

## **BUILDING DEMOCRACY: CHALLENGES, VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS OF AFGHANISTAN SINCE 2004**

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the world, one of the most crucial components in ensuring the functionality of election system is public engagement in different governance activities. The presence of traditional political leaders, the legacy of war, and disengagement of public from politics are all factors that have hindered Afghanistan's transition to democracy. Following the Taliban's defeat by US troops in 2001, Afghanistan adopted democratic norms and principles. In 2004, presidential elections were held for the first time, and citizens participated in order to transform Afghanistan into a democratic nation. However, public participation in elections has been steadily declining. There has been political violence, frauds, corruption and terror threats in the electoral process of Afghanistan. As a result, this paper details an in-depth examination of the presidential elections held in Afghanistan using data obtained from the country's Independent Election Commission (IEC) database. Additionally, this study analyses some of the primary causes for non-participation of citizens in election processes.

**Key words:** Afghanistan, elections, violence, frauds, participation,

### **Introduction**

Political participation refers to those activities conducted by private citizens that aim at influencing the government, either by affecting the choices of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel. Some political and social scientists explain participation as a decisive act by which people have tried to react to the political system according to their will (Menon and Hartz-Karp 2019). Some political scientists have been working on the role of the public in politics to find out a person's belief in politics. Youth and women's political participation is seen by analysts as a significant factor in democratization. Therefore, the model of democracy is vital to the development of every society. The term democracy is not used for only men, but it includes every citizen. The comprehensive understanding of democracy has been described as an effective access to democracy comprises the substantial involvement of men and women in social and political matters centered on equality, complementary and mutual benefit (Beetham et al. 2008). Since democracy provides the necessary terms and conditions for political institutions, so it helps to establish a civil society. The aim of these institutions increases citizen involvement in politics. The democratic political system is based on four fundamental principles. First, citizens involvement in the democratic process. It ensures that men and women participate equally in political engagements for the good of the government. Second, explicit concept of political participation gives people of society the ability to share their interests, desires, and facts to public leaders. Third, protection of human rights all the citizens. Fourth, establishment of a rule of law in which laws and procedures apply equally to all people. In American politics, a broad representation of public opinion is seen to be largely voluntary for political participation. Americans are enthusiastically involved in politics and the political leader who take part in politics are active in public matters (Michels and De Graaf 2010). The vote is one of the most spectacular among various political actions by people in political participation. Voting on a ballot paper is the simplest way to participate in political activities.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan has conducted four national presidential and three parliamentary elections. Unfortunately, the country's political system has shown significant deficiencies in each election phase. Both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010, respectively, were plagued by systematic fraud and eroded the legitimacy of the electoral management institutions in Afghanistan (Callen and Long 2015a). Thus, such acts have shown that complete democratic reform is necessary (Anna 2021). It is apparent that voting varies based on political conditions and developments in every country and election worldwide. However, in Afghanistan, the vote in presidential elections has changed significantly from one election to the

next. In 2004, the country saw the highest voting turnout. More than 70% of people registered for voting, and more than 50% were eligible for votes. This election has had the largest turnout in any election held ever (Coburn and Larson n.d.). However, the 2019 presidential election saw the lowest turnout in Afghanistan's political history, with less than 20% voting. Such a change in voting turnout indicated a lack of interest of the public in participating in electoral processes. As a result, it is critical to identify the fundamental factors that influence voter participation resulting in a lower turnout rate and the role of political parties and electoral institutions in the electoral processes of Afghanistan during elections (Gomes 2018). In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the public engagement in presidential elections of Afghanistan and review the factors that contribute to the non-participation of the public in electoral voting in Afghanistan.

### **Understanding the presidential election system and its scenarios**

According to Article 61 of the Afghanistan Constitution, it has a two-tier majority system. This means that the president is elected by free, public, secret and direct voting with more than fifty percent of the votes (i.e., absolute majority) (Coburn and Larson 2013). Whenever in the first round no candidate can win a majority of more than fifty percent votes, the election for the second round would be held within two weeks from the date of the announcement of the election results and in this round only two candidates who won the most votes (simple majority) in the first round will participate (Berman et al. 2019).

When the people directly elect a president, he usually has more power because he has the degree of democracy, legitimacy, and strong support of the people. However, if the president is elected indirectly, i.e., through parliament or elected assemblies, his powers are limited. A survey conducted by the Afghanistan Institute for Strategic Studies on multi-republican competencies shows that most respondents want the president to be reduced (Berman et al. 2019; Celis et al. 2013). Similarly, a 2012 poll by the United States Agency for International Development shows that 71 percent of Afghan parliamentarians interviewed believe that the president is too powerful in the current Afghan political system. In any case, according to Article 61 of the Constitution, the type of electoral system for the Afghan presidential election is a two-term majority system (Katzman n.d.). Now the question arises regarding the equality of votes.

If there is a tie between two or more candidates who won the majority of votes in the first round of elections, how will the election round be held? An interesting point is this that there is no provision in the Constitution in this regard. Still, the election law makes it clear that in the event of a tie between more than two candidates who received the most votes in the first round, the two candidates who meet the highest criteria, have a degree, work experience in government or non-government offices, have a medal or honorary title, are appointed as candidates for the second round (Vollan 2017). In the second round of elections, the candidate who wins the majority of votes becomes the president. In the event of a tie between the candidates in the second round, the winning candidate will be announced as President based on the above criteria. It should be noted that the requirements provided by the election law must be evaluated and approved at the time of registration of candidates so that when invoking those criteria, the rival candidate cannot challenge the election process (Shah 2004).

