

*Extended English Abstracts*

*of Articles of*

**The “Central Asia  
and The Caucasus  
Studies”**

**Scientific-Research  
Quarterly**

*No. 131, Autumn 2025*

1.

## **The Political Economy of Energy in Central Asia: The Role of Regional and International Actors**

Sajjad Abbasalipour<sup>1</sup>

Mehdi Fakheri<sup>2</sup>

### **Extended Abstract**

This paper analyzes the political economy of energy in post-independence Central Asia, arguing that the region's vast energy resources represented the most significant opportunity for its republics to overcome the profound economic and political crises of the 1990s. The present research pursues two primary levels of analysis: at the regional level, it examines the reasons for the failure of intra-regional cooperation and the decisive role of external powers; and at the domestic level, it re-examines the "resource curse" theory and analyzes the role of energy revenues in the political stability and economic structure of these nations.

The paper's main argument at the regional level is that economic and energy cooperation among Central Asian countries has largely failed due to the prevalence of a "realist logic," mutual distrust, and geopolitical rivalries. Statistical data corroborates this reality; despite recent growth, intra-regional trade constitutes only about five percent of these countries' total foreign trade, indicating a low level of economic interdependence.

One prominent example of the failure in economic cooperation is the collapse of the integrated power system inherited from the Soviet era. This system was based on the exchange of thermally generated electricity from downstream countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) during the winter for agricultural water supplied by upstream countries (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) in the summer. However, after independence, this efficient system was abandoned due to a lack of political trust, financial disputes, and concerns that water and energy resources could be used as leverage. This trend left the countries facing serious shortages and demonstrates that the region's leaders have prioritized relative gains and security concerns over the absolute gains achievable through cooperation.

The paper shows that regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program have also

---

<sup>1</sup>. MA in Regional Studies, Faculty of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. s.a.alipour1996@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>. Corresponding author and associate professor, Faculty of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. m.fakheri@sir.ac.ir

failed to fundamentally alter this realist logic. Rather than fostering regional integration, these institutions have become platforms for facilitating bilateral agreements, particularly between members and a major power like China.

Based on this analysis, the paper's key hypothesis is formed: large-scale and successful energy projects in Central Asia have only been realized when a major external power has played the role of a "facilitator and guarantor." Without the presence and will of a powerful economic and political actor, major projects do not come to fruition due to domestic obstacles. Numerous successful examples confirm this hypothesis: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, led by a Western consortium to reduce dependence on Russia; the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), with Russian participation; and most importantly, the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, which was rapidly implemented with Beijing's investment and guarantees, shifting the region's energy balance. Even the TAPI project has only approached the implementation phase with the support of international powers like the United States and India.

In this context, China's actions are analyzed as being fully consistent with a neomercantilist approach. Through massive investments in Kazakhstan's oil and Turkmenistan's gas sectors, China simultaneously pursues several strategic objectives: ensuring its own energy security, reducing dependency on vulnerable maritime routes like the Strait of Malacca which are under U.S. influence, and creating a counterbalance to other energy suppliers such as Russia

At the domestic and national economy level of analysis, the paper undertakes a critical evaluation of the "resource curse" theory. This theory posits that an abundance of natural resources leads to the formation of closed and authoritarian political systems by creating a "rentier state" that has no need for taxation or accountability to its society. Although the energy-rich republics of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) do have political systems with limited participation, the paper argues that the mere existence of resources cannot be considered the primary cause for the formation of these systems.

Citing the analysis of Stephen Haber and Victor Menaldo, the paper emphasizes that the roots of authoritarianism in these countries are more attributable to the political history and culture inherited from the Soviet era. These states were authoritarian even before the development of their natural resources. In fact, the paper proposes an inverse proposition: in the absence of energy revenues, these countries would have faced far more severe political, security, and economic instabilities during the turbulent 1990s, which was marked by managerial shocks, severe inflation, and the collapse of supply chains. The comparison of the relative stability and improved welfare in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan with the chronic political instability in resource-poor Kyrgyzstan reinforces this argument. Therefore, energy resources were not the "cause" of authoritarianism but rather a "vital tool" for maintaining minimal stability and preventing state collapse during the transition period.

The commodity price boom between 2000 and 2014 highlighted this role. During this period, Kazakhstan's GDP grew from 18 billion to 236 billion. These vast revenues allowed the governments to garner relative public consent by distributing a portion of the rents, thereby reducing the pressure for deep structural reforms. After the fall of oil prices in 2014, these countries sought to sustain growth by pursuing new roles, such as becoming a "transit corridor" within the framework of China's "Belt and Road Initiative."

In conclusion, the paper asserts that for Central Asia, energy resources have been an "opportunity" for survival and minimal development. These resources provided the necessary tools to manage post-collapse crises, while the roots of authoritarianism in the region are deeper and more historical. At the regional level, sustainable cooperation has failed to materialize due to the dominance of a realist logic, and major projects have always required the facilitation and guarantees of an external power. Amid this, China, with an intelligent strategy based on ensuring energy security and creating a balance of power, has become the decisive actor in the region's political economy of energy.

**Keywords:** Political Economy of Energy, Political Economy of Central Asia, Regional Cooperation in Central Asia, China and Central Asian Energy, Resource Curse.

2.

# Iran and the BRICS Countries: A Study of Trade Synergies

Moslem Ansarinasab<sup>1</sup>

Najmeh.Bydmal<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The study begins by emphasizing the accelerating pace of global economic and industrial development and the central role of international trade as a key driver of economic growth. Globalization, characterized by increasing interdependence among nations, has redefined economic structures and competition. Within this context, regional groupings such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) have become crucial for shaping international trade patterns. Given the strategic importance of BRICS, the paper seeks to assess Iran's trade relationships with these emerging economies to identify pathways for deeper economic cooperation and integration.

## 2. Literature Review

The paper reviews the evolution of global and regional economic integration, focusing on the rise of BRICS as a group of emerging economies with growing influence in global production, energy consumption, and finance. Citing scholars such as Goldman Sachs (2003), Zhang (2021), and Rahman & Islam (2023), it notes that BRICS now represents about one-quarter of global GDP and over 40% of the world's population. The review also discusses structural characteristics of BRICS economies—rapid growth, high energy dependence, and increasing participation in global governance—and argues that Iran, as an energy-rich developing economy, can complement and benefit from trade with this group.

