflicts, external factors also played a role in escalating violence and disorder in the country. First, groups such as al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS have been responsible for the atrocities committed in Afghanistan in the 21st century. Moreover, the relentless interference of foreign intelligence services, regional powers, and Afghanistan's neighbors in fueling the flames of war in this country is also noteworthy (Smith, 2004). The continuation of internal conflicts in Afghanistan over the past two decades has brought severe consequences for the nation and the country, underscoring the importance of studying this issue, as follows:

- Studying this issue helps better understand the causes and consequences of internal conflicts in Afghanistan and provides solutions for achieving stability in the country.
- Understanding social dynamics: Studying internal conflicts helps us comprehend how social, economic, and political factors contribute to the formation and intensification of conflicts. In Afghanistan, ethnic tensions, poverty,

unemployment, and administrative corruption are among the factors fueling conflicts.

- Planning for peace: Analyzing internal conflicts assists policymakers and social activists in finding effective strategies to resolve conflicts and create lasting peace.

This study aims to analyze and examine internal conflicts from the perspective of ethnic elites over the past two decades.

2. Research Hypotheses

This research does not begin with hypotheses but seeks to examine and analyze the perspectives of ethnic elites on Afghanistan's internal conflicts and the factors influencing them. The final results will be obtained after the distribution of the questionnaire and the analysis of the responses. Initially, the research lacks a hypothesis, but after the final analysis of the results, the researcher will formulate them.

In the past two decades, numerous studies have been conducted on Afghanistan's internal transformations and their impacts. Most of these studies have relied on library and internet resources, allowing authors to introduce bias toward specific ethnic groups. However, the present study, which can be considered an innovative contribution, uses the analysis of a questionnaire completed by 400 intellectual elites from various ethnic groups, analyzed through SPSS software, free from any personal bias. This approach is novel. The findings show that the most critical factor in the continuation of internal conflicts in Afghanistan is the monopolization of government by the dominant ethnic group, consistent with historical, theoretical, and documented evidence. Moreover, significant differences exist between the responses of Pashtun elites and those of other ethnic groups in the questionnaire responses. The research concludes that ethnic elites, given their influence in society, can act as both agents of conflict escalation and facilitators of peace.

3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

Political sociologists have extensively examined the role of ethnic conflicts and disputes in shaping social groups. Although no single theory explains the causes and factors of these conflicts, researchers have proposed different theories from their perspectives, addressing various

dimensions of the issue and attempting to explain its causes and factors.

3.1. Elite Competition Theory

The theory of elite competition is an explanatory theory that views the phenomenon of ethnicity through an instrumentalist approach, emphasizing the role of ethnic leaders. According to this theory, ethnic leaders inject a form of self-awareness into their ethnic group to secure the group's interests (Naemi, 2016). The role of political elites in establishing the stability and sustainability of societies is as important as their role in undermining stability and social order by instigating ethnic, religious, and class-based uprisings. This role is so significant in developing countries that it has been said that elites have the final say in the political and social development process (Sajadi, 2016).

3.2. Research Background

Mousavi (2009), in his book *Ethnic Nationalism and Human Rights Violations in Afghanistan*, explores the history of ethnic bias in the Islamic world and Afghanistan, focusing on political ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan (Mousavi, 2009).

Giostosi (2007), in his book *Afghanistan: War, Politics, and Society (1978-1992)*, examines factors contributing to the past wars, which are not unrelated to the ongoing unrest over the last two decades, despite being outside the time frame of this study (Giostosi, 1998).

Sajadi (2016), in his book *Political Sociology of Afghanistan*, uses the theory of social cleavages to explore the ethnic-religious cleavages in Afghanistan, which are considered active, historical, and influential in shaping political life and social forces. He analyzes the relationship between these cleavages and internal wars and jihadist parties (Sajadi, 2016).

Thomas Barfield's (2012) book *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* examines the impact of ethnic identities on conflicts, making it a valuable resource. Besides ethnic identities, other factors also play a role in prolonging conflicts (Barfield, 2012).

Ahmed Rashid's (2008) book *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* discusses the formation of the Taliban, the impact of internal wars in Afghanistan, and the role of neighboring countries like

Iran and India, as well as major powers like China and Russia. He also critiques U.S. foreign policy's impact on the internal situation in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (Rashid, 2008).

While these authors address some dimensions of the factors prolonging conflicts in Afghanistan, none have comprehensively examined both external and internal factors. Although this research may not be without flaws, it attempts to address more dimensions and opens the way for future research.

