

## Comparing the Nexus: Exploring the Relationship Between Neuroticism and Educational Leadership in Democratic vs. Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan.

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### Abstract

This comparative, repeated cross-sectional quantitative study examined the relationship between six aspects of neuroticism i.e., Anxiety, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability, Hostility and three educational leadership styles i.e., Transformational Educational style, Transactional Educational leadership style, and Laissez-Faire educational leadership style among 200 educational leaders in Afghanistan, with 100 educational leader were surveyed during the Democratic era in year 2020 and 100 during the Taliban era in the year 2025. Data were collected through in-person surveys at schools, colleges, and educational institutions, following Afghan Government SoPs and informed consent procedures. The results showed statistically significantly higher neuroticism scores across all six Aspects during the Taliban era, signifying heightened psychological distress, insecurity, and emotional instability among educational leaders. In contrast, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles were significantly more prevalent during the Democratic era. Correlation and regression analyses confirmed strong negative associations between neuroticism and transformational leadership, with depression emerging as the strongest predictor. Transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles also showed slight negative relationships with neuroticism, suggesting that under extreme stress, leaders struggled to maintain even structured or passive leadership approaches. Overall, the findings highlight a profound psychological and leadership shift under Taliban governance, where elevated neuroticism undermined leaders' ability to inspire, organize, or delegate effectively. The study underlines the importance of political stability and psychological well-being in sustaining effective educational leadership.

### Introduction

Afghanistan's educational landscape has been shaped by decades of political upheaval, ideological shifts, and international intervention. From the fall of the Taliban in 2001 to their resurgence in 2021, the country has experienced two dramatically different governance models each with distinct implications for educational leadership UNESCO (2021).

According to Safi, L. (2023) under the democratic government (2001–2021), Afghanistan witnessed significant progress in education. The Ministry of Education was restructured, national curricula were modernized, and international aid supported widespread school construction and teacher training. Female enrollment surged, and leadership roles in education became more inclusive and decentralized. However, challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and uneven access persisted.

Mohammadi, J. (2024) observed that In contrast, the Taliban regime (2021–present) has imposed

strict ideological control over education. Girls' secondary and higher education has been banned, curricula have been Islamized, and leadership positions are tightly regulated by religious authorities. Educational leaders now operate under surveillance, censorship, and moral conflict, often with limited autonomy and psychological support.

### **Historical Overview of Afghanistan's Education System**

Afghanistan's formal education system began evolving in the early 20th century, with the establishment of secular schools alongside traditional religious institutions DW News (2024). . The 1970s and 1980s saw attempts at modernization, but decades of war disrupted progress. During the Taliban's first rule (1996–2001), education especially for girls was severely restricted.

Post-2001, the democratic government prioritized education as a pillar of national development. By 2020, over 9 million children were enrolled in schools, including 3.5 million girls. Universities expanded, and leadership training programs were introduced. However, the collapse of the government in August 2021 marked a reversal of these gains Heinrich Böll, (2022).

Since the Taliban's return, the education system has undergone ideological restructuring. Female students and educators have been excluded, and leadership roles are now filled based on religious loyalty rather than professional merit Afghan Witness (2024).