The main goal of the study is to formulate a roadmap for Iran's trade policy through quantitative analysis of trade similarity, trade stability, and trade co-movement between Iran and BRICS members from 2003 to 2022. The authors pose a central research question: To what extent are Iran's trade patterns similar to and synchronized with those of BRICS countries? The answer, based on statistical and econometric modeling, is intended to guide Iran's strategic orientation toward this influential economic bloc.

## 3. Methodology and Indicators

---

<sup>1</sup>. Associate professor of Department of Economy, Vali-E-Asr University, Rafsanjan, Kerman, Islamic Republic of Iran, M.Ansarinasab@vru.ac.ir

<sup>2</sup>. PHD, Shahid Bahonar University, Kerman, Islamic Republic of Iran, Najmeh.Bydmal@yahoo.com

The research employs three quantitative indices: (1) the Grubel–Lloyd index to measure trade similarity, (2) a relative dispersion index to assess the stability of bilateral trade, and (3) a trade co-movement index to evaluate synchronization of trade dynamics. These indicators were applied to Iran’s trade data with each BRICS member over the 2003–2022 period, using statistics from the World Trade Organization. The methodology allows comparison of the structure and consistency of Iran’s export and import relationships with BRICS economies.

#### **4. Findings**

Results show that Iran’s trade similarity with China and India is the highest, reflecting strong alignment in traded goods and market integration. Russia follows with a moderate level of similarity, while Brazil and South Africa display weaker alignment. Over time, the Iran–China and Iran–India indices have maintained an upward trend, suggesting stable complementarities. In contrast, Iran–South Africa trade similarity has declined since 2015, indicating the need for renewed engagement and diversification of traded goods.

Analysis of trade stability reveals that Iran’s exports to India and Russia have demonstrated the highest consistency, while imports from Brazil and Russia have been the most stable among import partners. Overall, four out of five bilateral trade relationships (excluding South Africa) show strong and sustained stability. These results imply that Iran’s trade with BRICS members, particularly India, China, Russia, and Brazil, provides a reliable foundation for long-term economic planning.

The trade co-movement index highlights significant synchronization between Iran–China and Iran–South Africa trade flows, followed by Iran–Russia and Iran–Brazil. However, the Iran–India trade relationship shows weak and statistically insignificant co-movement, suggesting that its trade patterns are relatively independent of the other BRICS members. This indicates that strengthening Iran–India trade requires separate, targeted strategies rather than relying on indirect spillovers from Iran’s trade with other BRICS partners.

#### **5. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

The study concludes that Iran’s accession to BRICS could yield substantial trade and economic benefits. The findings of this study clearly indicate that Iran’s trade structure exhibits the highest degree of similarity and stability with China and India, followed by Russia and Brazil, while trade relations with South Africa remain relatively weak. The strong alignment and co-movement between Iran and China demonstrate that any increase in Iran–China trade is likely to stimulate trade with other BRICS members as well. In contrast, the relatively low synchronization with India implies that expanding trade with this country requires independent policy initiatives and focused economic diplomacy. These results highlight the multidimensional nature of Iran’s potential integration into the BRICS framework, where each bilateral relationship presents distinct opportunities and challenges.

In light of these findings, the study recommends that Iran actively pursue closer cooperation and eventual accession to the BRICS group to maximize its economic gains. Strengthening ties with China and India should be prioritized as these countries provide the most stable and synergistic trade relationships. At the same time, Iran should design targeted strategies to enhance trade diversification with Russia, Brazil, and

South Africa. Overall, the statistical evidence suggests that deeper trade engagement with BRICS could enhance Iran's global trade position, stabilize its export and import flows, and contribute to sustainable economic growth through strategic utilization of complementary capacities among emerging economies.

3.

## China and Russia's strategy in the Middle East

Hossein Fattahi Ardakani<sup>1</sup>

### **abstract**

The Middle East has always been a strategic region of interest to international powers. Meanwhile, China and Russia, as two major global powers, are trying to expand their influence in the region by creating a multipolar order and challenging the hegemony of the West and the United States. Based on the findings of the present study with a game theoretical framework and explanatory method, the strategies of these two countries in the Middle East are different but complementary. China has an economic, long-term, pragmatic, and flexible approach and tries to maintain its relations with all players in the region, while refraining from challenging the interests of the United States as a guarantor of stability. In contrast, Russia has a military and defense approach that includes political and military support for some countries, controlled arms sales, maintaining regional stability, and combating terrorism. Despite the differences in strategies, common interests have led them to cooperate and maintain frequent diplomatic contacts in the region. This strategic division of labor has led China and Russia to have a balanced presence in the Middle East and play an important role in its political and security developments.

### **Detailed abstract**

**Introduction:** The Middle East is important to global powers for geostrategic, economic, and energy reasons. Due to its geographical proximity, Russia considers this region its own lifeblood and seeks to protect its interests through political and military cooperation. However, the conflict in Ukraine and the developments in Syria have reduced its influence. This reduction has created opportunities for the United States and China. As an emerging power, China has expanded its interactions with the Middle East to provide the energy needed for its economy. Its approach is based on non-intervention, developing economic relations, and establishing stability, which is in contrast to Western policies. This strategy has won the trust of many countries in the region. Russia and China are active in a complex environment with the presence of multiple actors in the Middle East. They emphasize strategic cooperation and avoid tension with each other to counter American unilateralism. This cooperation helps China advance its economic plans and Russia maintain its security position. As a result, the presence of these two powers in the region is based on division of labor and cooperation to achieve common goals.

**Research Method:** This research is of an applied type and qualitative method, and is organized in a descriptive and analytical manner. To collect information, library and documentary methods were used, referring to books, articles, and reputable research achievements on the subject.

---

<sup>1</sup>. Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ardakan University, Ardakan, Yazd, Islamic Republic of Iran. h-fattahi@ardakan.ac.ir

**Theoretical Framework:** Game theory is one of the most common applied theories in the field of international relations, which is based on rational choices. According to this theory, the choices of actors in the field of international politics, especially in strategic and strategic situations and situations, depend on the type of choices of other competing actors. In fact, the ultimate goal of this method is to find an optimal strategy to achieve goals and benefits. The existence of concepts such as strategy, efficiency, balance, cooperation and conflict helps us in explaining the strategic competition strategy of China and Russia in the Middle East. It also plays a role in understanding the effects of convergence on Russia's relations with the Middle East and the balance of power in this region.

**Findings: China's Strategy in the Middle East: Economic and Energy Cooperation:** China's activities in the Middle East have been trade-oriented and pragmatic. China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 to improve interstate connectivity and create new trade routes, solidifying China's position as a central trading hub. Most countries in the Middle East are involved in this initiative, and research shows that it has achieved relative success compared to other areas.