4. Factors Contributing to Afghanistan's Internal Conflicts

4.1. *International Factors Contributing to Afghanistan's Internal Conflicts*

4.1.1. *Military and Political Interventions*

Afghanistan, located at the crossroads between Central Asia and Russia, Iran and Western Asia, Pakistan and South Asia, and East Asia, has become a center for strategic rivalries among various countries. In recent years, major developments, such as the presence of foreign forces, extremist groups, and the consequences of a weak state apparatus, have occurred. These issues are crucial from Afghanistan's national security perspective and for neighboring countries (Marvadi, 2021). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, attention once again focused on Afghanistan with the rise of the Taliban and the intensification of competitive wars among the Mujahideen for power. External powers, seeking to protect their interests in Afghanistan, intervened in various ways.

4.1.2. *The United States*

After the September 11, 2001, attacks, the United States identified terrorism as a threat to its vital interests and recognized northern Pakistan as the primary sanctuary for terrorists. In the 2009 official U.S. strategy document on Afghanistan and Pakistan, confronting current and potential security threats from extremists in this region was emphasized as crucial to U.S. national security. Terrorist groups in Pakistan are planning new attacks with global targets. Therefore, the primary goal of the United States must be to disrupt and defeat these groups in Pakistan and prevent their return to Afghanistan. Contrary to some beliefs, the U.S. military presence in

Afghanistan was not solely about counterterrorism; it also aimed to establish its system in the region to compete with other powers, such as Russia and China, and ultimately to control Iran (Rashid, 2008). As economics is a key factor in determining national power, the U.S. and other industrialized nations are increasingly striving to extend their dominance over two vital areas of energy resources—the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Afghanistan and Iran, as countries near these regions, occupy special positions in U.S. foreign policy. The primary goals of the U.S. include preventing the rise of hostile governments, encroaching on Russia's security borders, accessing Central Asia's economic resources, and nearing Iran's security borders (Salimi & Nasiri, 2014).

4.1.3. *Russia*

Russia's approach to Afghanistan, both before and after 2001, was influenced by the rise of the Taliban and their capture of Kabul in 1996. Concerns about the spread of radical Islam and security threats led Russia to support the anti-Taliban front. After the U.S. military invasion in 2001, Russia supported military operations alongside the U.S. With the establishment of a central government in Afghanistan, Russia continued to support the Karzai and Ghani administrations. During Ghani's era, coordination with the West to combat the Taliban was emphasized. Military and economic cooperation was also implemented through the NDN program. These collaborations caused a shift in Russia's foreign policy toward Afghanistan. However, as the Taliban gained more control, Russia had to adapt its policy. The Taliban's victories in various parts of Afghanistan and the central government's inability to prevent their advances contributed to the shift in Russia's approach. Between 2001 and 2017, drug production, which was a major source of Taliban funding, increased by forty times. In 2011 alone, it increased by 40 percent. Russia has been in contact with the Taliban since 2015, and these contacts date back to 2007.

Russia's primary goals in Afghanistan are preventing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, curbing Western and U.S. advances toward Russia's security borders and Central Asia, restoring influence in Russia's surrounding regions, hindering U.S. unity in regional equations, and preventing others from dominating economic resources in Russia and the region. Central Asian countries have

been heavily influenced by Russia's stance on the Afghan crisis (Safranchuk, 2021).

4.1.4. Central Asia

Central Asian countries, particularly due to their geographic proximity and historical relations with Afghanistan, have played a role in shaping and exacerbating internal conflicts. These countries, by supporting specific groups that have led to tensions in Afghanistan, have contributed to the unrest (Smith, 2021). Poverty and unemployment in Afghanistan, particularly in border areas with Central Asia, can lead to the spread of illegal activities, such as drug and human trafficking, further fueling internal conflicts.