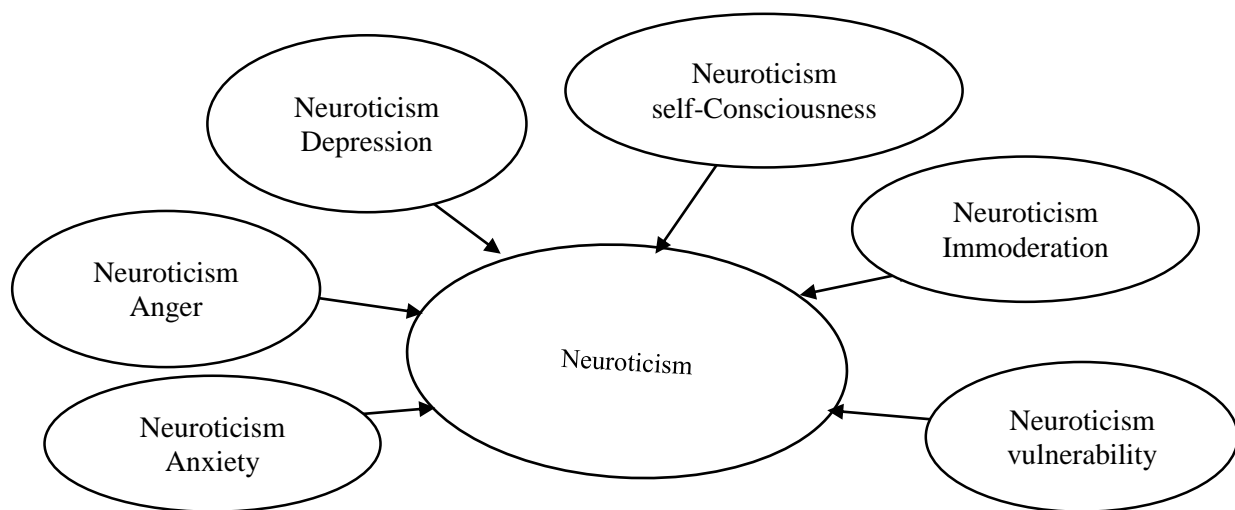
### **Neuroticism and Educational Leadership**

Neuroticism, a core trait in the Big Five personality model, reflects emotional instability, anxiety, and vulnerability to stress Ali.A (2025). Leaders high in neuroticism may struggle with decision-making, conflict resolution, and resilience especially in high-pressure environments like Afghanistan's education sector. Research suggests that neuroticism negatively correlates with transformational leadership behaviors and may lead to burnout or avoidance in conflict zones Ali, A (2025).

In Afghanistan, educational leaders face unique psychological stressors depending on the regime: democratic governance encouraged innovation but was fraught with insecurity, while Taliban rule imposes ideological conformity and suppresses autonomy Wiley Online Library (2023).

According to Berr et al. (2000), neuroticism in leadership is characterized by a leader's level of stress tolerance or psychological adjustment. Leaders exhibiting neurotic traits tend to demonstrate anxious behavior and thought patterns, often associated with heightened worry and stress (McCrae, 1987). Educational leader who exhibit such traits may set high goals and values for their group members and encourage them to challenge conventional norms (Bridbord & De-Lucia-Waack, 2011). These leaders are frequently described as volatile and inconsistent (Zhang & Huang, 2001). In some cases, Educational Leaders with neurotic traits may cause their team members to lose trust in their leadership A.Ali (2025).

Educational leaders who do not possess neurotic traits tend to be emotionally stable and secure (Judge & Bono, 2000a). Such leaders are generally less affected by stress and exhibit a greater ability to manage stressful situations matched to neuroticism leaders (Zhang & Huang, 2001). Educational leader with low neuroticism are often more confident in their decisions and maintain clearer thinking compared to those with higher levels of neuroticism A. Ali (2023) These leaders are also more likely to make balanced decisions, remain composed, and foster a calmer organizational atmosphere (Ehrhart et al., 2009). Additionally, leaders with emotional stability are often seen as more empathetic and respectful toward their team members (Bruk-Lee, 2009).



**Figure 1: Aspects of Neuroticism, A.Ali.et al (2023).**

**Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to quantitatively examine the relationship between neuroticism and educational leadership in Afghanistan under two distinct regimes. By comparing Educational leaders’ neuroticism scores and self reported leadership styles, the research seeks to uncover how political context influences psychological traits and leadership styles. The researcher of the study in hand is hopeful that the results obtained from this research study precisely identify the neuroticism and sub factors Neuroticism Anxiety, Neuroticism Anger, Neuroticism Depression, Neuroticism Immoderation, Neuroticism Self-Consciousness, Neuroticism vulnerability trait of personality, Educational leadership styles of in Afghanistan. The current study also clarifies the relationship among Neuroticism of personality and sub factors with educational leadership of Afghanistan. In addition to that the results obtained from the study in hand maybe helpful for all stakeholders in understanding the neuroticism and sub factors and style of leadership Moreover, the information collected from research study also contribute to the available information about style of leadership of the Educational Leaders and how those specific style of educational leadership. The effect of leadership styles of the educational leaders may be positive, negative or no affect which is mainly depending on the educational administrators’ personality traits. The researcher strongly believes that this research study must add useful information to the already available data about educational leadership, leadership styles and their relationship with personality traits.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the levels of neuroticism among educational leaders under each regime?
2. How does neuroticism correlate with perceived leadership effectiveness in democratic vs. Taliban-ruled Afghanistan?
3. Are there significant differences in neuroticism scores between the two groups?