**Diplomatic Engagements:** In the 21st century, China's foreign policy has been characterized by a concerted effort to build global partnerships and expand interests with other countries, using these relationships as geopolitical tools to exert power and influence. The essence of these partnerships lies in the shared commitment to managing inevitable conflicts, which enables the countries involved to continue cooperating in vital areas of mutual interest.

**Political alignment:** China supports a multipolar rather than unipolar order in the Middle East. It has sought to expand its political influence vis-à-vis other great powers by mediating conflicts across the region, notably the Syrian war and disagreements over the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

**Science and Technology:** The Middle East plays a prominent role in China's DSR, under which Chinese technology and technology companies have secured countries in the region with 5G network contracts. Through DSR, China seeks to establish itself as a global technological superpower with significant economic, security, and geopolitical implications for the Middle East and beyond.

**Military and Defense:** In the defense sector, China's activities in the Middle East have been expanding. The UAE purchased Chinese drones in 2016 and 2018 after the United States refused to sell its latest weaponized drones due to the impact of the war in Yemen.

**Russia's Strategy in the Middle East: Military and Defense:** Combating terrorism and preventing the spread of nuclear weapons are among the country's declared policies in the Middle East. Russia has developed its military and defense relations with Middle Eastern countries, which include selling military weapons, concluding defense contracts, and holding joint military exercises.

**Diplomatic Engagements:** By intervening in crises such as Syria and engaging in peace diplomacy, Russia seeks to establish itself as an influential global and regional power. These actions strengthen its international role.

**Economic and energy cooperation:** Moscow seeks to strengthen its economy through global trade and investment, including with governments and business companies in the

Middle East, and through the energy market, which includes several oil-producing countries in the Persian Gulf.

**Political alignment:** By supporting allies such as Syria and Iran, Russia advances its strategic interests in the Middle East and solidifies its position as a key power.

**Cooperation in the fight against terrorism:** The issue of combating terrorism has been a common ground for Russia's cooperation with countries in the region. Russia has sought to cooperate with Middle Eastern countries to address common security concerns, including the fight against terrorism and extremism.

**Nuclear Energy:** Russia's nuclear cooperation in the Middle East, by establishing long-term relationships in the fields of fuel and maintenance, is a strategic tool for consolidating the country's sustainable political and commercial influence in the region.

**Conclusion:** This study shows that China and Russia have little overlap in their interests in the Middle East. China focuses on economic interests through investments in infrastructure, energy, and the Belt and Road Initiative, while Russia emphasizes arms sales and security interventions to expand its influence. Nevertheless, the two powers have a strategic partnership to counter US hegemony and promote a multipolar world. Although they compete, they do not seek to constrain each other, but rather to define the boundaries of cooperation. This complementary strategy allows both countries to pursue their own interests while limiting US influence.

4.

# Design and Validation of a Diagnostic Model of Cultural Development Indicators in Central Asia

Mohammad Farhadi<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Central Asia—owing to its post-Soviet state-building, ethnic and linguistic diversity, connections to historic routes for the exchange of ideas and goods, and its location at the intersection of regional and extra-regional rivalries—offers a compelling case for examining cultural dynamics. In this setting, the coexistence of deep-rooted traditions and modernization projects has created institutional gaps between the old and the new and has influenced cultural outcomes. Alongside notable advantages, these interactions have also produced patterned disruptions—manifested in an underdeveloped civil society and the weakness of independent media, a fragile democratic culture and limited horizontal trust, inequality and volatility in the quality of education, and external pressures—that collectively shape the trajectory of cultural policymaking.

## Theoretical Framework

Cultural development theory is adopted to bridge the gap between purely economic or institutional accounts and the empirical ways in which values and norms translate into collective action, governance, and developmental outcomes. In this view, culture is the substrate of collective rationality and social learning—the medium through which values become stable norms of interaction, cooperation, and institutional trust. A key advantage is its amenability to operationalization, with indicators including cultural and civic participation, social capital, media literacy, and norm internalization. Crucially, economic and institutional dimensions are not displaced; rather, they function alongside culture as mediating or moderating variables, yielding a more complete account of developmental processes.

Consistent with a multidimensional conception of development, culture is not limited to literature and the arts; it denotes shared modes of living and collaboration anchored in systems of beliefs, values, and norms. From this vantage point, development is tied to the rationalization of society—both instrumentally and meaning-oriented—and is realized when knowledge and innovation are socially absorbed and embedded in everyday life. Accordingly, culture provides a foundational condition for broad-based development: sustained progress is unlikely without a corresponding cultural transformation across structural, institutional, and behavioral levels.

## Methodology

This exploratory, applied study adopts an inductive research strategy and a qualitative design using thematic analysis. We employ a networked thematic approach to visualize interrelations among themes and conduct coding in three stages—open, axial, and selective—to derive basic, organizing, and global themes. These results inform a conceptual model of **cultural development vulnerabilities** in Central Asia.

## Findings

Guided by cultural-development logic, we identify four interwoven drivers that weaken or strengthen cultural capacity and model them as networked causal circuits amenable to intervention. Culture is treated

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of International Relations, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. [m\\_farhadi@sbu.ac.ir](mailto:m_farhadi@sbu.ac.ir)

not as a set of symbols but as the substrate of collective rationality, social learning, and value organization. Intermediary institutions—independent media, civil associations, and the education system—serve as capability enablers, while interactions with the regional and extra-regional environment determine whether these capabilities consolidate or erode.

**1) Absence of robust civil society and independent media.** Dominant mechanisms include censorship/self-censorship, executive centralization, licensing hurdles for non-governmental and civil-society organizations (NGOs/CSOs), and weak media literacy. We uncover a feedback loop whereby media control reduces trust and horizontal participation, shrinking associational capacity and further legitimizing control.

**2) Weak democratic culture.** A cluster of patrons–client orientations, authoritarian discourses, merely procedural participation, and low social trust/tolerance. Democratizing culture generalizes communicative rationality—expanding dialogue and practicing tolerance—so that values become durable norms. We position democratic culture as a mediating variable between political institutions and cultural outcomes, implying policies that foster intergroup/cross-identity dialogue, institutionalized procedures for conceding electoral defeat, and social-mediation infrastructure.

