



The Durand Line Dispute: Historical Evolution and Its Geopolitical Implications for Pashtun Identity and Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

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Abstract

This study examines the Pak-Afghan border issue and its implications for the Pashtun population residing on both sides of the Durand Line. The research is guided by three primary objectives to investigate emerging issues arising from border management between Pakistan and Afghanistan, to analyze the socio-political, economic, and cultural implications of these issues for communities across the frontier; and to propose practical measures to address the identified challenges. Employing a qualitative research design, the study is based on an extensive review of existing scholarly literature complemented by content and thematic analysis. To enrich the findings with grassroots perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with tribal elders, traders, local scholars, and political representatives possessing knowledge of tribal and border affairs. The findings indicate that securitization measures, including border fencing and regulated crossings, have intensified political mistrust between the two states while simultaneously disrupting traditional mobility patterns, cross-border trade, and kinship networks. The research highlights how fragmented governance structures, security concerns, and unresolved disputes over the status of the Durand Line contribute to instability and socio-economic constraints in the borderland region. Moreover, the study underscores the impact of these dynamics on Pashtun identity, social cohesion, and perceptions of marginalization. The study concludes that a purely security-oriented approach to border management is insufficient for long-term stability. Instead, it recommends a balanced and inclusive strategy incorporating bilateral cooperation, community engagement, and development-oriented initiatives to transform the border from a contested frontier into a zone of collaboration and shared progress.

Keywords: Pak-Afghan Border, Durand Line, Pashtun Population, Border Management, Ethnonationalism, Borderlands Theory, Securitization, Cross-Border Relations, Regional Stability

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighboring Muslim-majority states that share not



only a long and porous border but also deep linguistic, historical, cultural, and religious linkages (Siddique, 2014). Despite these commonalities, bilateral relations have frequently been marked by mistrust, strategic rivalry, and periodic confrontation. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, relations have remained strained, with the notable exception of the period during the first Taliban regime in the 1990s (Rashid, 2008). Key sources of tension have included the dispute over the Durand Line, Afghanistan's historical support for the Pashtunistan movement, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's role as a frontline state during the Afghan jihad, Pakistan's backing of the first Taliban government, its participation in the post-9/11 War on Terror, and the rise of cross-border militancy (Fair, 2014; Giustozzi, 2019). In recent years, bilateral engagement has largely revolved around the activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), border management, Afghan refugees, and inter-state trade. This study specifically concentrates on border management and its consequences for tribal communities residing along the frontier.

The Durand Line remains the most enduring and contentious issue between the two states. Established in 1893 through an agreement between Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan and Sir Mortimer Durand, representing British India, the line demarcated spheres of influence between the two entities (Hopkirk, 1990). It effectively divided Pashtun tribal territories, separating communities that had historically maintained close ethnic and cultural ties. Following the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the Durand Line became the de facto international boundary. However, successive Afghan governments have challenged its legitimacy, arguing that the agreement was concluded with British India and lost its validity after the end of colonial rule (Siddique, 2014). Some Afghan narratives have also maintained that the agreement was time-bound, further complicating diplomatic relations. The division created by the Durand Line has generated significant political fragmentation among the Pashtun population. Tribal groups and extended families now reside in two separate sovereign states, limiting collective political mobilization and weakening unified representation of Pashtun interests (Spain, 1963). The separation has also disrupted traditional patterns of kinship, leadership, and cross-border interaction that historically sustained tribal cohesion. Measures such as the fencing of the border by Pakistan, particularly intensified after 2001 in the context of counterterrorism operations, have further restricted mobility and deepened grievances among border communities (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Economic repercussions have also been substantial. For generations, Pashtun communities depended on cross-border trade and seasonal movement for their livelihoods. The tightening of border controls and formalization of crossing points have curtailed informal trade networks and reduced income opportunities, thereby exacerbating economic vulnerability in already underdeveloped regions (Giustozzi, 2019). The disruption of traditional economic systems has intensified poverty and limited access to markets and resources. Security challenges constitute another critical dimension of the dispute. The historically porous nature of the border has facilitated the movement of insurgent groups and militants, contributing to prolonged instability in the region (Fair, 2014). Both states have accused each other of harboring or tolerating militant elements, further eroding trust. Borderland populations, particularly Pashtun tribes, have disproportionately suffered from



violence, counterinsurgency operations, and militant reprisals, resulting in loss of life, property destruction, and chronic insecurity.