The death of a presidential candidate is also one of the issues that the constitution has considered. According to the sixth paragraph of Article 61 of the Afghanistan Constitution, "whenever one of the presidential candidates during the first or second round of voting or after the election the re-election will be held under the provisions of the law (Byrd 2015). It should be noted that the word "death" is used in the constitution, which includes natural death. Still, in the event that one of the candidates is assassinated in the first or second round of elections, the position of the constitution is clear" (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan n.d.).

With the resignation of the presidential candidate, another important issue is debatable. The constitution is silent on the issue of candidates withdrawing in the first and second rounds of elections. In contrast, the election law explicitly states that "if one candidate does not run in the second round, the other candidate will be declared the winner" (Doğan 2014). It should be noted that

the legitimacy of the president, who came to power as a result of the resignation of a rival candidate in the second round, is not free of criticism because, in this way, the right to vote as one of the fundamental rights of citizens is violated. At the same time, the president may not have had the necessary popular support. In addition, given the importance and essential position of the presidency, whenever such a solution is envisaged, it should be envisaged by the constitution, not by the election law. In the above cases, it is possible that a candidate will not be able to run in the elections due to other obstacles, such as being injured or other obstacles, and the constitution is silent about such a situation.

According to the Constitution, early elections are possible due to reasons such as resignation, dismissal, incurable illness, and the death of the president. The constitution explicitly states that the first vice president assumes the powers and duties of the president in the event of the resignation, removal, or death of the president or an incurable disease that prevents him from performing his duties. For more clarity in the above four cases, information is provided below. One of the reasons for the early elections is the resignation of the president. The president must personally announce his resignation to the National Assembly. The purpose of the resignation of the President himself is to establish that the President has voluntarily agreed to leave the post without reluctance, coercion, or any other matter that impairs his consent.

According to Article 69 of the Constitution, the President is accountable to the nation and the Wolesi Jirga. Charges against the President for crimes against humanity, national treason, or other crime may be filed (entered) by one-third of all members of the Wolesi Jirga. If this charge is confirmed by two-thirds of all votes of the Wolesi Jirga, the Wolesi Jirga shall convene a Loya Jirga within one month. Whenever the Loya Jirga approves the charge by a two-thirds majority of the total number of members, the President shall be removed from office and the matter shall be referred to a special court. The Special Court is composed of the Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga, three members of the Wolesi Jirga and three members of the Supreme Court to appoint the Loya Jirga. The lawsuit is filed by a person appointed by the Loya Jirga, in which case the provisions of Article Sixty-seven of the Constitution shall apply.

It follows from the above constitutional provision that the president has only criminal responsibility towards the Wolesi Jirga; he has no political accountability. Similarly, the contrary meaning of Article Sixty-Nine follows that the President will not be tried if he commits other crimes apart from the crimes mentioned. While the president in the United States is prosecuted for treason, corruption, bribery, or other serious crimes; On the other hand, according to which Shari'a decree, the President should be considered safe from committing crimes other than those mentioned above. If the president dies for any reason, the vice president takes over the presidency, in which early elections must be held within three months. Therefore, the death of the president will lead to early elections. In terms of time, having elections within three months does not seem possible. The incurable disease of the president is also one of the cases that cause early elections. Incurable disease is a disease that is difficult to treat. In this case, the president's illness must be confirmed by a qualified medical board. In view of what has been pointed out, the Court of Appeals concludes that early presidential elections are held in the event of the resignation, removal, death and incurable illness of the President, the Electoral Law provides for early elections and their conditions.

The foregoing discussion illustrates the age of the president should not be less than forty years on the day of his candidacy; had only Afghan citizenship, was Muslim, born to Afghan parents; and has not been convicted by a court of committing a crime, crimes against humanity or deprivation of civil rights (Shah 2004). The duration of the presidential term, with the exception of the first term of the presidency, is four years. The type of electoral system for the presidential election is two-stage and in case of resignation, dismissal, incurable disease and death of the president, early elections would be held (Thier 2006). The president owes only criminal responsibility to the Wolesi Jirga. In view of the above issues, to improve the conditions of the presidential candidates, the term and period of the presidency and how to hold early elections, the following key points are presented:

1. The Constitution does not provide for literacy, higher education and the managerial ability for presidential candidates.

2. The Constitution is silent on the withdrawal of presidential candidates, but the election law addresses this issue. It is suggested that this be fully enshrined in the constitution.
3. The Constitution considers the state of death of candidates. Still, the position of the constitution is not clear concerning the assassination of candidates in the first or second round and situations such as injuries, injuries and other obstacles.
4. Early presidential elections in the event of the president's resignation, dismissal, death, and incurable illness are provided for in the constitution. However, the election law does not set rules for holding early elections and their conditions, and specific rules must be set.
5. The Constitution and election law do not provide a realistic timeline for the presidential election, as 60 days is not enough to hold the election, even though the president must take office thirty days after the results are announced. Therefore, it would be better to consider a reasonable timeline for holding presidential elections, both in terms of duration and climate.
6. The Constitution does not provide a specific solution to the situation in which the presidential election could not be held on time for various reasons, so it is necessary to pay attention to this issue when amending the constitution. Although the 2016 election law recognizes the continuation of the president's work, this issue must be clearly stated in the constitution.

#### **Nature of election process with reference the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system**

Although there were profound shortcomings in the administrative and political process of 2005 elections, the quality of free or fair elections in the 2010 elections reached its lowest point. It is possible that the country's slide into violence and the spread of corruption and supportive policies that took place in the early years disrupted the election, even though it was part of any electoral system(Singh 2019). However, it was also strongly possible that the incentives that the non-transferable single vote produced for the corruption of the electoral system would make matters worse again(Dodge 2011). A total of 2,000 complaints of electoral fraud, as well as 1.3 million votes in the 2010 election, were annulled, in fact, 25 percent of the total and more than the number of invalidated votes in the previous year's presidential election, of which there was criticism(Mukhopadhyay 2016; WEIDMANN and CALLEN 2013).