**3) Low educational indicators.** Rather than a simple resource deficit, these arise from structural/managerial weaknesses, legal–administrative overlaps, and programmatic dualities (Soviet legacies vs. new principles; centralization vs. decentralization; state-run vs. private). We shift the focus from outcome metrics to intervenable institutional mechanisms—misaligned finance and content, multiplicity of authorities, and rule conflicts—that block the conversion of educational inputs into cultural outputs (collaborative skills, critical literacy).

**4) Regional and extra-regional challenges.** Power rivalries, proxy conflicts, geo-economics pressures, and transnational identity tensions operate as environmental conditions. External shocks travel through identifiable channels—media, funding for education/culture, and language/identity policies—into the model’s core (civil society, democratic culture, education), motivating institutional shields and diversification of cultural resources.

**Synthesis.** The framework (i) replaces problem lists with networked causal circuits that make feedback loops visible; (ii) reorients analysis from outcome indicators to intervenable institutional mechanisms, identifying leverage points (independent media, associational capacity, educational governance architecture, institutional shields); and (iii) bridges micro–meso–macro levels to offer a mechanism-based, measurable account of cultural development in Central Asia.

## **Conclusion**

By designing and validating a network-based diagnostic model of cultural development indicators in Central Asia, this study shows that the observed decline in these indicators is not the product of a single cause but rather the outcome of interactions among four interlinked clusters: the absence of independent civil society and of independent media; weaknesses in democratic political culture; institutional deficiencies in education; and regional and extra-regional pressures. The underlying logic of these clusters is best understood as mutually reinforcing feedback loops—for example, media control → erosion of trust and collective action → diminished associational capacity → further control—that form a self-amplifying circuit and ultimately constrain the conversion of cultural inputs into measurable outcomes.

5.

# Phenomenology of Strategies for Resolving Water Disputes between Iran and Afghanistan in the Harirud Basin

Ali Akbarpour Almehr Joghi<sup>1</sup>

## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Shared water resources have always been one of the most challenging issues in international relations, especially in arid and semi-arid regions. In such circumstances, water acts not only as a vital resource but also as a geopolitical tool in relations between countries. The Harirud River basin is a prominent example of this fact, flowing between Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan and is of fundamental importance to them in terms of drinking water supply, agriculture, and food security. In recent years, the development of dams in Afghanistan, such as the Salma and Pashdan dams, and Iran's exploitation of the Dosti dam, has created increasing competition and sensitivities in this basin. The lack of a comprehensive and binding legal regime, coupled with climate change and weak intergovernmental institutions, has further complicated the existing disputes. Therefore, a scientific and in-depth study of strategies for resolving water disputes between Iran and Afghanistan seems to be an inevitable necessity. Meanwhile, phenomenology, as a qualitative approach that emphasizes understanding the lived experience of individuals, can provide a new understanding of the hidden layers and perceptions of experts regarding water disputes. With such an approach, the present study seeks to identify and explain efficient mechanisms and sustainable strategies for resolving water disputes in this basin by representing the experience and understanding of experts in the fields of water, international relations, and the environment.

### Research Methodology

This study was qualitative and conducted with an interpretive phenomenological approach. The statistical population included experts and specialists in the fields of water resources, diplomacy, environment, and regional studies who were selected through purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was reached. In total, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted between 1403 and 1404. The resulting data, after implementation, were analyzed through a three-stage coding process (open, axial, and selective). To increase the validity and reliability of the data, Lincoln and Guba's criteria including trustworthiness, verifiability, transferability, and dependability were used. The data analysis process resulted in the extraction of 11 main categories and 116 open codes, which were organized into seven domains: political, social, cultural, economic, legal, and environmental. The ultimate goal was to achieve a conceptual model that could explain the relationships between these categories within a strategic framework for managing water disputes between Iran and Afghanistan.

---

<sup>1</sup> . Master's degree in Political Science, Faculty of Humanities, Payam Noor Qochan University, Qochan, Islamic Republic of Iran. Email: akbarpourali1370@gmail.com

## Findings

The results showed that strategies for resolving water disputes in the Harirud Basin can be explained in the form of eleven main categories. The first category is “mutual benefits,” which emphasizes the need to redefine the interests of the two countries within the framework of win-win cooperation and sustainable development. The second category is “formal and informal diplomacy,” which includes expanding political dialogue, strengthening informal channels, and using regional and international mediation. The third is “international institutions,” which can play a monitoring and facilitating role in the form of specialized water organizations, legal forums, or UN development programs. The fourth category is “education and empowerment,” which, from the experts’ perspective, is considered the key to strengthening the culture of efficient consumption and improving the knowledge of local communities about water rights. “Economic interactions,” as the fifth category, refers to the capacities for cooperation in cross-border trade, energy, and joint investment in infrastructure projects that can reduce the intensity of water competition. The sixth category is “environmental issues,” which emphasizes the need to assess the environmental impacts of dam construction, wetland restoration, and climate change management. Next, “Scientific and local synergy” was proposed as a strategy to promote shared knowledge, exchange hydrological information, and attract the participation of border communities. “Executive will” is also a determining factor, without which even the best political agreements will not be achieved. The other two categories, “Cultural and social interactions” and “Transparency,” emphasize strengthening mutual trust, promoting intercultural dialogue, and free exchange of technical and management data, respectively. Finally, the “strategic document,” as the final category, raises the need to develop a common roadmap, determine time frames, and performance evaluation indicators. Table (1) reports the main categories and data sources:

**Table (1). Categories and subcategories extracted from interviews**

Main categories	Data sources (informants)
Mutual benefits (18)	1, 2, 2, 5, 4, 7, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 13, 14, 15, 15, 18, 18, 19
Formal and informal diplomacy (20)	1, 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 9, 9, 10, 10, 11, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 18, 20
International institutions (10)	1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17, 17, 19
Training courses (7)	1, 2, 4, 11, 12, 14, 19
Economic interactions (9)	1, 3, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20
Environmental issues (9)	2, 4, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 20
Scientific and local synergy (16)	2, 2, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7, 9, 9, 11, 19, 20
Executive will (4)	3, 5, 12, 20
Cultural and social interactions (7)	3, 6, 6, 13, 18, 19, 19
Transparency (11)	6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 20
Strategy Document (5)	3, 14, 15, 17, 20

