

Ethnic Politics and Youth Political Participation in Afghanistan

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September 2015

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“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline”

Kofi A. Annan

1.1. Introduction

For over two decades, the Afghan people suffered from ethnic violence, instability, insecurity, and the horrors of extremism and terrorism. The conclusion of the Bonn Agreement provided Afghanistan with a rare historical moment for a political and social change and democratic transition. Peacebuilding, democratization and state-building processes were put in motion under the auspices of the United Nations. With the earnest international focus on Afghanistan, an unprecedented flow of aid into the country enabled the INGOs and of course the Afghanistan government to finance reconstruction projects in order to raise the country from the ashes of war. In post 2001, Afghanistan has taken strides in realization of the peace agenda set in the Bonn Agreement. Yet, Afghanistan faces more subtle challenges in managing the social divisions, ethnic and linguistic problems that affects the young generation in the country. Today, at the end of democratic transition process, Afghanistan has entered the democratic consolidation phase in which the Afghan government and the civil society are expected to focus on democratic political development and effective nation-building based on common values stipulated in the Constitution. To achieve this goal, the government needs a policy shift toward its large youth population that can play a vital role in political development of the country and a successful social transformation of the current ethnicity-centered politics to a more national one.

Afghan educated youth, mainly have a dense presence within the civil society organizations, which acts more or less as a reactionary force and voices the social protests but fail short to translate it into political actions. Political parties, except a few youth-centric ones, are dominated by the traditional elites within a paternal political context. Therefore, in spite of wide participation, Afghan youth are seen as “political foot soldiers” than an active social and political core that could act as the linchpin of social dynamism.

In addition, with an 11.8 million of juveniles and youth (10-24), Afghanistan faces an unprecedented pressure from ‘youth bulge.’ Considering the slow pace of institution building and limited available employment opportunities and political capacities,

youth bulge on the one hand provides the country with a potent challenge, and on the other hand, drives the youth toward bad and worse choices of ‘exit’ or ‘violence’. Hence informing policy circles of the real challenges and problems that lies beneath the society’s skin is critical to democratic consolidation of ‘peace by peaceful means’ especially within the Transformation Decade (2015-2024).

This article explores the correlation between an active ethnic politics and youth political participation in Afghanistan. Constraints to youth political participation posed by a persistent ethnic politics, ethnic political parties and the electoral design and the prospects of youth participation in the upcoming elections are the main arguments of this research. Based on materials and information from the field, as well as an analysis of the past experiences and existing concrete realities and facts, this article endeavors to map the future of youth political participation, especially in the upcoming parliamentary elections, currently postponed for 2016.

1.2. Methodology

This research relies on both desk-based studies and information acquired from the field including data from the Independent Elections Commission of Afghanistan and the interviews with civil society activists, youth-led political parties, member of the *Wolesi Jirga*, and youth focus groups. To further augment the discussions, three workshops were held with wide participation of youth activists and civil society organizations in which they expressed their views and opinions on the topic and filled a questionnaire. These information and opinions are incorporated in this study through ground methodology.

1.3. Political participation: Definition and Forms

Providing a common and all-encompassing definition of political participation is a difficult task. Mainly two types of definition have been presented for political participation: teleological and praxialist (procedural-based). From a teleological perspective, political participation is an “activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making” or “activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies.”¹ Others with more praxialist approach have defined political participation “as an “engagement with traditional mechanisms in the . . . political system, such as voting in elections and joining political organizations.”² But generally, taking into consideration both the telos and the

1. Huntington, S. P., & Nelson, J. M., No easy choice: Political participation in developing countries. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976

2. Diemer, M. A., Fostering marginalized youths’ political participation: Longitudinal roles of parental political

praxis, political participation can be defined as public involvement in decision making through lawful and acceptable procedures that include activities, forms and types that are best explained in the following description:

Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. Political participation extends beyond parties, however. Individuals can also become involved in certain aspects of the electoral process through independent action—particularly at the local level—and by joining civil society organizations. Professional networks, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and the media can all provide avenues for political participation.³

Some has sorted out types and forms of political participation in two categories of institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms. Whereas institutionalized participation is directly related to actions regarding the institutional and electoral process with a direct impact, non-institutionalized forms of participation influences the policy making process in an indirect way. The latter form can include for example the participation in demonstrations, signing of petitions, boycotting products, civic disobedience, hunger strikes, etc.⁴ Observed realities shows that institutionalized forms of political engagement have been in decline in many countries, but in contrast, non-institutionalized forms have started to gain more importance. This can be interpreted as a signal that even though citizens are still supporting the democratic system, they have become more critical regarding the ways in which democracy is currently functioning.⁵ Non-institutionalized forms of political participation are observable in more extreme ways and forms in states with weak and ineffective institutions.

In post-conflict states, where the state apparatus are mostly rendered dysfunctional, the slow pace of institutionalization or the inefficiency of the established political and social institutions usually cause practicing non-institutionalized forms of political participation. In these countries, institutions fail short of incorporating major interests of various social and political groups and lack the capacity to accommodate specially the interest of the newly mobilized groups and the youth into the system.

Four decades ago, Huntington argued that the main factor behind the violence and instability throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America “was in large part the product of

socialization and youth sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 2012, Epub ahead of print, doi: 10.1007/s10464-012-9495-9.

3. *Women & Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections*, United Nations Publication, March 2005, p 33

4. See: Marien, S. et al., “Inequalities in Non-institutionalized Forms of Political Participation: A Multi-level Analysis of 25 countries”, *Political Studies*, No.58, 2010, pp 187-213; Hooghe, M. and Marien, S., “A Comparative Analysis of the Relation Between Political Trust and Forms of Political Participation in Europe”, *European Societies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2013, pp 131-152.

5. Marien, S. et al., op. cite; Stolle, D. and Hooghe, M., “Shifting Inequalities. Patterns of Exclusion and Inclusion in Emerging Forms of Political Participation,” *European Societies*, Vol. 13, No.1, 2011, pp 119-142

the rapid social change and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions.”⁶

Under such circumstances, opting non-institutionalized forms of political participation can be translated into even more radical options. When the institutions do not correspond with the demands and expectations of these newly mobilized groups, especially the youth, they tend to opt for more violent methods in order to ensure a measurable impact on the policy making process as well as policy makers or to break through the political barriers and the limits created by the old guard monopoly of power within the system. When institutionalized forms of political participation are perceived as non-effective, those unwilling to practice non-institutionalized forms yet without an outreach to extra-institutional ways and channels, opt for ‘exit’.⁷ High rate of human flight and emigration in fragile states and underdeveloped countries are to some degree, the result of such frustration in social and political life.

1.4. Youth political participation and ethnic politics

The main feature of divided societies is that politics is practiced almost exclusively along ethnic lines. Ethnically oriented democratic systems are often constituted based on a *de-jure* or *de facto* consociational design in which an ethnically-based power sharing formula exists to ensure representation as well as inclusion of all politically significant identity groups into the system. This consociational design provide spaces for ethnic political parties and elites to maintain their power and balance it against the changes that take place within the system by raising ethnic appeals and mobilizing their affiliated ethnic group based on ethnic agendas and play the ‘communal card’. Such political environment is conducive to further ethnicization of political parties and the emergence of new ethno-centric parties who claim to represent certain ethnic groups. The reciprocal relation between the political party and society often develops in the context of ethnic politics. The social divides usually cause the emergence of ethnic political parties that in Horowitz’ definition “derives its support overwhelmingly from an identifiable ethnic group (or cluster of ethnic groups) and serves the interests of that group”.⁸ Horowitz aptly notes:

By appealing to electorates in ethnic terms, by making ethnic demands on government,