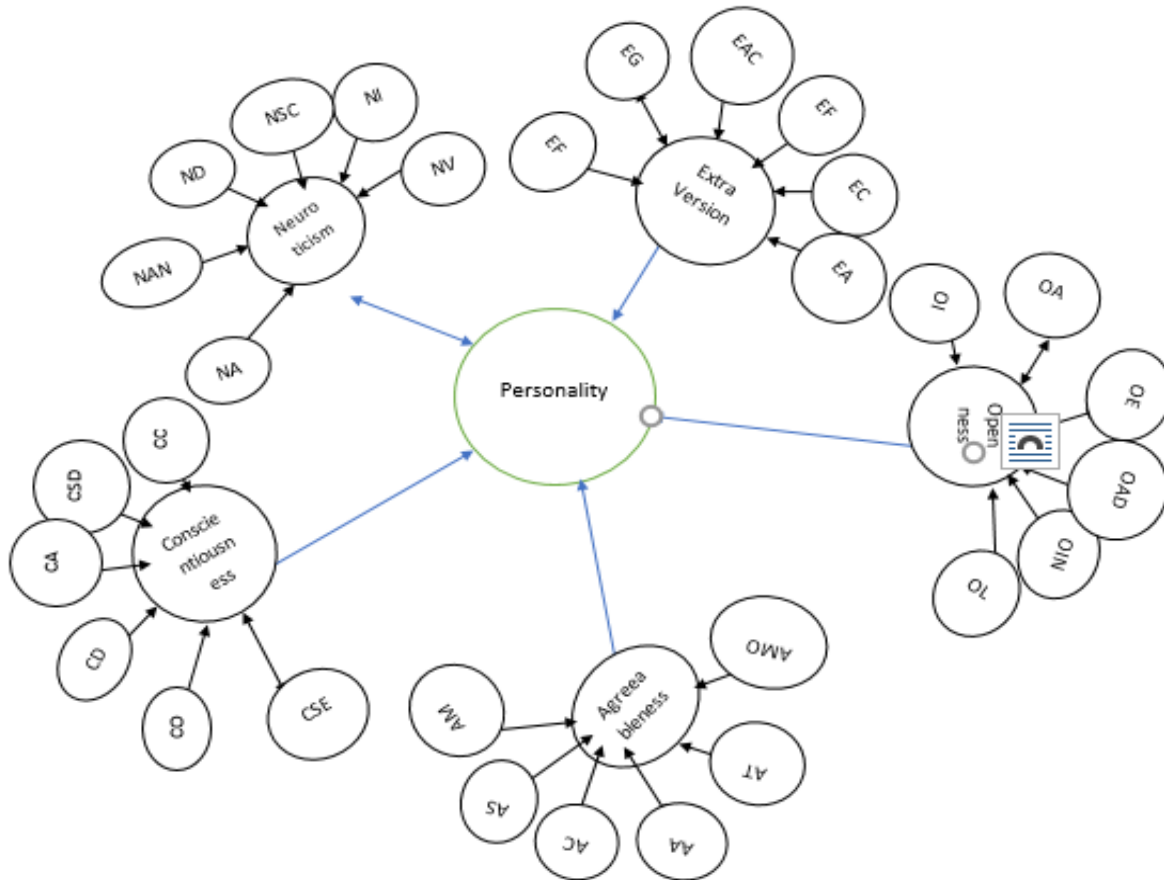
Theoretical Framework

**Personality Traits**

Heller et al. (2009) defined personality traits are the mixture of different factors that develop a patterns and character that direct the behavior of individuals. Almost all human beings have some main personality partialities and those main personality traits and partialities would be forecasted by PT and its signs (Myers-Briggs & McCauley, 1985). PT includes the personality by building unique

lifestyles and thinking methods which orders our experiences and feelings about future (Heller et al., 2002).