**Source: Researcher’s findings**

## Analysis and interpretation

Data analysis showed that the water disputes between Iran and Afghanistan are not simply a technical or legal phenomenon, but are deeply intertwined with political, cultural, and social variables. From this

perspective, any sustainable solution must be designed based on a multi-level approach. At the macro level, water diplomacy and regional institution-building play a pivotal role. At the meso level, scientific and economic cooperation can strengthen trust-building. At the micro level, local communities and civil society organizations are key factors in implementing agreements. According to the interviewees, the lack of executive will, weak information transparency, and the absence of legally binding mechanisms are the most important obstacles to realizing water cooperation between the two countries. Also, ignoring cultural and social ties has created a misunderstanding of the intentions and goals of the other party and sometimes led to an escalation of distrust. In contrast, successful global experiences such as the joint management of the Nile or Danube Rivers show that the combination of scientific diplomacy, legal agreements, and data transparency can pave the way for peace and cooperation. From a phenomenological perspective, experts believe that resolving water disputes requires a paradigm shift from competition to cooperation; in other words, water must be transformed from a “tool of power” to a “tool of convergence.” This can only be achieved through an integrated and interdisciplinary approach that simultaneously considers legal, technical, cultural, and economic dimensions.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show that strategies for resolving water disputes between Iran and Afghanistan in the Harirud Basin can be categorized into five main dimensions: political-diplomatic, economic-developmental, environmental, socio-cultural, and legal-institutional. These dimensions will be effective when implemented in the form of a joint strategic document and under the supervision of impartial international institutions. From a policy perspective, it is suggested that a permanent commission for the management of border waters between Iran and Afghanistan be established with the presence of international observers. Joint research projects be designed to monitor water resources and study the effects of dam construction. Water diplomacy be expanded at the academic and cultural levels to strengthen social and scientific relations between the two nations. Hydrological information be exchanged transparently and regularly between the two countries. An educational and empowerment program for local border communities be implemented in line with the sustainable use of water resources. Finally, the phenomenological approach showed that understanding water disputes is not possible without understanding the lived experience of the actors and their subjective perceptions. Therefore, any policy-making in this area should be based not only on technical data but also on human perception, political culture, and local capacities. Emphasizing this approach, the present article has attempted to present a multidimensional and deep picture of the complex reality of Harirud and pave the way towards participatory and sustainable management of border waters.

**Key Word:** Phenomenology; Water disputes; Iran; Afghanistan; Harirud.

6.

## **Geopolitical Changes in the South Caucasus and Iran's Economic and Security Interests**

Ali Akbar Jowkar<sup>1</sup>

Akbar Valizadeh<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction**

The South Caucasus region, with its unique geopolitical position, has long been one of the focal points of competition and influence among regional and extra-regional powers. Owing to its rich energy resources and the strategic importance of oil and gas transit routes, the region has acquired exceptional strategic significance. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the independence of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, numerous military and security crises emerged in the area, among which the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been directly linked to Iran's national interests. The growing presence of extra-regional actors—such as the United States, the European Union, NATO, and Israel—has created a complex situation in the South Caucasus with far-reaching implications for regional stability and security.

The geopolitical developments of the South Caucasus, particularly after the First and Second Karabakh Wars, have once again underscored the importance of this region in Iran's security and economic calculations. The November 2020 ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh marked the beginning of new geopolitical dynamics in the region, bringing both challenges and opportunities for neighboring states, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a country sharing borders with both Armenia and Azerbaijan and located at a strategic

---

<sup>1</sup>. PhD Candidate in Regional Studies, University of Tehran . Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. [a.a.jowkar98@ut.ac.ir](mailto:a.a.jowkar98@ut.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup>Corresponding author and assistant professor, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran . Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. [akbarvalizadeh@ut.ac.ir](mailto:akbarvalizadeh@ut.ac.ir)

crossroads between Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Caspian Sea, Iran is compelled to pursue a flexible and multilayered policy toward these developments.

An examination of regional crises and projects—such as the Zangezur Corridor—reveals that Iran faces a combination of opportunities and threats: growing influence of rival actors like Turkey and Israel near its northwestern borders, changes in transit dynamics reducing Iran’s geoeconomic role, and, conversely, new openings for cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union and participation in alternative transport corridors. From a security perspective, the consolidation of military cooperation between Azerbaijan and its allies, especially after the liberation of adjacent areas such as Jabrayil and Zangilan, has raised serious concerns in Tehran. Azerbaijan’s deepening ties with Tel Aviv challenge Iran’s red lines regarding regional power balance.

Simultaneously, discussions surrounding the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor—as a geopolitical and geoeconomic project—have heightened Tehran’s sensitivity to the possible closure of its border with Armenia. These concerns extend beyond security and encompass economic and transit dimensions: should the project materialize, Iran risks losing a vital role as the main land route connecting Nakhchivan to mainland Azerbaijan and as a key link between Central Asia and Turkey.

Economically, Iran has sought to counter competing regional projects by advancing the North–South Transport Corridor and deepening cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The 2023 Free Trade Agreement with the EAEU, set to take effect in 2025, provides Iran with a strategic opportunity to mitigate sanctions and expand access to regional markets. In this context, Armenia, as the only EAEU member sharing a land border with Iran, assumes increased importance and serves as a potential gateway for Iran’s broader economic engagement in Eurasia.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Iran’s foreign policy toward the South Caucasus must adopt an integrated approach—simultaneously emphasizing security deterrence, utilization of geoeconomic capacities, and careful management of interactions with both regional and extra-regional actors. Only through such a balanced and proactive strategy can Iran safeguard its borders, preserve its geopolitical relevance, and emerge as an influential and constructive player in the evolving dynamics of the South Caucasus and the broader Eurasian region.

7.

# **Analysis of the Joint Strategic Approach of India and Iran in the South Caucasus (With Emphasis on the Development of the North–South Corridor)**

Amirroham Shojaie<sup>1</sup>

Seyed Mehdi Velayati<sup>2</sup>

## **Extended Abstract**

### **Introduction and Problem Statement**

Despite the fundamental differences in the ideological foundations, value systems, and foreign policy orientations of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India, a form of strategic convergence has emerged between the two countries in recent decades within several domains of geo-economic significance. One of the most notable areas of this convergence lies in the South South Transport –Caucasus region, particularly within the framework of the International North South Corridor (INSTC) — a Europe through Iran and the Caucasus. This corridor embodies multiple dimensions, including transit, economic, security, and geopolitical aspects. Its importance can be analyzed in several respects: first, it offers substantial reductions in time and cost of transportation, making it economically attractive to New Delhi and other Asian partners; second, Iran, as the geographical pivot of the corridor, gains an opportunity to capitalize on its transit potential to mitigate the effects of sanctions and restore its regional role; and third, from the perspective of extra-regional powers such as Russia and the European Union, the corridor represents a safer and more diversified alternative to traditional global energy and trade routes. Accordingly, the central question of this study is: *what combination of factors has led to the formation and continuation of overlapping strategic approaches between Iran and India in the South Caucasus, particularly regarding the development of the North–South Corridor*

