

¹ Afghanistan's Younger, Elite and Educated Population: A
² Cultural Assessment and Possible Implications for the Economic
³ and Political Future of the Country

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8 Abstract

9 This paper is an exploration of the cultural values of the younger, elite segment of Afghani
10 culture using the Hofstede-Bond typology. Afghanistan was not included in Hofstede's
11 original or subsequent studies, and there is a dearth of empirically-based literature on the
12 cultural classification of this country. The results of this study indicate that this segment of
13 the Afghanistan population is low in power distance, highly masculine, slightly individualistic,
14 somewhat accepting of uncertainty, and possesses a short term orientation towards time. The
15 paper also compares these values with other cultures in the region and beyond, and explains
16 how these cultural differences could hold some promise for this war-torn country. Implications
17 for economic and political development are discussed.

19 *Index terms*—

One of the most popular and far-reaching crosscultural research is that of Geert Hofstede. Hofstede was employed as an industrial psychologist and head of the Personnel Research Department for IBM-Europe during the late 1960s and early 1970s. His administration of a "values" survey to IBM employees in the 72 national subsidiaries of the company changed our view of managing across cultures. Based on the data analyzed, Hofstede concluded that management theories are culturally bound, and what may be appropriate management behavior in one culture may be inappropriate in another (Hofstede, 1980a; Hofstede, 1980b; Hofstede, 1983; Hofstede, 1993; Hofstede, 1994; Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede's research has been widely cited in numerous academic studies (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson, 2006) and often forms the basis for cross-cultural training and analysis. Hofstede worked with data from his original countries surveyed and produced an analysis of forty O national cultures. Later research by Hofstede and others provided for the addition of ten more countries and three regions -East Africa, West Africa, and the Arab world (www.geert-hofstede.com, 2012).

31 The original dimensions of culture identified by Hofstede originally were power distance, individualism,
32 masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Power distance is the degree to which members of a society expect
33 power to be equally or unequally shared in that society. Individualism is the extent to which people look after
34 their own interests as compared with collectivism, in which people expect the group to look after and protect their
35 interests. Masculinity is the extent to which people value assertiveness, competition, and the acquisition of money
36 and goods. This is contrasted with femininity as a cultural dimension, which values nurturing, relationships, and
37 a concern for others. Uncertainty avoidance is a society's reliance on social norms and structures to alleviate the
38 unpredictability of future events (Robbins & Coulter, 2012). In essence, uncertainty avoidance is a measure of
39 people's collective tolerance for ambiguity.

Later research (Hofstede & Bond, 1988) added a fifth dimension called long-term orientation. This dimension, originally called Confucian Dynamism, is the extent to which a society encourages and rewards future-oriented behavior such as planning, delaying gratification, and investing in the future. It is a cultural preference for thrift, perseverance, tradition, and a long term view of time (Robbins & Coulter, 2012).

4 RESULTS

44 Hofstede's popularity attracted a number of critics, some expressing concerns about the ability to generalize
45 the results of his research and the level of analysis, as well as the use of political boundaries (countries) as culture.
46 The validity of the instrument has also been challenged ??Mc Sweeney, 2002;Smith, 2002). The homogeneity
47 of culture, or in other words, the assumption that people are all the same in every culture has also been called
48 into question (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). Relative to this study, there have been questions raised concerning
49 the validity of grouping a number of Arab countries into one culture, because there are significant differences
50 among Arab nations (Alkailani, Azzam & Athamneh, 2012; Sabri, 2012). The additional dimension of long-term
51 orientation (LTO) has been challenged on the grounds of conceptual validity (Fang, 2003). Grenness (2012)
52 points out the inherent problem of the ecological fallacy in Hofstede's work in which the predominant traits of
53 a group are generalized to the majority of individuals within that group. In 2010, the Journal of International
54 Business Studies (JIBS) published a special edition issue devoted to the improvement of cross-cultural research.
55 Of particular mention were the Hofstede and GLOBE studies. This paper does not address those issues, and
56 instead recognizes that all attempts to classify culture may have limitations. Even in the opening article of the
57 JIBS series, Tung & Verbeke (2010) point out the "undeniable" impact of Hofstede's research on the theories and
58 practice of management and international business.

59 This paper provides a preliminary look into the cultural assessment of a country not included in the Hofstede's
60 data set. Afghanistan is a complex country consisting of both tribal and nontribal groups which influence national
61 culture (Barfield, 2010). It is a country divided by rural and urban cultural values and one that seems to be
62 always at war internally or with outsiders. An accurate empirical assessment of the totality of Afghan culture is
63 nearly impossible. However, one can obtain some insight into the subset of Afghani culture that is perhaps most
64 relevant for business and closely resembles the cultural findings of the Hofstede studies.

65 1 II.

66 2 Method a) Respondents, Survey Instrument, and Procedure

67 The assessment of cultural dimensions was made using a sample of 46 Afghani students studying business and
68 economics at a university in Afghanistan. The sample consisted of 37 male and 9 female respondents. It was
69 primarily, though not exclusively, comprised of urban dwellers. The survey respondents ranged between 19 and
70 23 years of age and represented the more elite segment of Afghani society.

71 In this study we used Hofstede's Values Survey Module 1994 (VSM 94), a questionnaire containing items
72 developed for comparing the culturally determined values of people in five areas. The items measured respondents'
73 perceptions of Afghan culture on the value dimensions of power distance (PDI), masculinity (MAS), individualism
74 (IDV), uncertainty avoidance (UAI), and long-term orientation (LTO). Twenty items on the questionnaire
75 measured the five cultural dimensions and six items assessed demographics.

