

FINAL PROJECT: DRUG TRAFFICKING
The Nexus of Drug Trafficking and Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Drug trafficking, a prevalent transnational crime, casts a long shadow beyond its immediate societal and economic consequences. This paper explores the often overlooked, yet critical, environmental impact of drug production and its contribution to regional instability. By examining the case of Afghanistan, a nation already grappling with significant environmental challenges and exacerbated by the drug trade, this analysis aims to expose a cyclical trap further amplifying instability and insecurity. The research question guiding this exploration is: To what extent does drug trafficking exacerbate climate change, and how do these intertwined issues contribute to instability and insecurity, particularly in vulnerable regions? Drawing from this use case, this paper highlights the multifaceted nature of tackling drug trafficking, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and collaborative approaches that address drug trafficking and climate change both respectively and collectively.

OUTLINE

I. Abstract, Introduction, Introducing Drug Trafficking

- A. Structure and Dynamics of Drug Trafficking Organizations
 - i. Hierarchies, power structures, and operational networks.
 - ii. Diversification and adaptation to evolving law enforcement strategies.
 - iii. Links to other forms of transnational crime (e.g., human trafficking, arms smuggling).
- B. Corruption as a Facilitator
 - i. Increase in violence and organized crime activity.
 - ii. Destabilization of fragile states and conflict-affected regions.
 - iii. Fueling human rights abuses and forced displacement.
- C. Consequences for Security and Stability
 - i. Increase in violence and organized crime activity.
 - ii. Destabilization of fragile states and conflict-affected regions.
 - iii. Fueling human rights abuses and forced displacement.

II. Drug Trafficking and its Link to Climate Change

- A. Environmental Damage Caused by Drug Trafficking
 - i. Deforestation for illicit crops (e.g., coca, opium poppies).
 - ii. Chemical pollution from production and disposal of drugs and waste.
 - iii. Water contamination from hazardous chemicals used in processing.
 - iv. Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem disruption.
- B. Exacerbating Climate Change Impacts
 - i. Increased greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and production processes.
 - ii. Vulnerability of drug-producing regions to climate-related disasters (e.g., floods, droughts).
 - iii. Displaced populations and potential for increased conflict and instability.
- C. The Cycle of Vulnerability
 - i. How climate change impacts contribute to drug cultivation and trafficking,
 - ii. How drug trafficking activities worsen climate change impacts.

III. Consequences for Security and Stability

- A. Potential for increased violence and organized crime activity
- B. Environmental degradation caused by drug trafficking (deforestation, water pollution), leading to resource scarcity and conflict.
- C. Fueling human rights abuses and forced displacement both because of drug trafficking and climate change.
 - i. Point out a country/area who is particularly vulnerable. (Maybe highlight Latin America as a whole? Other options to consider: Afghanistan, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico). This should tie into my next point.
- D. Climate change-induced disasters (droughts, floods) exacerbating instability.
 - i. Droughts and floods: Droughts deplete water resources, leading to competition for limited supplies, agricultural losses, and food insecurity. This desperation can drive people to participate in the drug trade as a means of survival, either as cultivators, traffickers, or low-level dealers. Floods can destroy infrastructure, homes, and agricultural land, displacing communities and leaving them vulnerable. Displacement often leads to social and economic breakdown, increasing desperation and susceptibility to recruitment by drug cartels or gangs.
 - ii. Migration and forced displacement (already discussed, maybe repetitive?)
 - iii. Weakened governance and institutions.
 - iv. Increased violence and stability (already discussed, maybe repetitive?)
 - v. Exacerbating existing vulnerabilities

IV. Afghanistan Case Study

- A. The Taliban and Drug Trafficking
 - i. Trace the evolution of the Taliban's involvement in the opium trade, from taxing poppy cultivation to potentially controlling significant production and trafficking networks.
 - ii. Analyze the corrupt practices used by the Taliban, including extortion, intimidation, and collaboration with local officials.
 - iii. Discuss the impact of Taliban control on drug trafficking routes and global markets.
- B. Non-state Actors and Criminal Networks
 - i. Explore the presence and activities of other major drug trafficking organizations operating in Afghanistan, such as the Haqqani network and regional militias.
 - ii. Analyze their relationships with the Taliban, government officials, and international groups.
- C. Corruption at National and Local Levels
 - i. Examine the prevalence of corruption within the Afghan government, police, and judiciary, highlighting how it facilitates drug trafficking activities.
 - ii. Discuss the impact of corruption on law enforcement efforts and broader governance failures.
- D. Regional and Global Impact
 - i. Impact of drug trafficking on these poppy-growing provinces, focusing on:
 - a. Socioeconomic and environmental consequences, including poverty, deforestation, and water pollution to tie in climate change.
 - ii. Increased violence and insecurity due to turf wars and criminal activity (are there

stats around migration?).

