

The Bad Governance Trap and Undevelopment: A Case Study of Afghanistan

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Abstract:

Both Afghanistan and Bangladesh had a per capita income below \$500 in the early 21st century, but Bangladesh's per capita income is now more than three times that of Afghanistan. Surprisingly, at the beginning of the period, Bangladesh ranked worse than Afghanistan on corruption perception indices; hence, a small government was sufficient to experience high economic growth. However, emphasizing small government, such as that promoted by the World Bank's 1980s model, does not suffice for low-income, resource-scarce, landlocked countries like Afghanistan. In such contexts, institutions are not capable of transforming financial resources into effective public services. Using Paul Collier's framework, this paper evaluates how institutional performance and economic policies contributed to Afghanistan's failure to achieve development. The aim is to examine the underdevelopment trap of bad governance and ineffective policies in Afghanistan. The period 2005–2019 is divided into three five-year sub-periods; then, each sub-period is analyzed using a stylized-facts-based approach. The findings indicate that during the first period (2005–2009), economic management had the strongest performance, with an average score above the threshold of 3, while the criteria of public sector management and institutions had the weakest performance, scoring below the threshold. Since the average of all indices remained consistently below Collier's threshold, it can be concluded that Afghanistan was trapped in a bad governance trap. This trend continued in the second (2010–2014) and third (2015–2019) periods, although structural policies were in the worst state, unlike the first period, in which public sector management and institutions were in the worst state.

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1. Introduction

According to Amartya Sen (2000), development can only be realized when fundamental barriers to freedom, such as poverty and oppression, lack of economic opportunities, social exclusion, neglect in the provision of public goods, and excessive interference by repressive governments, are eliminated. Despite the unprecedented increase in global wealth, many countries still lack basic freedoms. In the presence of poverty and underdevelopment, individuals are deprived of the freedom to fulfill their basic needs, such as adequate nutrition, clothing, education, healthcare, and other essentials.

One of the major development challenges after World War II has been the fight against poverty affecting billions of people in developing and underdeveloped countries. Addressing this challenge has been among the primary goals of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), designed by the United Nations to facilitate development progress. However, by 2015, it became clear that the conceptual foundation of this approach had become outdated. Approximately 80% of the world's poor live in developing countries. Nonetheless, the true development challenge lies with a specific group of countries that remain at the lowest income levels and are even in the process of collapse. Although it is the 21st century, these countries are in many ways trapped in conditions reminiscent of the 14th century, plagued by civil wars, epidemics, and widespread ignorance. They are scattered across Africa, Central Asia, and other regions (Collier, 2007). During the golden decade (the 1990s), from the end of the Cold War to the events of September 11, the income of poor countries declined by 5%. Whereas before the Industrial Revolution all countries were poor, many have successfully escaped poverty. This raises a key question: why have some countries remained trapped in poverty? The brief answer lies in the concept of the trap. However, it should be noted that poverty itself is not inherently a trap because, if it were, no country would have ever advanced. If development is seen as a ladder to escape the poverty trap, the experience of countries shows that there are many development ladders, and many societies have managed to climb them. Yet some have either broken these ladders or become stuck on them. A society can gradually emerge from poverty unless it falls into a trap. In this context, examining the underdevelopment of low-income countries such as Afghanistan through the lens of development traps becomes particularly significant.

According to Paul Collier's (2007) development theory, four primary traps are typically identified as hindering economic progress in poor countries: the conflict trap, the bad governance trap, the natural resource trap, and the landlocked-with-bad-neighbors trap. All the countries examined in Collier's framework fall within the lowest income category and share the common characteristic of being caught in one or more of these underdevelopment traps. Among the traps outlined by Collier, this paper focuses specifically on the bad governance trap.

Governance and economic policies play a key role in economic performance. However, there is a fundamental asymmetry: good governance can foster economic growth by up to approximately 10%, while extremely poor governance and deeply flawed policies can rapidly and unlimitedly undermine economic systems (Collier, 2007).

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located at the heart of Asia, connecting three major cultural and geographical regions: the Indian subcontinent to the southeast, Central Asia to the north, and the Iranian plateau to the west. The emergence of Afghanistan in its modern form began in the 19th century. Since gaining independence in 1919, the country has experienced numerous ups and downs. Afghanistan's entrance onto the global stage at the beginning of the 21st century was a significant event, marked by the U.S. invasion (Barfield, 2010; Hamdard, 2019). From the start of the century until the end of the second decade, Afghanistan underwent three five-year periods of republican governance, supported by international institutions. However, its per capita income was only 496 USD in 2019 (World Bank, 2023). Afghanistan suffers from severe unemployment and poverty, ranking among the lowest-income countries (Taylor & Lybbert, 2020).

Given Collier's development theory and Afghanistan's historical background, the question arises: What is the status of the bad governance trap in Afghanistan? Addressing this question requires an analysis of Afghanistan's underdevelopment through the lens of its past governance structures.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature, Section 3 is devoted to previous empirical studies, Section 4 analyzes the governance trap clusters relevant to Afghanistan, and finally, Section 5 provides conclusions and policy implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Underdevelopment

Prior to the 19th century, development was not the norm but rather an exception in human history. In other words, underdevelopment was the prevailing condition throughout most of history. For nearly ten thousand years following the emergence of the first large-scale societies in the Middle East, long-term growth in living standards for the majority of the world's population was virtually zero. With the Industrial Revolution, first the countries of Western Europe and then, gradually, other countries—including newly decolonized nations—became integrated into a global political and economic system, and institutional structures began to change from limited-access orders to open-access institutions and economies (North et al., 2013).

By the outdated Cold War classification, it was commonly believed that the world consisted of one billion rich people and more than five billion poor people in the Third World. This perception shaped the global understanding of

development. Nonetheless, this dichotomy is increasingly outdated, as a substantial portion of those five billion now live in countries that are rapidly developing. This shift indicates that these countries are actively improving both their economies and living conditions (Collier, 2007). According to a declaration by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations in June 2009, over one billion people were suffering from hunger. In the first Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched by the UN, the link between poverty and hunger was institutionalized in order to reduce both. In general, the poverty line has been defined primarily on the basis of hunger, specifically the budget required to purchase a minimum caloric intake, along with a few other basic needs such as housing (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011). The United Nations established the MDGs as a framework to measure countries' progress by 2015, focusing on reducing poverty, improving education, and enhancing health. However, as 2015 approached, it became clear that the old way of thinking about development was no longer sufficient. A more nuanced and detailed understanding of the global situation was required.