76 The questionnaire was administered during class periods by the course instructor who asked students to
77 voluntarily participate in the survey. Students completed the survey questionnaire anonymously and returned
78 them to the instructor for analysis. The surveys were analyzed using the index method developed by Hofstede.
79 This involved computing a separate score for each of the five value dimensions. The scores for the value
80 dimensions obtained in this study were compared to the scores obtained by Hofstede in other countries of the
81 world (www.geert-hofstede.com, 2012). Comparisons were made to seven select countries: Brazil, Denmark,
82 Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Turkey, and the USA. Scores for each value dimension from the current study were
83 also compared to those from respondents living in countries within the region to better understand the relative
84 values. There were five countries included in this regional analysis: Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the
85 United Arab Emirates.

86 3 III.

87 4 Results

88 The results of the survey indicate that, in general, the culture of Afghanistan is low in terms of power distance,
89 high in terms of masculinity, somewhat individualistic, moderately accepting of uncertainty, and short term in
90 its orientation toward time. These results are surprising in that the value dimension scores for Afghanistan are
91 different from other countries in the region. A typical values portrait of countries in the region would be high
92 power distance, moderate in terms of masculinity, collectivist, and high in uncertainty avoidance. At this point in
93 time people in Afghanistan appear to value the sharing of power, a higher degree of masculine behavior, a more
94 individualistic perspective, and a greater acceptance of uncertainty. Long term orientation is difficult to compare
95 since this dimension was studied in only 23 countries (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). The Afghani people have an
96 even lower long term orientation than people from geographically-proximal Bangladesh and India, the only two
97 countries in the region studied on this cultural dimension. The data indicates that Afghans have a short term
98 orientation to time. Interestingly, people from the U.S. have an even shorter orientation to time. Figure 1 shows
99 the cultural values of Afghanistan relative to the Hofstede-Bond model.

100 5 a) Power Distance

101 The data indicate that Afghanistan's PDI is 21. This score suggests that Afghans have a low level of acceptance
102 of inequality among societal members. Figure 2 shows the PDI scores for Afghanistan and select other countries.
103 The data reveals that with respect to power distance, Afghanistan's culture is more similar to Denmark than
104 it is to Turkey. Figure 3 shows that within the region, Afghanistan's PDI is most similar that of Pakistan, but
105 markedly different from other countries. The average PDI score for the region is much higher than that found in
106 Afghanistan.

107 for the Economic and Political Future of the Country The data indicate that Afghanistan's MAS is 89. This
108 score suggests that Afghans have a culture that values dominant, masculine behaviors. Figure 4 shows the MAS
109 scores for Afghanistan and select countries. The data reveals that Afghanistan's culture is more masculine or
110 dominant than Germany and most other countries in the world. The data indicate that Afghanistan's IDV is 55.
111 This score suggests that Afghans are individualistic as a culture, placing it at odds with countries in the region,
112 whose cultures are mostly collectivistic. Figure 6 shows the IDV score for Afghanistan and select countries. The
113 data reveals that with respect to individualism, Afghanistan's culture is more similar to Israel than to Indonesia
114 or neighboring Turkey, whose cultures are less individualistic and more collectivistic. The data indicate that
115 Afghanistan's UAI is 50. This score suggests that Afghani culture has a relatively high tolerance for uncertainty.
116 Figure 8 shows the UAI scores for Afghanistan and select other countries. With respect to uncertainty avoidance,
117 Afghanistan's culture is similar to that of the USA. Figure 9 shows that within the region, Afghanistan's UAI
118 score is most similar to that found in Iran. Other countries in the region have cultures with a greater uncertainty
119 avoidance, except for Iraq, which has a lower score indicating a higher tolerance for uncertainty. The data indicate
120 that Afghanistan's LTO is 36. This score suggests that Afghans have a culture that is short-term oriented. Since
121 this dimension was added nearly a decade after Hofstede's original study, we have comparative LTO data for
122 relatively few countries. As such, comparisons with the Afghani data are difficult. Figure 10 shows the LTO
123 scores for Afghanistan and six other countries from which those data were collected. The current data reveals
124 that Afghanistan's long term orientation is similar to that of Bangladesh, but much lower compared to countries
125 in the East: China, Japan, and South Korea. According to Hofstede and Bond (1988), cultures with low LTOs
126 respect tradition, yet desire quick results. There is also social pressure to keep and advance one's social standing.

127 6 Global Journal of Management and Business Research

128 7 Discussion

129 While this study was not unlike the original Hofstede work in terms of sample heterogeneity, it is reasonable to
130 conclude that the unique characteristics of the sample population do not represent the total Afghani population
131 and wider view of Afghan culture. It is believed that the results are an accurate assessment of the urban, wealthier,
132 educated segment of the population. Beyond this exploratory study, additional surveys using the VSM94 with
133 more heterogeneous segments of the population would provide a more accurate description of Afghan culture.
134 While the usefulness of the data reported in this paper for international business and economic development may
135 be limited because of sample size, the findings should not be wholly discounted. Hofstede's initial data sample
136 from Pakistan was limited in size with only 37 respondents.