V. Combating Drug Trafficking

A. Challenges

- i. International cooperation and jurisdictional issues.
- ii. Limited resources and capacity in developing countries.
- iii. Addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality.
- iv. Corruption
- v. Additional complexity of addressing both drug trafficking and climate change simultaneously.

B. Strategies

- i. Strengthening law enforcement collaboration and information sharing.
- ii. Promoting transparency and accountability in government institutions (to combat corruption).
- iii. Community-based approaches to reduce vulnerability and support alternatives (to combat addiction which is fueling the industry).

VI. Conclusion

- A. Summarize the key findings on the complex relationship between drug trafficking, transnational crime/corruption, and climate change.
- B. Reiterate the additional complexity of addressing both drug trafficking and climate change simultaneously.
 - i. Competing priorities and limited resources hinder effective action on both fronts.
- C. Highlight the need for comprehensive and multi-pronged approaches to effectively tackle these interconnected issues.

INTRODUCTION

Drug trafficking is a pervasive transnational crime with far-reaching societal and economic impacts. However, its connection to climate change is often overlooked. To what extent does drug trafficking exacerbate climate change, and how do these intertwined issues contribute to instability and insecurity, particularly in vulnerable regions? This review explores literature surrounding drug trafficking and its global impact, as well as the environmental damage caused by drug production, the exacerbation of climate change impacts by these activities, and the resulting consequences. Afghanistan serves as a case study to illustrate the complex interplay of the Taliban, non-state actors, and regional dynamics fueling the drug trade and exacerbating environmental degradation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines drug trafficking as “a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances

which are subject to drug prohibition laws.”¹ This definition succinctly characterizes drug trafficking as the illicit cultivation, manufacture, distribution, and the sale of prohibited drug; however, understanding the full scope of this illicit industry is more complex. In the age of globalization, the drug trafficking industry is not an isolated phenomenon. It operates across diverse geographic regions and exploits intricate social, political, and economic vulnerabilities.² Drug trafficking organizations exhibit complex hierarchies, power structures, and operational networks. These entities adapt to evolving law enforcement strategies and maintain links to other forms of transnational crime. Corruption facilitates drug trafficking by increasing violence, destabilizing fragile states, and fueling human rights abuses.³ Several offices within the UN provided comprehensive data and analysis, highlighting the global scale and complexity of drug trafficking. Key findings reveal the increasing involvement of organized crime groups, the diversification of trafficking routes, and the impact of drug trafficking on security, governance, and public health. While previous studies have extensively explored the socio-economic drivers and consequences of drug trafficking, there is a notable gap in understanding the effectiveness of current international drug control policies in curbing the trade.⁴ The main arguments in the literature revolve around the need for a balanced approach that combines law enforcement with preventive measures and addresses the root causes of drug trafficking.⁵ However, there remains significant controversy over the best strategies to combat drug trafficking, with debates centering on the decriminalization of drugs, harm reduction approaches, and the role of international cooperation.

Environmental Damage and Climate Change Impacts

Climate change is a multifaceted challenge to human, state, and global security, which requires urgent and concerted efforts at national and global levels. The impacts of climate change on natural disasters, food security, and displacement of people highlight the need for proactive measures to mitigate and adapt to these challenges. Several scholars and experts have explored how climate change can exacerbate existing threats to national security as well as lead to new ones. The U.S. intelligence community has increasingly expressed concerns about the impact of climate change on national security. Their assessments provide a unique and authoritative perspective on the issue. The literature on environmental damage and climate change impacts highlights the urgency of addressing these interconnected issues. Studies from both UN agencies and the U.S. government underscore the severe consequences of climate change. However, there is a gap in understanding the long-term socio-economic impacts of climate change and the effectiveness of current mitigation and adaptation strategies. The main arguments focus on the need for global cooperation, the implementation of sustainable practices,

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “Drug Trafficking,” 2024.

² U.S. Government, *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization - Money Laundering, Threat Finance, Narcotics, Transnational Organized Crime, Sex Traffic, Black Market, Urbanization*. National Defense University Press. Washington, D.C, 2013, xiii-xviii.

³ David Bewley-Taylor, "Drug trafficking and organised crime in Afghanistan: Corruption, insecurity and the challenges of transition," *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 6 (2013): 6-17.

⁴ Wayne Hall, "The future of the international drug control system and national drug prohibitions," *Addiction* 113, no. 7 (2018): 1210-1223.

⁵ John Collins, "Rethinking 'flexibilities' in the international drug control system—potential, precedents and models for reforms," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 60 (2018): 107-114.

and the importance of transitioning to renewable energy sources to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming.

