

The Impact of Taliban's Official News Conference on Afghan Business Community in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

On 15th August 2021, The Taliban took over the control of Kabul. The replacement of Afghan Government by Taliban creates a great curiosity for the business community of the world. Similarly, this creates a panic situation in Afghan business community living across the border in Pakistan, where a major portion of Afghan refugees are residing. To clear the doubts of the Afghan and international community, Taliban held their first official news conference on August 17, 2021. This study intends to examine the impact of the aforementioned news conference on the perception of the Afghan business community living in Pakistan. The data was collected through questionnaire and interviews with the business community living in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A sample of 259 Afghan businessmen were selected randomly for the purpose. The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 23.0. The results of the study show a paramount change in the perception of the business community. Prior to the news conference, people were scared about their lives and assets. However, they felt ease at re-opening their businesses soon after the news conference.

Keywords: Taliban; News Conference, Afghan, Business, Refugee, Business Community

INTRODUCTION

The War on Terror, launched by the US Army in 2001, was a good beginning for the Afghans living inside and outside of Afghanistan. It gave them a new hope of rebuilding their country, and the dream of making a government of their choice was high. Millions of Afghan refugees came back from Iran, Pakistan, and other neighboring countries to Afghanistan. The Afghans were very optimistic in the sense that their lives would be prosperous in the post-Taliban era and had a desire that Afghanistan would be rebuilt. The Afghan authorities and the international community committed themselves to poverty reduction, economic development, and establishing an accountable democratic regime in Afghanistan (Bonn Conference, 2001).

The resumption of bilateral ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban provided a solid basis for enhanced economic ties between the two countries. A Joint Economic Commission, set up in 2002, created the possibility of enhancing economic cooperation between the two countries. Subsequently, due to these significant efforts, the

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industry in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa appeared to be more responsive to demand in Afghanistan (Shabbir and Ahmad, 2015).

But a widespread offensive by the Taliban and allies in the month of May, 2021 and the withdrawal of US troops left the Afghan people in chaos (Roggio and Bill, 2021). Currently, the governance of Afghanistan is in a state of flux following the effective collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan during the fall of Kabul to Taliban forces on August 15, 2021, and the subsequent re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which now exercises *de facto* control over most of the country (Ryan and DeYoung, 2021). The Taliban have said they aim to restore peace and security to Afghanistan, including the departure of Western troops, and to enforce Sharia, or Islamic law, once in power (Saikal, 2006).

It took the Taliban just over a week to seize control of the country after a lightning sweep that ended in Kabul as government forces, trained for years and equipped by the United States and others at a cost of trillions of dollars, melted away. The Taliban held their first official news conference in Kabul on Tuesday, August 17, 2021, since the shock seizure of the city, declaring they want peaceful relations with other countries and would respect the rights of women within the framework of Islamic law.

However, many Afghans fear that the Taliban will return to past harsh practices in their imposition of Sharia law. During their 1996–2001 rules, women could not work and punishments such as stoning, whipping, and hanging were administered. Hundreds of Afghans invaded the airport's runways in the dark, pulling luggage and jostling for a place on one of the last commercial flights to leave before US forces took over air traffic control on Sunday.

Study Objectives

Below are the prime objectives of the research study

1. To examine the impact of Kabul's fall on Afghan business community in Pakistan.
2. To Examine the impact of official news conference by Taliban on Afghan business community in Pakistan

Significance of the Study

The basic purpose of this research was to find the opinion of the Afghan people who are running their businesses in Pakistan and mostly have also established their work in Afghanistan after the Taliban government. On the 15th of August 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan by capturing Kabul. On the 16th of August, the data was collected through a questionnaire with the help of a team of experts. Exactly one day after that, Zabi Ullah Mujahid, the representative of the Taliban, conducted a press conference and explained their policy about the future of Afghanistan. This created some changes in the opinions of the people. Hence, to check the impact of the conference on the same representatives, the data was re-collected. The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 23.0.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Afghan refugees are the world's second largest refugee population, accumulated by Pakistan in its neighborhood over the last decades. The refugees from Afghanistan sheltered in Pakistan since the late 1970s may be classified into three groups. The first was in 1979, during the civil war when the USSR attacked Afghanistan. The second stream of refugees entered

Pakistan when the USSR began the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1980, and the third group of refugees when the United States of America's (USA) started its war against terror. About 3.5 million refugees found shelter in Pakistan during the crises of the 1980's.