137 The most surprising aspect of this study on culture may be the low power distance score found for the Afghani
138 respondents. In the region of central and southern Asia it would be expected to find a much higher PDI score.
139 While the low PDI may be a reflection of the sample, it may also reflect the lasting effect of the country's tribal
140 societal structure. A country once ruled by a king gave considerable power and autonomy to tribes. Those tribes
141 settled disputes and made decisions through a consensual process called *jirga* (Khapalwak & Rohde 2010). This
142 power-sharing tradition may explain the low power distance score, but further investigation would be necessary
143 to determine its cause. a) Geopolitical and Economic Implications Afghanistan, once a little known patch of
144 mountains in a perceived unimportant part of the world, rose in visibility with the invasion of Soviet troops in
145 1979. With the subsequent withdrawal of Soviet troops and the rise of the Taliban, Afghanistan would once
146 again gain international exposure with the terrorist attacks on America in 2001. Afghanistan remains important
147 to American and allied foreign policy given the potential for additional terrorist activity and its proximity to
148 troubled Pakistan. In addition to its geopolitical importance, the recent discovery of massive quantities of
149 minerals, including the much coveted rare earth minerals in the country (Simpson 2011) make Afghanistan a
150 potentially important economic entity. This potential source of wealth could help transform the country and its
151 culture towards a more modern state.

152 The cultural values of the educated elite could be quite useful in moving Afghanistan forward. Of particular
153 importance may be our findings related to the Afghani cultural dimensions of individualism and uncertainty
154 avoidance. In order to build a modern economic system based on an entrepreneurial spirit it is helpful for
155 cultural values to stress the importance of self-reliance and the acceptance of change. Individualism has been
156 positively correlated with long run economic growth (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2011). Afghanistan's moderately
157 high cultural orientation towards individualism is especially promising in a country that is attempting to rebuild
158 economically and politically. Having the ability to adapt to change, which is associated with a high uncertainty
159 tolerance (low UAI score), is another factor working in favor of Afghanistan's desire to rebuild. While it is naïve
160 to assume that massive change will occur overnight in this troubled country, there is some reason for hope that

7 DISCUSSION

161 the educated leadership, along with economic resources, can begin to rebuild Afghanistan. In order to facilitate
162 political change in Afghanistan's new democracy, it might also be useful to have leaders who possess a greater
163 concern for power-sharing, especially given the power and influence of the country's tribal leaders. (Rothkopf,
164 1997;White, 2001). After more than a decade of occupation by NATO forces dominated by the U.S. military,
165 there seems to be some degree of overlap between the cultural dimensions of Afghanistan and the United States,
166 more so than would be expected. The overlapping is evident in Figure 11, which plots the scores on the five
167 Hofstede dimensions for both Afghanistan and the U.S. While Afghanistan has a more masculine orientation and
168 the United States has a more individualistic orientation, one would expect greater divergence in cultural values
169 between these two countries. In that a discussion of the merits of the American and allied invasion as well as the
170 occupation of Afghanistan is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worthy to note that the values of the Western
171 powers may already have had some influence on the Afghani upper class development. History may teach us
172 another lesson, especially the history of Afghanistan. In the end, there is reason to hope that the cultural values
assessed in this survey may help bring about a more developed, tolerant, and peaceful country. ¹



Figure 1: Figure 1 :

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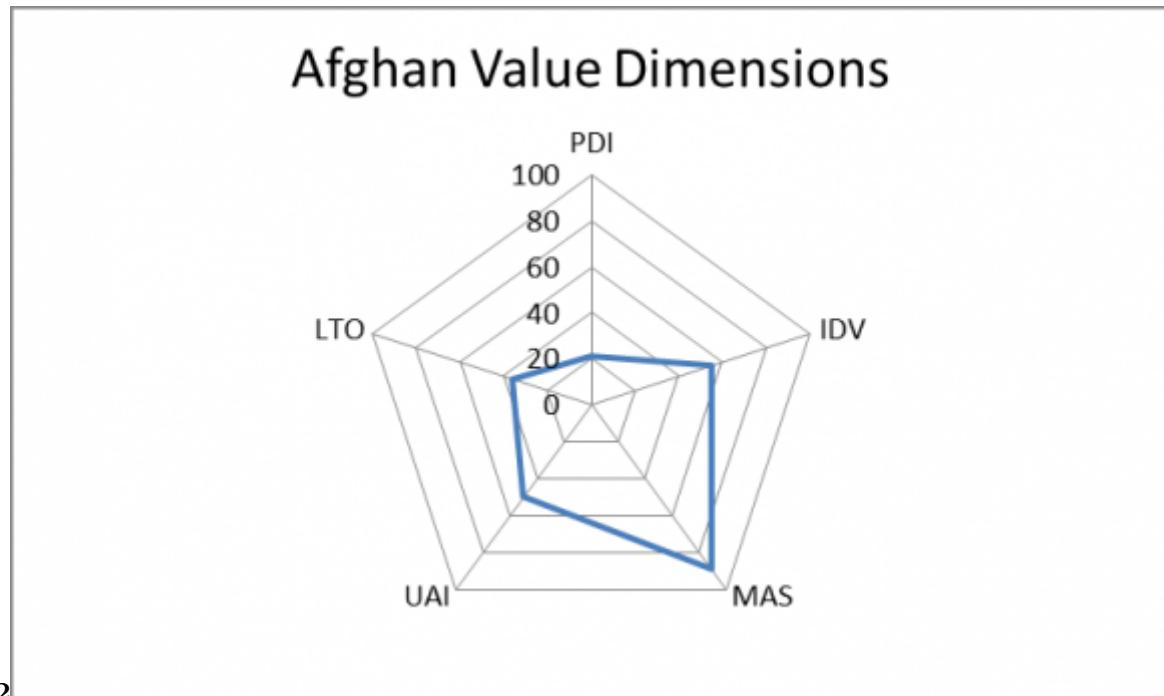


Figure 2: Figure 2 :