Many aspects of our personality come together to make the pieces of our thinking and how we live as a person and how we play our role in the world around us is based on our thinking (Taher et al., 2011). It is stated that character in the start and babyhood is connected to development of the mature personalities and that is discernible and unpredictable aspects could be witnessed in any individual for the whole life (Kornor & Nordvik, 2004). The Big Five personality trait model uses a structure to notice personality traits that were add an ordered model to represent five personality domains (Gosling et al., 2003). According to Goldberg (1993) every domain of personality traits has its own distinctive set of characteristics related to personality traits thus gives a complete picture of personality. According to Lounsbury (2003) the BFFP traits are (1) extraversion PT (2) openness to experience PT (3) conscientiousness PT (4) neuroticism PT (5) agreeableness PT.



**Figure**  
Big five factor of Personality Traits and its aspects Ali.A(2023)

**Big Five Personality Traits/Jung’s Theory Of Personality**

The credit for introducing the Big Five traits personality theory goes to Allport and Henry S. Odbert’s (1936), they develop this theory when they were searching the words related to the Personality in English Dictionary. The researchers exposed 18,000 words and divide those terms into different personality groups as a result 4,500 subsets of personality terms were introduced (Widiger & Trull, 1997). Raymond Cattell (1945) eliminated the synonyms and decrease the number of personality terms to 171 (MacDonald, 1995).

After that Tupes and Christal (1961) recognized the five different factors in the terms identified by Cattell, when they analyzed the database of the military (Judge & Bono, 2000a), these traits were named as namely (1) surgency, (2) agreeableness, (3) dependability, (4) emotional stability, and (5) culture. Carl Jung's Theory of Personality defines different types of personality traits that are unique and innate (Jung, 1971a). Lewis Goldberg (1990) resumes the investigation on the term personality traits and reintroduced the BFFP and confirms the findings of Tupes and Christal (1961), and the attention of researchers into the area of BFFP theory was continued (Costa & McCrae, 1992). According to Bass (1990), personality traits were labeled stable dimensions for personality features that completely define an individual. Drummond and Stoddard (1992); Tobacyk et al. (2008) stated that among researchers the theory of big five factors gained high acceptance and emerged as the best classification of personality characters. According to Zillig et al. (2002)

### **The Leadership Theory**

The pioneer of this theory of leadership was James MacGregor Burns (1978) and he explained this theory in his research work on theories of transformational style (TFL) and also transactional leadership style (TSL) he further explained that the educational leader/administrators must fall into one of the mentioned leadership's categories. Bass (1985) further explained Burns' research work on leadership styles and elaborate specific categories of leadership styles and named these styles as transformational leadership style (TSL), transactional leadership style (TFL), and non-leadership style/laissez-faire leadership (LFL).

According to Bass (1985) professional leaders/administrators cannot follow one leadership style but most leaders possess some part of each leadership style within their personality. The credit for dividing leadership style goes to Bass and Avolio (1996), they divide leadership in three main types and nine subgroups and these subgroups represent different levels of behaviors and leadership styles. Tupes and Christal (1961) introduced the existing BFFP Theory, by investigating the research records and finding patterns in the data. In addition to that, in the research of Goldberg (1990) elaborate the results, that there are five defined categories of personality traits for identification of people, to define themselves and eventually developed a list of personality traits inventory within the five personality traits domains. The link between transformational leadership styles and the BFFP Theory was first highlighted in the research work of Judge and Bono. (Judge and Bono 2000).

According to Bass (1985) that the political leadership and organizations commonly used TSL and TFL styles. Bass (1985) explained that the term leadership and divided it into three different categories, that are TSL, TFL, and non-leader/LFL (Tejeda et al., 2001). Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) was developed by Bass and his team to identify the leadership styles i.e. TSL, TFL, and LFL/non-leadership style (Bass, 1985).