Pakistan, along with Turkey, facilitated the Afghan refugee crisis. As per the 2005 census, about 35% of Afghan refugees have been sheltered in Pakistan since 1980. In 2008, approximately 2 million Afghan refugees registered in Pakistan. Most of Afghan refugees were living in the camps managed by the UNCHR in Pakistan. Thousands of Afghan refugees are still living in the urban localities of Pakistan without any prior registration. In 2008, approximately 8 million Afghan refugees were relocated from their region to Pakistan (Kronenfeld, 2008).

Among the reallocated Afghan refugees, most of the Afghans got shelter in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan, which was formally known as the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). According to Oberoi, in 2007, approximately 75 thousands Afghan refugees entered various parts of Pakistan every year, and the movement across the Pak-Afghan border was supposed to be a routine issue before the war of terror. According to a situational analysis, Pakistan supported Afghan refugees for three reasons: global assistance to Afghan refugees during the cold war, which resulted in the reduction and disintegration of the USSR from Afghanistan.

The second factor was the recession in the economy of Pakistan during the 90's. The third factor that constitutes change in geopolitical sense after 9/11 is Pakistan's being supposed to be an alliance with the USA and the scale of terrorist attacks. Financial and military assistance and appreciation from the international community for Pakistan were also on the agenda of sheltering Afghan refugees in Pakistan. As a result of all this, the Pakistani nation suffered a lot from drug and Kalashnikov culture due to the Afghan refugee movement towards Pakistan (Oberoi, 2007).

Mghir and Raskin in 1999 studied the psychological impact of Afghanistan's war. The study considered two Afghan refugee groups, i.e. refugees with Tajik parents and refugees with Pashtun parents. The two groups of refugees were analyzed using post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression psychological scales. The refugees with Tajik parents were significantly less dispersed and stressed than refugees with Pashtun parents. Also, there was a significant difference between the two groups from a socio-economic and cultural perspective. The parents of Pashtun refugees experienced more wartime in Afghanistan than Tajik refugees and witnessed more traumatic events.

Naseh et al. (2018) studied the aspects of Afghan refugees returning from Iran. This included basic health and daily life facilities such as covered living areas, access to and use of personal latrines, kitchens, electricity, and clean piped water for drinking. The study reviewed the basic indicators and needs of returnee refugees from Iran. The study showed that maintaining a living standard for the returnee Afghan refugees was no less than a challenge. One of the most important needs was shelter, which was essential for the returnee's reintegration.

Murthy and Lakshminarayana (2006) determined that the mental health of the civil population of the country is one of the most significant factors during war. The study showed that the incidence rate and prevalence of the mental disorder are increasing rapidly in the general population and are significantly affecting men as compared to women. The incidence

rate of mental health disorders was found to be associated with the availability of trauma and the cooperation of society.

Sim et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study to model the exposure to war and its impact on parental and child mental health for the refugees from Syria in Lebanon. The study developed and empirically verified relationship with the help of structural equation modelling (SEM) between the post-war effects and stress due to displacement from their country with the attitudes and behaviors and mental health disorders of 291 refugee mothers in 2017 in Lebanon. The study defined a positive relationship between post-traumatic stress and psychological distress in mothers with their exposure to war. Whereas the child's psychological issues were found to be inversely related to the post-traumatic stress. According to the study, post-war trauma has a negative impact on both mother and child's mental health and tends to increase negative parenting behavior.

Ulum and Kara in 2016 studied the effects of war on student refugee academic achievement in Syria. The study considered the war victim students at high and secondary schools in Adana, Turkey and collected the data by semi-structured interview in their mother tongue. The study analyzed the pre- and post-Syria's war grades of the students and concluded that war effects decreased the grades of students.