Consequences for Security and Stability

The impact of drug trafficking is vast. It has fueled violence and crime which has not only jeopardized public safety globally, but eroded trust in institutions regionally due to corruption. Readily available drugs through trafficking have fueled addiction and strained healthcare systems. The environmental degradation caused by drug trafficking leads to resource scarcity and conflict, fueling human rights abuses and forced displacement.⁶ Climate change-induced disasters, such as droughts and floods, exacerbate instability and weaken governance, further complicating efforts to combat drug trafficking.⁷ Studies indicate that drug trafficking exacerbates conflict, undermines governance, and fuels corruption, while climate change acts as a "threat multiplier," aggravating resource scarcity, displacement, and social tensions. The literature reveals a gap in understanding how the skepticism of climate change deniers, particularly among policymakers, impacts the effectiveness of strategies to combat drug trafficking and climate change. There is a lack of research on the influence of political ideologies and vested interests in shaping policies that address these interrelated challenges.

Afghanistan Case Study

Afghanistan is a prime example of the interplay between drug trafficking and climate change. The Taliban's involvement in the opium trade has evolved from taxing poppy cultivation to potentially controlling significant production and trafficking networks.⁸⁹ Corruption at national and local levels facilitates drug trafficking activities, while the presence of non-state actors and criminal networks complicates the situation.¹⁰ The environmental impact of drug trafficking in Afghanistan further exacerbates the country's vulnerability to climate change.¹¹ Deforestation for illicit crop cultivation, chemical pollution from drug production, and water contamination from hazardous waste contribute to environmental degradation.¹² These activities not only worsen the effects of climate change but also undermine the resilience of communities to adapt to changing environmental conditions. Climate change itself poses significant challenges to Afghanistan.¹³ The country faces increasing temperatures, erratic precipitation patterns, and

⁶ Nasrat Sayad and Said Hashmat Sadat. 2022. Climate Change Compounds Longstanding Displacement in Afghanistan. Migration Policy Institute

⁷ Nicholas Van Hear, Oliver Bakewell, and Katy Long, "Push-Pull plus: Reconsidering the Drivers of Migration." *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 44 (6): 927–44, 2018.

⁸ Rupert Stone, "Afghanistan's drug trade is booming under Taliban rule." Atlantic Council, August 24, 2022.

⁹ Mark Shaw, "Drug trafficking and the development of organized crime in post-Taliban Afghanistan," *Introduction And Overview* (2006): 189.

¹⁰ United Nations, "Afghanistan opium survey 2023. Cultivation and production after the ban: effects and implications." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, November 2023.

¹¹ Asadullah Jawid and Menusch Khadjavi. 2019. "Adaptation to climate change in Afghanistan: Evidence on the impact of external interventions." *Economic Analysis and Policy*, Elsevier BV, Amsterdam, Vol. 64, pp. 64-82.

¹² The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank. 2021. *Climate Risk Country Profile: Afghanistan.*

¹³ United Nations, "Finding common ground in Afghanistan's fight against the climate emergency." United Nations Sustainability Group, November 2022.

more frequent extreme weather events, which threaten agricultural productivity and water availability.¹⁴ These climatic stressors can push more people into the drug trade as a means of survival, creating a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and economic desperation.¹⁵ The case of Afghanistan illustrates the complex relationship between drug trafficking and climate change, where each issue amplifies the other's impact. The literature on the nexus between drug trafficking and climate change in Afghanistan is limited, with few studies directly addressing the interplay between these two critical issues. However, it can be inferred from existing research that the confluence of escalating drug trafficking activities and the adverse effects of climate change could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and compound challenges for Afghanistan's security, governance, and development.

Combating Drug Trafficking and Climate Change

Addressing drug trafficking and climate change simultaneously presents challenges, including international cooperation, limited resources, and corruption. While these issues are linked, policies primarily exist for each respectively. This approach is likely the best approach, as it would allow policymakers to tackle the specific nuances of each issue more effectively, ensuring targeted interventions that can address the unique aspects of drug trafficking and climate change without diluting efforts or resources. The literature on combating drug trafficking and climate change emphasizes the need for multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches to address these complex and interrelated challenges. Again, studies highlight the importance of international cooperation, robust legal frameworks, and community-based interventions to effectively combat drug trafficking, while advocating for sustainable development practices, renewable energy solutions, and climate resilience measures to mitigate climate change impacts. However, there is a recognized gap in integrating strategies that simultaneously tackle both issues, suggesting the need for innovative policies that leverage synergies between drug control and environmental sustainability efforts.