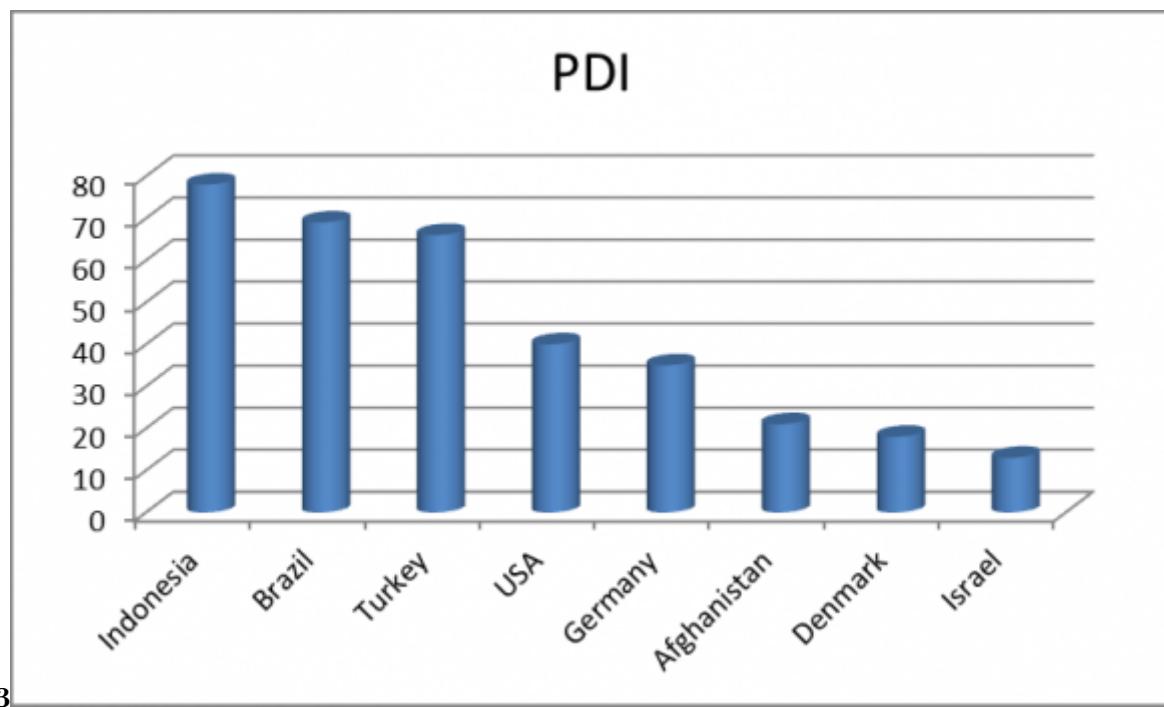


Figure 3: Figure 3 :