The objective of this paper is to determine the impact of the first official news conference held by the Taliban on August 17, 2021, on the refugees settled in various regions of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The researcher used a survey research method to collect the feedback of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan. The data is collected using a well-designed questionnaire, and face-to-face interviews have been conducted with the business community living in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The questionnaire includes a question about the perception of Afghan refugees living in this part of the world. The data is collected pre- and post- news conferences held by Taliban officials.

Study Population

The target population for the study is Afghan people settled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The sample population is the four main markets of the district of Peshawar. The study is conducted among Afghans who earn their living from the four most populous Afghan markets, namely Kharkhano Market, Markets in Hayatabad, Board Bazar, and Afghan colony. Pilot study is conducted to count the number of shops and determine the main source of their income. As a result, the following conclusions are drawn: There are about 700 shops in Kharkhano Market, 100 in Hayatabad, 300 in the board bazar and 70 in the Afghan colony run by the Afghans settled in Pakistan. They primarily deal in electronics, groceries, carpets, second-hand clothes and second-hand furniture, and some own pharmacies and auto repair shops.

Sample Size

Since the population size i.e. the number of afghan shops in all the four markets are known (1170), so Yamane (1976) formula can be used for the sample size.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. At a 95% confidence level, e is 0.05. From the given information, the above formula provided $n = 298$, but in the given study, a sample of size 300 is considered. After selecting the sample size, i.e., 300, the proportion allocation method was used for the selection of a representative sample from each market.

$$n_i = n * \frac{N_i}{N}$$

Where n_i is the sample number of shops in a market, N_i is the number of shops in a market, n is the total sample size, and N is the population size. After selecting the shops, the owner or the responsible person of each shop was interviewed. At the final stage, a simple random sampling procedure was used to select the representative sample. At the first stage, the data was collected on the 16th of August 2021 from 300 people. In the second stage, on the 18th of August 2021, the same respondents were approached to check the response of the press conference, but only 259 were present. Due to Muharram, business communities, being reluctant to give the answers, being scared, etc., the rest were not approached. So the analysis of the present study is based on 259 responses. The main focus of the data are based on factors like home in Afghanistan, business in Afghanistan, any fear/scare from the Taliban, female education, female rights, hijab, female work outside, freedom of the media, revenge, foreign investment, security, beard, turban, foreign aid, Taliban success and their competency. The last question about the last president, Ashraf Ghani, is asked.

Sampling Design

To achieve the objectives of the study, a sample of 259 Afghan businessmen are selected randomly. Data are gathered in two phases by using a well-structured questionnaire. In the first phase, information was collected before the press conference of the Taliban that is held on August 17, 2021, and in the second phase, the same information was asked of the same selected respondents after the press conference of the Taliban. SPSS 23 Version is used to analyze the data. To obtain the objectives of the study, first descriptive statistics were computed, such as frequencies, percentages, and averages, to describe the variables. For testing the hypothesis, the researchers used Paired Wilcoxon A ranked test was used.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered "acceptable" according to the Cronbach's alpha score. The value of reliability in the given case is 0.704. This shows a maximum overall degree of satisfactory.

Figure 1 below demonstrates the market-wise distributions of the respondents, which suggests 160 respondents are from the Karkhano Market, 23 from the Hayatabad, 60 from the Board, and 16 respondents from the Afghan colony.