### **Bass's leadership theory**

According to Ali, A, et al. (2023) one of the most commonly used explanations of leadership is that for the achievement of a particular goal or goals, direct communication with followers, interaction with each other and exercise in the situation must be used. According to Arvey et al. (2006) a person may be an effective leader if he/she can lead/ influence his/her followers and achieve the desired results beyond the expectation of subordinates. The subordinates must have a strong emotional attachment to their leader, and as a result of that, the followers must know about the personality traits and behavior of their leader (Hulpia & Devos, 2009). Avolio et al. (1995) presented one of the most commonly used theory of leadership styles is Transformational Leadership Theory, this theory consists of three types of leadership styles are transformational leadership style (TFL), transactional leadership style (TSL) and non-leadership/laissez faire leadership style (LFL) (Antonakis et al., 2003).

### **Transformational Leaders as Educational Administrators**

The transformational leadership theory does not completely represent the leadership but only

represents some particular ideas that were observed in the behavior of leadership (Avolio, 1999). According to Connelly (2008), the secondary school administrators must possess the qualities transformational leader as school administrators visualize the future, work for it, and lead their subordinates for the positive change in the society.

According to the multidimensional model of leadership, personal qualities of the leaders, such as ability to manage the responsibilities and personality, are directly propositional to behavior of the leader, (Chelladurai, 1980, 1993). Duckett, H., and Macfarlane, E. (2003) who developed the concept of TFL and TSL theory by investigating the political leader of that time (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). According to Burns all leaders possess the qualities of one leadership style at a time, either following TFL style or TSL style but not both because both of them are different styles of leadership (Nielsen et al., 2008).

The research work of Burns was extended by Bernard Bass (1985) and he highlighted that leaders can possess the factors of different leadership styles a time (Felfe & Schyns, 2006). According to Bass and Avolio (1996) leadership styles can be divided in three different styles different categories that is transformational leadership style (TFL), the transactional leadership style (TSL), and the laissez-faire leadership (LFL)/non-leadership style and 9 different subcategories to explain any leadership behavior (Cerit, 2009). The TFL theory is mainly depended on the motivation of subordinates and self-realization of the followers (Bass, 1985). Nash and Bangert (2014) indicate that followers are emotionally attached to the transformational leader and followers are inspired by their leader which results in excelling in their performance beyond expectations.

According to Tannenbaum et al. (1961) effective leaders are those who fulfill the needs of their followers, help them to achieve their goals, and improve their skills to upper level. According to the academic researcher, most the PT is related to TFL styles and effectiveness of leaders (Bono and Judge, 2004). According to Smith and Bell (2011) an individual may be a transformational leader if he/she has the ability to encourage, influence, to motivate his/her followers, and most importantly they can shape the attitudes of their followers according to the surrounding environment. A transformational leader encourages their followers by showing positivity, encouraging them to achieve their common objectives, promising to their mentors, and a strong and unshakable belief in the upcoming events in near future (Smith & Bell, 2011). Tejada et al. (2001) stated that transformational leaders are always positive and always help their followers for the achievement of the desired objectives.

(Luthans, 1994) indicates that a transformational always welcome positive change, which occurs in followers or in the organizations.

According to Avolio et al. (1995) a leader provides a strong sense of responsibility and vision to their followers which enable them to see the bigger picture. According to Bass (2000) for the improvement of schools, visionary transformational leadership is essential. Atwater et al. (1998) explained that due to selfishness and biasness of transformational leader rates themselves higher than the rating of their followers. Naturally, in transformational leadership, the vision and mission statements are shared among all group members and play an active role in society (Bass, 1999). Evans and Johnson, (1990) stated that Transformational leaders always encourage the followers to enjoy independence and the power to make their own decisions in a peaceful environment.

Decisions of the administration are depending on leadership practices; therefore, the style of leadership defines the direction of an organization (Walumbwa et al., 2007). Nowadays leadership studies emphasize maximum on team oriented methods and minimum on the hierarchical method (Bass, 1999).

