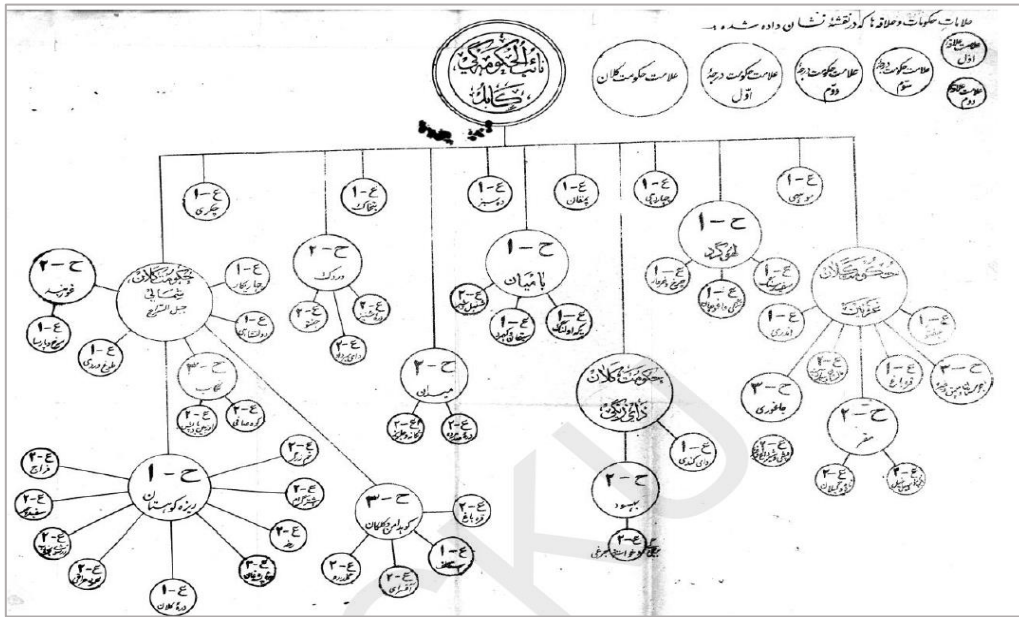


Review of the implementation of the AGORA methodology in Afghanistan under SRDP IV



Administrative divisions – Kabul province. 1923 Regulation of the administrative divisions of Afghanistan

Annex III. Relationship between *manteqas* and newly created districts in Afghanistan

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the administrative division of Afghanistan from a historical perspective and explores the congruence between the creation of new districts in the last decades and the notion of *manteqa*.

The 1964 Constitution mandated a review of the existing sub-national administrative units and the introduction of a new administrative law, passed by the new Parliament and enacted in 1965. This law simplified the sub-national administrative layers inherited from 1923 and established a clear hierarchy between provinces, large districts (loy wolaswali/لویه ولسوالی), districts (wolaswali/ولسوالی), sub-districts (Alaqadari/علاقه داری) and villages. The Law also listed all provinces, districts and sub-districts, providing a benchmark against which to assess the district creation process of the last decades.

Since the 1964 Constitution and the Law of 1965, people from different parts of the country have lobbied successive governments to have their areas recognized as official districts. This in turn led to an increase in the number of districts and provinces in the country. Available information indicates that the combined number of all types of districts grew from 296 in 1965 to 378 in 2021. Of these, 187 districts remained unchanged, 90 sub-districts were upgraded to full district status (the sub-district category was discarded), 101 new districts were created, and several districts were abolished.

Although in a number of countries the formal administrative boundaries inherited from the colonial (or Soviet era) do not always align and have at times been drawn with the purpose of contradicting local socio-spatial realities, this is not the case in Afghanistan (with the exception of some border areas). In fact, two sets of available data suggest a strong relationship between the process of district creation and the notion of *manteqa*: first the fact that, in areas where *manteqas* have been mapped, newly created districts always espouse the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*; and second, the fact that the term *manteqa* has been used in official documents to justify the district creation or upgrade.