6. Huntington, Samuel P., *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973, p 4

7. See: Matsumoto, Yukitoshi, Young Afghans in ‘transition’: towards Afghanistan, exit or violence?, *Conflict, Security & Development* , Vol. 11, No. 5 November 2011

8. Horowitz, Donald L., *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, California: University of California Press, 2000, p 291. Chandra defines an ‘ethnic party’ as “a party that overtly represents itself as a champion of the cause of one particular ethnic or set of categories to the exclusion of others, and that makes such a representation central to its strategy of mobilizing voters.” Chandra, Kanchan, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India*, Cambridge: University Press, 2004, p 3

and by bolstering the influence of ethnically chauvinist elements within each group, parties that begin by merely mirroring ethnic divisions help to deepen and extend them.”⁹

From a more instrumentalist perspective, elites in their competition over power, status and material resources aim at acquiring popular support by manipulating the masses. And ethnicity usually serves as the factor with the widest appeal in mobilizing the masses for the elites’ particularistic goals, that is, to gain or remain in power. In an ethnicized political atmosphere, usually old guard politicians create a monopoly over the ‘available political space and act as gatekeepers to that space’.¹⁰

In states experiencing rapid social change with a high percentage of youth population, known as ‘youth bulge’, old guard monopoly of power and constraints that it pose to youth political participation widens the gap between the older and new generation and undermine the youth’s thrust on ethnic political parties. The old guard struggle for maintaining their control over social and political process often collide with the ambitions of the youth who are seeking leadership positions and playing more effective role in political and social processes. Afghanistan is not exception to this, as in the past decade the struggle of new generation for recognition and changing the political landscape and resistance of the old guard to maintain the traditional social and political order has been one of the main dynamics of continuity and change. Gulab Mangal, a member of Afghan parliament states that:

Ethnic politics and social cleavages manipulated by ethnic figures and leaders have been instrumental to constraining youth political participation and their stronger presence in the bureaucracy and government institutions and have resisted the youths’ more national agendas.¹¹

As a result, ethnic politics affects youth political participation in two ways: first, constraining institutionalized forms of political participation for youth such as elections and voting through designing of an electoral system that serves as the gateway to the system, and second, which results from the previous factor, is the political design and monopoly of power by the old guard that pushes the youth toward exercising more non-institutionalized forms of political participation and to take a more critical attitude toward the political system or to even opt for a total exit.

9. Horowitz, op. cit. p 291

10. See: Larson, Anna and Noah Coburn, Youth Mobilization and Political Constraints in Afghanistan: The Y Factor, USIP, Special Report 341, January 2014

11. Interview with Gulab Mangal, Member of the Wolesi Jirga, Jun 18, 2015

1.5. Ethnic politics and youth political participation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is home to over thirty ethnic groups among which Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras are the larger ethnicities. The history of inter-ethnic relations in Afghanistan is one of co-existence, but also unequal opportunities and conflict. As Modernist and development theories suggest, group consciousness and self awareness increased with developing inter-ethnic contacts resulted from modernization of state has contributed to the creation and intensification of ethnic identities.¹² In Afghanistan also ethnicity became salient with modernization of state. Politicization of ethnicity in Afghanistan dates back to the era of state-formation during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1900). The Amir in order to create a centralized administration relied extensively on coercive force and practiced methods that resulted to an “ethnically polarized Afghanistan.”¹³ He suppressed Pashtun rebellions and then unified and mobilized them to suppress the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, and finally mobilized Sunnis for Jihad against the Hazara Shiites (as heretics), ‘whom they plundered, displaced and sold into slavery’¹⁴. The ethnocide of Amir for state making left deep scars in the social memory of Afghanistan’s ethnic groups that caused ethnic animosity, hatred, and alienation of Afghan communal groups.