### **The Transactional Leader as Educational Administrator**

According to Smith and Bell (2011) transactional leader did not accept change easily and must give rewards to their subordinates if they agreed that the performance of their subordinates was good. The transactional leader stresses answerability and does not intervene in official matters of their

subordinates/ teachers (Smith & Bell, 2011). According to Hoy and Miskel (1996) transactional leaders usually follow already set objectives and then observe and control results. Furthermore, transactional leader controls their subordinates and strictly follow the rules of reward and punishments for achievements of the already set objectives (Antonakis et al., 2003; Bass & Avolio, 1996).

In contrary to transformational that the Transactional leaders always believes in specified measures and not easily go away from already settled operating systems and procedures. Transformational leadership style and Transactional leadership style have some important and known characteristics, and these characteristics are different from each another i.e. transactional leadership style is associated with the assigned task and how the outcomes of the assigned task are presented. The transactional leadership style is related with implementation of rewards and punishments policy and also closely supervised the subordinates (Harm & Credé, 2010). According to Northouse, (2016) the transformational leadership style is mainly concerned with ethics, standards, emotions, and long term objectives, and these leaders are less task oriented and more people oriented. When Bono and Judge, (2004) studying the two leadership style i.e., transactional leadership style, transformational leadership style and its correlation with personality traits, they found that the correlation is strong and positive among leadership styles and five aspects of PT.

A transformational leader sees an organization like a machine and not like a growing organism (Smith & Bell, 2011). According to Bycio (1995) it is the Transactional leader responsibility to assign and identify the responsibilities to the

followers and a collective vision must be created for the organization. According to (Zopiatis & Constanti, 2009) the followers may be charismatic and inspirational if the leader leads them as a role model. The motivation and overall work performance of the followers are highly dependable on the attachment with their leader and the connection between leader and follower is highly important (Herzberg, 1959).

### **The Laissez-Faire Leaders as Educational Leader**

The laissez-faire leaders or non-leaders are those individual who avoid leading their followers and are not present when their followers need him/her (Bass & Avolio, 1996). The avoidance observed lack of leadership, lack of decision making, and escaping from responsibilities in LFL (Bycio, 1995). The most ineffective style of leadership is LFL leadership (Weinberger, 2009). Laissez-faire leaders did not motivate their followers, did not make the right decision on time, and feedback is also not given (Weinberger, 2009). Tejeda et al. (2001) explained that LFL is basically a type of administration and opposite to leadership and not proactive but reactionary. According to Bass (1999) the personality of a Laissez-faire leader is mostly witnessed with the quality of procrastination, conflicting with avoidance and non-involvement in official matters. (Bass, 1999; Antonakis et al., 2003) define the Laissez-faire leader as relinquishing decision-making, do not take any responsibility, and do not implement their authority.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite extensive research on leadership and personality, there is limited empirical data on how neuroticism affects educational leadership in conflict-affected states like Afghanistan. The psychological toll of leading under democratic reform versus ideological authoritarianism remains underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by comparing neuroticism levels and Educational leadership styles among Afghan educational leaders across two regimes.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a **comparative, repeated cross-sectional quantitative design**. Data were collected at **two distinct time points** in 2020 during Afghanistan's democratic governance and in 2025 under Taliban rule. While each dataset is cross-sectional, the two datasets together allow for

temporal comparison across political regimes. This design is appropriate for examining how the relationship between neuroticism **and** educational leadership may shift under differing socio-political contexts.

**Population**

Educational leaders include school principals, administrators, College Principals working in Afghanistan during the year 2020 Democratic Government and 2025 in Taliban era.

**Sampling**

Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample. The population was divided **two** into stratum i.e., rural and urban In the year *2020 in Democratic Era and in the year 2025 in Taliban Era* the Participants were randomly drawn from urban and ruler area schools/ Colleges/ Educational Administrators form five districts (Kabul, Kandahar, Balkh, Nangarhar (Jalalabad), Herat) from thirty four districts. Twenty educational leaders were from each district using simple random sample. In twenty educational leaders, ten were school principals; five were college principal and five from education admiration. This technique was chosen for its ability to minimize sampling error and provide equal representation to all items in different strata. The sample size was determined based on a 4% sampling error and a 95% confidence interval Ali, A., et.al (2025).