1. Congruence between the boundaries of new districts and *manteqas*

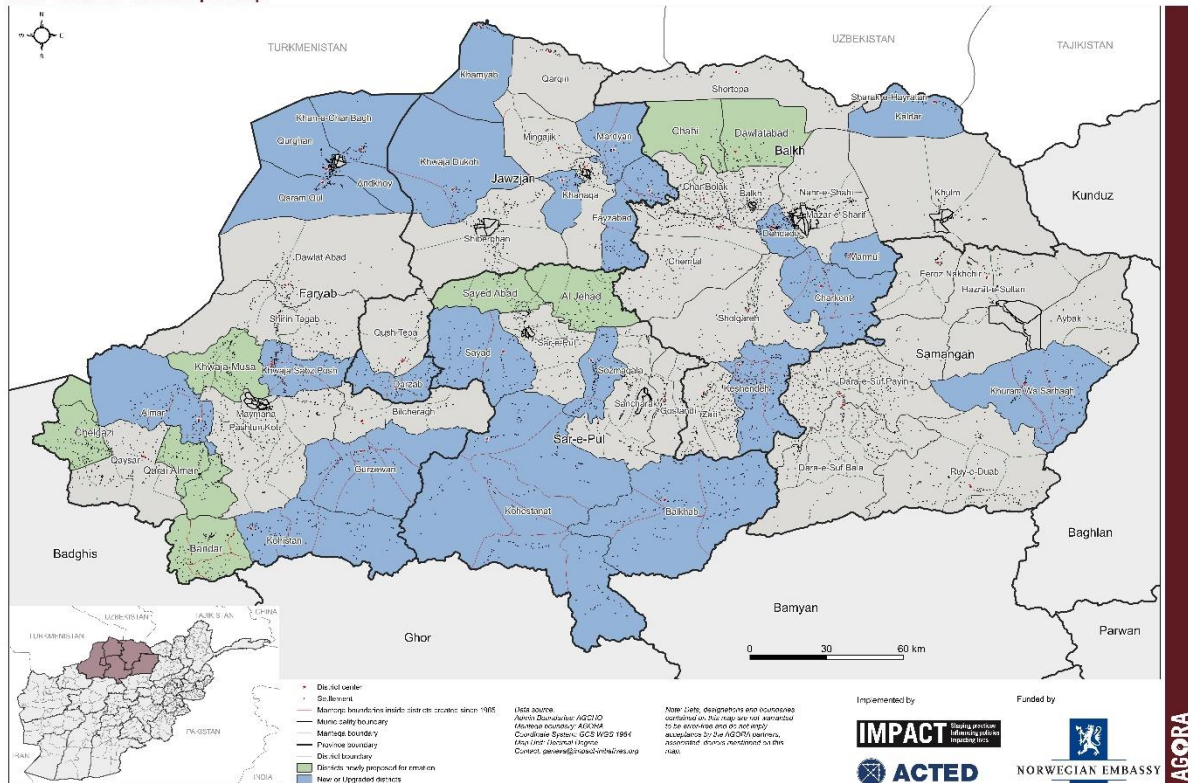
The boundaries of new districts established or upgraded since 1965 and those of districts proposed for creation by the interim Taliban administration have been compared with *manteqas* in Faryab, Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan and Sar-e-Pul provinces, where all *manteqas* have been mapped by IMPACT and ACTED. As shown in map 1 below, the result of this comparison shows clearly that the boundaries of the 24 districts that have been created since 1965 across all five provinces align with the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*. The comparison also shows that the boundaries of the 8 districts that are reportedly being proposed for creation by the Interim Taliban Authorities in Faryab, Balkh and Sar-e-Pul also match with the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*.



Map 1 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in five provinces of North Afghanistan

AGORA - Afghanistan / Northwest Region
New Districts / Manteqas Map

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2. The use of the term *manteqa* in official documents related to the district creation process

In addition, the review showed that in 16 of the 39 cases of district upgrade or creation for which documentation was found, spanning three different political regimes (the government of the Peoples' Democratic Party, the Mujahideen government, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), the official records show that new districts were created or upgraded from sub-districts (Alaqadari) to full district status in response to the requests of the residents of a certain '*manteqa*', or it is a '*distinct manteqa*' that must be converted to an official district.

These two datasets show that the *manteqa* has been a key reference that both the Afghan government and communities have used to inform the process of creating new districts over the last decades under every government, suggesting that the *manteqa* is not at odds with but rather aligned with the ongoing process of sub-national administrative division of the country, with the *manteqa* likely to be the lowest territorial reference for district creation.

Sub-national territorial administrative divisions in Afghanistan – a historical perspective

The history of the administrative division of Afghanistan illustrates how the central government gradually extended its reach from centre to periphery along administrative lines espousing the country's natural geography. In the 19th century, Afghanistan was divided into four then six, and finally



into five provinces whose boundaries followed the country's natural watersheds and river basins. These provinces were based on natural divisions created by the Kabul River and its tributaries (Kabul and Jalalabad provinces), tablelands between Kabul and Kandahar including the Turnak and Arghandab Rivers valleys (Ghazni), Helmand River valley (Kandahar), Hari Rud and Murghab Rivers basins (Herat) and valleys and basins of the tributaries of the Oxus River (Turkestan)¹. These efforts to divide the country administratively were driven by a desire to facilitate the execution of central authority, rather than intended to decentralise central authority to the periphery².

As the country was not properly surveyed in the 19th century, maps of these early administrative divisions were either not available or inaccurate, and the discussion of the administrative divisions of the early modern state of Afghanistan is therefore based on available written narratives.

The 1923 regulation on sub-national administrative divisions

King Amanullah introduced a reform of the sub-national administration, enshrined in the "Regulation of the Administrative Division of Afghanistan" (نظامنامه تقسیمات ملکیه افغانستان) of 1923. The Regulation created the following administrative divisions at the sub-national level: provinces (Wilayat/ولایت) high governorates (Hokumat Alla/حکومت اعلی), large governorates (Hokumati Kalan/حکومتی کلان), governorates (Hokumat/حکومت), sub-districts (Allaqa ha/علاقه ها) and villages.³ Naturally occurring geographic boundaries, the existing local areas that residents identified themselves as belonging to, and accessibility from the center informed these early administrative divisions. Moreover, the existing term Allaqa (علاقه) which is a synonym of the word *manteqa* became an official unit of the sub-national administrative division.