Today, one billion people are still extremely poor and live in countries in conflict that often face severe structural and political challenges. These countries are largely concentrated in Africa and Central Asia and experience problems such as civil wars, epidemic diseases, and a lack of education (Collier, 2007). Poverty results in an intolerable waste of human potential. It is not merely a lack of money; rather, it is the inability to realize one's full capabilities as a human being (Sen, 2000).

2.2. Theoretical starting point

An underdevelopment trap refers to a condition in which a country becomes stuck in poverty and is unable to advance its economy. Imagine an individual trying to climb a steep hill, only to continually slide back down. This metaphor aptly illustrates what occurs in countries caught in an underdevelopment trap. These societies may put significant effort into improvement; yet, various structural and institutional barriers continually pull them backward (Collier, 2007).

Rosenstein-Rodan (1943) argues that when firms invest in the industrial sector, the spillover effects can significantly benefit other sectors across the economy. Therefore, simultaneous development across multiple sectors can be mutually advantageous, even if no single sector is independently profitable in the early stages. This line of reasoning gave rise to the concept of the underdevelopment trap (Hoff, 2000).

Undeveloped countries are often poor because they are hot, infertile, malaria-ridden, and frequently landlocked. These factors make productivity difficult without large-scale initial investments to overcome such pervasive challenges. However, due to their extreme poverty, these countries lack the capacity to

finance the necessary investments. As a result, they are caught in what economists call a poverty trap. Without targeted action to address these fundamental barriers, neither free markets nor democratic governance alone will suffice to generate meaningful development (Banerjee & Duflo, 2011).

The S-shaped curve illustrates the origin of the poverty trap (Figure 1). Along the 45-degree line, today's income is equal to tomorrow's income. For individuals who are extremely poor and located within the poverty trap region, their future income is lower than their current income. This condition implies that, over time, individuals in this region become increasingly poorer, eventually converging toward point N, representing a state of chronic poverty. The arrows starting from point A indicate a possible trajectory: moving from A₁ to A₂, then to A₃, and so on, demonstrating a downward spiral. In contrast, those starting outside the poverty trap zone experience future income greater than current income; hence, they gradually become wealthier over time, at least until reaching a certain threshold. This upward path is represented by arrows moving from B₁ to B₂, and so forth (Banerjee & Duflo, 2001).

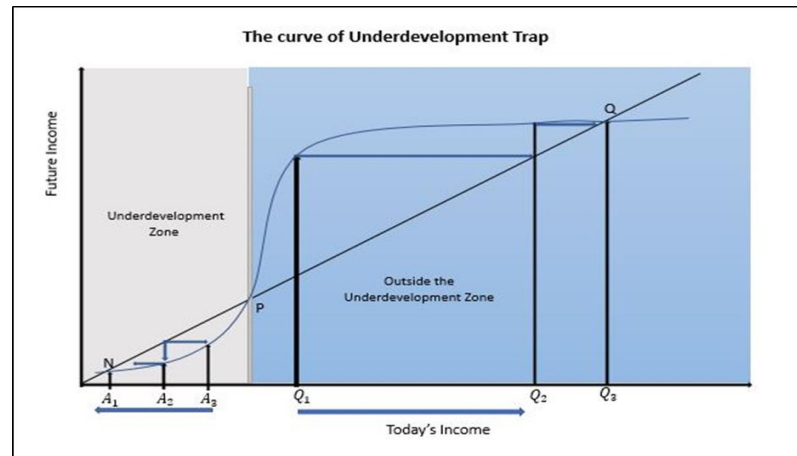


Figure 1: The Curve of the Underdevelopment Trap

Source: Banerjee & Duflo (2001)

Jeffrey Sachs, an economist widely recognized for his work on global development, has focused on how health-related issues such as malaria contribute to persistent poverty. Malaria is a disease that affects a significant portion of the population, and when a country struggles with major health challenges, it cannot achieve sustainable economic growth. For example, people are unable to work effectively during epidemics, which in turn hampers productivity and slows development (Sachs, 2005).

One of the principal causes behind the failure of nations is the existence of extractive institutions, which destroy the incentives for saving, investment, and innovation. These institutions entrench the power of predatory elites that, in turn, help to hinder the emergence of inclusive and productive economic institutions. In such regimes, politicians often perceive independent economic activity as a threat to their authority and actively suppress it. In extreme cases, extractive institutions lead to state collapse and also to the reproduction of chronic poverty, civil conflict, and humanitarian crises, as seen in countries like Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Zimbabwe (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

From a traditional perspective, societies are classified into two categories: limited-access orders and open-access orders. Development is understood as the transition from the former to the latter. According to Douglass North, this transformation requires a gradual and staged progression, particularly in fragile societies. Limited-access orders are highly vulnerable to both internal and external shocks. In such societies, shifts in the balance of power without elite consensus can result in violence and state breakdown. Thus, the gradual stabilization of social order and effective conflict management are critical for a successful transition (North et al., 2016).

In this regard, Paul Collier identifies four underdevelopment traps that are often overlooked:

1. the conflict trap: countries affected by war or ongoing violence because their resources are diverted from providing infrastructure and institutions toward sustaining conflict;
2. the natural resource trap: some countries are rich in natural resources (such as oil or minerals), but instead of promoting development, these resources often lead to corruption, rent-seeking behavior, and mismanagement, a phenomenon usually referred to as the resource curse;
3. being landlocked with bad neighbors: countries without access to the sea and surrounded by hostile or unstable neighbors face serious challenges in trade and economic growth; and
4. bad governance: countries with weak leadership frequently fail to manage their limited resources efficiently, leading to chronic economic mismanagement and underdevelopment (Collier, 2007).

2.3. Governance and economic policy

Governance and economic policies can shape economic performance in markedly asymmetric ways. Good governance and efficient policies can contribute to economic growth, but there is a natural ceiling on how fast economies can grow, typically around 10%. That is, regardless of how well governments perform, economies cannot sustainably exceed this rate of growth. Conversely, bad governance and ineffective policies can destroy economies at an alarming rate.

Due to this asymmetry, constraining government power may be even more important than merely promoting the efficiency of the public sector.