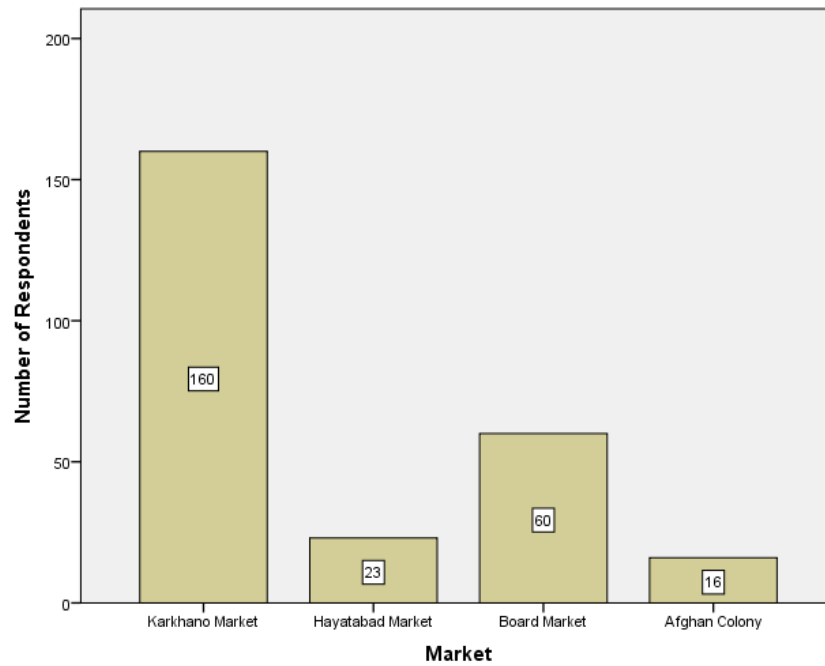


Figure 1: Market wise distribution of respondents

Figure 2 below demonstrates the proportion of Afghans living in Pakistan, while own a business in Afghanistan. The Figure indicates that 94 out of 259 respondents own business in Afghanistan.

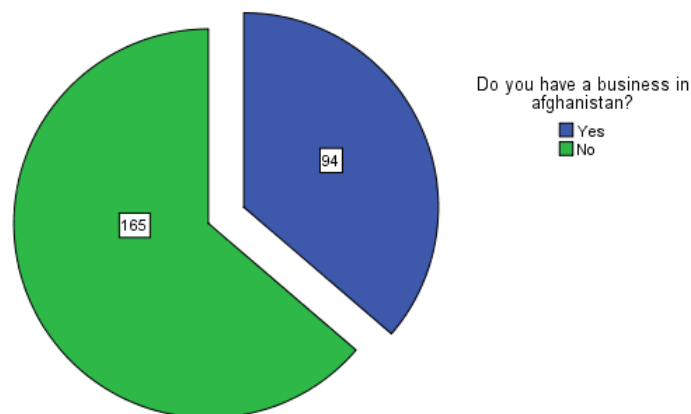


Figure 2: Own business in Afghanistan

The average age of the respondents is mean SD, i.e., 3513. The questions are divided into positive and negative natures. A descriptive summary of the two is summarized in Tables 1 and 2. The result of table no.1 revealed that the response to the question about providing security to the citizens is remarkably increasing from 29.3% to 61.8%, with a difference of 32.5%. From 70.7%, people were of the opinion that they would not provide any security to

the citizens, which decreased to 38.2%. According to the 84.2% of those who participated in the survey before the press conference, the Taliban will be unable to strengthen the economy of the country. Their opinions have been changed to 70.3%. At the press conference, 80.7% of participants responded that females would not get education during the Taliban's government, while 19.3% were in favour of females getting education during the Taliban's government. The responses are changed to 30.1% after the press conference. The response to the question about allowing females to work outside is increasing from 21.6% to 29.7%, with a difference of 8.1%.

Prior to the press conference, 71.4% of participants said the Taliban would not grant equal rights to women, but that number dropped to 65.6% after the press conference. According to 18.1% of participants, the media will be free in the Taliban's government, which increases to 23.2% with a difference of 5.1 percent after the press conference.

The survey shows that before the press conference, 70.3% of participants responded that the Taliban would not give equal rights to all religions, while after the press conference, the response of participants in favour of the Taliban about giving equal rights to all religions increased with a difference of 3.9%.

Table1: Types and frequencies of responses from the positive nature questions.

Types and frequencies of responses	Before Press Conference n= 259				After Press Conference n= 259				Difference in percentages of yes responses
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	
Taliban will provide full security to all citizens	76	29.3	183	70.7	160	61.8	99	38.2	32.5
Country will be economically more strong during Taliban governments.	41	15.8	218	84.2	77	29.7	182	70.3	13.9
Female will get the education during Taliban's Government.	50	19.3	209	80.7	78	30.1	181	69.9	10.8
Taliban's will allow females to work outside.	56	21.6	203	78.4	77	29.7	180	70.3	8.1
Taliban's will give equal rights to the females.	74	28.6	185	71.4	89	34.4	170	65.6	5.8
Taliban's will give freedom to media.	47	18.1	212	81.9	60	23.2	199	76.8	5.1
Taliban's will give equal rights to all religions.	77	29.7	182	70.3	87	33.6	172	66.4	3.9

Table2: Types and frequencies of responses from the negative nature questions.