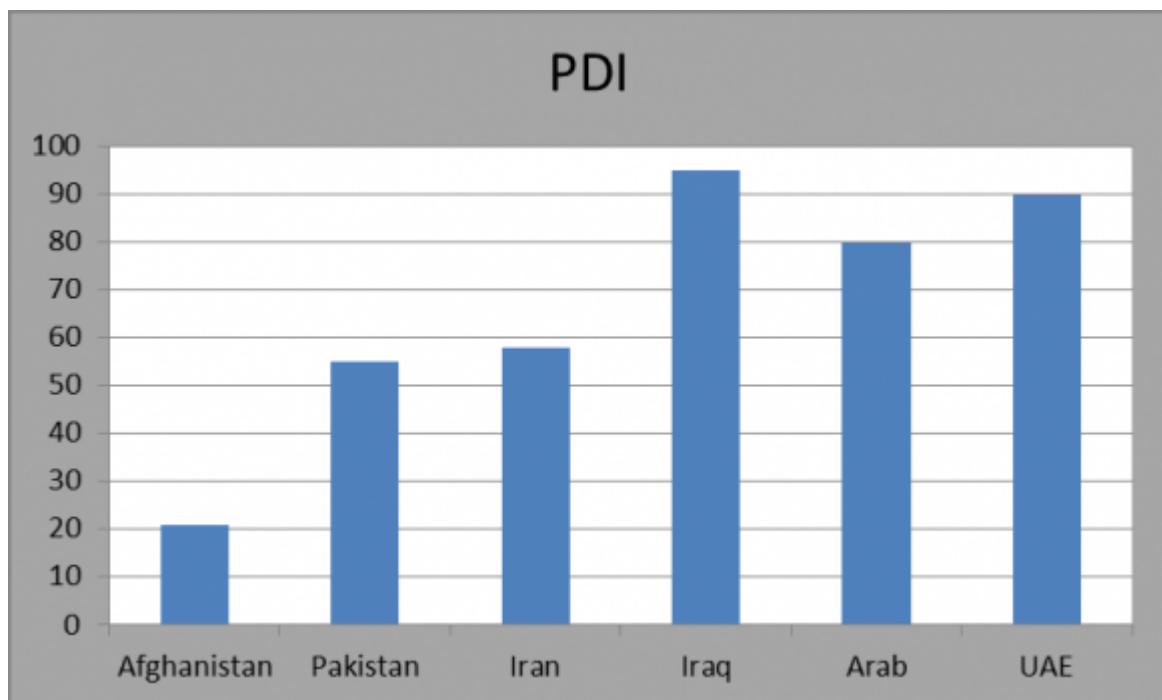


Figure 4: Volume

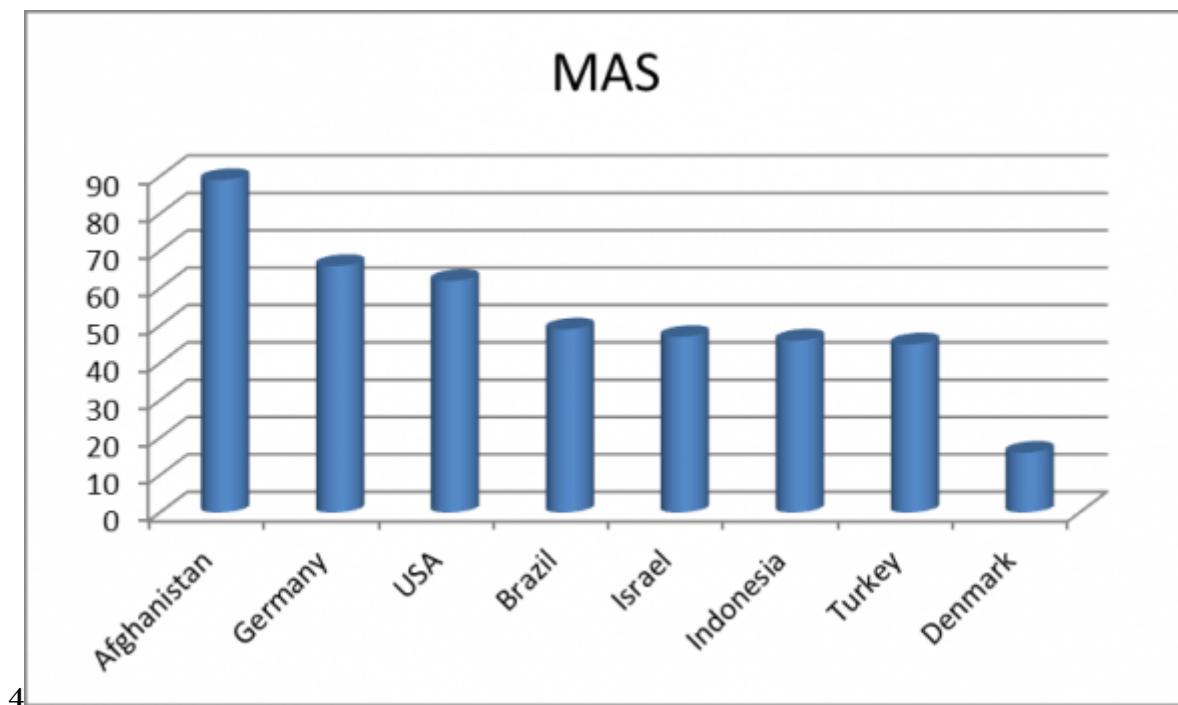


Figure 5: Figure 4 :

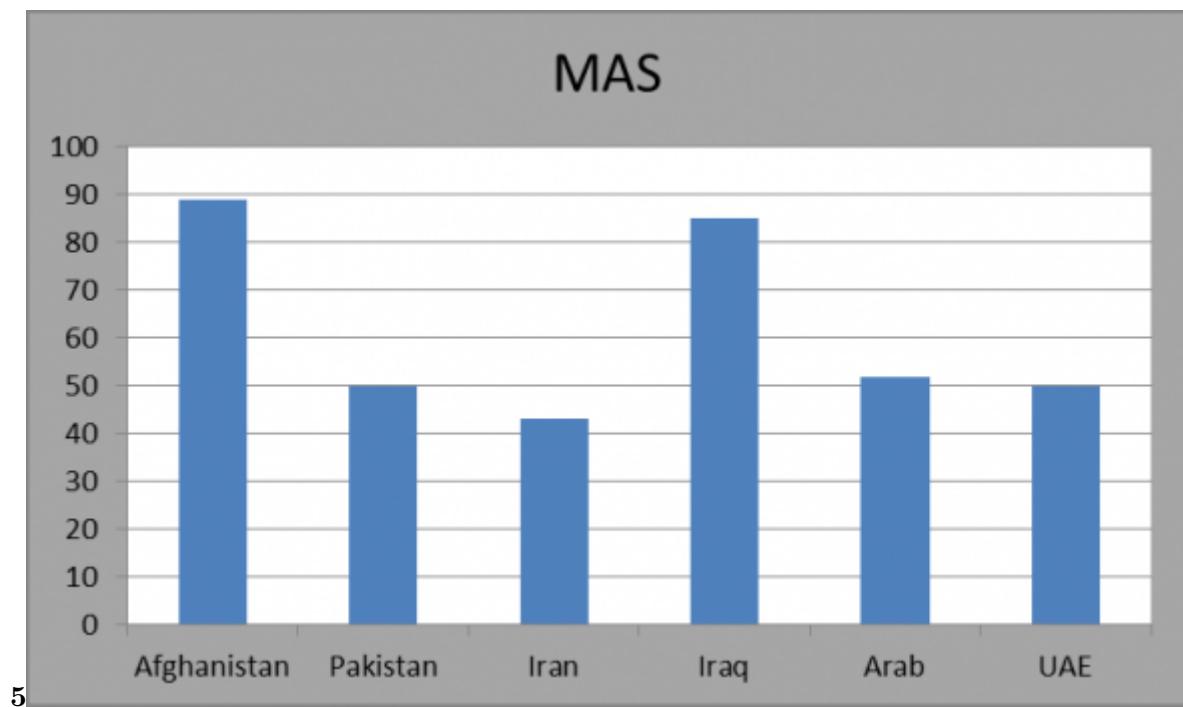


Figure 6: Figure 5 :

