

## Title: The Bamiyan Buddhas as a powerful symbol of considerable socio-political kudos

Class | **GCT 567 Social Computing**

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### Introduction

Societies have long sought to protect their cultural heritage. In times of conflict and war, cultural identity become all the more important. This is because heritage values derived from the heritage sites encompasses the significance of the historic environment to contemporary communities including people's sense of identity and belonging. Accordingly, heritage such as the Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan can become targets of oppressive action that seeks to destroy the cultural symbols or the iconography associated with alternative faiths and traditions. Moreover, the protection or destruction of cultural heritage has not only social but political consequences; its violent actions by the Taliban to the Bamiyan Buddha are used as a political tool for nation-building in order to display their political power so on. The purpose of this study is to analyze how cultural heritage is understood and interpreted in the conflict zones by revealing about the public perspectives and stances on the destroyed heritage. In light of this, we explore to discover various social, political and cultural aspects towards the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan on Twitter by mapping the key themes both from national and international communities using a search keyword 'Bamiyan' in English and Farsi.

### Methods

We crawled keywords related to Bamiyan from **English** and **Farsi** tweets. After preprocessing and data cleansing, we reached over **21-thousand** tweets during **2021.01.01~10.07**.

The Bamiyan is a **multivalent** issue that needs a careful study not only at the **macro-level** but also in **micro topics**. At the same time, we are looking through Bamiyan from a tiny window of twitter's posts and comments.

We studied the magnitude of tweets per subject over time to understand the big picture, applying **text mining techniques** to grasp the details. We applied the **sentimental analysis** to draw the tweets direction and **Word2Vec** to map out the relationship between events, topics, locations and influential people.

Since many events and topics include Bamiyan, we need to select a handful of topics to exploit the interactions. The topic selection starts by removing stop-words and **categorising** keywords to **cities** of Afghanistan, **people**, **events** and **topics**, then we elect the **most frequent** ones and draw the results.

### Results

#### Before the Taliban regime took over

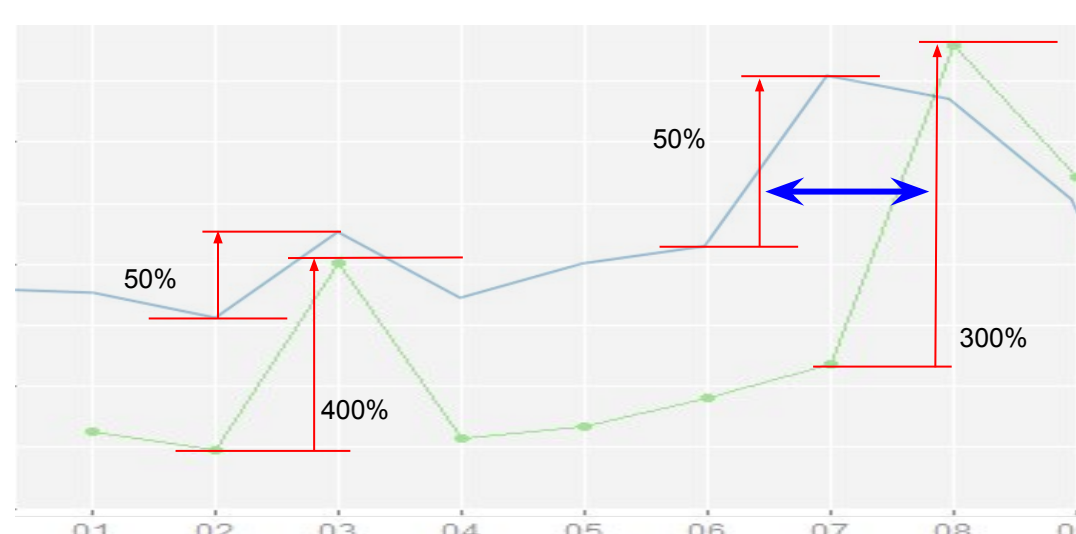
The word "Bamiyan" was understood and appeared in social media as related to the cultural heritage of the Buddha, which remains destroyed in the Afghanistan valley.