According to Paul Collier, both advocates of good governance and proponents of sound policies, two somewhat different groups, have tended to exaggerate the impact of their preferred solutions. In fact, they can help seize existing opportunities, but they cannot create opportunities out of nothing, nor can they overcome structural constraints such as geography or natural resource limitations. For instance, no matter how effective its governance or how well designed its policies, Malawi cannot become a rich country simply because the underlying opportunities for such transformation do not exist.

Bad governance destroys promising development prospects through a limited capacity to penetrate society, regulate social relations, extract resources, or allocate them effectively toward designated purposes (Leftwich, 2021). Of course, in the short term, a country may experience relatively high economic growth even under bad governance, for example, because of extremely sharp increases in export commodity prices. A case in point is Nigeria, which managed to achieve a degree of economic growth during the first oil boom between 1974 and 1986, despite governance weaknesses.

However, the less obvious yet more critical qualification lies in the fact that governance and policy are multidimensional; not all dimensions carry equal weight in all circumstances (Collier, 2007). According to Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index, two countries, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, ranked among the most corrupt globally. There is no doubt that both suffer from bad governance. What is surprising, however, is that being among the most corrupt countries did not prevent Bangladesh from pursuing relatively sound economic policies and achieving economic growth (Transparency International Report, 2005). But what about Afghanistan? One interpretation could be that macroeconomic variables such as exchange rates and tariffs played a key role, rather than the honesty or competence of government officials. However, according to Paul Collier, a more accurate interpretation is that what really matters is the difference in opportunities.

Indeed, as noted in the 2021 SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction) report, a follow-up survey indicated that 81.5% of respondents consider corruption to be a major problem in government. For example, salaries for Afghan security and police forces were largely funded by foreign aid, and some corrupt officials created fictitious rosters of non-existent soldiers and officers. The salaries intended for real personnel were instead embezzled by these corrupt actors (SIGAR, 2021).

In Afghanistan, bad governance is arguably more critical than in Bangladesh because Afghanistan lacks alternatives. The only viable provider of services is the state itself, and corruption has blocked that pathway. Hence, governance and policy do matter, provided that opportunities exist. But then the question arises:

How can we determine whether governance and policy are good and efficient? Assessing these issues is subjective and can be controversial. Is governance in France worse than that in the United States? Are Sweden's economic policies better than those of Britain? Fortunately, such debates are far less contentious when it comes to low-income countries; no one seriously doubts that Angola has worse governance than India, or that Afghanistan has poorer policies than China. It should be emphasized that inefficient policies and bad governance are not necessarily underdevelopment traps: societies can learn from failure, and many do.

2.4. How does a trap form?

Collier (2007) explains underdevelopment traps through an empirical analysis of low-income countries as a case study. When reviewing Collier's framework, it becomes clear that there is no fixed structure or universal condition that turns a weakness or characteristic of an underdeveloped country into a trap. However, what is evident is that Collier's traps are indeed traps, exactly as their name suggests, meaning that a developing country can easily fall into one. Once inside, the country becomes locked into an inefficient system that hinders its development. The nature of these problems varies significantly across the different traps. However, what all these traps have in common is their damaging effect on economic growth and development. Collier notes that there is no clear boundary between the traps, implying that they often overlap or reinforce one another. A country may even fall into multiple traps simultaneously or sequentially (Collier, 2007).

Evidence from the post-conflict period in Afghanistan suggests that the country was, for a time, on a path from the conflict trap toward a period of economic growth. However, in the next section, I will explore the possibility that Afghanistan has actually entered a bad governance trap, which may in part be influenced by another trap, the foreign aid trap. Collier argues that if a country, according to the IDA index, consistently scores below the governance threshold (3 out of 6 points) for four consecutive years, it indicates that the country is caught in a bad governance trap, suffering from weak institutions and ineffective economic policies.

3. Literature Review

Khalid (2011) evaluated the dynamics of political development in Afghanistan. The findings indicate that the current crisis is the outcome of a combination of internal conflicts and foreign interventions. The characteristics of the current situation can be traced through history, the conflicts of interest among key politicians, and the contradictory personal agendas of Afghanistan's leadership. These actors have obstructed the establishment of formal institutions in the country. According to Khalid (2011), the existing political frictions have resulted

from the convergence of these factors. As a proposed solution, he advocates for the development of modern democratic institutions, alongside efforts to challenge and transform Afghanistan's traditional political culture.

Coyler (2012) conducted a series of studies to conceptualize governance through foundational sociological concepts such as social order, institutions, and power, drawing on empirical evidence from Afghanistan. His research sought to answer the question of whether governance outcomes require functionally equivalent substitutes for the state, or whether they are achievable without direct state involvement. The findings suggest that in Afghanistan, social control serves as the only practical substitute for the state in enforcing rules. However, such control, when not supported by a functioning state, remains geographically and socially limited in scope.

Sterlib (2013) investigated the importance of governance reform and state capacity for Afghanistan's success in achieving high economic growth and economic development. The findings reveal that Afghanistan provides important lessons for the international community, particularly regarding the link between financial aid and improved governance. Despite over a decade of efforts, the establishment of an independent and effective governance structure in Afghanistan has faced serious challenges.

The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (2014) carried out historical studies on the evolution of good governance in Afghanistan. The results show that Afghanistan has a long history of attempted governance reforms; however, factors such as difficult geography, ethnic fragmentation, and ongoing conflict have made such reforms extremely challenging. Informal and feudal structures have often dominated formal institutions, and widespread corruption has undermined the rule of law. Additionally, excessive centralization of state authority has hindered the effective implementation of local programs. The participation of non-governmental institutions and community councils has also remained insufficient.

Ogawa (2014) recognized the importance of local governance institutions in establishing sustainable peace tailored to local conditions. The findings indicate that community participation enhances internal trust and strengthens local structures. This process can serve as a catalyst for peacebuilding at the local level.

Again, the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (2014) examined the political dynamics and local governance in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. The results show that Nangarhar is a region where informal networks and personal relationships play a key role in access to resources. The appointment of Gul Agha Sherzai as governor in 2005 disrupted the prior mujahideen order and, through external funding and U.S. military support, he consolidated his position. Governance in Nangarhar has largely been based on personal interests and informal relationships

rather than on the strengthening of formal institutions. The reforms implemented have been largely superficial, failing to alter the underlying power structures. The constitutional reforms after 2001 have also been mostly symbolic, with law enforcement capacity remaining weak. Corruption, the inability to effectively manage local budgets, and the lack of institutional coherence are among the primary obstacles to good governance.