Humanitarian consequences have likewise emerged. Persistent conflict, cross-border shelling, and military operations have led to repeated waves of displacement, producing both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2023). Displaced populations often face limited access to healthcare, education, sanitation, and employment. Women and children are especially vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking, and other forms of abuse in such fragile settings.

Beyond political, economic, and security implications, the Durand Line has significantly disrupted the cultural and social fabric of Pashtun society. Communities sharing a common language, traditions, and tribal affiliations have been separated by a rigid state boundary. This division has contributed to identity-related tensions and challenges to cultural continuity, affecting social cohesion and collective memory (Spain, 1963). Over the decades, both Pakistan and Afghanistan, at times with the facilitation of international actors, have undertaken diplomatic initiatives, border coordination mechanisms, and confidence-building measures aimed at managing tensions (International Crisis Group, 2017). Nevertheless, the issue remains unresolved and continues to shape bilateral relations. This research, therefore, examines the historical evolution of the Pak-Afghan border dispute and critically analyzes its multifaceted impact on Pashtun communities residing along both sides of the frontier.

Statement of the Problem

Durand Line was a soft line, drawn in the context of the Great Game. For over hundred years, tribes along the line used to cross it freely for trade, social, cultural, political contacts. After the deployment of international forces in Afghanistan for War on Terror, Pakistan started imposing stringent measure including deployment of army, controlling crossing points, use of identification documents for passengers and fencing the border, creating not only problems for the tribesmen and traders but also adversely affecting Pak- Afghan relations. This research is an attempt to study implications of the Pak-Afghan border management, especially fencing of the border, for population across the border.

Research Objectives

The current research targets to achieve the following purposes: -

1. Investigate issues emerging from Pak-Afghan border management.
2. Analyze the implications of Pak-Afghan border issues for population across the Durand Line.
3. Recommend measures to address the challenges.

Significance of the Study

The study offers a specific view about border management and the issues surrounding it from the local's perspective. Academia may find it helpful while theorizing the concept of border management and border fencing and how it has become a significant issue in literature of security studies particularly in the field of conflict resolution. Additionally, this study may benefit researchers and policy makers.



Literature Review

Recent scholarship has emphasized the demographic and political centrality of the Pashtun population in Afghanistan and Pakistan. For example, Borthakur (2022) argues that Pashtuns constitute the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, forming nearly half of the country's population, while also representing a significant minority in Pakistan. Despite the territorial division imposed by the Durand Line, traditional tribal structures and pre-state institutions continue to shape social and political interaction among Pashtuns on both sides of the border. These enduring indigenous systems have sustained a cross-border ethnic consciousness that transcends formal state boundaries. According to Borthakur, this shared identity has historically influenced Kabul-Islamabad relations, particularly after Pakistan's creation in 1947. However, from the 1980s onward, the politicization and militarization of Pashtun identity by extremist actors-often supported by transnational networks-have strained bilateral ties. The study concludes that the "Pashtun factor" significantly affects regional geopolitics and contributes to shaping the broader security environment of South Asia.

Similarly, Jafri (2020) highlights the prolonged suffering of Pashtun communities during decades of armed conflict. Beginning with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and continuing through civil war, Taliban rule, and the post-9/11 War on Terror, Pashtun-majority areas have experienced extensive casualties, displacement, and socio-economic devastation. Jafri estimates that millions of Afghans predominantly Pashtuns were killed, injured, or displaced during successive conflicts. Militancy and counterterrorism operations transformed the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands, particularly the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and adjacent Afghan regions, into battlegrounds. The presence of militant networks, drone strikes, and military operations further destabilized Pashtun society. The study also critiques media narratives and political discourses that have frequently conflated Pashtun identity with militancy, overlooking the fact that many Pashtuns have themselves resisted extremist groups and suffered disproportionately from violence. Jafri contends that Pashtuns have often been instrumentalized by both state and non-state actors pursuing strategic objectives, thereby intensifying humanitarian and security challenges in the region.

