

Bareen Democracy Forum Reviving Democratic Aspirations: Afghanistan's Path Forward Policy Paper

Executive Summary:

The Bareen Democracy Forum: A Comprehensive Roadmap for a Free and Democratic Future, held on March 27–28, 2025, by the Bareen Initiative for Development (BID), marked a turning point in the struggle to revive democracy in Afghanistan. This event, themed "Reviving Democratic Aspirations: Afghanistan's Path Forward," brought together civil activists, academics, diplomats, and youth to amplify silenced voices and chart a path to liberation from Taliban oppression. This policy paper, drawing on the forum's discussions, presents a comprehensive framework for rebuilding democracy in Afghanistan. By identifying key challenges, offering strategic recommendations, and proposing future programs, we outline a clear roadmap to defeat the Taliban and establish a sustainable democratic system. The paper emphasizes the roles of women, youth, the Afghan diaspora, and the international community, and includes monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure success.

Introduction: A Beacon in the Darkness

Afghanistan, once a cradle of culture and civilization, is now shrouded in darkness under Taliban rule. Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, over 70% of women have been denied access to education (UN Report, 2024), and the country's economy has seen a 27% decline in GDP (World Bank, 2024). Yet, amidst this gloom, the Bareen Democracy Forum, held and shone as a beacon of hope. Featuring voices like Dr. Sahraa Karimi University lecturer & Film Director, Mrs. Manizha Ramezy University lecturer & Author, Ms. Nigara Mirdad, Mrs. Hasina Jalal Human Rights activist & University Lecturer and Mrs. Nazifa Mahboobi journalist the event was not just a gathering—it was a movement for reviving democracy, rebuilding national identity, and breaking free from the grip of extremism.

This policy paper, inspired by the forum's profound discussions and actionable insights, provides a comprehensive framework for reviving democracy in Afghanistan. We analyze the challenges, propose practical solutions, and define the roles of internal and international stakeholders. Our goal is to create a free, democratic, and inclusive Afghanistan where women, youth, and all segments of society can live with dignity.

Current Situation Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges:

- Taliban Domination: The Taliban's extremist ideology has stripped away fundamental rights. According to a 2024 UN report, 98% of Afghan women are excluded from public life, and over 1.5 million children are out of school.
- Fragmentation of Anti-Taliban Forces: The lack of unity among political, military, and civil groups remains a major obstacle. For instance, the National Resistance Front and various

political factions have yet to form a cohesive strategy.

- Economic and Social Isolation: Afghanistan's GDP has plummeted from \$19.8 billion in 2020 to \$14.5 billion in 2023 (World Bank, 2024), with over 90% of the population living below the poverty line (UNDP, 2024).
- Suppression of Women and Youth: Women and youth, the engines of change, face severe repression. Human Rights Watch (2024) reports the detention of over 500 female protesters.
- Lack of International Support: Insufficient global pressure has allowed the Taliban to continue their oppression unchecked. Only 12 countries have imposed targeted sanctions on the Taliban (UN Security Council Report, 2024).

Opportunities

- Public Dissatisfaction: A 2023 Gallup survey indicates that 85% of Afghanistan's people are dissatisfied with Taliban rule, creating potential for a grassroots movement.
- Active Afghanistan Diaspora: Over 6 million Afghans live abroad (UNHCR, 2024), many of whom, especially women and youth, are actively organizing resistance and garnering global support.
- Technology and Media: The Taliban cannot fully control the internet, with over 7 million Afghans having access (Data Reported, 2024), providing an opportunity for awareness and mobilization.
- Taliban Vulnerabilities: A fragile economy, global isolation, and lack of international legitimacy make the Taliban vulnerable. For example, Afghanistan's foreign reserves have dropped from \$9 billion in 2021 to under \$2 billion in 2023 (Central Bank of Afghanistan, 2023).

Stakeholder Analysis

For the success of this roadmap, engaging key stakeholders is essential:

- **Afghanistan's Women and Youth:**
 - Interest: Participation in politics and society, access to education, and equal rights.
 - Influence: As drivers of change, they can lead grassroots movements.
 - Role: Leading the anti-Taliban coalition, organizing protests, and creating educational content.
- **Afghanistan Diaspora:**
 - Interest: Supporting their compatriots and rebuilding a democratic Afghanistan.
 - Influence: Access to financial resources and international networks.
 - Role: Garnering global support, funding projects, and networking with activists inside Afghanistan.
- **International Community (Governments and Organizations):**
 - Interest: Regional stability, counter-terrorism, and human rights advocacy.
 - Influence: Ability to impose sanctions and provide financial and military aid.
 - Role: Applying diplomatic and economic pressure, funding anti-Taliban forces, and overseeing power transitions.