Spanta (2017) emphasized the importance of good governance and structural reforms. The findings indicate that without the establishment of a transparent and efficient governmental system, sustainable development and peace in Afghanistan are not achievable. He underscores the necessity of strengthening state institutions, combating corruption, and implementing reforms within the judicial and executive systems. These reforms, he argues, must be comprehensive and carried out across all levels of government in order to restore public trust in the state. He also highlights the essential role of the international community in supporting these reforms and ensuring the country's stability.

Hamdard (2019) investigated the barriers to Afghanistan's political underdevelopment from the perspective of civil society. The results indicate that Afghanistan's political underdevelopment stems from the weak rule of law and the persistence of political autocracy, both fundamentally rooted in the absence of political thought and the incapacity of civil institutions. Political thought and civil society in Afghanistan have failed to challenge the deeply entrenched autocratic mindset and to provide viable alternatives to it.

Rahimzada (2021) examined the institutional structure of power and political instability in Afghanistan over the past century. The findings indicate that the formation and persistence of informal institutions, alongside existing formal institutions and the establishment of networks among elite actors, have contributed significantly to political instability in Afghanistan. Specifically, the state's behavior toward elites through granting privileges, exclusion, and marginalization has facilitated the emergence of a power network, particularly since 2001. This has created opportunities for elites to engage in high-stakes bargaining to secure resources and privileges. This leverage has enabled them to instigate tension and conflict whenever their interests were threatened. As a result, Afghanistan has remained trapped in a fragile, limited-access order.

Mojaddedi and Noori (2022) investigated the nature of Afghanistan's government under the Constitution and its associated challenges. The research findings show that the Afghan state became highly centralized through the 2004 Constitution, wherein local governance structures served primarily to implement policies designed by central authorities. The separation of powers and institutional checks and balances were overshadowed by a dominant executive branch. A relatively weak legislature and the growing influence of the executive

over the judiciary were among the key factors undermining governance and fueling persistent tensions between the executive and parliament.

Akhtar and Niazi (2023) reviewed the causes of governance problems in the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The findings indicate that despite extensive efforts toward governmental reform, challenges such as ongoing conflict, centralization, corruption, and informal power structures have hindered the effective implementation of laws. Informal institutions play a more influential role than formal institutions but have received less international support. Widespread corruption, lack of coordination among institutions, and weaknesses in law enforcement have undermined the legitimacy of the government.

Ansari Samani et al. (2023) studied political violence and its economic consequences, with evidence from selected Middle Eastern and North African countries, including Afghanistan, during the period 2010 to 2020. The results show that political violence diverts costs toward non-developmental pathways, leading to decreased productivity and reduced employment opportunities. Furthermore, financing wars requires mobilizing resources from internal and external sources, increasing taxes, domestic borrowing, and the printing of new currency. Consequently, political violence contributes to increased debt, unemployment, and inflation.

In a notable study on Afghanistan, Barfield (2023) analyzed the conflict from cultural and historical perspectives. The findings argue that war and politics are deeply intertwined in this region. Power transitions in Afghanistan, such as those in 1978, 1979, 1992, and 1996, have consistently failed to unify the state or establish stability. This reflects a recurring pattern of ineffective governance and leadership challenges within society. The complex interplay of historical legacies, leadership difficulties, and external influences has shaped Afghanistan's political landscape over the years.

It appears that much of the research on governance in Afghanistan has been conducted from a historical perspective, with each study addressing various governance challenges. However, this study aims to examine governance in Afghanistan using Collier's threshold, which is based on World Bank institutional indicators and is designed to assess institutional performance and economic policy inefficiencies in developing countries. Some countries may repeatedly fail in institutional performance and economic policies, thereby falling into a "bad governance trap." Accordingly, Collier's trap can serve as a suitable tool for evaluating Afghanistan's institutional and economic policy conditions, representing an innovative aspect of this research.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Qualitative case study and data collection

This paper employs a qualitative case study method that allows for an in-depth analysis of various aspects and nuances of a specific subject. Case studies typically involve large volumes of detailed data to provide a deeper understanding of the subject and produce more reliable findings (Eisenhardt, 1989: 538–540). This approach is suitable due to its ability to cover detailed data and multiple variables such as human rights, economic growth, poverty, governance capacity, and corruption (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 18). An intensive single-case study is effective for answering “how” and “why” research questions. The study period spans from 2004 to 2021, beginning with the establishment of the republic based on free elections under international intervention and continuing until 2021. Afghanistan, as a relatively extreme case among underdeveloped countries, provides a relevant context for examining the effects of bad governance and inefficient policies. Despite its long history and available opportunities, the country remains trapped in poverty, making it a suitable case to test Collier’s development theory. This paper innovatively uses Collier’s threshold to assess Afghanistan’s institutional and economic policy performance.

The research followed three stages: identifying indicators of governance traps, collecting empirical data, and evaluating Afghanistan based on those indicators. The “stylized facts” method (Jean-Philippe & Potters, 2001) was used to systematically analyze the data and assess whether Afghanistan’s underdevelopment aligns with the characteristics of a bad governance trap. In this regard, to ensure validity, sources were cross-compared. Secondary sources were selected based on the case-specific focus on Afghanistan and practical time and location constraints. Paul Collier’s book *The Bottom Billion* (2007) served as the primary theoretical framework, supported by literature on the role of governance traps in Afghanistan’s underdevelopment.

4.2. Country policy and institutional assessment

The World Bank introduced the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) to distinguish less developed countries and to allocate development assistance more effectively. CPIA evaluates the quality of a country’s policies and institutional frameworks, focusing on factors under the government’s control rather than outcomes that may be influenced by external conditions (World Bank, 2014).

CPIA measures how well a country’s policy and institutional framework supports sustainable growth and poverty reduction, reflecting its capacity to use development aid effectively. The index consists of 16 criteria grouped into four equally weighted clusters: economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management and institutions (World Bank, 2014). Since 2006, the World Bank has published annual CPIA scores. Countries are rated from 1 (low) to 6 (high) based on performance in a

given year, relative to established benchmarks rather than year-to-year improvement. These assessments are conducted by World Bank experts and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Bank's Executive Directors or the governments they represent.