The 1923 regulation divided the country into five provinces and four hukumati Alla, each reporting directly to the centre. These administrative divisions are described in table 1 below.

Table 1 – 1923 subnational tier administrative divisions

Provinces (ولایت)	Hukumati Alla (حکومت اعلی)
Kabul	Samti Mashriq
Herat	Samti Janub
Kandahar	Farah
Turkestan	Maimana
Qataghan wa Badakhshan	

Each province was in turn composed of a number of large governorates, governorates, sub-district (alaqa - علاقہ) and villages; while each hukumati Alla (حکومتی اعلی) was composed of governorates, sub-districts, and villages. This complex structure was further complicated by the fact that each administrative level could report directly to a province or a hukumati Alla as the case may be. In the case of Kabul province, for example, ten villages and five alaqas reported directly to the provincial level, while a number of alaqas and villages also reported directly to a number of hukumati alas, without being subordinated to any intermediary administrative divisions.

¹ Andrew W.P. 1880, "Our Scientific Frontier" Page 29, available on the website of digital library of India

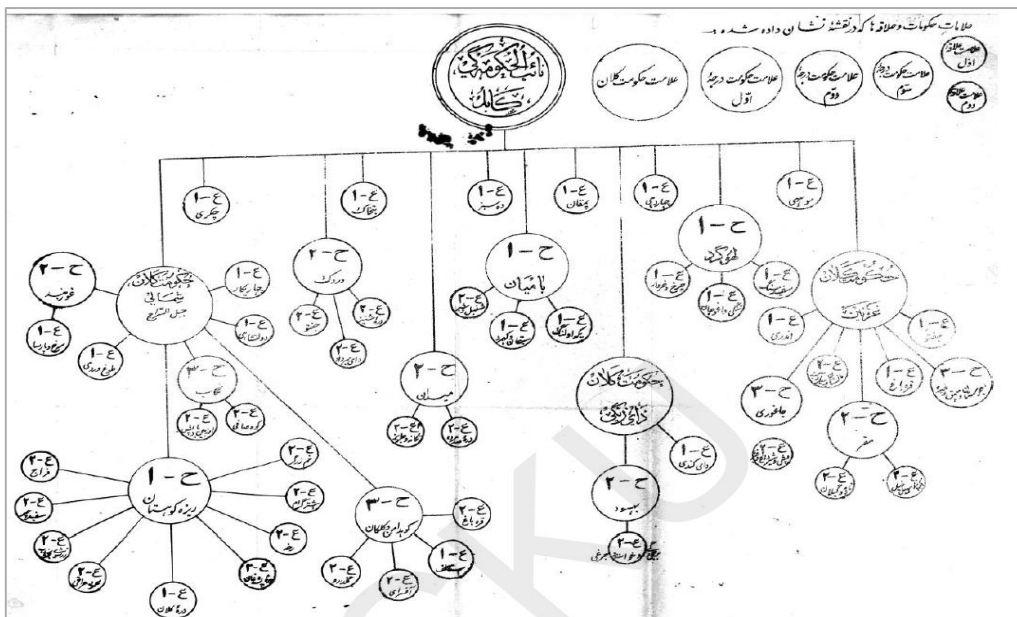
² Mirwais Ayobi and Haroun Rahimi "A Study of Afghanistan's Organisation and Structure of Public Administration under the 2004 Constitution" Page 7, AREU Issues Paper 2018

³ The regulation is available on the website of Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University (ACKU), <http://law.acku.edu.af/>



Figure 1 below provides an illustration of the complexity of the administrative divisions created by the 1923 regulation.

Figure 1 – Administrative division of Kabul province as per the 1923 regulation



From 1923 until 1964 several reforms were introduced through royal decrees and cabinet decisions to simplify the layers of administrative units, with high governorates (حکومت اعلی) and governorates (Hokumat/حکومت) being transformed into provinces or districts (Wolaswali/ولسوالی), the latter being a new administrative category introduced in 1965 alongside that of large districts (loy Wolaswali لویه ولسوالی). For their part, sub-districts (Allaqa) endured until the 1990s, when this unit was abolished by the first Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA).

The 1964 constitution and sub-national administrative divisions

The Constitution of 1964 is a key milestone in the discussion of the sub-national administrative divisions of Afghanistan. It mentioned “balanced development” as an objective of the constitution and provided for the people to have a voice in the local development (articles 109) through consultative provincial councils. Although several other constitutions were enacted in the country after 1964, all of them maintained the objective of balanced development at the sub-national level and the consultative nature of the provincial councils in matters pertaining to the local development.

The Constitution mandated a review of the existing sub-national administrative units and the introduction of a new administrative law, passed by the new Parliament and enacted in 1965. This Law simplified the sub-national administrative layers and established a clear hierarchy between provinces, large districts (loy wolaswali/ولسوالی لویه), districts (wolaswali/ولسوالی), sub-districts (Alaqadari/علاقه داری) and villages. The Law also listed all provinces, districts and sub-districts, providing a benchmark against which to assess the district creation process of the last decades.