In a related analysis, Ahmad (2021) examines how the 1947 partition reshaped the political landscape for Pashtuns in Pakistan. While the Durand Line predated the partition, its transformation into the recognized boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan heightened its political sensitivity. Ahmad explains that Pakistan has consistently maintained that the Durand Line constitutes a legitimate international border under international law. This firm stance has added complexity to bilateral disputes and has directly affected Pashtun communities living along the frontier. Border hardening measures, enhanced security protocols, and fencing initiatives have increasingly intertwined the everyday lives of Pashtuns with state security agendas, intensifying debates over identity, sovereignty, and cross-border mobility.

Furthermore, Raja et al. (2023) note that despite longstanding tensions, Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep sociocultural and economic linkages that historically fostered interdependence. However, cross-border militancy, smuggling, and insurgent activities have compelled Pakistan to adopt stricter border management policies. Their research proposes a comprehensive framework aimed at stabilizing and institutionalizing border governance through



coordinated security mechanisms, regulated trade systems, and confidence-building measures. The authors argue that effective management of the border is essential not only for national security but also for restoring economic cooperation and regional stability. The existing literature consistently highlights the profound impact of the Pak-Afghan border dispute on the political, economic conditions, and identity dynamics of Pashtuns residing along both sides of the frontier. Much of this scholarship adopts a qualitative design and relies on secondary data for conceptual and comparative evaluation (Raja et al., 2023). These studies emphasize that sustained bilateral cooperation could unlock shared economic opportunities; however, persistent mistrust and unresolved territorial disagreements continue to hinder mutual development.

Akhtar (2021) traces the emergence of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) to a grassroots mobilization that began in January 2018, when youth from Waziristan marched to Islamabad to protest extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and landmines in tribal areas. According to Akhtar, the PTM evolved into a broader civil rights movement articulating long-suppressed grievances of Pashtun communities affected by drone strikes, Taliban violence, and military operations. The study interprets the PTM as a response to decades of marginalization and securitization in the borderlands.

Similarly, Chowdhury (2020) underscores that Afghanistan continues to dispute the Durand Line's status as a formally recognized international boundary. The unresolved nature of this disagreement, he argues, has prolonged instability and imposed heavy costs on border populations. Following the events of September 11, 2001, Pakistan joined the United States in counterterrorism operations, leading to extensive military campaigns in the former FATA region. Chowdhury contends that these operations disproportionately affected Pashtun civilians through displacement, arrests, and casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). At the same time, he maintains that improved border regulation could enhance both economic stability and security. Pakistan's recent initiatives such as fencing, gate construction, and stricter monitoring are presented as efforts to reduce cross-border militancy and promote regional peace, although Afghan authorities have frequently resisted such measures due to sovereignty concerns. Expanding on the sociocultural dimension, Tariq et al. (2019) analyze the Pashtun tribal system and its foundational code, Pashtunwali, which governs social conduct and communal life. The authors argue that decades of conflict beginning with the Soviet intervention and continuing through subsequent wars undermined the authority of traditional tribal elders (Maliks) and elevated religious actors (mullahs) within local power structures. This transformation, they contend, contributed to the militarization of tribal areas and the erosion of customary conflict-resolution mechanisms.

From a diplomatic perspective, Amina (2017) examines the recurring border clashes and diplomatic tensions linked to the Durand Line. Although the boundary has gained broad international acknowledgment, successive Afghan governments including the Taliban have questioned its legitimacy. Amina highlights contrasting narratives Pakistan views border management as essential for national security, whereas Afghan authorities often interpret fencing and regulation as attempts to formalize a contested division. The study calls for a structured border management regime capable of transforming the frontier from a zone of hostility into a platform for cooperation.

Addressing identity and radicalization, Bazai et al. (2018) argue that while



terrorism is universally condemned within Pashtun society, the region's prolonged exposure to militancy has stigmatized the broader community. Their study revisits Pashtunwali as a cultural framework that promotes honor, hospitality, and peaceful conflict resolution, suggesting that indigenous value systems could serve as counterweights to extremist ideologies.