Table 1: CPIA index

Clusters	Criteria
Economic Management	Monetary and Exchange Rate Policies
	Fiscal Policy (Budgetary Policy)
	Debt Policy and Management
Structural Policies	Trade (Trade Policy and Economic Openness)
	Financial Sector (Structure and Function of the System)
	Business Regulatory Environment
Policies for Social Inclusion and Equity	Gender Equality
	Equity of Public Resource Allocation
	Human Resource Development (e.g., Education and Health)
	Social Protection and Labor
Public Sector Management and Institutions	Policies and Institutions for Environmental Sustainability
	Property Rights and Rule-Based Governance
	Quality of Budgetary and Financial Management
	Efficiency of Revenue Mobilization
	Quality of Public Administration
	Transparency, Accountability, and Corruption in the Public Sector

Source: World Bank Report 2014

The economic management cluster assesses the quality of macroeconomic policies, including price stability, public debt management, and fiscal and budgetary policies. Its focus is on whether countries have adopted sound economic policies for sustainable growth. The evaluation of this criterion significantly influences investor confidence and international donors. The cluster of structural policies includes policies that determine market efficiency, such as foreign trade, financial systems, and the business environment. The goal is to facilitate economic growth through structural reforms and enhanced competitiveness. Countries with stronger financial systems and more open trade policies generally score higher in this cluster (World Bank, CPIA Report, 2024). The indicators of policies for social inclusion and equity assess government performance in social areas, poverty support, access to public services, and gender policies. Countries with stronger and more inclusive systems of education and health receive higher scores. Additionally, the level of access for marginalized groups to economic opportunities is important here. Finally, the cluster of public sector management and institutions is the most important part of the CPIA and evaluates the quality of governance, anti-corruption efforts, accountability, and the efficiency of public institutions. Countries with an

independent judiciary, transparent budgeting, and responsive government perform better. This cluster has the greatest impact on IDA allocations (World Bank, CPIA Report, 2024).

The CPIA is designed to assess the economic and institutional policies of low-income countries. Weighting within each cluster is equal across criteria, with annual scores ranging from 1 (weakest) to 6 (best). Each cluster's score is the weighted average of its criteria scores, again on a scale of 1 to 6. National performance is evaluated through the CPIA. The International Development Association ranks countries based on the weighted average of CPIA clusters. This weighted average is calculated as 24% for clusters A–C, 68% for cluster D, and 8% from the Annual Report on Portfolio Performance (ARPP). Therefore, as noted, governance (cluster D) has the largest role in ranking countries. Since governance performance is scored from 1 to 6, Collier (2007) defines a threshold score of 3. Countries scoring below this threshold are considered to have bad governance and ineffective economic policies and are likely to fail.

5. Data Analysis

As noted in Section 4, countries' economic and institutional policy performance is evaluated based on the World Bank's CPIA index. Given that CPIA data for Afghanistan is available from 2005 to 2019, covering three five-year governance periods, the analysis is conducted across these three intervals: 2005–2009, 2009–2014, and 2014–2019. These periods are referred to in the analysis as the first, second, and third phases of the Republic.

5.1. First phase of the Republic (2005–2009)

Following the Bonn Conference and the establishment of the interim and transitional governments, Afghanistan held its first presidential election in 2004. This event marked the formation of all governmental structures and the official commencement of the operations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The findings presented in Table 2, which reflect the CPIA cluster scores, illustrate the performance of Afghanistan's economic policies and institutional frameworks during the first phase. In this period, the economic management cluster demonstrated relatively strong performance throughout the term. Among all the clusters, the cluster of public sector institutions exhibited the weakest performance compared to the others.

Table 2: Clustered CPIA Index Data (2005–2009)

Cluster	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Average
Economic Management	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.2
Structural Policies	2.3	2.5	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.46
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.4
Public Sector Management and Institution	2.2	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.4	2.26
IDA index	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.6	2.75	2.59

Source: World Bank

As seen in Table 3, in the cluster of economic management, macroeconomic policies such as exchange rate and monetary policies demonstrated the strongest performance during this period. Conversely, fiscal policy, specifically the efficiency of the budgetary sector, exhibited the weakest performance. Regarding structural policies, the trade sector received a relatively higher score, whereas the financial structure, reflecting the functioning of the country's financial system, showed weak performance.

The highest score was observed in the cluster of social policies and human resource development, which may be attributed to the increased interest of citizens in schools and universities. However, the gender equality indicator recorded poor performance within this cluster. Among the clusters of public sector institutions, which carry significant importance, the quality of public financial management and budgeting performed relatively well. On the other hand, property rights and rule-based governance demonstrated the weakest performance in this period, despite their critical importance.

Table 3: Strongest and Weakest Indicators of the Clusters in the First Period

Cluster	Trend	Average	Strongest indicator	Weakest indicator
Economic Management	Relatively stable	3.2	Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy (3.74)	Fiscal Policy (2.88)
Structural Policies	Slowly rising	2.46	Trade (2.66)	Financial Structure (2.2)
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	Gradually rising	2.4	Human Resource Development (2.88)	Gender Equality (2.02)
Public Sector Management and Institution	Fluctuating	2.26	Quality of Financial Management (2.92)	Property Right (1.66)

Source: World Bank

The economic management cluster exhibited a relatively stable trend, with minor fluctuations and generally good performance throughout the five-year period. This stability may be attributed to the involvement of international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in designing and implementing fiscal and monetary policies. Exchange rate stabilization and inflation control were among the strengths of this period. Despite corruption and implementation challenges, the economic cluster demonstrated a relatively acceptable performance, with its score remaining above the Collier threshold level of 3.

The structural policy cluster showed a gradual upward trend, possibly influenced by reforms in customs and trade and the establishment of investment institutions, which contributed to improved trade and market structure. The social inclusion

and equity cluster remained unchanged during the first three years, followed by an increasing trend. This improvement might be linked to increased government and donor investments in education, health, and social services, as well as the expansion of programs such as the establishment of the National Solidarity Fund, which supported development initiatives, particularly in rural areas. However, the cluster of public sector management and institutions, which was the weakest during this period, experienced minor fluctuations. It appears that the government suffered from structural weaknesses in public administration, law enforcement, high levels of corruption, and institutional unaccountability. Additionally, the lack of sufficient experience in newly established institutions and the absence of professional capacity in governmental agencies had a profound negative impact. Considering the average cluster performance score (2.59), this evaluation indicates that although the country's economic policies and institutions showed relatively moderate improvement over the five years (starting at 2.5 and ending at 2.75), the scores consistently remained below the Collier threshold of 3. This reflects weak governance accompanied by inefficient policies.