SUPPORTING GRAPHS AND CHARTS

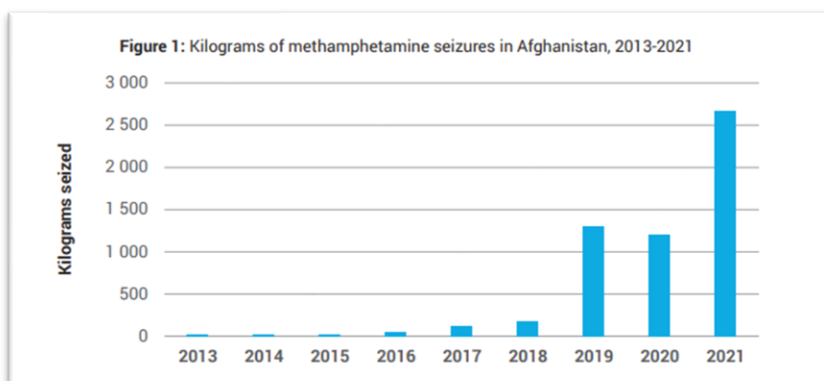


Figure 1

¹⁴ Climate Change Knowledge Portal, "Afghanistan," 2024.

¹⁵ Adriana E. Abdenur, and Siddharth Tripathi, "Local approaches to climate-sensitive peacebuilding: lessons from Afghanistan." *Global Social Challenges Journal* 1, no. 1 (2022): 40-58.

Figure 1. This Graph highlight how the methamphetamine supply in Afghanistan and neighboring countries is rising. United Nations. *Understanding Illegal Methamphetamine Manufacture in Afghanistan*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Research Brief, September 2023.

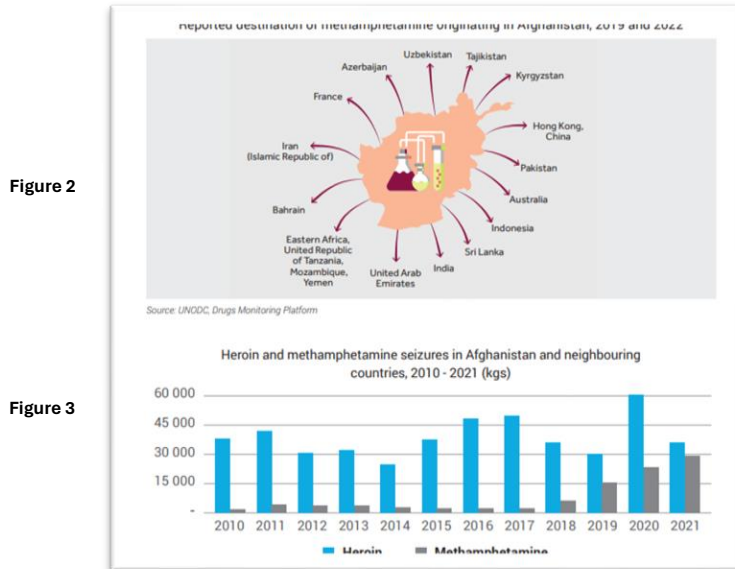


Figure 2 and 3. This image and graph showcases the export and seizure of heroin and methamphetamine in Afghanistan. United Nations. *Understanding Illegal Methamphetamine Manufacture in Afghanistan*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Research Brief, September 2023.

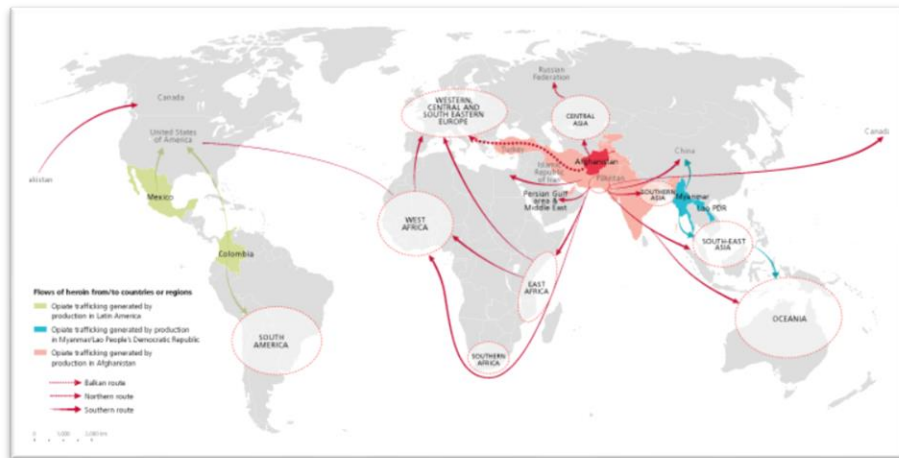


Figure 4. This map highlights the global export of illicit drugs out of Afghanistan. United Nations. *Understanding Illegal Methamphetamine Manufacture in Afghanistan*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC Research Brief, September 2023.