**Sample Size:**

One hundred Educational leaders were the participants per era (total n = 200), ensuring statistical power for comparative analysis.

**Data Collection Instruments**

Neuroticism trait of Personality: Measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44), focusing on the neuroticism subscale.

Educational Leadership: Assessed through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which captures transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. Demographic Data: Age, gender, years of experience, and institutional type were recorded to control for confounding variables. Both instruments were translated into Dari and Pashto, and back-translated to ensure linguistic and cultural validity.

**Data Collection Procedure**

In the year 2020 Democratic Era and 2025 Taliban Era the data was collected through Surveys. The questioners were administered in person at schools, College and educational institutions, with informed consent obtained and strictly following the SoPs of the Afghan Government.

**Data Analysis**

The statistical analysis of data collected from 200 educational leaders in Afghanistan, 100 during the Democratic era in year 2020 and 100 during the Taliban era in the year 2025. The study examines the relationship between six aspects of neuroticism i.e., Anxiety, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability, and Hostility and three educational leadership styles i.e., Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-Faire.

**Mean score of six aspects of neuroticism and three educational leadership styles.**

Era	Anxiety	Depression	Self-Consciousness	Impulsiveness	Vulnerability	Hostility	Transformational	Transactional	Laissez-Faire
Democratic	2.1	2.9	2.7	2.8	2.9	2.8	4.0	3.0	2.2
Taliban	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.9	3.0	3.1	3.4

The table shows that Neuroticism scores are consistently higher in the Taliban era and transformational style of educational leadership decreases **and** transactional and laissez-faire style of educational leadership increase. Clear increase was found in all six aspects neuroticism in the Taliban era, which indicate a major psychological shift toward stress, insecurity, and negative affect

**t-Test of six aspects of neuroticism and three educational leadership styles**

Variable	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Anxiety	-14.22	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Depression	-13.28	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Self-Consciousness	-12.32	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Impulsiveness	-14.10	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Vulnerability	-13.11	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Hostility	-19.92	<0.001	Expressively greater in Taliban era
Transformational	14.62	<0.001	Expressively greater in Democratic era
Transactional	10.14	<0.001	Expressively greater in Democratic era
Laissez-Faire	11.82	<0.001	Expressively greater in Democratic era

The table indicates that all six aspects of Neuroticism i.e., Anxiety, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability and Hostility were significantly higher in the Taliban era and statistically significance exists in all six aspects of neuroticism. This shows that educational leaders practiced greater psychological distress, insecurity, and emotional instability under Taliban governance. The table above indicates that all three educational leadership styles i.e., Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire were significantly higher in the Democratic era as compared to the Taliban era. The increase in Transformational educational leadership increased, showing educational leaders were more exciting, inventive, and cooperative. Transactional educational leadership was also rose, shows a emphasis on organization, passivity, and presentation and observing. Similarly, Laissez-Faire leadership showed a growth, indicating to a more submissive or hands off approach in certain contexts. Overall, the statistical results confirm that each style of educational leadership experienced a significant increase during the Democratic era.

**Pearson correlation table showing the relationships between the six aspects of neuroticism and the three leadership styles**

Neuroticism Aspect	Transformational Leadership	Transactional Leadership	Laissez-Faire Leadership
Anxiety	-0.35	-0.40	-0.29
Depression	-0.50	-0.29	-0.28
Self-Consciousness	-0.42	-0.16	-0.20
Impulsiveness	-0.36	-0.31	-0.15
Vulnerability	-0.48	-0.34	-0.23
Hostility	-0.41	-0.35	-0.35

The table above indicates that Transformational educational Leadership was negatively correlated with all six aspects of neuroticism. The maximum correlation was found with Depression where Pearson’s correlation coefficient is  $r = -0.50$ . Transactional educational Leadership moderately negatively correlated with all aspects, with Anxiety the value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient is  $r = -0.40$  and Hostility Pearson’s correlation coefficient is  $r = -0.34$ . Laissez-Faire Leadership: Shows moderate negatively correlations, especially with Depression Pearson’s correlation coefficient are  $r = 0.38$  and Hostility the value of Pearson’s correlation coefficient is  $r = 0.35$ .