5.2. Second phase of the Republic (2010–2014)

Following the 2009 elections, the Afghan government entered its second phase of operations. During this period, the cluster of economic management exhibited weaker performance compared to the previous phase, although it remained close to the threshold level. Other clusters showed slight improvements on average. The strongest cluster (economic management) and the weakest cluster (public institutions) remained unchanged relative to the prior phase.

Table 4: Clustered CPIA Index Data (2010–2014)

Cluster	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Average
Economic Management	3	3	3	3	3	3
Structural Policies	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.25
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.64
Public Sector Management and Institution	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.48
IDA index	2.625	2.675	2.675	2.65	2.65	2.655

Source: World Bank

Findings from Table 5 indicate that within the economic management cluster, the weakest indicator changed compared to the previous period, with public debt policy and management replacing fiscal policy in this position. In the three clusters of structural policies, social policies, and public institutions, the indicators of trade, human resource development, and quality of public financial management demonstrated stronger performance. In contrast, the indicators of financial structure, gender equality, property rights, and rule-based governance showed the weakest performance compared to the first phase. However, the

rankings of the strongest and weakest indicators within these clusters remained unchanged.

Table 5: Strongest and Weakest Indicators of the Clusters in the Second Period

Cluster	Trend	Average	Strongest indicator	Weakest indicator
Economic Management	Stable	3	Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy (3.5)	Debt Management (2.6)
Structural Policies	Stable	2.5	Trade (2.5)	Financial Structure (2)
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	Fluctuating	2.64	Human Resource Development (3.4)	Gender Equality (1.8)
Public Sector Management and Institution	Slow Ascend	2.48	Quality or Financial Management (3.5)	Property Right (1.5)

Source: World Bank

The performance trends of the clusters during this period exhibited minor positive variations and overall greater stability. Except for the economic management cluster, which performed relatively worse than that in the previous period, this decline appears to be attributable to changes in public debt policy and management, which performed weaker than fiscal policy during this phase, thereby lowering the cluster's overall score. The stability in structural policies may be due to the absence of major changes in the country's fundamental structures during this period. When structural reforms progress slowly, or no new decisions are made within this timeframe, this indicator remains unchanged. Generally, structural reforms or policies appear to have been implemented less in this phase.

Variations in the social inclusion and equity cluster may be linked to new social programs or policies implemented in early 2011, such as increased attention to social welfare, education, health, or supportive policies. The cluster of public sector management and institutions showed slight improvement, possibly indicating the beginning of reforms and minor changes in public institutions, such as enhancing institutional performance or increasing capacity to address public and administrative issues. Overall, these changes across all clusters led to an increase in the average IDA index score compared to the previous phase. However, the score remained below the Collier threshold level of 3 throughout the five-year period, indicating persistent challenges related to the bad governance trap.

5.3. Third phase of the Republic (2015–2019)

Following the 2014 elections, the establishment of the National Unity Government ensured the continuation of the republican system. During this period, the economic management cluster remained unchanged and consistently stable throughout the five years, demonstrating steady performance. The average performance of the structural policies and social inclusion and equity also

remained approximately stable. The cluster of public sector management and institutions showed an average improvement. Although the ranking of the strongest cluster (economic management) remained unchanged, the ranking of the weakest cluster shifted compared to the previous two phases. In this phase, the cluster of public sector management and institutions was replaced by the structural policy cluster as the weakest-performing cluster.

Table 6: Clustered CPIA Index Data (2015–2019)

Cluster	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Average
Economic Management	3	3	3	3	3	3
Structural Policies	2.66	2.66	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.56
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.62
Public Sector Management and Institution	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.58
IDA index	2.69	2.71	2.67	2.67	2.7	2.69

Source: World Bank

According to the results in Table 7, the rankings of the indicators within all clusters remained unchanged during this period. The strongest indicators, including macroeconomic policy, trade, human resource development, and quality of public financial management, maintained their positions as the top-performing metrics from the previous phase. Performance improvements were observed in the trade and human resource development indicators. Meanwhile, the weakest indicators, i.e., debt management, financial structure, gender equality, property rights, and rule-based governance, continued to rank lowest within the index.

Table 7: Strongest and Weakest Indicators of the Clusters in the Third Period

Cluster	Trend	Average	Strongest indicator	Weakest indicator
Economic Management	Stable	3	Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy (3.5)	Debt Management (2.6)
Structural Policies	Stable	2.56	Trade (2.5)	Financial Structure (2)
Policies for Social Inclusion /Equity	Fluctuating	2.62	Human Resource Development (3.4)	Gender Equality (1.5)
Public Sector Management and Institution	Slow Ascend	2.58	Quality or Financial Management (3.5)	Property Right (1.9)

Source: World Bank

During this period, the cluster exhibited stable performance, indicating that macroeconomic frameworks such as monetary, fiscal, and trade policies

remained consistent throughout the phases. Economic policymakers were likely satisfied with the previous course, or external environmental factors, such as inflation rates or exchange rate stability, were effectively controlled.

In the early years of this phase, some structural reforms may have been implemented within the structural policy cluster, such as in energy, taxation, trade, or market regulations, but these changes were either not sustainable or had limited impact. The return to lower scores may be attributed to implementation barriers, changes in government, or shifting policy priorities. However, it appears that social policies related to health, education, and social welfare experienced stagnation or slow progress during the third phase. The slight increase observed in 2019 may indicate efforts to improve performance, possibly due to the upcoming elections, but not sufficiently strong to reverse the overall trend.

The public sector management and institutions cluster exhibited a growth trend during this period, which may be attributed to institutional reforms, increased transparency (such as the investigation into the Kabul Bank crisis), enhanced government accountability, and improved efficiency following the 2014 elections and the establishment of the National Unity Government. Strengthening government structures, combating corruption, and implementing digital policies such as the electronic national ID system could reflect these advancements.