Types and frequencies of responses	Before Press Conference n= 259				After Press Conference n= 259				Difference in percentages of yes responses
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	

Taliban's will take revenge from Afghan forces.	21 3	82. 2	46	17.8	66	25. 5	19 3	74. 5	-56.7
Are you scared from Taliban?	16 7	64. 5	92	35.5	11 8	45. 6	14 1	54. 4	-18.9
Foreign countries will stop investment in Afghanistan.	24 8	95. 8	11	4.2	21 4	82. 6	45	17. 4	-13.2
Taliban's will impose the condition of Hijabs on females.	23 1	89. 2	28	10.8	19 7	76. 1	62	23. 9	-13.1
Taliban's will impose the condition of turban on all people.	19 4	74. 9	65	25.1	17 7	68. 3	82	31. 7	-6.6
Taliban's will impose the condition of beard on all people.	21 2	81. 9	47	18.1	19 7	76. 1	62	23. 9	-5.8

The above table shows that 82.2% of the respondents of the survey says that the Taliban would take revenge from Afghan forces, which was decreased to 25.5% after the press conference. Their perspectives differed by -56.7%. 64.5% of participants were scared of the Taliban's government, which reduced to 45.6% after the press conference.

Before the press conference, 95.8% of respondents are in favour of foreign countries' stopping investment in Afghanistan, which decreased to 82.6% after the press conference. 10.8% of participants said that the Taliban would not impose conditions of hijab on females, which was increased to 23.9% after the press conference. The percentage of people who say they will wear a turban has dropped from 74.9% to 68.3%, a -6.6% drop. At the press conference, 81.9% of participants said the Taliban would force everyone to wear a beard. This opinion was changed after the press conference with a difference of 5.8%.

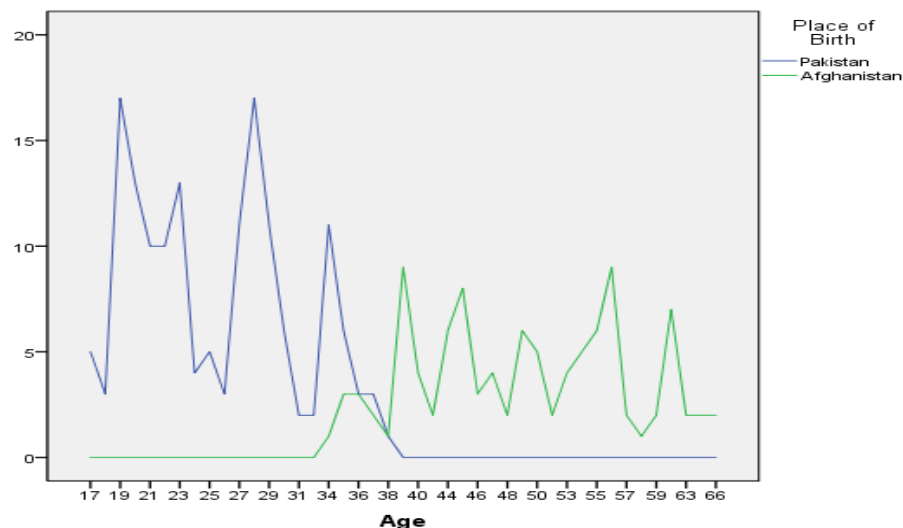


Figure no. 1 shows that the birthplace of Afghan people is Afghanistan, those who have more than 36 years of age, while those who have less than 36 years of age have Pakistan as

their birthplace. It shows 36-year-old and younger Afghan people have their businesses in Pakistan and are born in Pakistan. This is because of the Afghan people's migration to Pakistan due to the Soviet Union war in 1979 to 1989.