The non-transferable electoral system (SNTV) was chosen for Afghanistan when the country was in transition. Occasionally, Afghans and the international community, and even those who recommended using this electoral system in 2005, have expressed concern about the suitability of this system for Afghanistan, saying that it is a post-election electoral system. In this country, it should have been considered and reformed(Reynolds 2006). The results of this electoral system have been what some have doubted. During its first seven years in office, the Wolesi Jirga, or Afghan House of Representatives, has shown that it is a mechanism for trade, customer service, the emergence of coalitions, and a place where people with not-so-good pasts have dramatically dominated the country's future(A Middle Finger to the Past: Afghanistan Votes, Despite the Odds n.d.). The new Liberal Democrat and Progressive Parties have faced severe obstacles in conveying their messages and choosing candidates. As expected, women have not been able to mobilize effectively on their common interests. President Karzai's team may have hoped that the electoral system would delay the emergence of new political parties, fragment opposition political parties, and increase the ability of influential people in the provinces to support and elect their supporters in parliament (Sultana and Aquil 2009). Perhaps President Karzai's ideal scenario was for a loyal, Pashtun bloc to emerge with this electoral system, with the executive backed by the legislature.Although this electoral system helped to disintegrate the opposition and prevent the formation of new political parties, this electoral system also led to the disintegration of the foundation in support of President Karzai in the absence of a united party within the whip. As in the last three presidential elections, the support of the majority for the "pro-government" group has often been fluid and unreliable(Gomes 2018).

The electoral system of the non-transferable single vote was adapted with many mistakes in this country. It was a blow to the millions of Afghans who deserved a transparent system for electing and appointing the first democratic parliament in their country(Ghadiri, Sara T. 2010).



### **Understanding public participation in presidential elections of Afghanistan (2004-2019)**

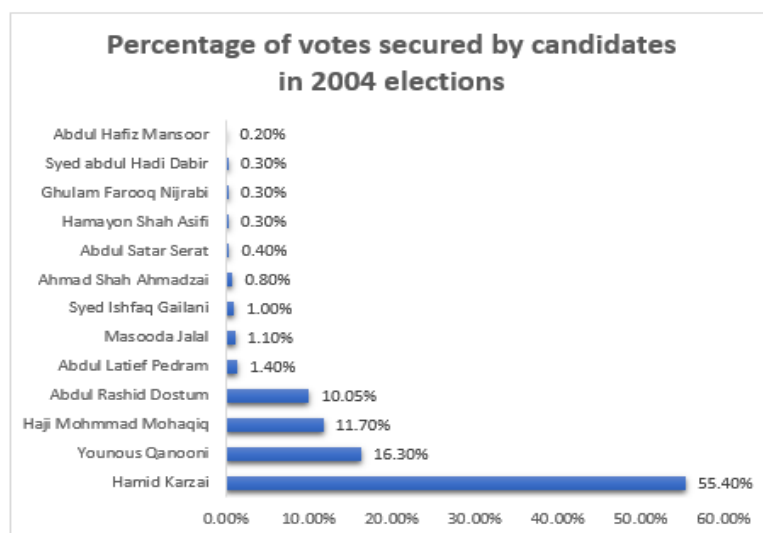
Since adopting the constitution in 2004, Afghanistan has held seven national elections, four presidential and three parliamentary elections. Hamid Karzai ruled the country for thirteen years, and in 2014, he could not hold the majority in elections. President Hamid Karzai, bound by a term restriction, did not come back as an incumbent in the 2014 presidential election (Katzman n.d.). In the first round of those elections held in April 2014, when no contender met the criteria of 50% majority, former Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Abdullah and former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani competed for the second round of elections in June 2014. In the second round, Abdullah and his supporters alleged fraud in the preliminary results that showed him losing to Ghani and forced an audit of the polling count, supervised by the U.N. (Landmark Afghanistan Presidential Election Held Under Shadow Of Violence | HuffPost n.d.). The conflict was finally settled only by direct mediation of the U.S. State Secretary John Kerry, leading to a new Abdullah as new extra-constitutional “chief executive” and Ghani as president and Abdullah. Disputes continued throughout the term of the coalition government about the respective powers of both leaders, notably concerning nominations at the national and the provincial governments. A commitment to reform the electoral process was a crucial component of the original coalition government agreement in 2014, which moved slowly during the government's first years in office as both sides tried to take control of or otherwise exercise vetoes over the process (Afghanistan 2017). President Ghani passed the new electoral legislation by executive order in September 2016. New commissioners were appointed in November 2016 to the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC), which supervises the election process, and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) was setup for looking into election complaints. A year later, in November 2017, Ghani appointed new President of the IEC. In the context of the continuing electoral reform debates and IEC instability, the elections parliamentary elections of 2015 were delayed. These elections finally took place in October 2018 after several delays. President Ghani issued a further executive order in February 2019, revising Afghanistan's Electoral Law and dismissing all members of the IEC and ECC, in reaction to claims of fraud and mishandling of parliamentary elections that took six months to complete ((Afghanistan's Incomplete New Electoral Law 2017).