Since the 1964 Constitution and the Law of 1965, people from different parts of the country have lobbied successive government to have their areas recognized as full districts. This in turn led to a gradual but steady increase in the number of districts as well as provinces in the country.



The 2000 Law on local administration enacted by the first IEA provides a full list of all sub-national administrative divisions in the country and illustrates that trend, with the number of districts growing from 296 to 341. The Law also formalizes the abolition of the two categories of large districts (loy wolaswalis) and sub-districts (alaqadaris), with the majority of sub-districts being upgraded to full district status. From 2001 onwards, 36 districts and three provinces were created, bringing the total to 34 provinces and 378 districts.

Table 3 below show the growth in the number of sub-national administrative divisions from 1965 until 2021.

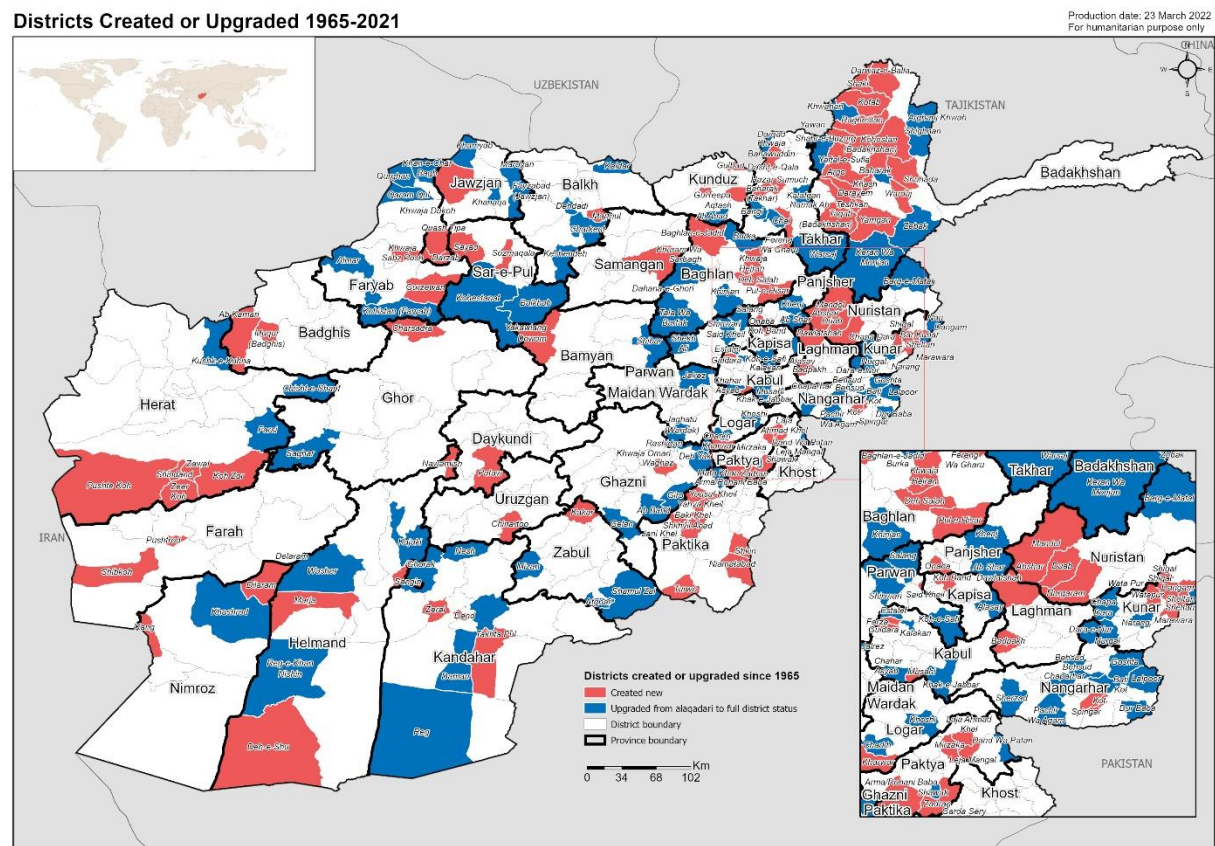
Table 3 – Sub-national administrative units in 1965 and 2021

	1965	2000	2021
Provinces	28	31	34
Loy Wolaswali	4	0	0
Districts	171	341	378
Alaqadari	121	0	0
Total all district Categories	296	341	378

In sum, available information indicates that 187 districts remained unchanged, 90 sub-districts were upgraded to full district status, and 101 new districts were created, as shown in map 2 below.



Map 2 - Districts created and upgraded from 1965 and 2021



District upgrading and creation and the notion of *manteqa*

Although in a number of countries the formal administrative boundaries inherited from the colonial (or Soviet era) do not always align and have at times been drawn with the purpose of contradicting local socio-spatial realities, this is not the case in Afghanistan (with the notable exception of some border areas). In fact, two sets of available data suggest a strong relationship between the process of district creation and the notion of *manteqa*: firstly the fact that, in areas where *manteqas* have been mapped, newly created districts always espouse the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*, and secondly, the use of the term *manteqa* to justify the district creation or upgrade request or decision in a number of official documents.