In the pursuant decades, the successors of Amir never took initiatives to alleviate the ethnic grievances and instead the increased tensions over issues such as official language (Dari replaced with Pashtu), religious exclusion of Shiites particularly in the period of the Musahiban dynasty (1929-1973) widened social gaps. Many of the dynamics of the Afghanistan’s civil conflicts in last three decades have its roots in the aggravated grievances and ethnic polarization which occurred within a period that spans from 1880 to 1973. In short, inter-ethnic relations in Afghanistan have been one of domination and subordinations, but generally “a sort of political balance evolved among the various groups and all of them had allocated spaces within the hierarchical system” until the communist coup in 1978.¹⁵

The communist coup of 1978 marked the end of the traditional political order and unleashed window of opportunities for the long-suppressed ethnic groups to change their political and social status. The political consciousness brought by the change of political and social structure and more importantly the Soviets invasion to some extent provoked a nascent nationalism among Afghans. In addition, the increased self consciousness among ethnic groups caused the creation of collective organizations

12. Newman, Saul, “Review: Does Modernization Breed Ethnic Political Conflict?,” *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Apr, 1991), pp 451-478,

13. Saikal, op. cit. p 25

14. Rubin, Barnett R., Rubin, Barnett R., *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan (Second Edition)*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, p 50; Bird, Tim, and Alex Marshall, “Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way,” New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011, p 12

15. Rais, Rasul Bakhsh, “Conflict in Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion and Neighbors,” *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, January 1999, p 2

based on ethnic identity or ideology, primarily as social movements. These movements were later organized as political parties to represent ethnic, religious, or local interests. Although all political parties publicly shared a common objective: to defend the country against the 'godless communists' and the Soviet invaders, but in the course of political developments during the Afghan-Soviet war, the parties splintered into several factions defined by their ethnic affiliation, religious outlook and *modus operandi*.¹⁶ The ethnic politics came to define the political and social developments in the following years and resulted to the break out of civil wars in 1990s.

The civil wars (1992-1996) following the collapse of the communist regime in Kabul, marked an overtly ethnic conflict. Major Jihadi political parties lined up along ethnic cleavages to champion ethnic rights and interests. Among others, Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami, and Sayyaf's Ettehad-e-Islami came to represent Pashtuns; Rabbani and Massoud's Jamiat-e-Islami as Tajik, Hezb-e-Wahdat as Hazara, and Dostum's Junbesh-e-Melli as Uzbek fought each other with overt ethnic manifestations. The atrocities and violence that occurred in the 1990s civil wars further widened the social gaps and increased the inter-ethnic animosity and in words of Ahmad Rashid 'irreparably damaged the fabric of the country's national and religious soul'¹⁷. Furthermore, ethnicization of war and politics changed the political and social parameters in Afghanistan and impeded state-building and reconciliation for a decade until 2001. Under such ethnicized political environment even some movements like Taliban who emerged with religious agendas also appeared as ethnic organization representing certain ethnic group.

In post 2001, the establishment of the new democratic government under President Karzai with the full support of the international community, unleashed new opportunities for Afghans specially the youths. Schools, universities, vocational centers and institutes and other public and private educational centers were reopened or newly established that gave the Afghan youth a denied opportunity, the right to education. This contributed to emergence of new and young elite in Kabul and other core cities, as well as, peripheral cores around the country. Within the new democratic environment, the youth who were previously mobilized to serve old-guard political goals, re-organized and came to be recognized as a new political force that could impact positively the future of democracy and peace in the country. Together with the repatriates from Diaspora, Afghan youths emerged as the main driving force of the new political order that run the bureaucracy and provided the government with necessary technical skills and expertise. This reorganization of the youth and their emergence as a new political force was soon perceived as a challenge to the old-guard politicians and traditional elites who had dominated Afghan society and politics for decades. Traditional elites and charismatic ethnic leaders, as the main stakeholders of power, started to subdue the challenge posed by the new elite groups who were yet not well organized and well

16. See: Kashima Masahiro and M Qasim Wafayezada, International Assistance to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: the Cases of Cambodia and Afghanistan, Journal of Human and Socio-Environmental Studies, issue No. 23, March, 2012, pp 43-70

17. Rashid, Ahmad, Taliban, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010, p 83

financed as these ethnic figures. They were able to constrain youth political visibility and influence through manipulating social cleavages and ethnic mobilization and maintaining ethnic divisions as the main driving force of history and politics in Afghanistan. Ethnic political parties and leaders therefore regained their control and dominance through strengthening ethnic manifestation of their affiliated parties, ethnic mobilization and an electoral design that, in one way or another, favored these traditional groups.