### **The 2004 Presidential election**

On October 9, 2004, the first presidential election took place. The turnout was approximately 80%. Hamid Karzai was sworn in as President of Afghanistan in December 2004 after winning the first round of voting (55.4 percent of the vote) over 17 challengers (Election of Karzai Is Declared Official - The New York Times n.d.). During 2005, he governed by decree since the National Assembly had not yet been formed. Despite having Pashtuns in his inner circle, Karzai was known for putting ethnic and political factions in high government positions (Goodson 2005). During Karzai's first elected term, Ahmad Zia Masoud, the brother of slain Northern Alliance supreme military commander Ahmad Shah Masoud, served as first vice president. Hamid Karzai was officially declared victor of the 2004 presidential election in Afghanistan by the Joint Electoral Management Body Secretariat (JEMB) on November 3, 2004. President Karzai earned 55.4 percent of the vote, Qanooni 16.3 percent, Mohaqeq 11.7 percent, and Dustam 10 percent, while the other 12 candidates received a combined 7% of the vote. JEMB chairman, Zakim Shah stated that President Karzai received 4,443,029 legally counted votes out of a total of 8,128,940. President Karzai had a sufficiently strong lead of around 39.1 percentage over his closest opponent, Qanooni, who won 1306,503 votes. 935325 votes were received by Muhaq and 804861 by Dustam [figure 1]. Only four candidates received more than 10% of the vote (Johnson 2006). While Karzai won resounding victories in the country's south, southeast, northeast, and western zones, all of which are dominated by the Pashtun ethnic majority, Karzai appeared to have performed fairly well in the country's north and central zones, which are dominated by Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and other minorities. Karzai fared exceedingly well in various portions of non-Pashtun areas. One study shows that 86% of the voters in Pashtun supported President Karzai. That wasn't unexpected since Karzai belongs to one of

Afghanistan's major ethnic communities. But 40% of Tajiks, surprisingly, voted for Karzai as well. In addition, 16% of Uzbeks and 21% of Hazara votes have been supported by Karzai (Karzai Divides Afghanistan In Reaching Out to Taliban - WSJ n.d.). Afghanistan continues to be a predominantly rural nation with strong ethnic and tribal connections. However, even if they belonged to an ethnic rival, most Afghans seemed to have cast their ballots for the one they felt best for Afghanistan. The Afghans living in Iran and Pakistan also supported Karzai by a majority. In Pakistan, 80% of votes cast and 44,4% of votes cast in Iran were polled for Karzai. It is worth noting that most Afghans living in Iran speak Persian ("Ethnicity, Space, and Politics in Afghanistan" by Benjamin Dubow n.d.; Riphenburg 2005). This election is notable for its rejection of dictatorship in all its manifestations and for establishing legitimacy for a new administration led by Hamid Karzai. Karzai was not a member of political or civil war organizations. Karzai gained the confidence of the people being neutral in the factional conflict.

Moreover, the challengers of Karzai lacked popular backing and vision. Karzai was chosen with the hope of reliving the Afghan identity and its standing in international politics. Most of the "enlightened Afghans" feel that their worldwide reputation will allow them to set Afghanistan on the path to a peaceful and stable, progressive and prosperous country (Andisha 2015).



*Figure 1- Percentage of Votes secured by candidates in 2004 election*

### **The 2009 Presidential election**

The Independent Election Commission (IEC), whose commissioners were chosen by and personally loyal to Karzai, was accused of lacking legitimacy in the presidential election on August 20, 2009 (Andisha 2015). The IEC fixed the election date on August 20, 2009, slightly later than the April 21, 2009 deadline set by Article 61 of the Constitution. The IEC fixed a date for elections on August 20, 2009 slightly later than the date of April 21, 2009, as specified by Article 61 of the Constitution, which allows elections to be held at least 30 days before the term of Karzai (Katzman n.d.). Registration added approximately 4.5 million eligible voters, bringing the overall number to approximately 17 million. However, reports of registration fraud, including sales of registration cards, were widely reported. A total of 32 candidates participated in the contest, and 3,200 contestants took part in 420 provincial seats. Some 80% of candidates ran as Independents for a Provincial Council and one party, Hezb-i-Islami, was running as multiple candidates in several Provinces. Around 200 women competed in the 124 seats reserved for women for the Provincial Council (30% of total seats). The number of women candidates in Kandahar and Uruzgan was less than the number of reserved seats. Five hundred twenty-four independents were competing in the province of Kabul for the 29 council seats (Ayub, Deledda, and Gossman 2009). The election ended in the victory of Hamid Karzai, incumbent on the elections, who took 49.67% of the votes, while Abdullah, his primary opponent, finished second with 30.59% [figure 2]. There was little safety, poor participation and little public understanding of the voting procedure and general electoral

reinforcements, threats and other electoral fraud during the elections. A second runoff poll was initially set for November 7, 2009, announced under significant U.S. and ally pressure. Still, it was terminated when Abdullah declined to participate and Hamid Karzai was named president of Afghanistan for a 5-year further term(Lafraie 2011).

The election was the second conducted under Afghanistan's current constitution and concurrently with elections for 34 provincial council seats. The Taliban demanded a boycott of the election, referring to it as a "crusaders agenda" and "American process." The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC) issued its official preliminary list of registered candidates on May 17, 2009. Forty-four presidential contenders registered in the presidential elections. Before the election, three candidates withdrew from the contest and supported one of their top two candidates. Each presidential candidate was accompanied by two vice president candidates(Coburn and Larson 2013).