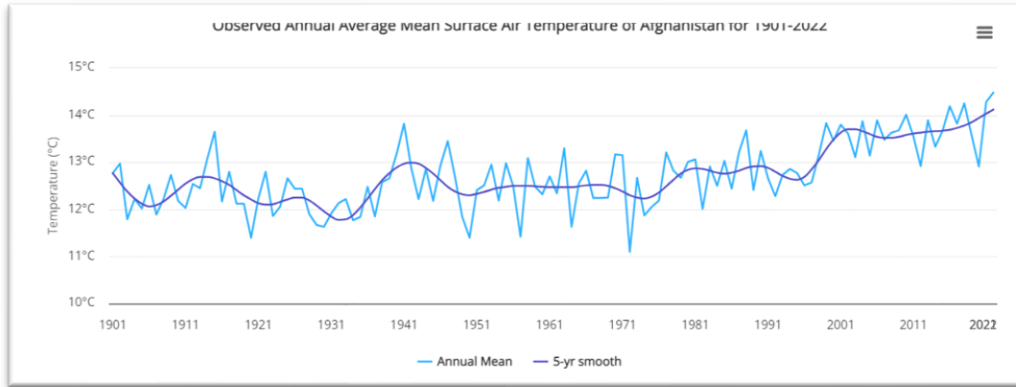


Figure 5

Figure 5. This chart highlights the steady increase of surface air temperature of Afghanistan from 1901-2022. Climate Change Knowledge Portal. “Observed Annual Average Surface Air Temperature of Afghanistan for 1901-2022.

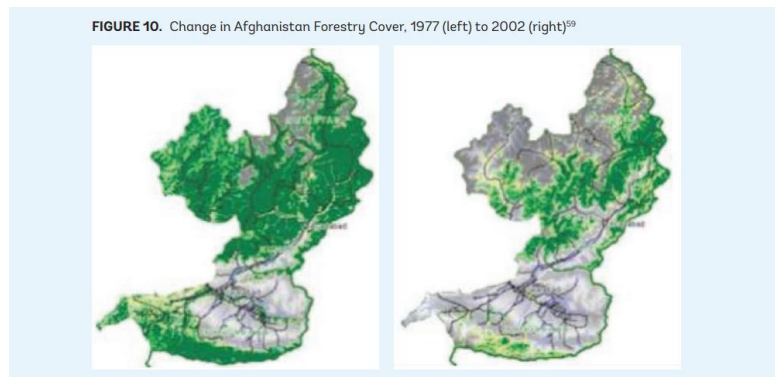


Figure 6

Figure 6. This image shows the difference between the forestry cover in 1977 and 2002. The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank. 2021. *Change in Afghanistan Forestry Cover, 1977 (left) to 2002 (right)*.

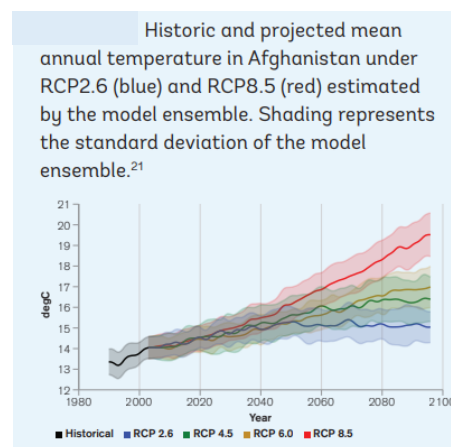


Figure 7

Figure 7. This graph shows Afghanistan’s projected temperatures through 2100. The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank. 2021. Climate Risk Country Profile: Afghanistan.”

U.S. POLICY ON DRUG TRAFFICKING

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) spearheads domestic efforts, while the Department of State and Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) lead international and national strategies, respectively.¹⁶ The DEA’s Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) utilizes a multi-faceted approach to combat drug trafficking in the U.S. This strategy hinges on interagency collaboration, fostering information sharing and joint operations between the DEA and various federal agencies.¹⁷ Guided by a national strategy, OCDETF targets the entire drug trafficking infrastructure, from disrupting supply chains and transportation networks to dismantling leadership and financial operations. This approach is further strengthened by strategically positioned Strike Forces that tailor their efforts to regional threats. Additionally, OCDETF prioritizes investigations targeting high-impact organizations identified on the Consolidated Priority Target List.¹⁸

By allocating resources through national initiatives, OCDETF addresses specific drug crises. This collaborative and comprehensive approach, aligned with the DEA's mission, aims to significantly reduce the illegal drug supply in the U.S. and dismantle criminal organizations. The current administration prioritizes a balanced approach^{19,20} However, debates persist regarding the efficacy of various strategies.²¹ While U.S. policies have yielded some success in disrupting drug trafficking operations, their long-term effectiveness in curbing overall criminality and corruption remains debatable. Focusing solely on enforcement has limitations, addressing root causes, and prioritizing human rights are crucial considerations. Ultimately, the “single most important weapon in the fight against drug trafficking is international cooperation.”²²

U.S. POLICY ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The U.S. prioritizes climate action through regulations, tax credits, and research, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and invest in clean energy.^{23 24} The Biden

¹⁶ United States, “Office of National Drug Control Policy.” The White House, 2024.