#### The withdrawal of the U.S. military in April 2021

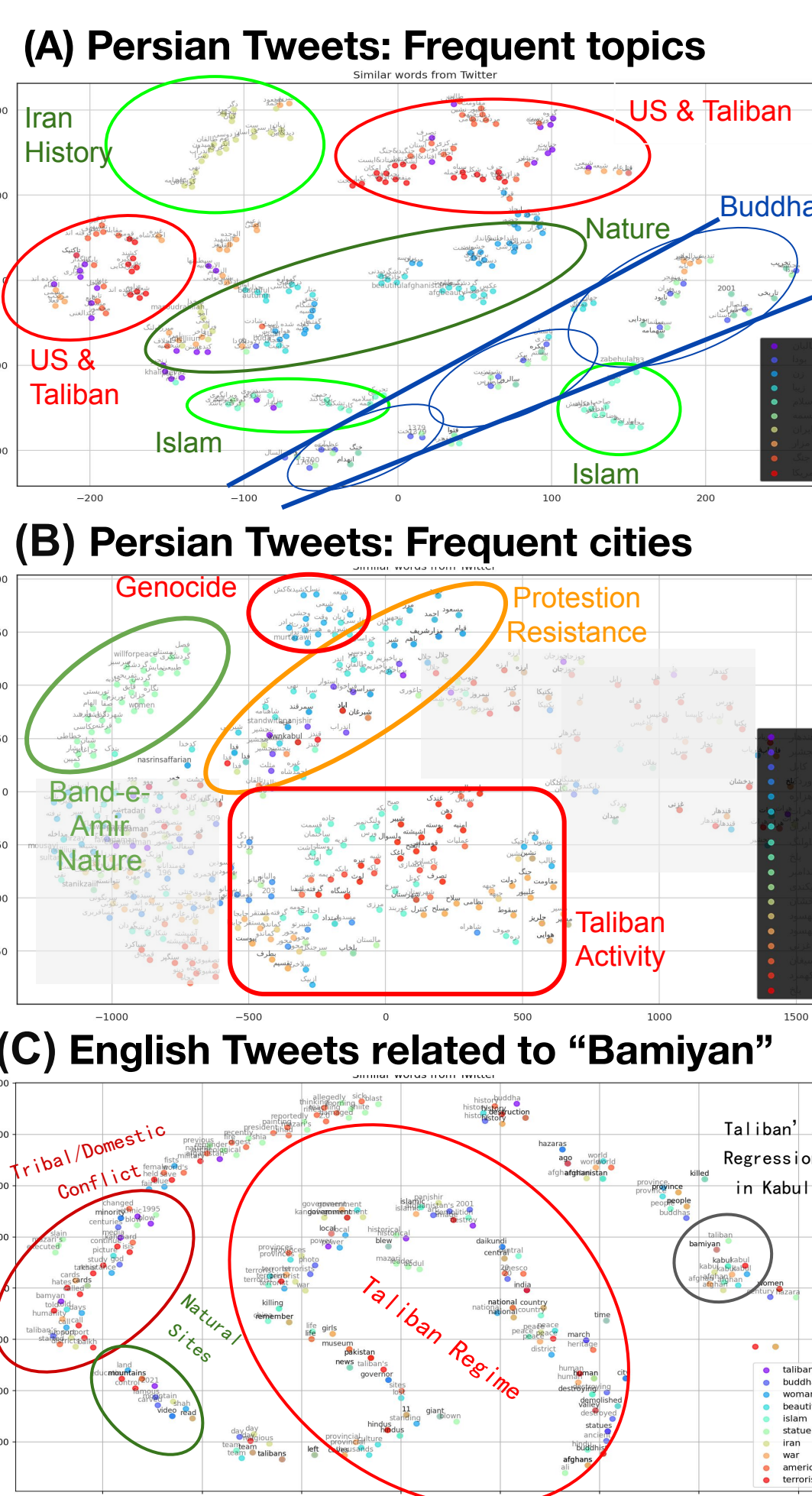
The word "Taliban" emerged as the most similar to the word "Bamiyan" in relation. Then, words related to the Taliban's destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas as an act of cultural heritage eradication in 2001 appeared.

#### After the Taliban dominated Afghanistan in August 2021

The meaning of the word "Bamiyan" has been depicted on social media as very close to the word "Taliban". Even the Hazaras people, who were suppressed by the Taliban in the Kabul region, predominantly appeared together.



[Fig 1] Importance of Event in Local and Global Scale (# of Tweets)



#### Domestic (Farsi) Tweets

Contained various contexts such as nature and religious background related to Bamiyan and political issues.

#### Global (English) Tweets

Political issues related to Bamiyan, especially the context related to Taliban, was dominant. In other words, the view of Bamiyan in the perception of the international community is treated as political point of view rather than as a cultural heritage or cultural value.

[Fig 2] Recent Farsi and English Data Results of Word2Vec

### Lessons learned & Concluding Remarks

This research examined how the socio-political contexts surrounding the Bamiyan Buddha have changed according to the 2021 political situation in Afghanistan by extracting words that have similar embedding values to the word "Bamiyan".

As political events changed (a democratic society, the withdrawal of US troops and the full power of the Taliban) in Afghanistan, The meaning of Bamiyan, which was similar to the value of cultural heritage, changed similarly to the Taliban related to the political issue in Afghanistan.

In addition, this study compared Farsi tweets and English tweets to confirm how the interests for the Bamiyan differ the point of view between Afghanistan and the international community. In Afghanistan, there were opinions on Bamiyan in various contexts, including natural, religious, and political perspectives. On the other hand, the international community's interest in Bamiyan was dominated by interest in the political context surrounding the Taliban.