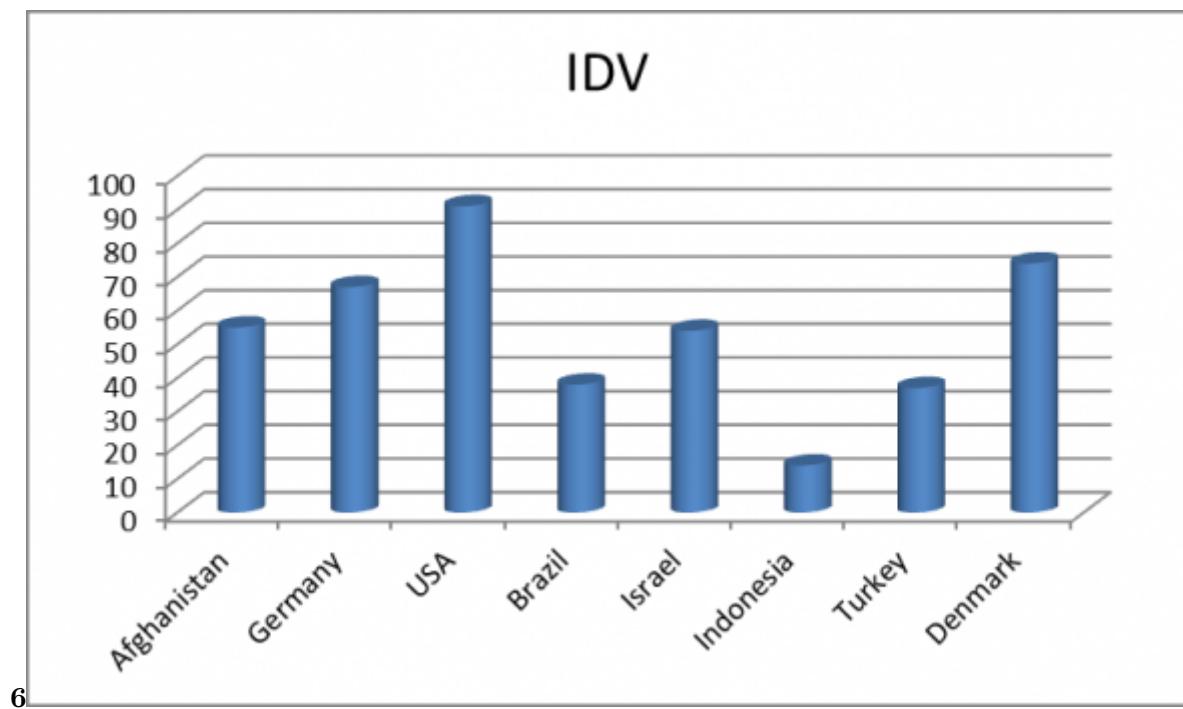


Figure 7: Figure 6 :

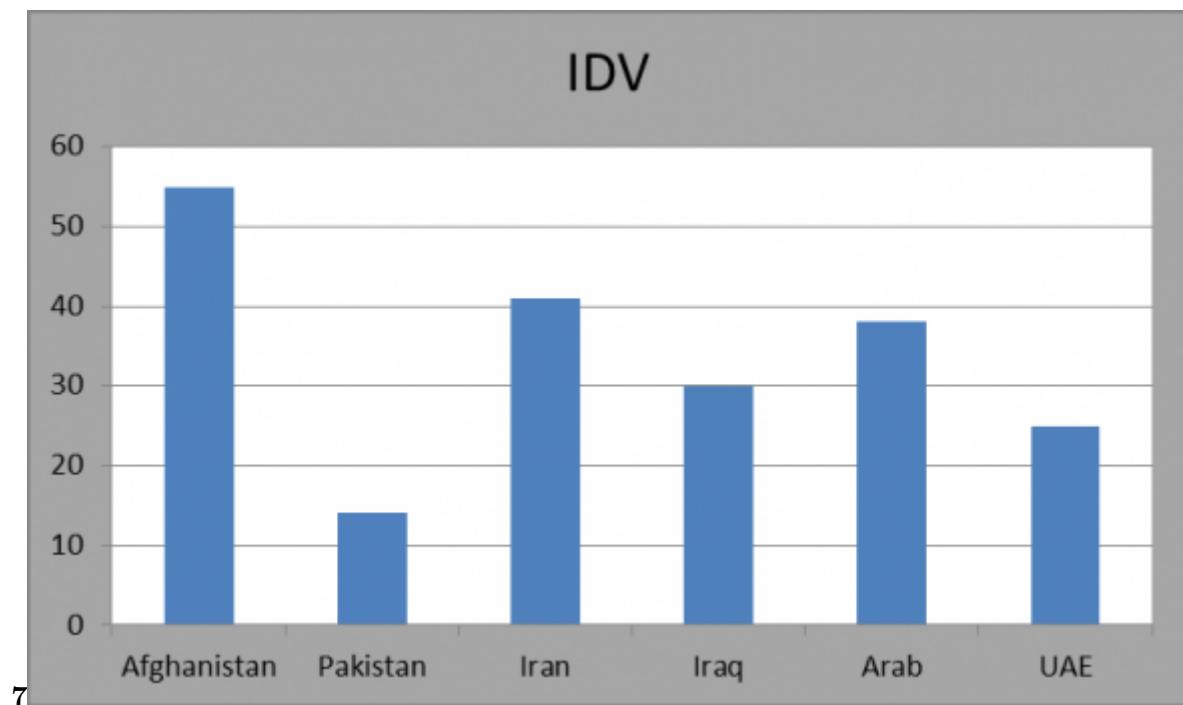


Figure 8: Figure 7 :