### **:Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The main research question is: *which combination of geo-economic and geopolitical variables has produced a shared strategic orientation between Iran and India regarding the North–South Corridor?* The study hypothesizes that, due to Iran's geographical advantages and strategic resources — including its exceptional transit position, access to open seas, abundant energy reserves, and latent infrastructural capacity — which hold high geo-economic value for India, as

---

<sup>1</sup>PhD student in International Relations, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Literature and . Humanities, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran

<sup>2</sup>.Master's student in International Relations, University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran

well as the existence of mutual economic, security, and commercial interests, a thematic and progressive cooperation has emerged between Tehran and New Delhi in this domain. However, the sustainability and deepening of this cooperation depend on structural variables at the international level (such as sanctions and global power balance) and geopolitical dynamics within the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

### **:Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on the **geo-economic approach**, which goes beyond traditional interpretations of military power and emphasizes the growing role of economy, geography, and infrastructure in reproducing national power and shaping international behavior. From a geo-economic standpoint, geography is not merely a physical backdrop but functions as a source and instrument of economic power. Within this framework, actors such as Iran and India seek to link economic interests with security and geopolitical gains through investment in transit routes, corridors, and multidimensional infrastructural projects. The research methodology is analytical–explanatory and relies on documentary data, scholarly articles, reports of international institutions, trade statistics, and policy analyses. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the interplay between economic interests, political motivations, and structural constraints.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The findings indicate that shared geo-economic interests between Iran and India — particularly in reducing trade costs and time, securing India’s access to the markets of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe, and developing alternatives to long and costly maritime routes — constitute the key drivers of India’s willingness to cooperate with Iran. Within the framework of its multilateral foreign policy, India seeks to lessen its overdependence on maritime routes extending from the Strait of Malacca to the Suez Canal and to reduce its geostrategic vulnerabilities through diversification of land-based trade routes. Conversely, Iran, under economic pressures caused by sanctions, aspires to utilize its geographical and infrastructural potential to enhance regional connectivity, generate transit revenues, and redefine its role as a bridge between East and West. The INSTC project and trilateral agreements among Iran, India, and Russia represent tangible manifestations of these converging interests, holding the potential to evolve into a new axis of economic and political cooperation.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain: infrastructural and logistical deficiencies in Iran (particularly in the railway network), bureaucratic inefficiencies in India, international sanctions and U.S. pressure, and persistent security uncertainties in the Caucasus region. Additionally, regional competition from powers such as Turkey and Russia, and their efforts to expand alternative routes such as the *Middle Corridor* (China–Kazakhstan–Azerbaijan–Turkey), directly influence the efficiency and attractiveness of the North–South route. At the extra-regional level, U.S. policies aimed at restricting economic interaction with Iran, as well as India’s complex relations with both Washington and Moscow, compel New Delhi to proceed cautiously in infrastructure cooperation with Tehran. Overall, the findings reveal that while geo-economic factors form the foundational incentives for bilateral cooperation and have facilitated partial progress of the project, its continuity and expansion are contingent upon structural transformations in the global order. As the international system moves toward multipolarity, Iran’s unique

geographical position and India's aspiration to diversify its partners and trade routes could jointly foster the elevation of the North–South Corridor's strategic relevance in the near future

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the Iran–India relationship within the framework of the North–South Corridor cannot be explained solely through ideological or political lenses but must be interpreted through the logic of geo-economics and mutual economic–security interests. In the short term, factors such as Iran's transit position, India's energy demands, and transport cost efficiencies serve as primary drivers of cooperation. However, in the medium and long terms, two determinants become decisive: first, U.S. policy choices regarding sanctions and waivers toward Iran; and second, regional developments in the Caucasus and the competition among parallel corridors. Hence, the continuity and effectiveness of the INSTC depend on a certain degree of reconfiguration in the international order — either through gradual improvement of Tehran–Washington relations or via the global transition toward a multipolar system that allows India greater autonomy in pursuing its geo-economic interests. In such an environment, Iran, by leveraging its geographical centrality and energy potential, could strengthen its connective role between the global South and North, transforming itself from a local actor into a regional transit and geo-economic power

**Keywords:** India, foreign policy, Iran, South Caucasus, North-South Corridor, Geoeconomy, Bilateral relations

## 8.

# **Karabakh in Transition from Conflict: A Legal Analysis of Post-War Challenges and Pathways to a Sustainable International Order**

Shamim Mahpouri<sup>1</sup>

Maryam Afshari<sup>2</sup>

The Nagorno Karabakh conflict stands as one of the most enduring and intricate territorial disputes in the post-Soviet space. The 2020 Second Karabakh War, followed by the 2023 Azerbaijani military operation, fundamentally reshaped the regional order by restoring Azerbaijan's full territorial control and leading to the dissolution of the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh in January 2024. This dramatic development ushered in a critical post-war phase that demands careful legal and institutional scrutiny under international law. The present study examines the post-conflict situation in Nagorno Karabakh, emphasizing the reconciliation of the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination as essential components for achieving sustainable peace. Employing a qualitative and documentary research design, this study combines descriptive, analytical, and comparative approaches. Primary sources include binding international instruments such as the UN Charter, Security Council resolutions, ICJ judgments, and conventions governing humanitarian and human rights law, while secondary sources consist of scholarly literature, United Nations reports, and regional analyses. Comparative case studies—such as the Aland Islands model in Finland, the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Northern Ireland peace process—provide analytical benchmarks for exploring feasible post-conflict arrangements. The findings indicate that while the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity aligns with international law, it simultaneously generates significant humanitarian and legal obligations. The

---

<sup>1</sup>. Ph.D. Candidate in Public International Law, Faculty of Law, Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. Mahpouri.shamim@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>. Corresponding author and Assistant Professor of Law, Islamic Azad University, Damavand Branch, Damavand, Islamic Republic of Iran. Maryam.afshari@iau.ac.ir

displacement of approximately one hundred thousand ethnic Armenians, alleged violations of cultural and property rights, and ongoing ICJ cases under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination underscore the need for sustained international oversight. Reconstruction efforts must adhere to principles of transitional justice, encompassing restitution, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. Furthermore, stability cannot be secured solely through military victory or political control; effective peacebuilding requires inclusive governance, protection of cultural heritage, and socio-economic reintegration. Establishing local accountability mechanisms in conjunction with international monitoring, under the supervision of organizations such as the United Nations or OSCE, is critical to ensure compliance with humanitarian and human rights standards.