1.5.1. Ethnic political parties in post 2001

With the fall of the Taliban government and the conclusion of the Bonn Agreement under the auspices of the United Nations on December 5, 2001, Afghanistan met a historical opportunity for peacebuilding, reconciliation and democratization. Ethno-political factions played an important role in democratic transition by agreeing on provisional arrangement that envisaged peacebuilding and democratization in Afghanistan. Initially, the outcome of the Bonn Agreement was the creation of an Interim Administration “as first step toward the establishment of a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government.”¹⁸

The role of ethnic political parties in facilitating a democratic transition can be better understood if we consider the nature of socio-political structure in Afghanistan. If divided societies in words of Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) are not fertile soil for democratic values, certainly the success of democratization was questionable in Afghanistan. As Smith notes:

Non-institutionalized systems like Afghanistan’s are far more difficult to decode, since the loci of consensus are buried in tribal lore, family relations, financial connections, longstanding feuds and other considerations that are not easily penetrated by the modern political mind or organized by modern political institutions.¹⁹

In addition to the social and political fragmentation resulted by the long-lasting civil conflicts, the tribal nature of almost half of the Afghan’s society posed a grave problem for transition to democracy and ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Therefore, the ethnic political parties by representing the major interests of social groups and by using their influence on tribes and local elites contributed to the initial success of democratization and the implementation of the Bonn Agreement provisions. Although, the ethnic parties’ overwhelming presence in the government and political institution was pushing the political process toward a more elite-driven one, yet the ethnic or religious political factions’ ability to mobilize support of the tribes and ethnic groups for strengthening the new administration was vital. As noted by National Democratic

18. Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions, December 5, 2001, at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Afgh%20S2001%201154.pdf> (Accessed on March 11, 2012)

19. Smith, Scott Seward, (2011) *Afghanistan’s Troubled Transition: Politics, Peacekeeping, and the 2004 Presidential Election*, Boulder & London: First Forum Press, p 11

Institute (NDI), “The groups that had operated earlier as military factions had established extensive management, organizational and communication structures – and these allowed the groups to command resources and public recognition in the post-Taliban era.”²⁰

In this phase the ethnic manifestation of political parties and their clientelistic structure – though non-democratic it may seem – enabled them to win the support of ethnic and religious groups for the democratization and peacebuilding processes and to lead them to a gradual political transformation. This put the ethnic political parties at the core of the political system, which was already designed within a de facto consociational context, enabling them create a monopoly of the power, resources, and politics, leaving no space for newly mobilized political groups and specially the youth. Internal power politics became highly ethnicized and took negative shape in the course of development.²¹ All issues had to be channeled and addressed through these ethnic political parties including employment and job hunting opportunities. These ethnic political parties came to define the nature of the social relations as well as the forms of political participation. Leader of a youth-led political party explains that:

Ethnic politics exercised by political leaders is based on sensationalism, that breeds violence and inter-ethnic antagonism that in turn creates fertile grounds for the traditional leaders to play off communal groups and advance their own goals. Politics has been ethno-centric in Afghanistan and many minority groups have been intentionally marginalized. And within each ethnic group, ethnic leaders have created a monopoly of their own, decreasing the chances for youths to play a role better than a ‘foot soldier’ or being able to substitute the traditional political leaders.²²