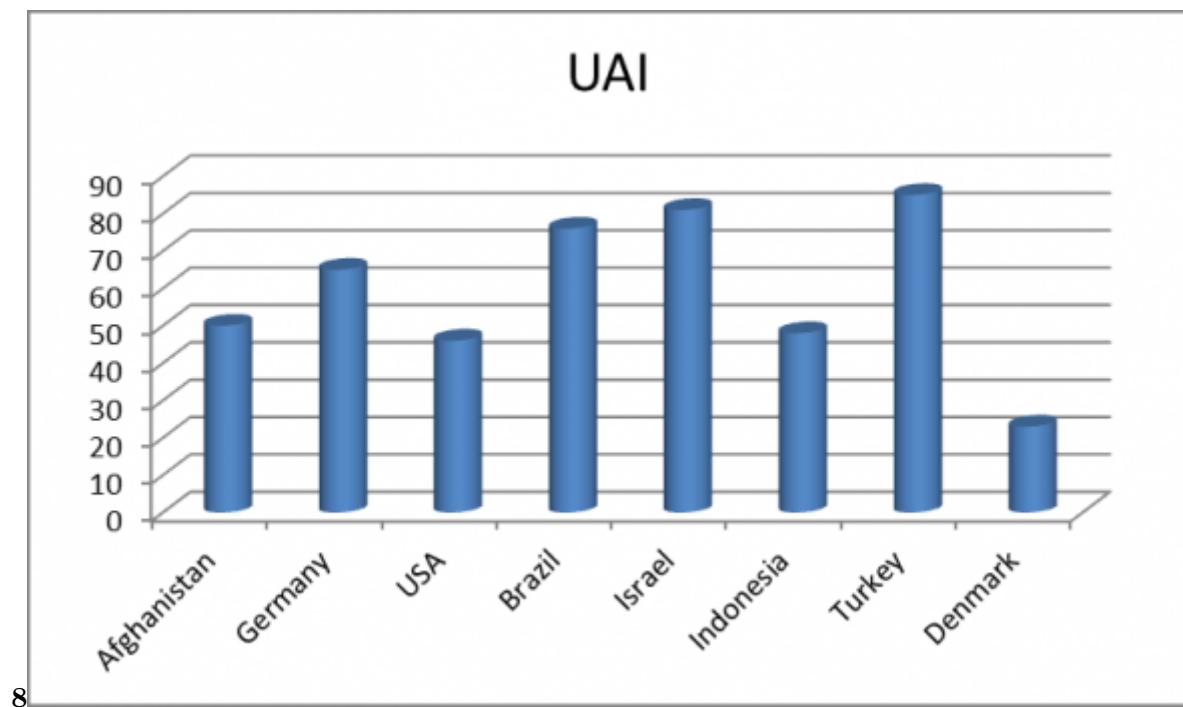


Figure 9: Figure 8 :

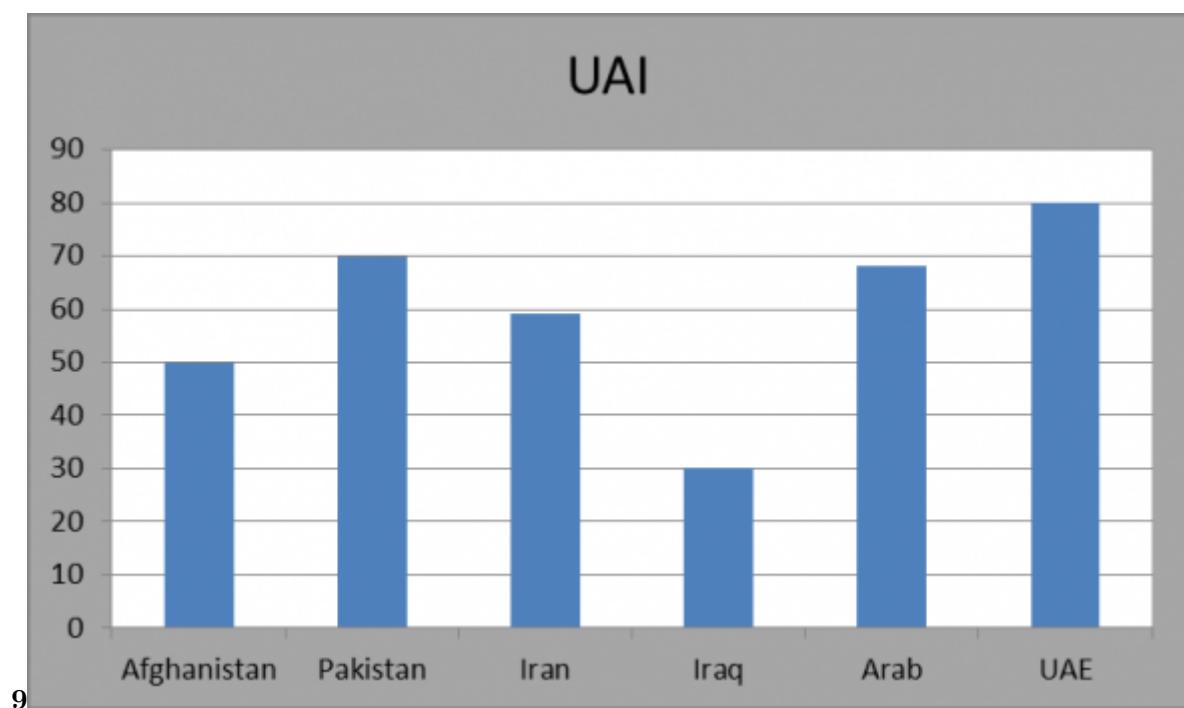


Figure 10: Figure 9 :