In a comprehensive geopolitical assessment, Waheed (2020) analyzes the enduring border dispute as a central determinant of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, particularly in the post-2001 era. He notes that the division of ethnically homogeneous Pashtun populations fuels sensitivities in Afghan domestic politics. While many Afghan Pashtuns support Kabul's historical claims, non-Pashtun groups often advocate pragmatic recognition of the boundary. Waheed concludes that a durable resolution requires inclusive dialogue involving affected border communities and confidence-building measures between both states.

Finally, Khan (2014) situates the border issue within Afghanistan's broader post-war transition, encompassing security, political restructuring, and economic recovery. He argues that instability in Afghanistan inevitably affects Pakistan due to the porous frontier and intertwined security dynamics. Consequently, Pakistan remains highly vulnerable to spillover effects, necessitating macro-level security planning and cooperative regional engagement. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that the Pak-Afghan border dispute is not merely a territorial disagreement but a multidimensional challenge influencing governance, security, socio-economic stability, and ethnic identity. The literature underscores the urgent need for cooperative border management frameworks and inclusive political dialogue to mitigate conflict and promote sustainable peace in the region.

Liwal (2019) emphasizes that Pashtuns living along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier possess a longstanding tradition of autonomy and resilience. Identifying strongly with their cultural heritage, they are generally characterized by conservatism, adherence to customary norms, and a preference for peaceful coexistence. Historically, despite repeated invasions due to their region's strategic location near the Indian subcontinent, Pashtuns defended their territories without pursuing expansionist ambitions. During the 1930s, thousands of Pashtuns engaged in nonviolent resistance against British colonial rule through the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, which united rival tribes for nearly seventeen years in a collective struggle to end colonial domination. However, in the post-9/11 era, Pashtun regions have experienced intensified violence. Militant groups have exploited these territories as operational bases, coercing local populations and recruiting youth for extremist activities, including suicide missions, thereby deepening instability and undermining indigenous traditions of peace (Liwal, 2019).

Similarly, Ahmad (2020) argues that the US led War on Terror in Afghanistan triggered profound fiscal, social, and ideological transformations across the border region. As a frontline state, Pakistan encountered substantial internal and external policy challenges. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), with its predominantly Pashtun population and strong communal structures, bore significant consequences of the conflict. Owing to geographical continuity and sociocultural similarities with Afghanistan, the border areas became refuges for Al-Qaeda affiliates and other militant networks. The prolonged conflict produced widespread political disillusionment, economic



strain, and social fragmentation among Pashtuns. Ahmad (2020) links these conditions to the emergence of militancy, arguing that political marginalization, economic deprivation, and societal disruption collectively fueled resentment within the Pashtun community.

Literature Gap

A critical review of existing scholarship reveals that much of the literature approaches the Pakistan-Afghanistan border dispute through a rational-actor framework, primarily focusing on state-level strategies and geopolitical considerations. However, the complexity of the issue is compounded by the involvement of non-state and extra-national actors, including militant organizations, Taliban factions, Mujahideen groups, and tribal networks, whose motivations do not always align with conventional state-centric logic. Historically, governance in Afghanistan has often been influenced by tribal elders, and even contemporary political structures including the Taliban regime reflect factional and tribal configurations rather than a cohesive national framework.

Although substantial research addresses the diplomatic and security dimensions of the border dispute and its implications for bilateral relations, there is limited people centered analysis examining how border fencing, regulation, and securitization affect the daily lives, mobility, economic conditions, and identity dynamics of borderland Pashtuns. This study seeks to bridge this gap by foregrounding local experiences and community level impacts of border management policies.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the implications of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border issue for the Pashtun population, this study draws upon two complementary theoretical perspectives Borderlands Theory and Ethnonationalism. Borderlands theory conceptualizes frontier regions as dynamic social spaces where identities, loyalties, and economic interactions transcend formal political boundaries. It highlights how borders are not merely territorial demarcations but lived spaces that shape everyday experiences, cross-border kinship ties, and hybrid identities. In the context of the Durand Line, this perspective helps explain how Pashtun communities maintain transnational linkages despite securitization measures.