¹⁷ U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, “Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF),” 2024.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Combating Drugs and Crime,” 2024.

²⁰ United States, “FACT SHEET: White House Releases 2022 National Drug Control Strategy that Outlines Comprehensive Path Forward to Address Addiction and the Overdose Epidemic.” The White House, Statements and Releases, 2022.

²¹ Julia Buxton, “Drug control and development: A blind spot,” In *Drug Policies and Development*, pp. 13-42. Brill Nijhoff, 2020.

²² Sandro Calvani, “Role of Law Enforcement in Combating Human and Drug Trafficking,” U.S. Department of Justice Library, 2000.

²³ Ashley Lawson, “Clean Energy Standards: Selected Issues for the 117th Congress,” Congressional Research Service: R46691, 2021.

²⁴ Kennedy et al., “Majorities of Americans Prioritize Renewable Energy, Back Steps to Address Climate Change.” Pew Research Center, 2023.

administration rejoined the Paris Agreement, set ambitious emission reduction goals, and enacted the Inflation Reduction Act, the largest climate legislation ever passed. Its whole-of-government approach involves multiple agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)²⁵ and Department of Defense (DOD)²⁶, addressing climate change as a security threat. New legislation and the National Security Strategy emphasize this urgency.²⁷ Despite progress, challenges remain. Critics question achievability without further congressional support, and political opposition persists.²⁸ Technological limitations and potential policy reversals by future administrations pose additional hurdles.^{29 30}

Rather than assessing the effectiveness of specific U.S. policies on climate change, it would be prudent to understand why they matter when discussing combating drug trafficking. While existing policies targeting drug trafficking may achieve some success, their effectiveness wanes in the face of climate change's exacerbating effects. Climate change intensifies existing root causes of drug trafficking, which may limit the long-term success of policies.

U.S.-AFGHANISTAN POLICY AND RELATIONS

Following decades of complex engagement, U.S.-Afghanistan relations have entered a turbulent period marked by the 2021 U.S. withdrawal and Taliban resurgence. The current state of relations prioritizes pragmatic engagement focused on humanitarian aid and counterterrorism concerns. While the U.S. does not recognize the Taliban regime, it engages to ensure adherence to commitments made in the Doha Agreement,³¹ which is also known as the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.³² U.S.-Afghanistan drug policy since 2002 reveals a series of missteps and limited successes. Early neglect transitioned through various strategies, each plagued by corruption, unintended consequences, and minimal impact on poppy cultivation.³³ The Obama administration's shift towards interdiction and rural development faced similar limitations, while the Trump administration's efforts yielded negligible results with humanitarian costs.³⁴ Glaringly absent was a focus on demand reduction, leaving treatment options woefully inadequate. This history suggests a critical need for a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that addresses not only supply-side interventions but also the crucial element of demand

²⁵ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Climate Change Regulatory Actions and Initiatives," 2023.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary for Policy (Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities), Department of Defense Climate Risk Analysis. Report Submitted to National Security Council, 2021.

²⁷ "National Security Strategy," 2022.

²⁸ Richard K. Lattanzio, Jane Leggett, Kezee Procita, Jonathan L. Ramseur, Corrie E. Clark, Genevieve K. Croft, Rena S. Miller. "U.S. Climate Change Policy." Congressional Research Service: R46947, Version 4, 2021.

²⁹ Dan Lashof, "Tracking Progress: Climate Action Under the Biden Administration," World Resources Institute, 2023, 28.

³⁰ Alica C. Hill and Madeline Babin, "What the Historic U.S. Climate Bill Gets Right and Gets Wrong." Council on Foreign Relations, 2022.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations With Afghanistan," 2022.

³² U.S. Department of State, "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America," 2020.

³³ Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Drugs, security, and counternarcotics policies in Afghanistan," The Brookings Institute, 2020.

³⁴ Ibid.

reduction, while acknowledging the complex socio-political dynamics of the Afghan drug trade.