Overall, the IDA index experienced moderate growth in this phase. This increase may indicate better access to development resources, foreign aid, and more sustainable economic policies resulting from post-2014 electoral changes and the formation of the National Unity Government. Improvements in international relations, enhanced economic credibility, and better management of foreign aid resources could be among the contributing factors.

5.4. Why has weak governance persisted?

One obvious reason is that not everyone suffers from corruption. Many leaders in some of the poorest countries are themselves among the global wealthy elite. They prefer the status quo to remain unchanged, as it serves their interests to keep citizens uneducated and uninformed. However, the persistence of corruption is not solely driven by personal interests. Among politicians and officials, there are many honorable individuals who, despite numerous challenges, sometimes manage to overcome their opponents. These moments represent opportunities for reform.

Yet, economic reforms are not only a matter of political will; they are also a technical issue. Low-income countries like Afghanistan suffer from a chronic shortage of individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills. Few citizens receive adequate education, and those who do often emigrate. Nevertheless, the factors that determine the pace of reforms from a situation where governance and policies are undeniably poor are crucial. Based on available data on Afghanistan, we evaluated the country's economic and institutional policies over three five-year periods from 2005 to 2019.

As seen in Figure 1, the economic management cluster, including macroeconomic policies such as exchange rate control, monetary policy, and debt management, has consistently shown relatively good performance over the three periods and has remained above the Collier threshold level (score 3). However, other clusters, such as structural policies, social inclusion and equity policies, and public sector management and institutions, exhibited weak performance throughout all three periods. As a result, the overall average of all clusters indicates that Afghanistan remained below the Collier threshold (3) during this timeframe. Collier classifies countries that fall below this threshold for four consecutive years as trapped in bad governance. Accordingly, Afghanistan suffered from the bad governance trap over three consecutive five-year periods. This situation was particularly influenced by the public sector management and institutions cluster, which had the greatest impact, accounting for 68% of the effect.

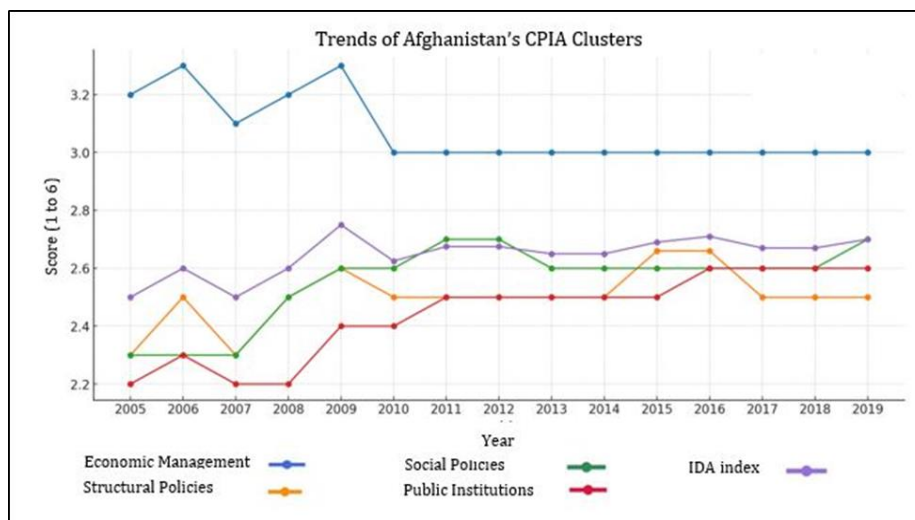


Figure 1: Trend Chart of Afghanistan's CPIA Clusters from 2005 to 2019

Source: Research Findings

According to Collier's argument, governance and policies are conditional on the existence of opportunities. If we look back to 2006 and examine the corruption perception indices of Bangladesh and Afghanistan, Bangladesh ranked lower than Afghanistan, indicating that it was more corrupt. Both countries, in 2005, had a per capita income below \$500, placing them among low-income countries. However, by 2019, Afghanistan's per capita income was \$652, while Bangladesh's had risen above \$1,800. This suggests that with better management and reduced corruption, Bangladesh could achieve better performance.

Nevertheless, evidence shows that despite weak governance throughout the periods, the two countries experienced significantly different trajectories in economic growth and social welfare over time. Thus, their futures are imagined to be entirely distinct. The key reason for this difference lies in the availability of opportunities. Bangladesh, in addition to receiving foreign aid, is not landlocked and has access to open waters. This facilitates exports and service trade. For such countries, according to Collier's reasoning based on World Bank models, a minimal state that does not obstruct macroeconomic policies is sufficient for growth and transformation. However, in Afghanistan, lacking opportunities like those of Bangladesh, governance and policies carry greater importance for effectively converting financial resources into public services.

According to Collier's theory, countries like Afghanistan have failed to transform financial resources into public services, sometimes leading to crises. The inability of public institutions to convert financial resources into services, alongside widespread corruption, contributes to the persistence of the bad governance cycle.

6. Conclusions and Policy Implications

Sen (2000) defines development as the expansion of real freedoms for individuals. From this perspective, development is not merely economic growth or increased production; rather, it entails creating conditions that enable people to have meaningful choices in their lives. These freedoms include access to economic, social, and political opportunities. One of the key challenges of development is the critical situation of countries that remain deprived of basic freedoms despite the increase in global wealth. Countries at the lowest income levels, and often on the brink of collapse, are unable to meet their fundamental needs, such as nutrition, clothing, education, and healthcare, due to poverty and underdevelopment. In such circumstances, these countries are constrained not only economically but also in terms of individual freedoms, as people are forced to live under harsher conditions to fulfill their basic needs.

A key concept in the analysis of underdevelopment is the notion of the "underdevelopment trap." Poor countries, due to their specific geographic characteristics, such as heat, aridity, malaria, and geographic constraints, are unable to achieve economic growth and development. These countries require substantial investments to overcome these challenges, but poverty and a lack of financial resources impede such investments. Afghanistan, despite its important geographical location at the crossroads of three major cultural and geographic regions, continues to suffer from underdevelopment and poverty. Since the 19th century, Afghanistan's history has been marked by colonial rivalries and internal conflicts, which have had severe negative impacts on its growth and development.