3. Congruence between the boundaries of new districts and *manteqas*

The boundaries of new districts established or upgraded since 1965 and those of districts proposed for creation by the interim Taliban administration have been compared with *manteqas* in Faryab, Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan and Sar-e-Pul provinces, where all *manteqas* have been mapped by IMPACT and ACTED.

As detailed below for each province, the result of this comparison shows clearly that the boundaries of the 24 districts that have been created since 1965 across all five provinces align with the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*. The comparison also shows that the boundaries of the 8 districts that are reportedly being proposed for creation by the Interim Taliban Authorities in Faryab, Balkh and Sar-e-Pul also match with the boundaries of one or more *manteqas*.

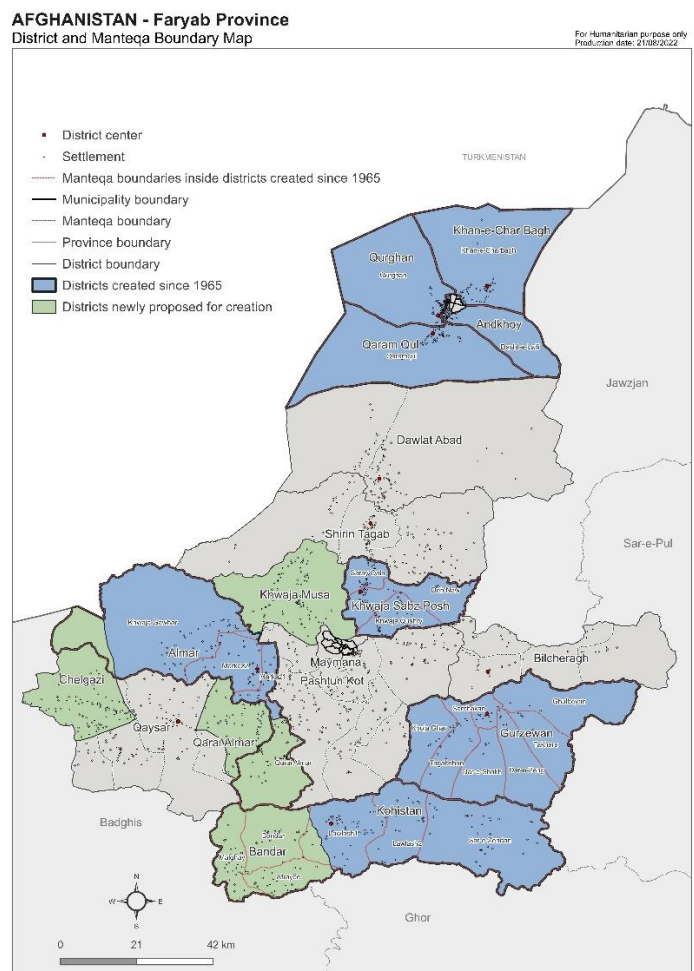


a. Faryab

In Faryab Province, eight districts were created or upgraded since 1965, and four districts are proposed for creation. As shown in map 3 below, the four districts in the North of the province, three of which were elevated from the status of *alaqadari* to district in the 1990s, align with eponymous *manteqas*, while the district of Gurziwan (created in the late 1990s out of Belcheragh district) aligns with the external boundaries of its seven *manteqas*. In addition, the boundaries of the districts of Almar, Kuhistan, and Khwaja Sabz Posh align with the external boundaries of their respective *manteqas*.

The interim Taliban administration is also planning to create four new districts in Faryab by the names of Chelgazi, Bandar, Khwaja Musa and Khaibar, with boundaries matching those of one or more existing *manteqas* already mapped by ACTED and IMPACT and used for community mobilisation and aid delivery. Chelgazi and Khwaja Musa align with eponymous *manteqas*, while the planned district of Khaiber joins two neighbouring *manteqas* with similar agro-ecological and ethnic features from the districts of Almar and Qaisar (Qarai Almar and Qarai Qaisar *manteqas*), and Bandar district joins the three adjacent *manteqas* of Bandar, Malghay and Lafrayee in Kohistan district.