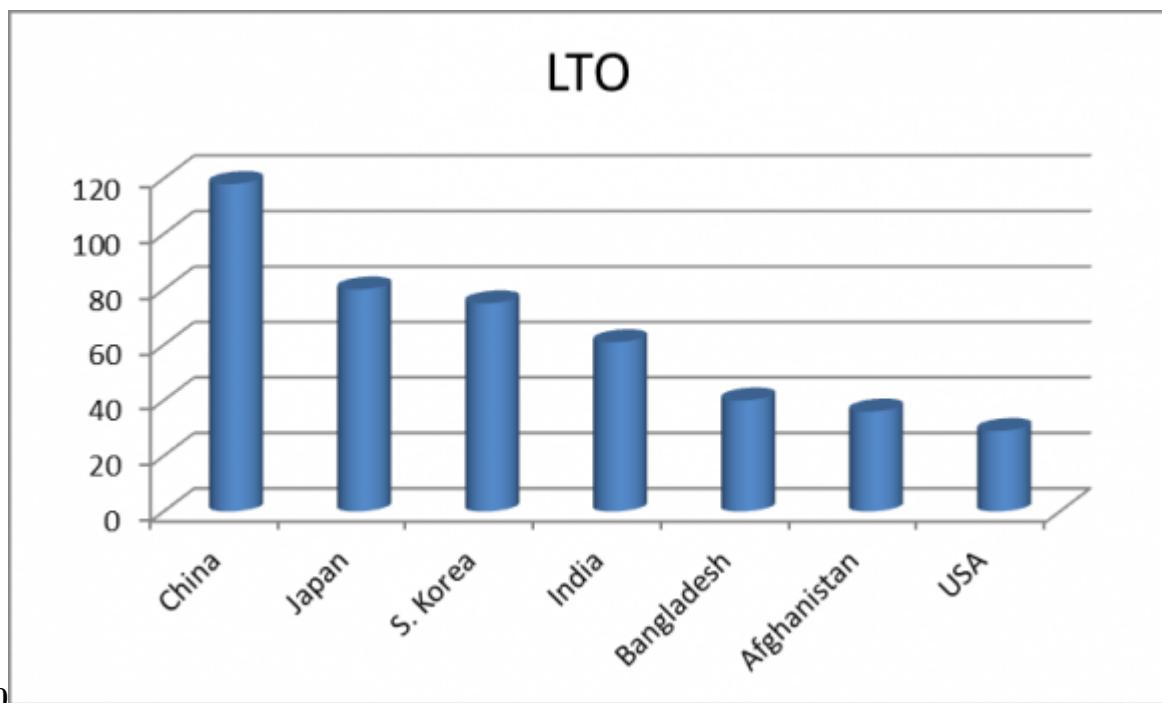
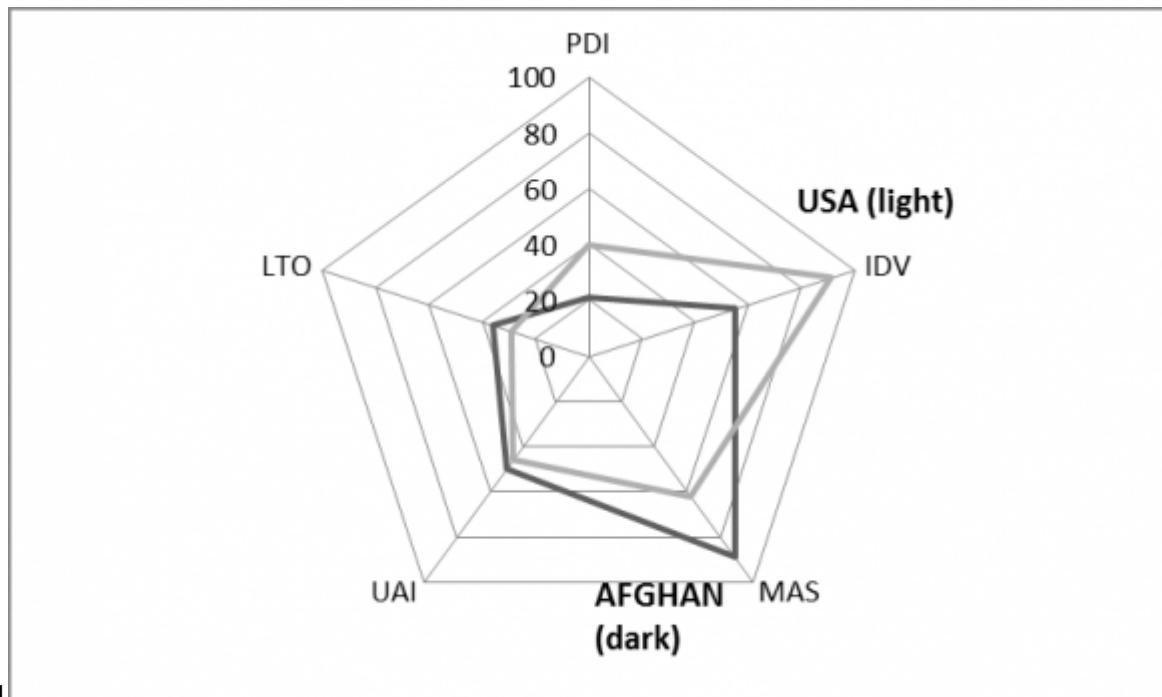


Figure 11: Figure 10 :



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Figure 12: Figure 11 :

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