4.2. Regional Factors Contributing to Afghanistan's Internal Conflicts

4.2.1. Iran

During the Afghan civil war, Iran supported the Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, and his military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, as well as Uzbek and Tajik warlords Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ismail Khan. Iran's support stemmed from the Taliban being perceived as a serious security, ideological, and economic threat to both Iran and Shia communities in Afghanistan (Milani, 2006). After the fall of the Taliban, Iran participated in Afghanistan's reconstruction, aiming to establish an "economic influence zone" by pressuring the Afghan government to distance itself from Washington and positioning itself as a transit hub for goods and services between the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, and China (Milani, 2006). Iran's foreign policy in Afghanistan has focused on preventing the spread of radicalism and ISIS throughout Afghanistan, accelerating the U.S. withdrawal, ensuring fair water-sharing agreements, promoting Iranian influence, supporting the Shia Hazara ethnic minority, and repatriating Afghan refugees while emphasizing that Iran's security is tied to Afghanistan's stability (Milani, 2006, p. 49). Iran's strategic objective in cooperating with other regional powers, such as Russia, China, India, and Central Asian countries, has been to limit U.S. influence in the region (Milani, 2006). Iranian policymakers' refusal to accept the reality of shared interests between Iran and the U.S. in Afghanistan has prevented Iran from securing its

national interests in Afghanistan and has prolonged the suffering of the Afghan people (Bankdar, 2007).

4.2.2. Pakistan

In the past half-century, Pakistan has created serious crises in neighboring Afghanistan by encouraging terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and political instability. According to most experts, Pakistan's security depends on Afghanistan's instability and the presence of a government compatible with Pakistan's interests (Shafaq, 2016). To preserve its territorial integrity, Pakistan has actively sought to prevent the establishment of a non-aligned government in Afghanistan and has made significant efforts to establish a provisional government or weaken the Afghan state. The Taliban, a key player in Afghan civil society, have played an essential role in Pakistan's foreign policy to create a friendly government or destabilize Afghanistan. If a non-aligned government comes to power in Afghanistan, past experience suggests that political instability and the formation of a weak state may actually further Pakistan's national interests (Azimi, 2008).

4.2.3. India

India has been aware of Pakistan's policy of using Afghan territory as a training base for Kashmiri terrorists against its own territorial integrity, particularly in Kashmir. The post-Taliban political situation in Afghanistan, under U.S. oversight, provided India with an opportunity to strengthen its position, causing concern among Pakistan's military establishment and motivating them to further strengthen the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and religious groups within Pakistan. Additionally, Pakistan's military has promoted religious extremism within its own country, supported the Afghan Taliban, and trained and executed terrorist activities in order to maintain influence in Afghanistan.

4.3. Internal Factors Contributing to Afghanistan's Internal Conflicts

Internal factors have also played a critical role in fostering ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan after the Taliban era. These factors are elaborated below.

4.3.1. Political Factors

The lack of political legitimacy in Afghanistan prevented the rulers from distancing themselves from ethnic and tribal affiliations on the one hand, and from falling into the trap of external regimes, especially after the Taliban, on the other (Dehzad, 2016). As a result, a national and inclusive government that holds itself accountable to all citizens has not formed in this country. The ethnic and tribal foundation of power in Afghanistan led to a complete concentration and monopoly of power, preventing power-sharing and public participation in political authority. This concentration of power blocked the formation of a national and inclusive government that could have been achieved through power-sharing, stifling national trust and leading to the spread of corruption and mismanagement (Andishmand, 2014). The crisis of legitimacy in Afghanistan's political system, along with the geostrategic position and ethnic identity of Afghan rulers, has never been grounded in principles of governance. Power struggles have often been accompanied by the bloodiest scenes, producing deadly conflicts. The rulers, with disregard for society and reliance on foreign powers, have consistently failed (Rahimi, 2017).

The lack of a strong political institution and the personalization and privatization of power are additional causes of political instability in Afghanistan. The absence of institutionalized political structures capable of eliminating violence from society, combined with the personalization of power—essentially political corruption—has led to the exploitation of power for personal gain. All these factors have contributed to the spread of corruption in society and, ultimately, political instability in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's governments, due to structural and social weaknesses, have consistently failed to gain widespread public approval. The state has always been weak in relation to society. In other words, Afghanistan is characterized by weak states and strong societies, meaning that power is concentrated within society, leaving the state powerless. The accumulation of power within society renders the state unable to dominate or balance it. Throughout Afghanistan's history, leaders such as Ahmad Shah Durrani, Abdur Rahman Khan, and Amanullah Khan sought to strengthen the central government by altering social relations, dominant value

systems, entrenched tribal equations, and the balance of forces to empower the central state. However, all of them failed in these efforts (Dehshyar, 2011).