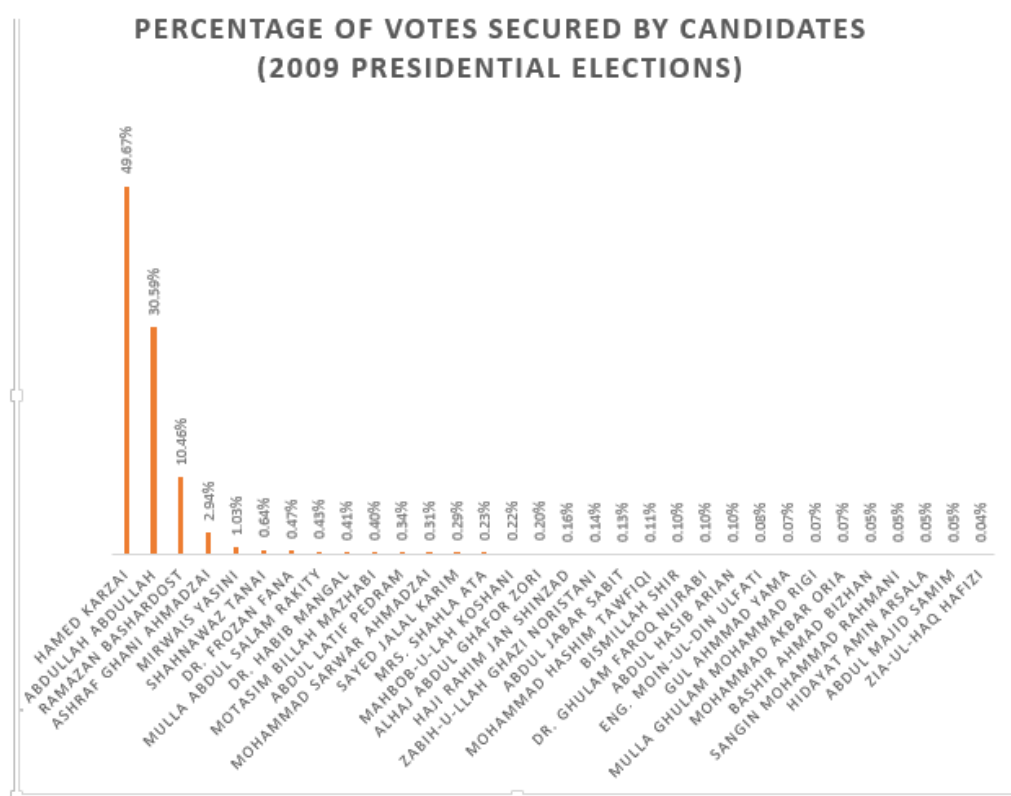


Figure 2- Percentage of Votes secured by candidates in the 2009 election

### The 2014 Presidential election

Afghanistan conducted presidential elections on April 5, 2014, followed by a second round on June 14. President Hamid Karzai, who was in office at the time, was unable to get in the majority. From September 16 until October 6, 2013, presidential nominations were available for registration. A total of 27 people were confirmed as candidates. However, Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission dismissed 16 of the candidates on October 22, leaving just 11 contenders in the contest. By April 2014, three contenders had withdrawn from the campaign in favor of some of the remaining eight contenders(Coburn 2015). The final results of the first round were released on May 15, 2014, after the release of preliminary findings and a time for adjudication of the complaints. No one obtained an absolute majority of votes among the eight contenders contesting the first round. The constitution and the electoral law of Afghanistan thus provide for a runoff election(Dogan 2014).

The majority of the votes were gained by the former Foreign Affairs Minister and the 2009 elections runner-up, Dr. AbdullahAbdullah, who won 45% (2,972,141 votes). He would stand before former finance minister Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai in the runoff election planned for July 14, 2014, who garnered 31.56 percent (2,084,547) of the first-round votes [figure 3,4,5]. It was planned to report the

results of the runoff election on July 22, 2014. The second set of results was released two months after the runoff on June 14. The preliminary findings were scheduled for release on July 2, followed by the final findings on July 22. However, extensive allegations of fraud delayed the publication of these results(Najafizada 2014). Consequently, John Kerry, the then-Secretary of State of the United States, mediated discussions between the two remaining contenders, Ghani and Abdullah. Following a series of conversations and discussions between Ghani, Abdullah, and Kerry, the two candidates decided to sign an Agreement to Form a National Unity Government on a 50–50 power-sharing basis.

As a consequence of the political accord, Abdullah was given a distinct post as Chief Executive. The National Unity Government's mandate would expire with the September 2019 presidential election in Afghanistan. The election marked the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's history(Giustozzi 2014).