In sum, the current institutional incorporation of political parties and power sharing structure is not conducive to emergence of youth-led or youth-centered parties through which the youth could voice their aspirations as well as their concerns. Moreover, ethnicization of the politics has had an out-bidding effect causing ethnicization of youth politics as well, as they saw all resources and positions being distributed or divided on an ethnic and ethnic party affiliation bases. Raihana Azad, Afghan MP believes that:

The situation has forced the youth to affiliate themselves with ethnic political groups and to take more ethnically divided formation as they see the opportunities and offices attached to such affiliations.²³

20. NDI, Political Parties in Afghanistan: A Review of the State of Political Parties After the 2009 and 2010 Elections, June 2011, p1

21. Interview with civil society activist, Jun 12, 2015

22. Interview with the leader of Kar wa Touseaa Political Party, Kabul, Jun 12, 2015

23. Interview with Raihana Azad, Daikundi MP, Jun 15, 2015

1.5.2. Changing party politics and the rise of maverick leaders

Party politics in Afghanistan underwent tremendous changes as a result of official policy toward political parties and new amendments in the law of political parties. First, the official policy affected the party politics dynamism as President Karzai, the former president preferred co-optation of major and influential political figures over attracting cooperation of influential political parties. This policy, on the first hand, resulted in splits within the parties and consequently, major figures of the political parties emerged as independent politicians, changing the political structure into an even more persona-centric one. The leading figures of various political parties which had their own support bases as well as an accumulated wealth enough to finance a small-scale political faction, tended to act independently from the party and to enter negotiations with the government by themselves. While the leading organs of the political parties were no longer able to provide financial support to local clients and warlords, the charismatic leaders were not willing to share their wealth with the party but rather wanted to invest in it for the purpose of strengthening their own position. In addition, the Karzai administration's policy of co-optation and the buying loyalty of individual politicians with positions and government's support changed the patterns of membership or party support among the masses as well. Those who were previously affiliated with certain parties because of *ideological incentives* shifted their loyalty to individual politicians to receive a patronage job, or position in the government, etc. Hence, the party affiliation changed from an ideological one into one based on *outcome incentives*, enabling the old guard individual politicians to further attract support by using the government resources.²⁴ This personalization trend further marginalized youth activists and the larger youth population in Afghanistan to play a decisive role through institutionalized forms of political participation. As observed by and reflected in the USIP special report in 2013:

Youth politics ... is still deeply tied to old-guard political networks. In many provinces, power brokers use youth organizations to maintain political control. Continuing dominance of the old guard will likely prevent the emergence of a youth bloc or a youth vote in the upcoming elections.²⁵

Under such circumstances, youth political participation is constrained by ethnic politics and the nature of the interplay between the society and politics. Even though, the youth enjoy a sizable presence in the bureaucracy and wide participation in the politics, they lack the institutional and organizational means to play a more effective role in policy making circles and leadership, as stated by a leader of a youth-centered political party:

24. Ideological incentives are achievement of collective goals and giving expression to deeply held beliefs; outcome incentives are the rewards that come from achieving certain personal goals, such as expanding social networks, getting a patronage job, or becoming an elected representative; and process incentives are derived from the inherent interest and stimulus of being politically active. See: Pippa Norris, *Democratic Phoenix: Reinventing Political Activism*, Cambridge: University Press, 2002, p 105; See also, Duverger, Maurice, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, New York: Wiley, 1962, pp 61-71

25. Gran Hewad and Casey Garret Johnson, *A Rough Guide to Afghan Youth Politics*, United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 344, April 2014

Although the youth have a dense presence in the government and run the bureaucracy with their technical skills and expertise, but their presence in the leadership and policy making circles is limited due to the persistent traditional norms of politics and lack of the incentives for the emergence of youth centered political parties.²⁶

Youth elites find it difficult to mobilize support and define themselves as an established group within a highly ethnicized political environment beyond ethnic orientations. Currently, with the ethnic political parties back in fashion, the youth feels more frustrated and the future perspective gets grimmer as one of youth focus groups in Kabul explained:

There is no hope, and no one should expect a change that would precipitate de-ethnicization of politics, but in the long term, we expect de-politicization of identities and emergence of a more national political thought, conducive to stronger youth political participation.²⁷

Youths, therefore affiliated themselves with the older and well established political parties with an ethnic quota in the power that would help them to get a position or enjoy stronger support as a follower of the much stronger old guard.