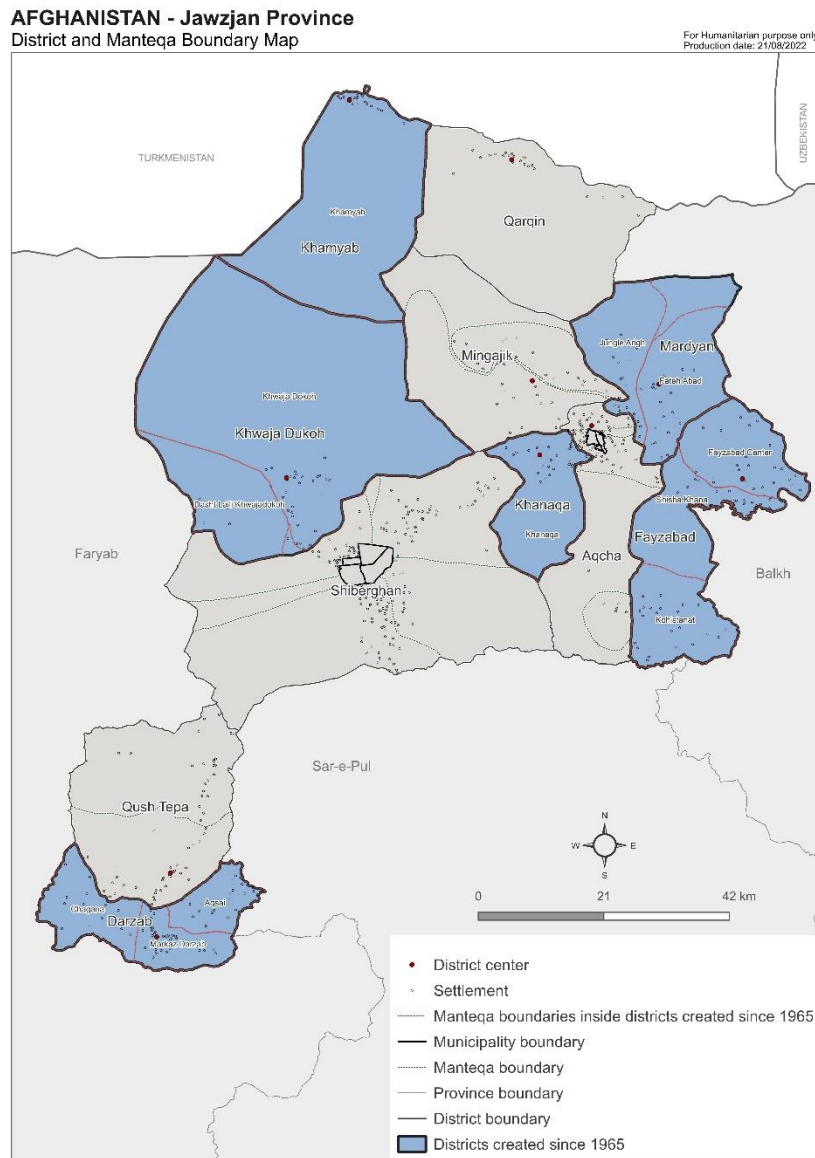
Map 3 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in Faryab Province



b. Jawzjan

In Jawzjan Province, six districts have been created or upgraded from the status of aloqadari since 1965. As shown in map 4 below, the boundaries of the districts of Khamyab and Khanaqa align with the eponymous *manteqas*, while those of Mardyan, Fayzabad, Khwaja Dukoh and Darzab districts align with the boundaries of their respective *manteqas*.

Map 4 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in Jawzjan Province



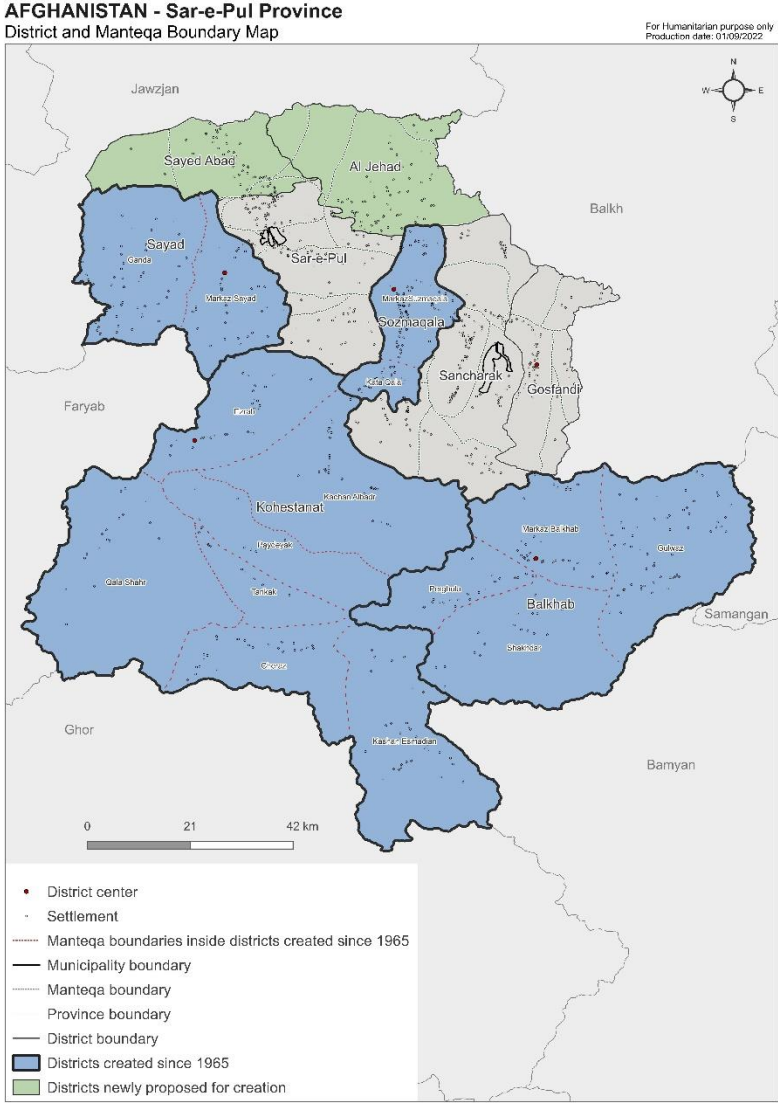
c. Sar-e-Pul

In Sar-e-Pul Province, four districts have been created or upgraded from the status of aloqadari since 1965, and two are proposed for creation. As shown in map 5 below, the boundaries of the district of Sozmaqala align with the eponymous *manteqa*, while those of Sayad, Kohestanat, and Balkhab districts align with the boundaries of their respective *manteqas*.