The concept of ethnonationalism further illuminates how shared ethnicity, language, and cultural traditions foster a collective consciousness among Pashtuns on both sides of the border. The division of a single ethnic group by an internationally recognized boundary has intensified debates over sovereignty, legitimacy, and national belonging. By integrating these theoretical lenses, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how geopolitical disputes intersect with ethnic identity and grassroots realities in the Pak-Afghan borderlands.

Theory of Borderlands

The theory of borderlands, most notably articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa and influenced by the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre, conceptualizes borders as socially produced and dynamic spaces rather than fixed geopolitical lines. From this perspective, borders are sites of interaction where identities, power structures, cultures, and economic interests converge and are continuously renegotiated. This approach challenges the rigid understanding of boundaries as impermeable divisions and instead emphasizes hybridity, fluidity, and lived



experience within frontier regions.

In the context of the Pak-Afghan border, particularly along the Durand Line, this theoretical lens reveals how colonial demarcation transformed an integrated socio-cultural space into a politically contested frontier. The borderland that emerged is characterized by overlapping sovereignties, layered identities, and cross-border kinship networks. A central component of borderlands theory is the notion of political fragmentation. The Pak-Afghan frontier is marked by contested authority, where state institutions coexist and often compete with tribal leadership structures and non-state armed actors. This fragmented governance framework creates uncertainty in law enforcement, security administration, and service delivery, directly influencing the daily lives of Pashtun communities. The coexistence of formal state systems and informal tribal mechanisms produces a complex Socio-political landscape that cannot be fully explained through conventional state centric approaches.

Culturally, borderlands are arenas of interaction where traditions, languages, and social norms intersect and evolve. Despite securitization measures and fencing initiatives, cross-border marriages, trade relations, and tribal affiliations persist, reflecting the resilience of transnational social networks. The Pashtun population, bound by shared language and customary codes such as Pashtunwali, maintains cultural continuity that transcends the imposed boundary. Borderlands theory thus helps illuminate how identity in such regions is not erased by territorial demarcation but instead reshaped through negotiation and adaptation.

Overall, this framework provides a multidimensional understanding of the Pak-Afghan border issue by foregrounding lived realities. It highlights political fragmentation, economic constraints, security pressures, and cultural continuity while also recognizing the agency of border communities in shaping their own social and economic trajectories.

Ethnonationalism

The concept of ethnonationalism examines the intersection between ethnic identity, territorial attachment, and political aspiration. It refers to a strong collective identification of an ethnic group with a specific homeland, often accompanied by demands for recognition, autonomy, or self-determination. In the case of the Pashtun population divided by the Durand Line, ethnonationalism offers a powerful analytical lens. The border has separated a historically cohesive ethnic group, intensifying debates over belonging, sovereignty, and representation. Ethnonationalism helps explain feelings of marginalization and exclusion that may arise when ethnic identity appears misaligned with state boundaries. It sheds light on demands for political participation, cultural preservation, and equitable development within both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This perspective also clarifies how grievances linked to border securitization, military operations, and restricted mobility can evolve into broader identity-based mobilizations. Ethnonational consciousness may manifest not necessarily as separatism, but as calls for dignity, rights protection, and cultural recognition. Thus, ethnonationalism helps contextualize the socio-political responses of Pashtun communities to border policies and regional conflicts.



Selection and Justification of Theoretical Frameworks

The selection of borderlands theory and ethnonationalism is grounded in the multidimensional nature of the Pak-Afghan border issue. While borderlands theory enables an exploration of spatial dynamics, hybridity, and governance fragmentation, ethnonationalism provides insight into identity politics and collective aspirations. Together, these frameworks bridge structural and identity-based explanations. Borderlands theory captures the everyday realities of living in a securitized yet socially interconnected frontier, emphasizing adaptability and resilience. Ethnonationalism complements this by explaining how shared ethnicity and historical memory shape political consciousness and responses to state policies. By integrating these perspectives, the study moves beyond a narrow geopolitical analysis and adopts a people-centered approach. It examines how political boundaries intersect with ethnic solidarity, how governance fragmentation influences social order, and how identity narratives shape perceptions of security and sovereignty.