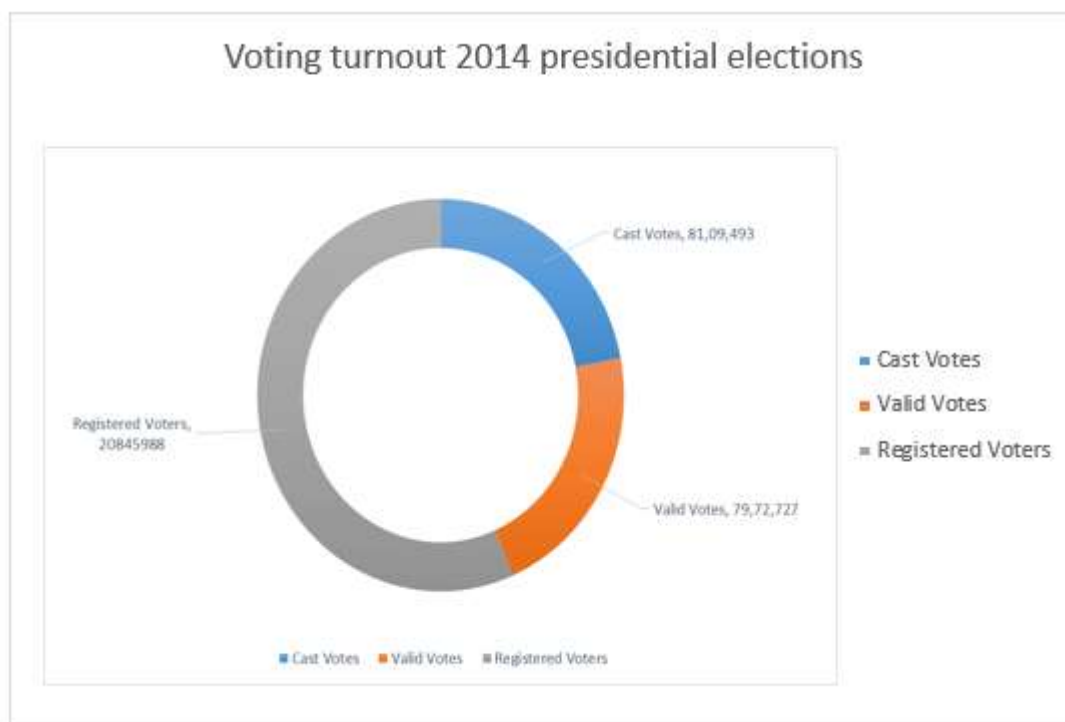


Figure 3- Voting turnout in 2014 elections

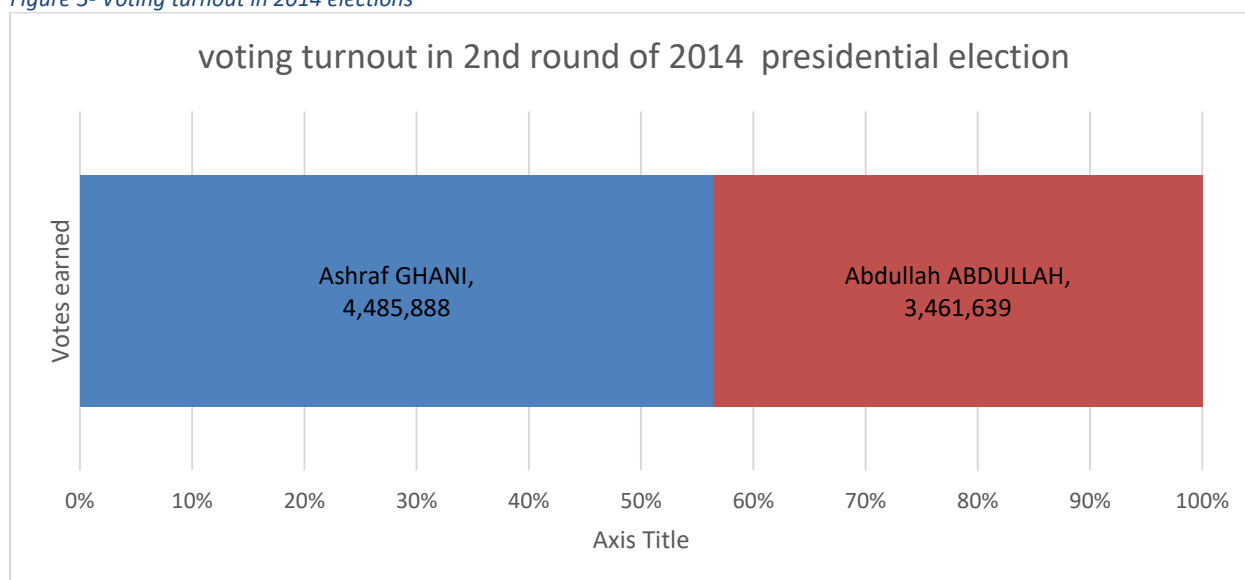
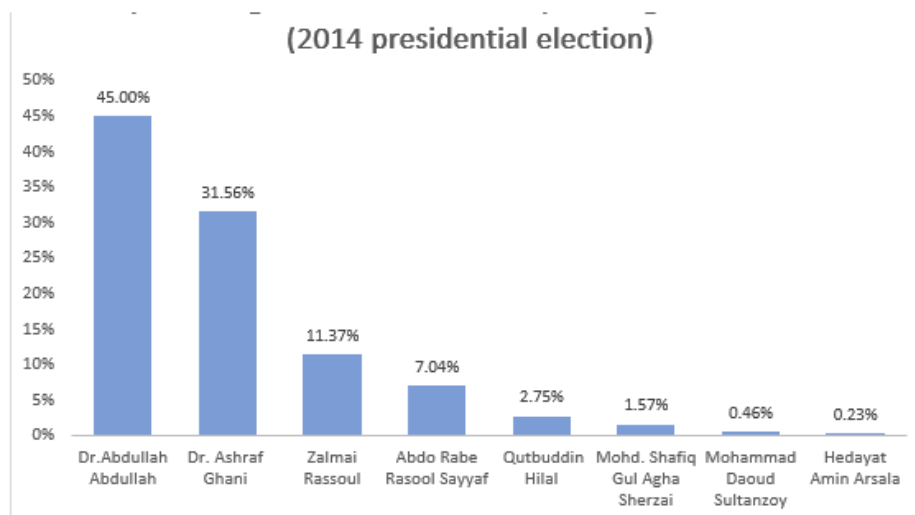


Figure 4- voting turnout in 2nd round of 2014 presidential elections





*Figure 5- Percentage of Votes secured by candidates in the 2014 election*

### **The 2019 Presidential election**

On September 28, 2019, Afghanistan conducted its recent presidential elections. According to preliminary results, President Ashraf Ghani was re-elected with 50.64 percent of the votes [figure 6]. Ashraf Ghani was proclaimed the winner on February 18, 2020, after delayed disputed ballots. Abdullah Abdullah rejected the results and established his parallel government and inaugural ceremony. On the other hand, Ghani was sworn in for a second term on March 9, 2020. On May 16, 2020, Ghani and Abdullah reached an agreement of power-sharing in which Ghani would continue to be President and Abdullah began would be the lead peace negotiator with the Taliban. The elections were initially set for April 20 but were postponed to July 20 by the Independent Election Commission on December 26, 2018 (Dadabaev 2020).