The interim Taliban administration is also planning to create two new districts in Sar-e-Pul by the names of Sayedabad and Al Jihad, with their respective boundaries matching the boundaries of eponymous *manteqas*.

Map 5 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in Sar-e-Pul Province



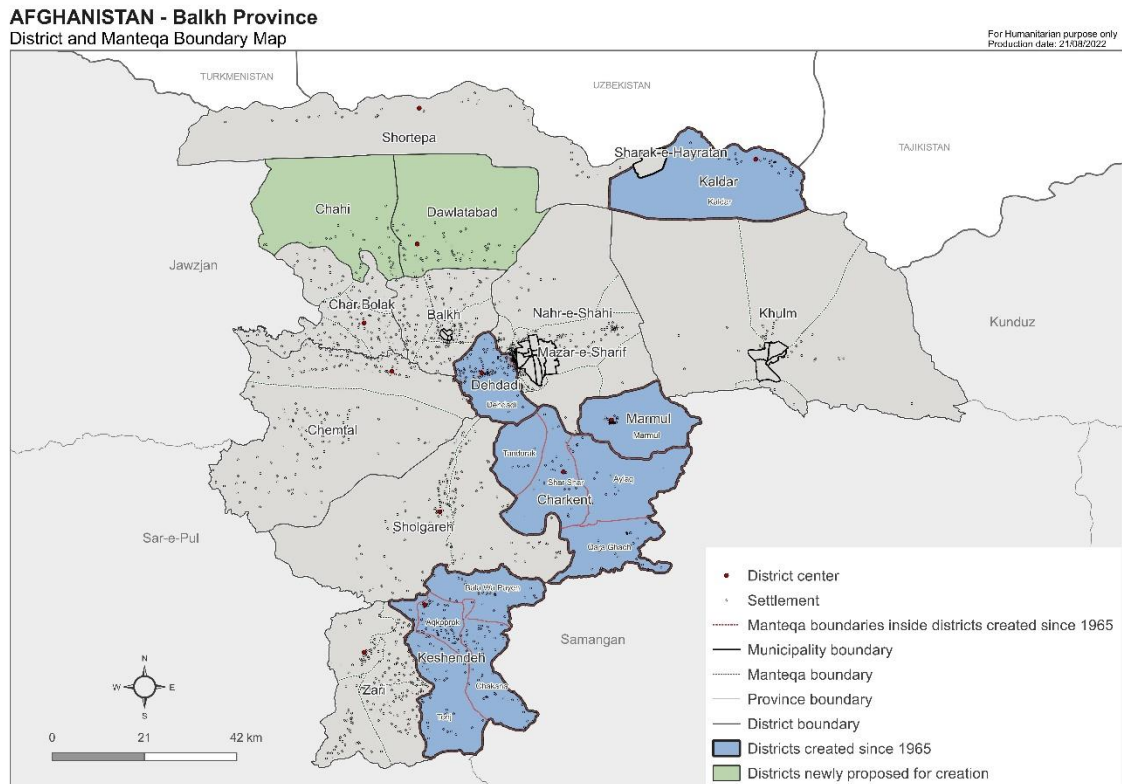
d. Balkh

In Balkh Province, five districts have been created or upgraded from the status of aloqadari since 1965, and two are proposed for creation. As shown in map 6 below, the boundaries of the districts of Kaldar, Dehdadi and Marmul align with the eponymous *manteqas*, while those of Chahar Kent (literally four *manteqas*) and Keshendeh districts align with the boundaries of their respective *manteqas*.

The interim Taliban administration is also planning to create two new districts in Balkh Province by the names of Chahi and Dawlatabad, with their respective boundaries matching the boundaries of eponymous *manteqas*.



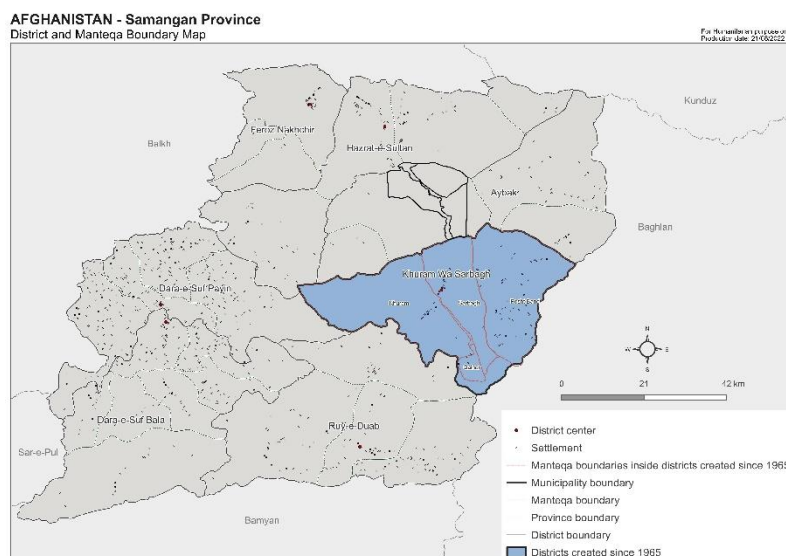
Map 6 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in Balkh Province