Application and Implications of the Chosen Frameworks

Applying borderlands theory allows researchers to investigate how political fragmentation, economic limitations, and cross-border mobility influence local livelihoods and social cohesion. It facilitates analysis of informal trade networks, kinship ties, and community adaptation strategies within a securitized environment.

Simultaneously, applying ethnonationalism enables an assessment of how territorial division affects identity formation, collective memory, and political engagement among Pashtuns. It provides tools to examine how narratives of marginalization, sovereignty, and recognition shape both grassroots mobilization and state responses. Together, these frameworks deepen the analytical scope of the research by situating the Pak-Afghan border issue within broader debates on identity, governance, and spatial politics. They illuminate not only the structural constraints imposed by the border but also the agency, resilience, and evolving consciousness of the Pashtun population living on both sides of the frontier.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the border-related challenges affecting cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with particular attention to border fencing and its implications for the Pashtun population residing on both sides of the frontier. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in depth understanding of both visible and underlying issues experienced by local communities in the borderland region. Rather than relying solely on statistical indicators, the study seeks to capture perceptions, lived experiences, and socio-political dynamics associated with the Pak-Afghan boundary. The research is primarily grounded in a comprehensive review of existing scholarly literature, including academic articles, books, policy papers, and analytical reports addressing the historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions of the Pak-Afghan border dispute and fencing initiatives. Previously published materials were systematically examined to identify recurring themes, competing narratives, and documented impacts of border management policies on regional stability and local livelihoods. To strengthen the analytical depth of the study, content analysis and thematic analysis were employed. Relevant literature was carefully reviewed, coded, and



categorized into thematic clusters such as security concerns, economic disruption, identity dynamics, governance fragmentation, and cross-border mobility. This process enabled the identification of patterns and conceptual linkages within the existing body of knowledge.

In addition to secondary sources, the study incorporates primary qualitative insights gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with selected tribal elders, cross-border traders, and local scholars from the Pashtun community on both sides of the border who are directly affected by the boundary issue. Their perspectives provide grassroots-level understanding of the socio economic and cultural consequences of fencing and securitization measures. Furthermore, interviews with Pakistani political leaders possessing expertise in tribal politics were included to contextualize policy level viewpoints and strategic considerations.

Accordingly, the research findings are derived from three principal sources:

- a. Published scholarly material and policy literature on the Pak-Afghan border and fencing.
- b. Perspectives and experiential input from tribal elders, traders, and local scholars within the Pashtun community.
- c. Views of Pakistani political leaders with direct involvement or stakes in tribal and border politics.

By triangulating these sources, the study ensures analytical rigor and presents a balanced, people centered understanding of how border management policies influence bilateral cooperation and the socio-political realities of the Pashtun population.

Results and Discussion /Findings of the Study

1. Issues Emerging from Pak-Afghan Border Management

The findings reveal that border management along the Durand Line has generated multiple interconnected challenges. First, political mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan continues to complicate effective coordination. Divergent official positions regarding the legal status of the boundary have contributed to inconsistent policy implementation and diplomatic tensions. Second, the fencing and securitization of the border have disrupted long-standing patterns of cross-border mobility, including trade, kinship visits, and seasonal migration. Third, fragmented governance structures where state authorities, tribal systems, and non-state actors operate simultaneously have created administrative ambiguity and enforcement gaps. The presence of militant groups and the legacy of counterterrorism operations have further intensified security concerns, often leading to strict regulatory measures that affect civilian populations.

2. Implications for the Population Across the Durand Line

The study finds that border-related measures have had significant socio-economic, cultural, and political implications for Pashtun communities residing on both sides of the frontier. Economically, fencing and regulated crossings have reduced informal trade flows, increased transportation costs, and limited livelihood opportunities for border-dependent families. Socially and culturally, restrictions on movement have weakened cross-border kinship ties and complicated access to shared tribal lands and community networks. Politically, many respondents expressed feelings of marginalization, exclusion, and limited



participation in policy decisions directly affecting their lives. Identity dynamics have also been influenced, as the division of an ethnically cohesive population by a securitized boundary has reinforced both transnational solidarity and local grievances.