The IEC again postponed the election on March 20, 2019, by two months, from July 20 to September 28. A political crisis arose when the results were announced. Abdullah Abdullah denounced the results and vowed to establish a rival administration in northern Afghanistan. On February 22, Abdullah selected a new governor in Sar-e Pol Province who would be loyal to him. American ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad tried to mediate between Ghani and Abdullah. Still, the two were unable to reach an agreement, and both took the presidential oath of office on March 9, with Ghani swearing-in for a second term. On March 23, 2020, the United States announced a \$1 billion reduction in funding to Afghanistan due to the political situation. Unless Ghani and Abdullah achieve an agreement, the funding might be significantly reduced. On May 17, 2020, Ghani and Abdullah reached a power-sharing agreement, bringing the political crisis to an end (Andisha 2015).

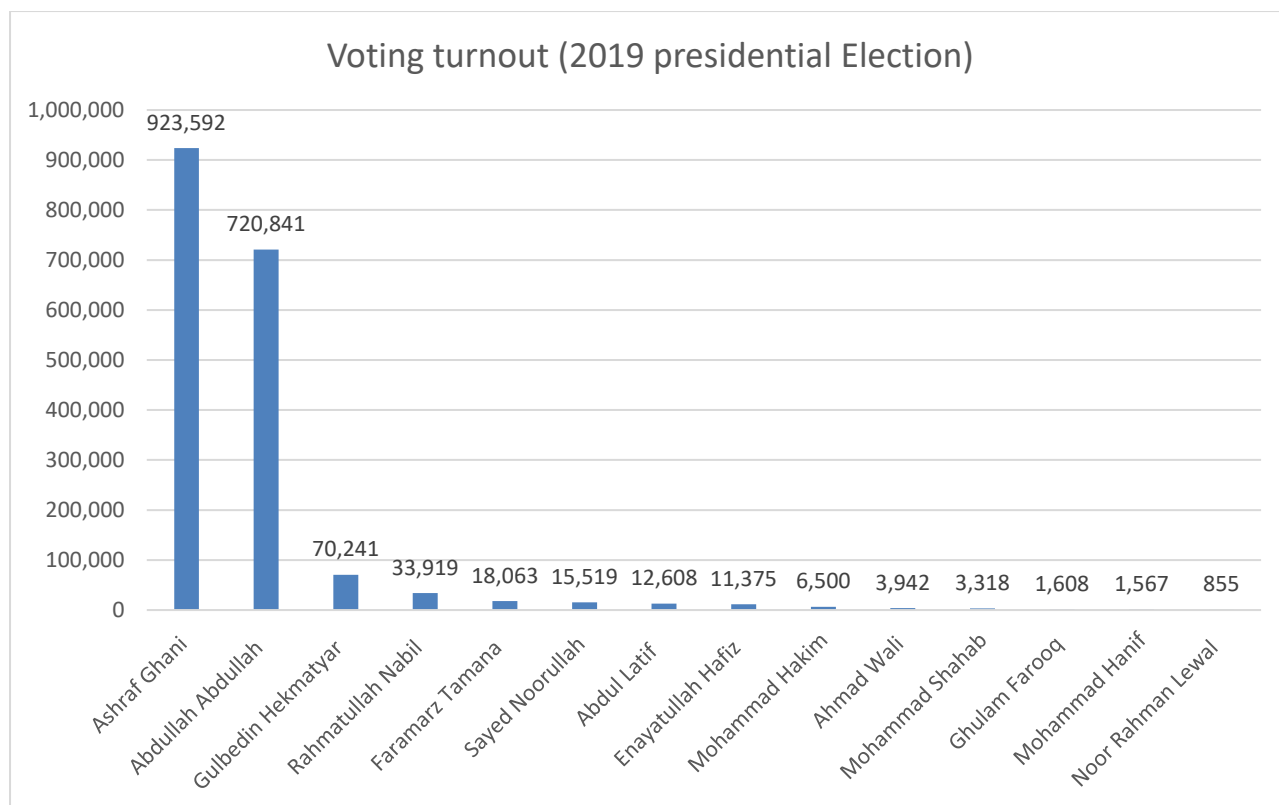


Figure 6- Percentage of Votes secured by candidates in 2020 election

### Lack of public participation and election challenges

Regrettably, Afghanistan's fledgling democracy experience in the last two decades has not yielded any results of democracy. Three rounds of presidential elections and three rounds of parliamentary elections after 2001 were turned into a crisis. The lack of political participation and engagement of the people in the Political and civil affairs is the people's disbelief over the government (Lafraie 2011). Unfortunately, Afghanistan's emerging democracy experience in the last two decades has not created any results for democracy. The previous two decades have not made any results for democracy [figure 7] (Giustozzi 2014).