4.3.2. Economic Factors

Afghanistan's political system has always been highly ineffective in distributing economic, political, and social opportunities among individuals and groups within society. This inefficiency has been a significant contributing factor to the political crisis in the country. If a political system does not function effectively in economic terms, a distributional crisis inevitably arises, as wealth must first be created before it can be redistributed. For example, Afghanistan's Shia population has historically been deprived of basic educational opportunities, with not a single higher education institution existing in Shia-populated areas. When students were sent abroad for higher education, efforts were made to exclude Shia students from this privilege—a violation of rights that continues to this day, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly. This is despite the fact that Afghanistan's constitution explicitly states that all citizens are entitled to free education (Amir Ahmadi, 1999).

While social participation in social and political activities is essential for nation-building and the formation of a stable political system, poverty in Afghanistan has fostered social isolation and disunity rather than participation. Poverty deepens the gap between the government and the people. The more ineffective and dysfunctional the social and political system, the more poverty increases and spreads. A reciprocal relationship exists between poverty and the governing political system. The poverty rate in Afghanistan is alarmingly high, with 55 out of every 100 Afghans living below the poverty line. The country also suffers from a 43% unemployment rate. Approximately 80% of the population works in agriculture, while 11% is employed in industry (mainly weaving), and 9% in services. The weakening of the country's economic base undermines the foundations of the rule of law. Therefore, political development for the rule of law in society cannot be realized without economic development (Mojtahedzadeh, 2002).

The unequal distribution of economic resources and wealth across the country causes some regions to experience far worse economic conditions than others.

When analyzing Afghanistan's history, the policies of its rulers toward other ethnic groups, especially the Hazara and Shia populations, are found to be more oppressive than even those of Zionism and South African apartheid. In Israel and South Africa, Muslims and black populations were not barred from attending school, whereas in Afghanistan, the Hazara and Shia communities were formally denied education. At the same time, numerous schools were built in Pashtun areas, even in cities, where children from the Pashtun ethnic group were encouraged to attend schools, including students from northern Pakistan.

4.3.3. *Social Factors*

One of the major social crises in Afghanistan is the identity crisis. An identity crisis arises when various identities develop artificially within a country. In Afghanistan, for instance, instead of a shared national identity, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and local identities have developed, such as Pashtun (Afghan), Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and Baluchi identities. Afghanistan is home to a wide range of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious minorities, a demographic distribution that has led to division, conflict, tension, and numerous disputes throughout the country's history, posing serious threats to national unity. This situation has made it difficult for progressive leaders throughout modern Afghan history to foster unity, national cohesion, and the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups within an effective state (Sardarnia, 2011).

Historians describe Afghanistan's modern history as a history of bloodshed and the death of political and national justice. They believe that discriminatory ethnic, linguistic, and religious practices by past Afghan rulers and leaders have set ethnic groups against each other, creating a deep political and social crisis. As a result, true national unity has never emerged in this country. Ethnic and linguistic tensions have fractured national unity in Afghanistan, making it difficult for nation-building efforts to take root for an extended period. The deep ethnic and religious divisions in Afghanistan have led to social fragmentation, severely impacting national cohesion and unity. Consequently, society's actions and attitudes are shaped by sub-national factors such as ethnicity and religion, obstructing efforts toward establishing a political system based on the protection of

the rights of all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, political, or other affiliations.

Afghanistan is a clear example of cultural and intellectual poverty. Factors such as a lack of modernization in social and communication structures, political stagnation, and the persistence of rigid social and cultural systems have contributed to this situation. The prolonged war has devastated the educational system and led to severe cultural impoverishment. During the conflict, educational institutions were either closed or destroyed, or they were used as military bases by combatants. The spread of illiteracy among the younger generation has provided fertile ground for the infiltration and acceptance of extremist ideologies promoted by the Taliban and al-Qaeda (Salimi & Nasiri, 2014).

5. **Methods and Materials**

This research is applied in terms of its goal and utilizes a descriptive-explanatory method. Through a deductive strategy and inspired by the theory of elite competition, it seeks to assess the impact of variables such as ethnic nationalism, deprivation, the state, and regional and transregional power competition on internal conflicts. The analysis is based on responses to a questionnaire, processed using SPSS software, which was randomly distributed among 400 intellectual elites from Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek ethnic groups.

6. **Findings and Results**

The results show that 72.5% of the respondents are male, and 27.5% are female. The largest group of respondents holds a bachelor's degree, accounting for 154 individuals or 42.4% of the sample. The highest number of respondents belong to the Hazara ethnic group, comprising 33.1%, followed by Tajiks at 23.1%, Uzbeks at 21.5%, Pashtuns at 17.6%, and other ethnic groups with the lowest frequency of 4.7%. The majority of respondents come from the provinces of Sar-e Pol (14.9%), Jowzjan (13.8%), Herat (10.2%), Kabul (9.9%), Daikundi (6.3%), and Maidan Wardak (6.1%).