Although Afghanistan gained independence in 1919, it remains among the low-income countries. Economic theories and analyses have been developed by prominent economists such as Jeffrey Sachs, Banerjee and Duflo, Daron Acemoglu, and Paul Collier. Collier's framework identifies four types of traps—conflict, natural resources, landlocked geography, and bad governance—that may entrap such countries individually or simultaneously. Bad governance can manifest as corruption, weak state institutions, and failure to provide public services to the population, all of which hinder economic and social development. The present paper aimed to examine Collier's bad governance trap in Afghanistan. This trap is assessed through the evaluation of policies and institutions of low-income countries using the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) index. The CPIA measures the extent to which a country's policy and institutional framework supports sustainable growth and poverty reduction, and consequently reflects the country's capacity to effectively utilize development aid. The outcome of this assessment is an overall score alongside separate scores for 16 different indicators grouped into four categories, which constitute the structure of the CPIA. These scores are derived from the judgments of World Bank experts. The index consists of 16 criteria organized into four equally weighted clusters. Each criterion is scored annually on a scale from 1 (weak) to 6 (strong). According to Collier's framework, countries with an overall score below the threshold of 3 are considered trapped in weak governance and inefficient policies.

The CPIA clusters were analyzed based on the available data for Afghanistan from 2005 to 2019, covering three consecutive five-year periods. Following the Bonn Conference and the establishment of the interim and transitional governments, Afghanistan held its first presidential election in 2004. Subsequently, all governmental structures were formed, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan officially began operating. In the first period (2004–2009), the economic management cluster consistently remained at or above Collier's threshold. In contrast, the other clusters scored below the threshold, among which the cluster of public administration and institutions exhibited the weakest performance. On average, the country's cluster scores were below Collier's threshold.

Following the 2009 elections, the Afghan government entered its second period. In the second period, starting in 2010, the results show a relative improvement in the clusters of structural policies, social inclusion and equity policies, and public administration and institutions. Nevertheless, the average cluster scores remained consistently below Collier's threshold throughout the five years. The strongest cluster (economic management) and the weakest cluster (public administration and institutions) retained their ranks from the previous period.

Ultimately, after the 2014 elections, the establishment of the National Unity Government ensured the continuation of the republican system. In the third period (2015–2019), further relative improvements were observed, predominantly in the cluster of public administration and institutions, which led to a shift in the rank of the weakest cluster, now replaced by the structural policy cluster. In sum, the results across these three five-year periods demonstrate that despite a slight improvement in the average cluster scores (from 2.59 to 2.69) between 2005 and 2019, Afghanistan remains below Collier's threshold and continues to suffer from the severe bad governance trap and ineffective economic policies.

Across these three periods, the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been unable to convert financial resources into effective public services. Comparing Bangladesh and Afghanistan reveals some interesting points. While both countries had a per capita income below \$500, Bangladesh's per capita income rose above \$1,800 in 2019, whereas Afghanistan's per capita income was only \$652. Surprisingly, at the beginning of the period, Bangladesh ranked lower than Afghanistan in the corruption perception indices. For countries like Bangladesh, despite severe corruption and given its unique opportunities—such as access to open seas and greater potential for trade—a small government may be sufficient to promote economic growth, thereby improving social welfare.

However, for a landlocked country like Afghanistan, whose financial resources were heavily dependent on foreign aid during this period, effective governance and sound economic policies are of greater importance. Hence, it is recommended that future studies focus on the critical role of governance and efficient economic policies, further identifying opportunities, proposing solutions for improving governance, escaping the bad governance trap, and implementing effective economic policies, which could be both interesting and practical.

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تله حکمرانی بد و توسعه نیافتگی: مطالعات موردی افغانستان

چکیده

درآمد سرانه افغانستان و بنگلادش در اوایل قرن بیست و یکم کمتر از ۵۰۰ دلار بوده، اما اکنون درآمد سرانه بنگلادش بیش از ۳ برابر افغانستان است. جالب اینجاست که در آغاز این دوره، بنگلادش در شاخص‌های ادراک فساد وضعیت بدتری نسبت به افغانستان داشته و به همین جهت، داشتن یک دولت کوچک برای تجربه رشد اقتصادی بالای این کشور کافی راهگشا می‌شود. در مقابل، احتمالاً تأکید بر دولت کوچک مانند آنچه که توسط مدل دهه ۱۹۸۰ بانک جهانی ترویج می‌شد، برای کشورهای کم‌درآمد، کم‌منابع و محصور در خشکی مانند افغانستان کافی نیست. در چنین شرایطی، نهادها قادر به تبدیل منابع مالی به خدمات عمومی مؤثر نیستند. این مقاله با استفاده از چارچوب پل کولیر، چگونگی عملکرد نهادی و سیاست‌های اقتصادی را در ناکامی افغانستان در دستیابی به توسعه ارزیابی می‌کند. هدف، بررسی تله توسعه‌نیافتگی افغانستان ناشی از حکمرانی بد و سیاست‌های ناکارآمد است. بدین منظور، دوره ۲۰۰۵ تا ۲۰۱۹ به سه زیردوره پنج ساله تقسیم شده و سپس هر زیردوره با رویکردی مبتنی بر واقعیت‌های سبک‌وار تجزیه و تحلیل شده است. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهد که در دوره اول (۲۰۰۵-۲۰۰۹) گروه معیارهای مدیریت اقتصادی با میانگین امتیاز بالاتر از آستانه ۳ بهترین وضعیت را داشته، در حالی که معیارهای مدیریت بخش عمومی و نهادها با امتیاز پایین‌تر از آستانه ضعیف‌ترین عملکرد را داشته‌اند. از آنجایی که میانگین همه شاخص‌ها به طور مداوم زیر آستانه کولیر (امتیاز ۳) قرار گرفتند، نتیجه گرفته می‌شود که افغانستان در دام حکمرانی بد گرفتار شده است. این روند در دوره‌های دوم (۲۰۱۴-۲۰۱۰) و سوم (۲۰۱۵-۲۰۱۹) نیز ادامه یافته، هرچند در این دو دوره معیار سیاست‌های ساختاری، به جای مدیریت بخش عمومی و نهادها، بدترین وضعیت را از آن خود کرده‌اند.

کلمات کلیدی: افغانستان، تله توسعه‌نیافتگی، حکمرانی بد، واقعیت‌های سبک وار، شاخص CPIA