## Regression Analysis of the six aspects of neuroticism and the three leadership styles

Neuroticism Aspect	Transformational ( $\beta$ )	Transactional ( $\beta$ )	Laissez-Faire ( $\beta$ )
Anxiety	-0.32	-0.12	-0.20
Depression	-0.35	-0.08	-0.15
Self-Consciousness	-0.34	-0.05	-0.14
Impulsiveness	-0.30	-0.10	-0.12
Vulnerability	-0.29	-0.09	-0.14
Hostility	-0.31	-0.11	-0.16

The above table shows that Transformational educational Leadership Strong *negative*  $\beta$  values in all aspects of neuroticism trait. Which indicate that educational leaders' anxiety, depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability and hostility increases, their quality to motivate, transform, and cooperation decreases in Taliban era. The strongest predictor is **Depression ( $\beta \approx -0.35$ )**. Transactional educational Leadership Shows *slight negative relationship* which shows that Educational Leadership under Taliban control, facing delicate stress and uncertainty and discover it tougher to regularly impose planned reward punishment systems. High psychological distress reduces leaders' ability to monitor, control, and reward effectively, leading to a breakdown of transactional mechanisms. Laissez-Faire educational Leadership also shows *slight negative relationship* suggesting that the in Taliban era, leaders under intense psychological strain were not even manage a consistent hands off stance. Instead, they were become erratic, inconsistent, or disengaged altogether. which reduces the appearance of a stable laissez-faire pattern.

### Discussion

The study provides compelling evidence that the political and social environment in Afghanistan has a direct impact on the psychological state of educational leaders and their leadership styles. During the Democratic era, leaders exhibited lower neuroticism and higher engagement in transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. In contrast, the Taliban era was marked by significantly elevated neuroticism and a decline in all three leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership.

The consistent increase in anxiety, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, vulnerability, and hostility during the Taliban era reflects a broader climate of fear, uncertainty, and instability. These findings align with psychological theories that link authoritarian governance and conflict environments to heightened stress and emotional deregulation. Elevated neuroticism not only undermines leaders' personal well being but also diminishes their capacity to lead effectively.

Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and collaboration, was significantly higher in the Democratic era. Regression analysis confirmed strong negative  $\beta$  values across all neuroticism aspects, with depression being the strongest predictor ( $\beta \approx -0.35$ ). This suggests that as leaders became more depressed and anxious, their ability to motivate and transform their institutions diminished. The decline of transformational leadership under Taliban governance indicates a loss of innovation, cooperation, and forward-thinking in educational institutions.

Transactional leadership, which depends on structured systems of rewards and punishments, showed a slight negative relationship with neuroticism. This suggests that leaders under Taliban rule, facing high psychological distress, found it increasingly difficult to enforce consistent organizational structures. The breakdown of transactional mechanisms reflects the erosion of order and accountability in educational institutions, as leaders lacked the stability to monitor and reward effectively.

Interestingly, laissez-faire leadership also showed a slight negative relationship with neuroticism. While laissez-faire is often associated with passivity or delegation, in the Taliban era it appears that extreme psychological strain prevented leaders from even maintaining a consistent hands-off stance.

Instead, leaders became erratic, inconsistent, or disengaged altogether. This indicates that laissez-faire leadership in this context was not a deliberate style but rather a collapse of leadership presence.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Taliban era was associated with significantly higher neuroticism and reduced leadership effectiveness among educational leaders in Afghanistan. Transformational leadership suffered the greatest decline, while transactional and laissez-faire styles also weakened under psychological strain. The results underscore the importance of fostering psychological resilience and political stability to sustain effective educational leadership.

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