Existing U.S. drug policies, while achieving some success through enforcement and harm reduction, face significant challenges in the long term due to climate change's impact on root causes. Climate change exacerbates factors like poverty, instability, and limited economic opportunities, pushing individuals towards the drug trade as a coping mechanism. Existing policies primarily focus on disrupting supply chains, neglecting the underlying social and economic drivers. The current strained relationship between the U.S. and Afghanistan further complicates the situation. This complex situation and interconnectedness of drug trafficking and climate change necessitates a comprehensive approach that transcends traditional enforcement. Climate change exacerbates factors like poverty and instability in Afghanistan, fueling poppy cultivation as a coping mechanism and hindering eradication efforts. Moving forward, effective solutions require addressing root causes, prioritizing demand reduction, strengthening international cooperation, and tailoring policies that are tailored to Afghanistan.

THE IMPACT OF DRUG POLICY ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Drug trafficking activities undeniably contribute to environmental degradation, particularly through deforestation and habitat destruction. This not only exacerbates biodiversity loss but also weakens ecosystems' resilience to climate change impacts, creating a vicious cycle.³⁵ However, current discussions often overlook a crucial aspect: the role of drug prohibition in *amplifying* these environmental harms. As noted in a report the International Coalition on Drug Policy Reform and Environmental Justice,

Drug prohibition is a key driver of [organized] crime, corruption, and state capture in ecologically fragile regions. Addressing the climate emergency requires urgent, coordinated action by the environmental and drug policy movements, to replace prohibition with regulation that supports people and planet.³⁶

However, by forcing the drug trade underground, prohibition incentivizes activities that inflict significant environmental damage. This includes deforestation for hidden cultivation sites, the use of environmentally harmful chemicals in clandestine processing, and the establishment of remote trafficking routes that bypass environmental regulations.³⁷ Additionally, prohibition weakens governance, hindering efforts towards sustainable land management and environmental protection. Criminal organizations exploit weak governance to operate with impunity, further exacerbating environmental damage. While drug trafficking and climate change are independent issues, they intertwine in complex ways that exacerbate each other's negative impacts. Addressing this complex nexus requires not only a multifaceted approach, but one that will need to constantly be reassessed over time. While tackling the root causes of drug trafficking and fostering international cooperation are crucial, integrating environmental considerations into drug policy development is equally important.

³⁵ Kendra McSweeney, "The Impact of Drug Policy on the Environment." Open Society Foundations, 2015, 13.

³⁶ Kendra McSweeney et al., "Revealing the missing link to Climate Justice: DRUG POLICY," Drug Policy Reform and Environmental Justice: International Coalition, 2014, 4.

³⁷ John Walsh and Josefina Salomón, "What's the Carbon Footprint of Drug Prohibition?" Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), 2022.

GLOBAL IMPACT

In the age of globalization, the impacts of drug trafficking transcend national borders. Even in isolation from the complex interplay explored in this paper, drug trafficking exerts a significant and multifaceted negative impact on various aspects of society. From a socioeconomic perspective, drug trafficking can contribute to poverty and inequality by disproportionately affecting marginalized communities.³⁸ Profits often bypass legal markets, hindering economic development and exacerbating existing income disparities. Associated drug use can strain healthcare systems through increased demands for treatment and management of related illnesses, further impacting societal well-being.³⁹ ⁴⁰ Drug trafficking activities can disrupt social fabric, leading to increased violence, societal breakdown, and a general erosion of trust within communities.

In terms of security and governance, drug trafficking poses a significant threat by strengthening criminal networks. The substantial revenue generated empowers and emboldens these organizations, potentially undermining state control, threatening law enforcement, and contributing to broader regional instability. Drug money can also infiltrate legal and political institutions, fostering corruption and undermining the rule of law.⁴¹ This weakens governance structures and hinders effective responses to other security threats, potentially creating a vicious cycle where weakened governance facilitates further expansion of criminal networks.⁴² Competition for control of lucrative drug routes and markets can fuel violent conflicts, further destabilizing affected regions and hindering long-term peacebuilding efforts.⁴³

As explored in this paper, drug trafficking can also have detrimental environmental consequences. Cultivation of illegal crops often involves deforestation and unsustainable land-use practices, contributing to environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.⁴⁴ Production and processing of certain illegal drugs can involve hazardous chemicals that pollute water resources, contaminate soil, and pose health risks to local communities. The complex interplay between drug trafficking, transnational crime, corruption, and climate change creates a vicious cycle that fuels instability and insecurity, particularly in vulnerable regions. Drug trafficking thrives in environments weakened by poor governance, where insufficient regulation, limited law enforcement capacity, and susceptibility to bribery provide fertile ground for illicit economies. Climate-induced challenges can further exacerbate these conditions, undermining livelihoods,

³⁸ Karimian M, Motevalian A, Damghanian M, Rahimi-Movaghar A, Sharifi V, Amin-Esmaili M, Hajebi A., "Explaining socioeconomic inequalities in illicit drug use disorders in Iran," *Med J Islam Repub Iran*. 2017 Dec 18;31:108. doi: 10.14196/mjiri.31.108. PMID: 29951409; PMCID: PMC6014806.