The results of the study showed that there are four business markets where Afghan people are working with a majority in various types of businesses. Results showed that 61% of Afghan people do their business in the Karkhano market while 23% work in the board market. Besides these, a very small percentage of 8% and 6% work in Hayatabad and Afghan colony respectively. The reason behind the larger portion of Afghan people working in Karkhano market is the small distance from Afghanistan's border. The Afghan people are very punctual in performing prayers, as the results showed 86% of the respondents performing prayers on time. Afghans are engaged in various types of businesses, out of which some are in the majority. From the results, it is observed that 29% of Afghans run electronic goods businesses while 24% run grocery stores. Aside from these, Afghans run carpet businesses, second-hand furniture businesses, and second-hand clothing businesses with 10%, 12%, and 10%, respectively. 13% run other businesses. Normally, Afghans appeared to be illiterate, but this study found that only 25% are literate. Among all Afghans, 76% have their own homes in Pakistan, while 71% have their own homes in Afghanistan. This shows that the majority of the Afghan people have their own homes in both countries, which indicates that they want to be connected to both countries. They don't want to leave in one country forever. From the results, it is also observed that 89% of Afghans are married, the main reason being their early age of wedding.

A Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency (TURF) analysis is used to find the optimal opinion of the respondents by trying to find the four significant factors between the two data collection points. See Table 3, which summarizes the results of the analysis. The table shows that overall, there is no difference in the response at two different points in time.

Table3: TURF analysis of significant factors

Before Press Conference	After Press Conference
Foreign countries will stop investment in Afghanistan, Taliban's will impose the condition of Hijabs on females, Taliban's will impose the condition of beard on all people, Taliban's will take revenge from Afghan forces	Foreign countries will stop investment in Afghanistan, Taliban's will impose the condition of Hijabs on females, Taliban's will impose the condition of beard on all people, Taliban's will take revenge from Afghan forces
No difference	

A question about the ranking of the Taliban government was also asked before and after the conference. The wording of the question was, "How many marks are you giving to the Taliban's government competency?" This was analyzed through the Paired Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. The value of the test statistic was found to be $z = -8.984$ with a P-Value of 0.0000, indicating the significant difference between the opinions of respondents before and after the conference.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the Taliban's news conference on Afghan business community in Pakistan. For this purpose, a sample of 259 Afghani businessmen working in Pakistan was randomly selected. The information was gathered at two different time points; one before the news conference held by the Taliban and the other after the conference. Information was noted on a well-structured questionnaire that consists of demographic questions of the respondents and questions related to their perception of the Taliban.

The results of the study reveal that all Afghan refugees with less than 36 years of age start their businesses and settle in Pakistan. There are various types of businesses run by Afghan people, including electronics, grocery stores, carpets, second-hand furniture, second-hand goods, and various others. Such businesses are run in three different market places; those are Karkhano market, where a large number of Afghans work; the Afghan colony; Board bazar; and Hayatabad market. At a very young age, they get involved in some sort of business. That is the one reason that Afghans residing in Pakistan have low literacy. The connectivity of Afghans with Pakistan as well as with Afghanistan can be imagined from their own houses in both countries. This may be an indication of their willingness to stay connected with both countries. Another reason for their attachment to both countries is their love for their homeland and their business in Pakistan.

There is a clear indication from the respondents that the Taliban have an influence on the region, particularly on Pakistan and Iran. From the study, it has been noticed that the opinions regarding positive questions that include "providing security to citizens", "female education", "working females in society", "Providing rights to females", "freedom to the media", and "equal rights to all religions" were considerably increased after the press conference held by the Taliban. And for negative questions such as "not providing security to citizens", "foreign investment will be stopped", "scared of the Taliban", the opinions were considerably decreased after the press conference. Besides these, in this study, to find the optimal opinion of the respondents by trying to find the 4 significant factors of the two data collection points by using Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency (TURF) analysis.

The paired Wilcoxon signed rank test was used and significant differences were obtained between the opinions of respondents before and after the conference. This study concludes that the Taliban's conference and their way of dialogue with the media have a very positive influence on the people. Before, people were scared of the Taliban, but now the Taliban have changed their negative influence to a positive one on people's minds. People now have high hopes for the Taliban as Afghanistan's government.

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