Comparative analysis demonstrates that the coexistence of territorial integrity and minority protection is attainable through robust legal and institutional frameworks. The Aland Islands settlement exemplifies autonomy without secession, balancing respect for sovereignty with protection of linguistic and cultural identity, while the Northern Ireland peace process highlights the indispensable role of trust-building, reconciliation, power-sharing, and transitional justice institutions in achieving lasting stability. Applying these lessons to Nagorno Karabakh, the study advocates for a rights-based model that emphasizes equality before the law, the return or compensation of displaced populations, and the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage within Azerbaijan's sovereign territory. Such an approach aligns with international legal principles and fosters regional peacebuilding through dialogue and cooperation.

In conclusion, post-war reconstruction in Nagorno Karabakh must transcend conventional territorial settlements to establish a comprehensive legal order rooted in justice and inclusivity. Sustainable peace hinges on balancing territorial integrity with self-determination, ensuring accountability for violations, and facilitating the socio-political reintegration of affected communities. The success of this transition depends on three interdependent pillars: the political will of both Armenia and Azerbaijan to implement confidence-building measures, continuous engagement of international and regional organizations in monitoring and supporting post-conflict governance, and the adherence to international law as a tool for peace rather than geopolitical contestation. By integrating these elements, Nagorno Karabakh has the potential to transform from a site of recurrent conflict into a model of lawful coexistence and regional stability.

**Keywords:** Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Territorial Integrity, Right to Self-Determination, Transitional Justice, Minority Rights, Sustainable Peace

9.

## **Detailed Summary of the Research:**

### **China's Strategic Interests in Recognizing the Taliban; Opportunities and Challenges (2021-2025)**

Safiullah Mawlavi zada<sup>1</sup>  
Arsalan Ghorbani sheikhnashin<sup>2</sup>

This research examines the approach of the People's Republic of China toward the Taliban government in Afghanistan, utilizing Graham Allison's rational choice theory to analyze Beijing's challenges, opportunities, and strategic interests in the context of recognizing the Taliban. Employing an analytical-descriptive method based on library and documentary sources, the study addresses the question of how China's strategic interests—including border security, countering extremism, access to natural resources, and the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—have influenced its decision-making regarding the recognition of the Taliban, leading to the adoption of a de facto recognition policy. The primary hypothesis of the research posits that these interests have propelled China toward a cautious and pragmatic approach, establishing a balance between security threats and economic opportunities without jeopardizing its international legitimacy.

In the introduction, the research refers to the political-security transformations in Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, which have redefined the regional geopolitical environment. China's primary concern lies in the activities of groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in eastern Afghanistan, posing a direct threat to Xinjiang's security. As the ruling power, the Taliban plays a pivotal role in containing or facilitating these groups. Despite the Taliban's pledges of non-cooperation with foreign entities, China remains apprehensive about their informal ties, leading to caution in official decision-making. Conversely, economic opportunities, such as access to lithium, copper, and gold resources, along with Afghanistan's geopolitical position as a corridor linking Central Asia, Iran, and South Asia, render it a vital link in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By adopting a de facto recognition policy, China pursues its interests without formal commitments, an approach interpretable under Allison's model as a rational decision based on cost-benefit assessment.

The theoretical framework of the research is grounded in Allison's rational choice theory (the rational actor model), which views states as unitary rational entities that make decisions based on clear objectives, available resources, and option analysis. This model analyzes China's behavior as a logical response to conditions of ambiguity and threat. Following the Taliban's rise to power, China faced a duality of security concerns (ETIM threats) and economic prospects (resource access and BRI), achieving equilibrium through de facto recognition to preserve its international credibility. The research emphasizes that while this model has limitations, such as neglecting internal and bureaucratic factors, it proves valuable for analyzing China's strategic decisions.

The first section of the research is dedicated to China's strategic interests in Afghanistan under Taliban leadership. China's interests have remained constant since 2001, but priorities have shifted. During the first

---

<sup>1</sup>. PhD student in International Relations, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. [mowllasafiullah@gmail.com](mailto:mowllasafiullah@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>. Corresponding Author and Professor of International Relations, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. [ghorbani@khu.ac.ir](mailto:ghorbani@khu.ac.ir)

Taliban era (1996-2001), national security was paramount, with China securing assurances from Mullah Omar to prevent ETIM activities. After the Taliban's overthrow, China recognized the Karzai government and supported the U.S. war on terrorism, emphasizing the principle of non-interference. In the second Taliban period, priorities have evolved toward internal security, investment protection, and subsequently economic interests. China evaluates Afghanistan more from a regional stability perspective than bilateral relations, enhancing its diplomatic role in trilateral negotiations with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The dispatch of an official representative to Kabul in 2023 and the acceptance of a Taliban representative in Beijing in 2024 are regarded as implicit recognition. Chinese customs data indicate growth in bilateral trade post-2021, albeit imbalanced: Chinese exports have doubled, while imports (primarily pine nuts) have fluctuated. Charts illustrate the composition of exports (heavy machinery and textiles) and imports (pine nuts and zinc). The research concludes that China, by focusing on limited developmental aid, seeks to mitigate security risks and bolster its influence in Central Asia.

The second section analyzes China's decision on de facto recognition. De facto recognition serves as a flexible tool in international law, enabling limited relations without official commitments. In the case of the Taliban, China has established diplomatic and economic interactions without de jure recognition, such as ambassadorial appointments and BRI pursuits. China's decision assessment stems from concerns over the power vacuum following the U.S. withdrawal, which could empower ETIM. China considers ETIM one of its five primary threats and is wary of terrorist attacks and infiltration into Xinjiang. Reports highlight ETIM's activities in Central Asia and the dissemination of extremist propaganda. China leverages the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for counter-terrorism efforts and is concerned about the U.S. removal of ETIM from its terrorist list in 2020. The research underscores that de facto recognition acts as a pressure mechanism on the Taliban to sever ties with ETIM.