3. Recommended Measures to Address the Challenges

Based on these findings, the study recommends a multidimensional approach to border management. First, bilateral confidence-building mechanisms should be strengthened to enhance diplomatic coordination and transparency. Second, regulated but community sensitive mobility frameworks such as special border passes for local residents and traders should be introduced to balance security concerns with socio-economic needs. Third, inclusive policy dialogues involving tribal elders, local representatives, and civil society actors should be institutionalized to ensure participatory decision-making. Finally, cross-border economic cooperation initiatives, including joint markets and infrastructure development projects, should be prioritized to transform the border from a zone of contestation into a platform for shared development.

Discussion

The findings of this study strongly correspond with earlier research on the Pak–Afghan border dispute. For example, Chowdhury (2020) observed that Afghanistan’s continued rejection of the Durand Line as an internationally recognized boundary sustains diplomatic friction and complicates effective border governance. The present study confirms this argument by identifying unresolved boundary perceptions as a central obstacle to bilateral cooperation. Similarly, Waheed highlighted that the border dispute fuels insurgency, smuggling, and instability; the current findings align with this conclusion by demonstrating how fragmented control and competing authorities create security vulnerabilities along the frontier. The socio-economic implications identified in this study are also consistent with prior scholarship. Ahmad (2020) reported that counterterrorism policies and militarization disproportionately affected Pashtun communities in border provinces, producing economic strain and social resentment. Likewise, Jafri (2021) emphasized that decades of war and militancy severely disrupted Pashtun society across both countries. The present findings reinforce these conclusions by illustrating how fencing and movement restrictions have further constrained trade networks, employment opportunities, and cross-border family connections.

Furthermore, the identity related outcomes observed in this research resonate with earlier analyses grounded in ethnonational and borderland perspectives. Raja, Ghumro, and Zeb (2022) stressed that effective border management must balance security concerns with socio-cultural realities, while Akhtar (2021) demonstrated how perceptions of marginalization can contribute to political mobilization among Pashtun communities. The current study supports these arguments by showing that exclusion from policy processes strengthens grievances but also reveals that many respondents favor cooperative and development-oriented solutions. Therefore, by integrating community level evidence with prior academic findings, this research substantiates earlier conclusions while contributing a more people-centered understanding of the evolving dynamics along the Pak–Afghan border.



Conclusion

This study examined the emerging issues from Pak–Afghan border management and analyzed their implications for the Pashtun population residing across the Durand Line. The findings demonstrate that while border fencing and stricter regulation have been introduced primarily to address security concerns, they have simultaneously generated political tensions, economic disruptions, and socio-cultural fragmentation in the borderland region. The unresolved dispute over the legal status of the boundary continues to hinder bilateral cooperation, while securitization policies have disproportionately affected communities whose livelihoods and identities are historically transnational. The research confirms that the border is not merely a territorial demarcation but a lived social space shaped by overlapping governance structures, ethnic solidarity, and regional geopolitics. A sustainable resolution requires shifting from a purely security driven framework toward a balanced, community sensitive, and cooperative border management approach that promotes stability, trust, and shared development between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Recommendations

1. Establish continuous institutional platforms for diplomatic engagement to address misunderstandings and enhance coordination on border management.
2. Develop special border passes or regulated crossing systems for local residents, traders, and divided families to reduce socio-economic hardship.
3. Create cross-border markets and trade corridors to stimulate economic growth and reduce dependence on informal or illicit trade networks.
4. Involve tribal elders, local scholars, civil society representatives, and community stakeholders in designing and implementing border policies.
5. Strengthen intelligence sharing and joint monitoring mechanisms to counter militancy without disproportionately targeting civilian populations.
6. Prioritize infrastructure, education, healthcare, and employment initiatives in border regions to address long-standing socio-economic grievances.
7. Promote cultural exchanges, academic collaboration, and people-to-people diplomacy to rebuild trust and reduce hostility between communities on both sides of the frontier.

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