³⁹ R. Krausz, Michael, Jean N. Westenberg, Nickie Mathew, George Budd, James SH Wong, Vivian WL Tsang, Marc Vogel et al. "Shifting North American drug markets and challenges for the system of care." *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 15, no. 1 (2021): 1-8.

⁴⁰ Nicoleta Stoicea, Andrew Costa, Luis Periel, Alberto Uribe, Tristan Weaver, and Sergio D. Bergese, "Current perspectives on the opioid crisis in the US healthcare system: a comprehensive literature review," *Medicine* 98, no. 20 (2019).

⁴¹ Bewley-Taylor, 6-17.

⁴² Susan Rose-Ackerman, "The challenge of poor governance and corruption," *Especial 1 DIREITO GV L. Rev.* (2005): 207.

⁴³ Laura R. Blume, "Collusion, co-optation, or evasion: The politics of drug trafficking violence in Central America," *Comparative political studies* 55, no. 8 (2022): 1366-1402.

⁴⁴ Jake Spring and Gabriel Stargardt, "'Narco-deforestation' in focus at upcoming summit of Amazon nations." *Reuters*, August 3, 2023.

increasing competition, and creating incentives for desperate populations to engage in criminal activities for survival. This, in turn, fuels corruption as organized crime networks infiltrate institutions, subverting legal processes and hindering effective environmental policy implementation. The cycle perpetuates itself, as weakened governance and compromised climate action create conditions conducive to further expansion of criminal networks and environmental degradation.

In this study, Afghanistan served as a stark example of this interconnectedness. Years of conflict and political instability have created fertile ground for drug trafficking, with the poppy trade serving as a significant source of income for many Afghans.⁴⁵ However, climate change threatens the livelihoods of these very farmers, potentially pushing them further towards poppy cultivation and contributing to the drug trade.⁴⁶ This, in turn, weakens governance and hinders the country's ability to address climate change effectively.⁴⁷ Only through a holistic approach that tackles both drug trafficking and climate change, with a focus on addressing root causes and fostering international cooperation, can Afghanistan have a change to break free from this vicious cycle.

Addressing both drug trafficking and climate change simultaneously presents significant challenges. Competing priorities and limited resources necessitate difficult choices and strategic allocation of resources. The complexities of international cooperation, where diverse stakeholders and varying national interests converge, further complicates the situation. Striking a balance between addressing immediate security concerns and long-term environmental sustainability requires careful consideration and collaboration. The consequences of drug trafficking ripple far beyond the immediate locations of production and consumption, highlighting the urgent need for global cooperation and coordinated efforts to address this complex issue.

CONCLUSION

Breaking this cycle necessitates a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach that goes beyond traditional solutions. Strengthening international cooperation and bolstering national institutions are crucial for effective action on both fronts. Addressing the root causes of both issues, such as poverty, inequality, and unsustainable practices, is essential for long-term solutions. Including local communities, civil society organizations, and the private sector, is vital for developing and implementing effective strategies.

Building upon the established knowledge of drug trafficking's multifaceted societal impacts, this study explored the nascent and under-researched connection between these illicit activities and environmental issues, particularly climate change. While existing literature provides valuable insights into both issues respectively, the intricate ways they interact and

⁴⁵ Valeri Modebadze, "Afghanistan under Taliban: a new regime poses a threat to international stability." *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (2022): 277-291.

⁴⁶ Marcus Gauster, "Ecological threats to security and state resilience in Afghanistan." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2021): 31-40.

⁴⁷ Najibullah Zaki, "An Overview of Climate Change in Afghanistan: Causes, Consequences, Challenges and Policies," 2023.

exacerbate each other remain largely uncharted territory. Recognizing the limitations of current research, this paper aimed to contribute to the discourse by analyzing the potential linkages between drug trafficking and climate change. While acknowledging the scarcity of peer-reviewed articles explicitly addressing this nexus, the paper leveraged foundational knowledge from established research on each individual issue to build a framework for further exploration.

I believe that this undertaking serves as a starting point, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive exploration of this complex interplay. As the urgency of climate change intensifies and its consequences become increasingly profound, a deeper understanding of these interconnected threats is crucial. Akin to the rapid rise in attention directed towards climate change in recent decades, we can anticipate a surge in research and discussion surrounding the connection between environmental concerns and other transnational issues, like drug trafficking. This has the potential to shed light on the complex dynamics at play, potentially fostering more holistic and effective strategies to address both issues. As linkages are acknowledged and better understood, policymakers and researchers will be better equipped to tackle these interconnected threats collectively and respectively. Ultimately, this would promote stability and security in vulnerable regions and foster a more sustainable future for all.

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