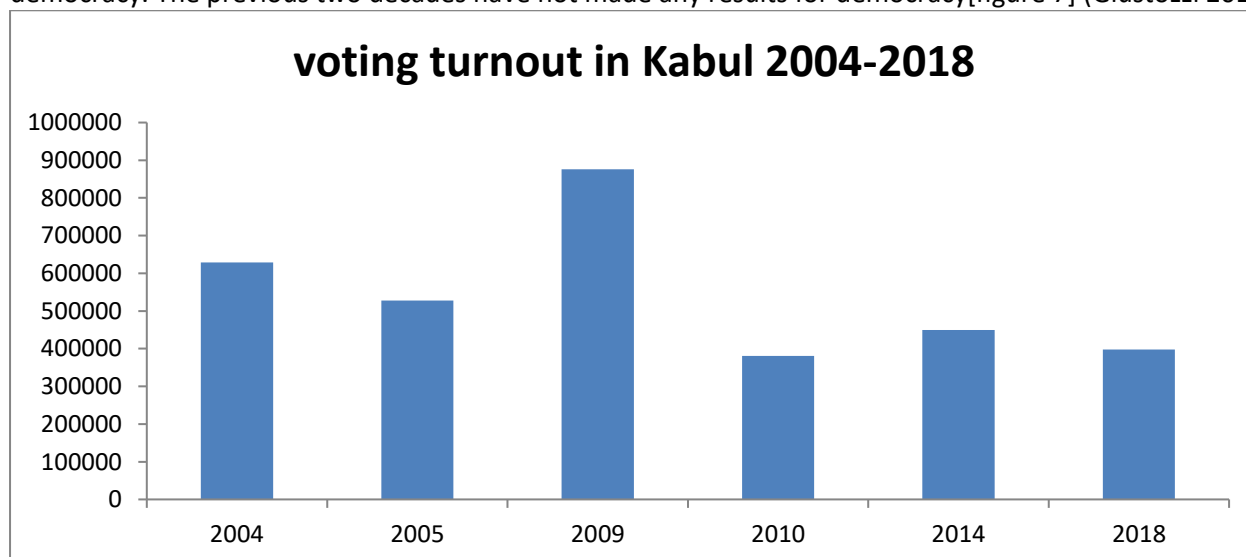


Figure 7- Public participation in elections 2004-2018 (Kabul province)

### Electoral Violence

Taliban are a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist group, roots in the Pashtun Heartland of Afghanistan. The group controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, when the U.S led intervention in afghan removed them from power and established a government led by Hamid Karzai. The first election

took place in 2004. In Afghanistan, the election is a violent affair since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 (Simon and Benjamin 2001). Five national elections were held, and each served as a focal point for Taliban violence. Electoral violence firstly impacts societies and limits the extent of legitimacy and accountability for the elected government. Violence led to the loss of the trust of the citizen in government and faith in democracy. For over years, the Taliban is contesting the Afghan government's legitimacy and authority to govern the people and rejects the country's democratic political process. The main motive is not only to disrupt the electoral process but also to influence the outcome (Condra et al. 2018).

### **Economic Influence**

Afghanistan is the least developed country compared to others, presently holding 170 rank out of 189 countries. In the education area, the Afghan government is facing the primary challenge literacy rate is 31%, and out of which 17% is the female rate (2015-16) 3.6 mean, (2017) 3.8 and (2018) increased 3% only 3.9 mean average population is educated. According to the Afghan times, more than 2.5 million people are jobless, of whom 45% are high school graduates and holding university diplomas. In the Business sector also (2019), the Afghan rank is 167<sup>th</sup> in (2020) increased up to 173<sup>rd</sup> rank but still due to international fluctuation, instability in politics and economics; foreign industries are not that much attracted (Callen and Long 2015b; Jalali 2006). About 23.9% population is unemployed, one of the main reasons Afghan is not successful against terrorism. The agriculture sector is the main advantage to Afghan people, but snow and climate can become a hurdle and create uncertainty. Currently, the Afghan is having a huge debt and to boost the economy self-dependency in Afghan people is very important in which they are lacking. These all above factors are directly distressing election if the government is not going to revenue some severe act Afghan people are going to lose faith in government and continuously affecting election system (World Bank report).

### **Electoral fairness**

Since the first-time election was held in Afghan citizens are not obliged to cooperate with the government. This attitude toward government directly provides evidence toward election fraud, such as sharing information with rebel parties and its critical to the government's survival. Berman et al. (2019) conduct a survey regarding fraud reduction during the lower house (Wolesi Jigra) parliament election (2010), visited 471 polling stations and measured the Afghan people's attitude toward the government (Berman et al. 2019). Observed that lack of trust in the electoral institute, disorganization in the electoral process, but the central area where security is given at highest rate compared to ruler area people are giving positive attitude. Parliament election held in 2010 is not fair result. The international community blamed Independent electoral commission (IEC) for falling and manipulating the election race, and some believed Karzai government is controlling a large part of the country. One main factor influencing the election process is when the U.S withdrawing troops and the Taliban increasing attacks near election time directly affecting the election, and hardly 5 million people are casting a ballot. Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) is also a reason for election fraud in this system. If both winning candidates struggle for a small margin, even minor manipulation may lead to victory and flop the party (Coyne and Pellillo 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Elections play an essential role in the political system of every country and determine the countries development in terms of democracy, the rule of law and justice. Public participation in these processes is also considered vital as it legitimizes the winning political party. Although democracy is a new subject in Afghanistan, the lack of public participation in electoral processes decreases every election. Taliban controlled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 and returned back August 2021. The elections are a violent affair since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Five national elections have been held, and each served as a focal point for Taliban violence. For many years Taliban has been opposing the Afghan legitimacy government and its authority to govern the people and rejects the country's democratic political process. Since the first elections, the people of Afghanistan have lost faith and cooperation with the government. This attitude comes in the backdrop of evidence towards election fraud, such as sharing information with rebel parties, security issues, and it is critical to the

government's survival. Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan enshrined a Single Non-Transferable Vote system for afghan society. In this system, one can win by a single additional vote. There is less growth of political parties in the game of power in this system, and some political parties have called for a change in the electoral system. The election commission of Afghanistan is still at its initial stage and needs to be developed.

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