The third section addresses opportunities and challenges. Opportunities include containing ETIM through reliance on the Taliban, trade and investment (such as the Amu Darya oil contract with an annual investment of 150 million USD), and security enhancement via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. China offers economic incentives to safeguard its interests. Table 1 lists opportunities: border security, resource access, BRI expansion, and geopolitical influence. Challenges encompass the legal ambiguity of de facto recognition, contractual risks, and the weakening of international pressure on the Taliban. Table 2 delineates challenges: diplomatic contradictions, the Taliban's non-commitment to human rights, and regional instability. The impact on China's global interests includes economic strengthening (mining contracts), security (ETIM management), and geopolitics (filling the U.S. vacuum). Table 3 outlines the prospects for interests. The research also references China's response to Russia's official recognition of the Taliban in July 2025: a cautious welcome for economic exploitation without official costs, within a soft balancing framework.

In the conclusion, the research emphasizes that the People's Republic of China, confronting the complex, unstable, and multifaceted situation in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, has adopted a cautious, phased, and multidimensional approach, not driven by ideological alignment or mere geopolitical rivalry with the West, but rather within the framework of a measured and rational strategy based on preserving and expanding its national interests in Afghanistan and the region, such that China, by avoiding official recognition and instead accepting the Taliban government on a de facto basis, has successfully established a flexible balance between domestic imperatives, international obligations, and geo-economic opportunities arising from the power vacuum in Afghanistan, and on one hand, this strategy has enabled Beijing to play an active role in Afghanistan's security equations and prevent potential threats from the presence of extremist Islamic groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and ISIS near Xinjiang's borders, and on the other hand, to view Afghanistan as a potential geo-economic node for advancing strategic projects like the "Belt and Road Initiative" and continue investments in mining, transit, and energy sectors within a controllable and relatively stable framework, while by not officially recognizing the Taliban, it has kept its position negotiable in interactions with other global actors, particularly Western countries, and avoided international costs associated with legitimizing a group that, in the view of many nations, lacks standards for human

rights, political inclusivity, and rule of law, although this dual-faceted policy has created opportunities for economic and political influence in Afghanistan, it has also entailed challenges such as limited international legitimacy, competition with Russia and Iran, and vulnerability to Afghanistan's internal insecurities.

**Keywords:** China, Taliban, Afghanistan, Recognition, Regional Security

# 10.

## Macro-Determinants of Educational Inequality in Afghanistan

Hamid Masoudi <sup>1</sup>

Mohammad Nasir Saberi<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

Education is central to human capital development, enhancing cognitive and physical skills vital for economic growth and social mobility. Yet, educational inequalities, particularly in developing nations like Afghanistan, obstruct sustainable development. Equitable access to quality education is a fundamental right and prerequisite for societal advancement. Geographical disparities, arising from uneven resource distribution, restrict educational access in rural areas (Esmaeili et al., 2022). In Afghanistan, over 3.7 million children, 60% girls, are denied education due to poverty, conservative cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, and regional disparities (Ministry of Education, 2025; Omari, 2018). Post-2001 gains in women's education have recently declined (Danshvar, 2023). Scandinavian models, emphasizing infrastructure investment and support for low-income families, provide successful frameworks (OECD, 2019). This study examines economic, social, cultural, and geographical factors to propose actionable policies for reducing educational disparities in Afghanistan.

### Methodology

Adopting a positivist approach, this research utilizes secondary data analysis from Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Higher Education. The study population encompasses Afghanistan's provinces, focusing on key drivers of educational inequality. Educational equity, defined as equal opportunities within the education system (Tajasob, 2012: 49), is operationalized through indicators such as female and male teacher ratios, student enrollment, and public/private school prevalence. Data were analyzed using SPSS and linear regression to evaluate the impact of

---

<sup>1</sup> . Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Birjand, Birjand, Iran. [hmdmasoudi@birjand.ac.ir](mailto:hmdmasoudi@birjand.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> . Master's Student, Social Sciences Research, University of Birjand. Birjand , Iran. [mohammadnasir.saberi@birjand.ac.ir](mailto:mohammadnasir.saberi@birjand.ac.ir)

independent variables (economic, social, cultural, geographical) on educational inequality. An inequality index was computed per province, with regression models offering both univariate and multivariate insights.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Educational inequality, characterized by the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources, limits access to quality education across social, economic, and gender divides (Zare, 2014: 68). Farrell (1993) conceptualizes equity across access, participation, outcomes, and life impacts. Prior studies underscore multifaceted drivers: Esmaeili et al. (2022) highlight rural infrastructure deficits in Iran, Omari (2018) links household income to inequality in Nigeria via regression analysis, Greiving et al. (2020) demonstrate crisis-exacerbated learning gaps in Germany, and Tohid & Nasir (2020) address low-literacy household deprivation in Pakistan using the Atkinson index. Bourdieu's (1984) concepts of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) and habitus frame education as a non-neutral field reproducing inequality (Sharepour, 2004: 87). Tilly's (1998) exclusion and adaptation mechanisms emphasize resource control by dominant groups (Allen, 2009), while Taylor's (1992: 25) identity recognition highlights cultural exclusion in Afghanistan's multi-ethnic context (Ahmad & Bashir, 2021: 57). This study's novelty lies in its integrated analysis of multidimensional factors, contextualized to post-2021 Afghanistan, employing regression and provincial clustering.

## **Findings**

Data analysis from official sources reveals profound educational inequalities across Afghanistan's provinces. Provinces like Kapisa and Sar-e Pol show higher female teacher ratios and public school prevalence, while Zabul, Helmand, and Uruzgan suffer from severe shortages of teachers and infrastructure. High private school rates in Khost and Nangarhar indicate reliance on the private sector. Cluster analysis categorized provinces into high (Ghazni, Zabul), medium (Faryab, Jowzjan), and low (Kabul, Herat) inequality groups, driven by conflict, poverty, and infrastructure deficits (Central Statistics Organization, 2025). Linear regression identified border proximity ( $B=0.265$ ,  $p=0.062$ ) as a significant factor, with religion, employment, and unemployment showing negligible, non-significant effects (Billon et al., 2021).

## **Conclusion**

Educational inequalities in Afghanistan, driven by economic, social, cultural, and geographical factors, pose significant barriers to sustainable development. Cluster analysis reveals stark disparities, with border provinces facing acute challenges due to conflict, poverty, and limited infrastructure. Comprehensive policy interventions are essential, including enhancing educational infrastructure, improving teacher training, providing financial support to low-income families, and launching awareness campaigns to shift cultural attitudes, particularly toward girls' education. Collaborative efforts between government and international organizations are critical to fostering equitable education, reducing disparities, and promoting sustainable socioeconomic progress in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Educational inequality, Indicators of inequality, Afghanistan, Inequality