The results indicate that, regarding the distribution of respondents' agreement with the existence of internal conflicts in the country, the highest percentage (51%) consists of those who agreed with the existence of conflicts, totaling 185 individuals. Subsequent frequencies reflect responses that were completely or

somewhat in agreement. In total, 96.5% of respondents acknowledged the presence of internal conflicts. Regarding agreement with the influence of ethnic groups on conflicts, 44.1% somewhat agreed, 25.6% agreed, 4.4% completely agreed, 16.8% disagreed, and 9.1% completely disagreed. Concerning the influence of regional and international competition, the largest group, 123 individuals (33.9%), somewhat agreed, while 101 (27.8%) agreed, 85 (23.4%) disagreed, 45 (12.4%) completely agreed, and 9 (2.5%) completely disagreed.

Regarding deprivation's influence on internal conflicts, 168 respondents (46.3%) somewhat agreed, 39.4% agreed, and 3.6% completely agreed. The distribution of agreement on the government's incompetence showed that most respondents agreed with the idea of government incompetence contributing to internal conflicts.

6.1. *Question 1: How does ethnic nationalism influence Afghanistan's internal conflicts from the perspective of ethnic elites?*

Table 1

Linear Regression for Identifying the Influence of Ethnic Nationalism on Internal Conflicts

Source	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	3.621	0.110		32.783	0.000
Ethnic Nationalism	0.128	0.031	0.215	4.173	0.000

F: 17.416, sig= 0.000, R²= 0.073

According to [Table 1](#), the independent variable of ethnic nationalism can explain 7% of the variance in the dependent variable of internal conflicts, indicating the model's suitability for predicting the dependent variable. The significance level is 0.000, indicating a meaningful relationship between ethnic nationalism and internal conflicts. The effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is indicated by the beta coefficient,

which is 0.215. This suggests that for every one-unit change in the independent variable, the dependent variable changes by 0.215 units. Therefore, ethnic nationalism influences internal conflicts.

6.2. *Question 2: How does relative deprivation influence Afghanistan's internal conflicts from the perspective of ethnic elites?*

Table 2

Linear Regression for Identifying the Influence of Relative Deprivation on Internal Conflicts

Source	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	3.476	0.189		18.436	0.000
Relative Deprivation	0.156	0.049	0.166	3.193	0.002

F= 10.195, sig= 0.000, R²= 0.052

As shown in [Table 2](#), the significance level of 0.000 indicates that the effect of relative deprivation on internal conflicts is statistically significant. The beta coefficient of 0.166 shows that for every one-unit change in relative deprivation, internal conflicts increase by 0.166 units. The R² value of 0.052 means that relative

deprivation can explain 5% of the variance in internal conflicts. Therefore, relative deprivation affects internal conflicts.

6.3. *Question 3: How do regional and transregional competitions influence Afghanistan's internal conflicts from the perspective of ethnic elites?*

Table 3

Linear Regression for Identifying the Influence of Regional and Transregional Competition on Internal Conflicts

Source	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	3.462	0.127		27.179	0.000
Regional and Transregional Competition	0.168	0.035	0.352	4.703	0.000

F: 9.723, sig= 0.000, R²= 0.126

Based on the information in Table 3, the R² value of 0.126 shows that regional and transregional competition can explain 12% of the variance in internal conflicts. The beta coefficient of 0.352 indicates that a one-unit change in the independent variable results in a 0.352-unit change in the dependent variable. The significance level of 0.000

confirms the meaningful relationship between the variables. Therefore, regional and transregional competition influences internal conflicts.

6.4. *Question 4: How does the government influence Afghanistan's internal conflicts from the perspective of ethnic elites?*

Table 4

Linear Regression for Identifying the Influence of the Government on Internal Conflicts

Source	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
Constant	2.094	0.185		13.481	0.000
Government	0.353	0.044	0.392	8.105	0.000

F= 65.698, sig= 0.000, R²= 0.152

As seen in Table 4, the significance level of 0.000 indicates a meaningful relationship between internal conflicts and the government. The beta coefficient of 0.392 suggests that for every one-unit change in the independent variable, the dependent variable changes by 0.392 units. The R² value of 0.152 indicates that the government can explain 15% of the variance in internal conflicts.