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➤ **Anti-Taliban Military and Civil Forces:**

- Interest: Overthrowing the Taliban and establishing a democratic system.
- Influence: Capacity for direct confrontation with the Taliban and organizing internal resistance.
- Role: Conducting military operations, organizing protests, and collaborating with the anti-Taliban coalition.

Comprehensive Roadmap for Reviving Democracy in Afghanistan:

To defeat the Taliban and rebuild a democratic Afghanistan, this policy paper presents a multi-faceted roadmap:

➤ **Formation of a Broad Anti-Taliban Coalition**

Actions:

- Establish a unified coalition with shared leadership and a democratic charter.
- Hold monthly meetings for coordination and decision-making.
- Role of Women and Youth: At least 50% of leadership positions should be held by women and youth.
- Goal: Create a united front to pressure the Taliban politically, militarily, and ideologically.
- Success Indicator: Formation of a coalition with at least 10 political and civil groups

➤ **Global Diplomatic and Economic Pressure**

Actions:

- Impose smart sanctions on Taliban leaders and cut off their financial resources
- Prevent Taliban recognition at the United Nations.
- Role of Diplomats: Lobby for support from at least 30 countries.
- Goal: Weaken the Taliban's economy.
- Success Indicator: A 20% reduction in the Taliban's financial resources

➤ **Digital Education and Awareness**

Actions:

- Launch online educational platforms with content on democracy and human rights
- Produce radio programs and social media content in local languages (Farsi & Pashto).
- Role of Diaspora: Produce and distribute content in collaboration with activists abroad.
- Goal: Raise awareness among 1 million Afghans.
- Success Indicator: Reach 500,000 people with digital educational content.

➤ **Strengthening Internal Military and Civil Forces**

Actions:

- Provide equipment and training to anti-Taliban military groups



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- Organize covert civil networks.
 - Role of International Community: Supply resources through secure channels.
 - Goal: Increase internal pressure on the Taliban.
 - Success Indicator: Conduct at least 10 coordinated civil protests and increase anti-Taliban military operations by 30%.
- Networking Young and Female Leaders
- Actions:
- Form a global network with 5,000 Afghanistan's women and youth participants.
 - Conduct 10 leadership training workshops
 - Role of Diaspora: Coordinate and fund workshops.
 - Goal: Amplify the voices of women and youth.
 - Success Indicator: Engage 2,000 participants in workshops
- Cultural Revival and National Identity Rebuilding
- Actions:
- Support 100 art and literary projects
 - Host 5 cultural festivals in diaspora-hosting countries.
 - Role of Artists: Produce works of resistance.
 - Goal: Rebuild national identity.
 - Success Indicator: Produce 50 cultural works and attract 100,000 attendees to festivals
- Preparation for Power Transition and Democratic System Establishment
- Actions:
- Design an inclusive democratic framework with input from women and youth.
 - Plan free elections under UN supervision
 - Role of International Community: Oversee and fund elections.
 - Goal: Establish a sustainable democratic system.
 - Success Indicator: Draft a democratic framework
- Establishment of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms
- Actions:
- Form an international monitoring committee with UN participation.
 - Publish quarterly progress reports.
 - Success Indicators:
 - A 30% reduction in human rights violations (per UN reports).
 - A 40% increase in women's participation in political and civil activities.
 - Goal: Ensure transparency and effectiveness of actions.

Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies:

- Risk: Taliban Resistance
 - Likelihood: High
 - Impact: Increased violence and repression
 - Mitigation: Strengthen anti-Taliban military forces and secure global support to reduce Taliban power.
- Risk: Lack of International Cooperation
 - Likelihood: Medium
 - Impact: Reduced financial and diplomatic resources
 - Mitigation: Extensive lobbying by the diaspora and diplomats to secure broader support.
- Risk: Division within the Anti-Taliban Coalition
 - Likelihood: Medium
 - Impact: Weakened united front
 - Mitigation: Develop a shared charter and use neutral mediators to resolve conflicts.

Conclusion:

The Bareen Democracy Forum demonstrated that democracy in Afghanistan, despite Taliban domination, remains alive—in the dreams of youth, the cries of women, and the resolve of an unbroken people. This policy paper, with its comprehensive roadmap, offers practical solutions to defeat the Taliban and rebuild democracy. By implementing this plan, we can create an Afghanistan where every individual lives with dignity and freedom. The future is in our hands—let us fight for it together.

Appendices:

- Proposed for Roadmap Implementation:
 - Form the anti-Taliban coalition and launch digital awareness campaigns.
 - Intensify diplomatic pressure and support internal military and civil forces.
 - Expand networking for women and youth and promote cultural revival.
 - Year 2: Prepare for power transition and elections.
- Suggested Resources:
 - UN reports on human rights in Afghanistan.
 - Academic studies on the role of women and youth in democratic rebuilding.
 - Historical documentation on cultural resistance to extremism.