e. Samangan

In Samangan one district has been created since 1965. As shown in map 7 below, the boundaries of the district of Khurram Sarbar were aligned with those of its four constitutive *manteqas*.

Map 7 – Relations between districts created since 1965 / districts newly proposed for creation and *manteqas* in Samangan Province



4. The use of the term *manteqa* in official documents related to the district creation process

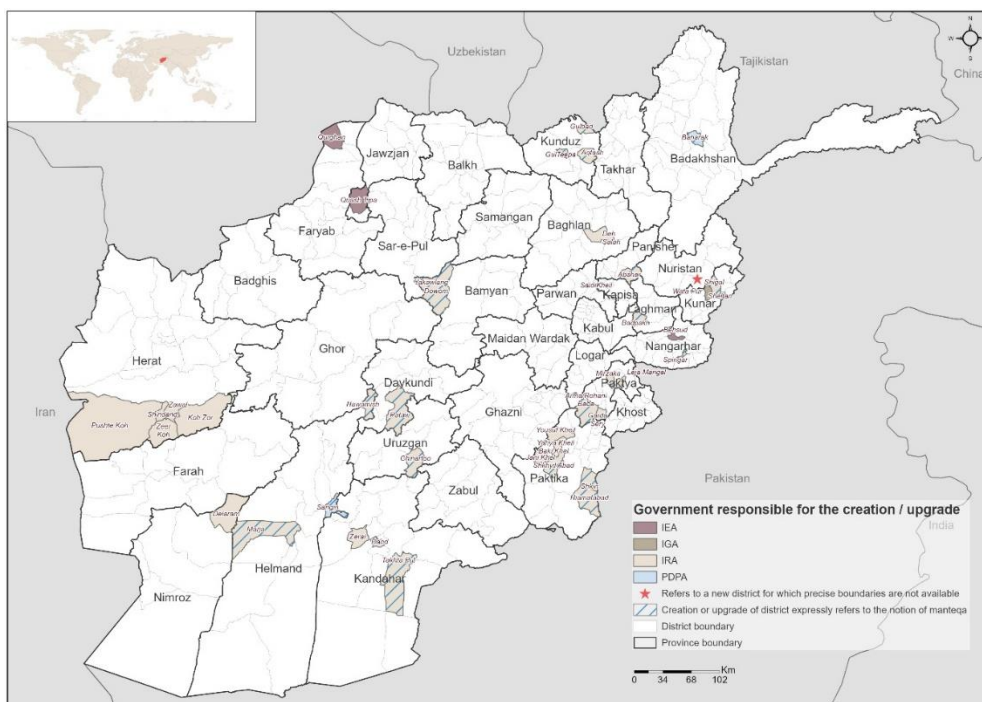
Official proposals and approval documents have been found for 39 newly created districts and two districts upgraded since 1982. These documents show that in 16 cases, new districts were either created or upgraded from Alaquadari to full district status in response to the requests of the residents of a certain '*manteqa*', or it is a '*distinct manteqa*' that must be converted to an official district. Documents from three different political regimes, the government of the Peoples' Democratic Party (the 1980s), the Mujahideen government (1990s)⁴, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2002-2021) have all used the word "*manteqa*" as a rationale to describe a new area meeting the conditions for becoming a new district or being upgraded to full district status.

The department of geodesy and cartography also conducted surveys in six of the above cases to establish the distinctiveness of the *manteqas* proposed by the provincial governors or the people, in all cases recommending upgrading the *manteqas* to district status.

In sum, although the word *manteqa* was not used in all 39 cases for which documentation is available, its use in 16 cases indicates the importance of the notion as a rationale for district the creation or upgrade.

Map 8 below shows the districts created or upgraded for which full documentation and rationale is available, indicating the locations where the notion of *manteqa* was invoked as part of the rationale to create or upgrade districts.

Map 8 – Districts created or upgraded for which full documentation is available, and relation to the notion of *manteqa*



⁴ Decrees of the Leadership of the Revolutionary Council of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, 2nd October 1982 and of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 11th May, 1996 to create Baharak district in Bдахshhan and Saidkheil district in Parwan provinces respectively.



Conclusion

The information presented above indicates that *manteqas* have been used as a key reference by both local communities and successive Afghan governments to inform decision making with regards to the process of district creation that has been ongoing over the last decades. Available evidence from five provinces of Afghanistan also suggests that the lowest territorial reference for the district creation process is the *manteqa*, and that should this process of district creation be taken to its logical conclusion, districts would align with *manteqas* in most areas of Afghanistan.