6.5. *Summary of Independent Variables' Influence on Internal Conflicts*

The order of influence from the independent variables is as follows: the government has the greatest influence at 15%, regional and transregional competition at 12%, ethnic nationalism at 7%, and relative deprivation at 5%. Another factor that may influence internal conflicts but was not included in the study's variables is the diversity of ethnic groups.

Table 5

Differences in Perspectives Among Ethnic Groups

(I) Ethnicity	(J) Ethnicity	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Hazara	Pashtun	0.167*	0.040
	Tajik	0.7619	0.629
	Uzbek	0.2094	0.996
	Others	0.10163	0.844
Pashtun	Hazara	0.16736*	0.040
	Tajik	0.24355*	0.001
	Uzbek	0.18830*	0.031
	Others	0.26900	0.077
Tajik	Hazara	-0.7619	0.629
	Pashtun	-24355*	0.001
	Uzbek	-0.5525	0.890
	Others	0.2544	0.999
Uzbek	Hazara	-0.2094	0.996
	Pashtun	0.18830*	0.031
	Tajik	0.05525	0.890
	Others	0.08069	0.934
Others	Hazara	-0.10163	0.844
	Pashtun	-0.26900	0.077
	Tajik	-0.02544	0.999
	Uzbek	-0.08069	0.934

According to [Table 5](#), the only significant difference in perspectives on internal conflicts is between the Pashtun ethnic group and other ethnic groups. The significance level is less than 0.05, indicating a meaningful difference in perspectives among these groups.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Afghanistan is a country with a heterogeneous ethnic society, characterized by a mosaic structure. Numerous ethnic groups and tribes, each with different customs, traditions, and forms, coexist and represent the diversity and dynamism of Afghanistan. The internal roots of the conflict in Afghanistan include the "national identity crisis, presidential political structure, political legitimacy crisis, government inefficiency, and financial and economic weaknesses." The external factors contributing to the conflict in Afghanistan include regional and transregional power competition, the role of Pakistan and India, and the rivalry between the U.S., Russia, and Iran.

Internal conflicts have highlighted deep-rooted divisions within Afghan society. Ethnic differences, particularly between Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, have fueled tensions and perpetuated distrust among various groups. The marginalization of certain communities has led to discontent, which militant groups often exploit to recruit members and garner support. A prominent factor in escalating internal conflicts in Afghanistan is the country's diverse ethnic and tribal composition. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks are some of the main groups involved in the power struggle. The competition for political dominance has continually fueled tensions, leading to violent conflicts.

Another critical aspect influencing Afghanistan's internal conflicts is the lack of stable and effective governance. Incompetence and corruption within the political system have deepened ethnic divisions, contributing to widespread discontent and dissatisfaction among the population. A weak central government has been unable to establish its authority or provide essential services, leaving a power vacuum that militant groups have exploited. External interventions have significantly

intensified Afghanistan's internal conflicts. Over the past two decades, countries such as the United States, Pakistan, and Iran have played various roles by supporting different factions, often exacerbating the conflict. Their strategic interests, proxy wars, and arming of militant groups have complicated the fragile situation inside the country. Rampant poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to education and healthcare have made portions of the population vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. The hopeless conditions push individuals toward radical ideologies, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

In summary, both internal and external factors have played a significant role in perpetuating internal tensions in Afghanistan. However, among the internal factors, ethnic nationalism stands out as a key factor in marginalizing other ethnic groups, leading to distrust and disunity, which manifest in various forms of dissatisfaction within society. Among the external factors, the interference of major powers and interested countries has historically played a continuous role in creating insecurity and instability in Afghanistan, with little respite. These external actors, in pursuit of their interests, have deprived the country of peace.

The results show that the variable of the government has had the most influence on internal conflicts, accounting for 15%. The government has long been dominated by one ethnic group, which explains this outcome. The next influential variable on internal conflicts is the competition among regional and international powers, which accounts for 12% of the impact. These powers have supported and engaged with different factions in Afghan society, contributing to the intensification and continuation of conflicts. Another noteworthy finding is that the views of the Pashtun ethnic group differ significantly from those of other groups, which reinforces their dominant role in governance.

Based on these findings, enhancing cohesion and interaction among the various ethnic groups and communities in society, promoting a culture of peace and dialogue to resolve conflicts, and reforming flawed governmental policies to increase transparency and justice could be beneficial in improving the situation in Afghanistan.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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