1.5.3. Electoral design

The institutional design and the type of electoral system are decisive and important, because in divided societies, institutional arrangements and electoral design can systematically favor or disadvantage ethnic, national, and other social and political groups, especially the youth.²⁸ In Afghanistan, therefore adopting an electoral system that would meet the requirements of the Afghan society were important for successful democratic peacebuilding and the institutionalization of democratic culture as well as inclusion of major social and political group within the government. Central to this issue was to ensure a balanced representation of all ethnic and communal groups that would give them a voice in the decision-making process and create an incentive for social groups to 'abandon extra-institutional action strategies'.²⁹ In addition, the role of political parties further posed the question of which electoral system should be adopted, because the type of the electoral system is believed to play a role in structuring party systems.³⁰ Electoral systems also affect the ways parties organize and function

26. Interview with leader of Labor and Development Party (Hezb-e Kar wa Tawseaa), Jun 7, 2015

27. Interview with youth focus group in Kabul, Jun 5, 2015

28. Belmont, K., Mainwaring, S., Belmont, K., Mainwaring, S., Reynolds, R., "Introduction: Institutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy," in A. Reynolds (ed.) *The Architecture of Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp 1–11.

29. Alonso, Sonia & Ruben Ruiz-Rufino, "Political Representation and Ethnic Conflict in New Democracies," *European Journal of Political Research*, Issue 46, 2007, p 237; International Crisis Group, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, Asia Briefing, No. 39, Kabul/Brussels, June 2005, p 1

30. Lindberg, Staffan I., "Consequences of Electoral Systems in Africa: A Preliminary Inquiry," *Electoral*

internally.³¹ Furthermore, as Ishiyama argues, the design of the electoral system can have a wide range of political outcomes which affects “the quality and the breadth of representation, the fractionalization and polarization of political party systems, voter turnout and voter behavior, and the stability of the government and the political system.”³²

In Afghanistan, two issues severely affected youth political participation through institutionalized channels and created obstacles for an effective social and political role: first the adoption of an SNTV electoral system, and second the persistence of the traditional patterns of voting that came to disadvantage the youth in the elections.

1.5.3.1. PR versus SNTV electoral systems

In 2004, when the discussions over the electoral system started, the proportional system (PR) appeared to have more supporters among the major political factions. The proponents of the PR model argued that it would contribute to the development of a democratic party system and therefore result to a more balanced relationship between the legislative and the executive branches of the government. In addition, a PR system can ensure representation of minority groups and a more inclusive parliament where every social group have their voice in the decision making process. Furthermore, the civil society and political activists and as well as the international advisors to the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB), especially the UNAMA supported a PR model.³³ The reason behind these contentions was to provide the opportunity for creation of a party system that in King’s (1969: 120-40)³⁴ definition could contribute to vote structuring, integration and mobilization of citizens, organization of the government, policy formation, and interest aggregation in a highly fragmented society. Furthermore, a party system could provide a means to organize the institutional foundations of democratic politics which cannot be fulfilled by other bodies such as civil society or private organizations. In sum PR was thought to be more conducive to the emergence of strong political parties that can influence the ethnicized Afghan milieu. Lack of major political parties could lead the political structures toward a more persona-centric one where maverick or charismatic political leaders were the main players, with low or no ability to aggravate the interests of various social groups.

Studies, Vol. 24, 2005, pp 41–64; Lijphart, Arend, “The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, 1945-85,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 84, No. 2. (Jun., 1990), pp 481-496

31. See: Mainwaring, Scott, *Politicians, Parties and Electoral Systems: Brazil in Comparative Perspective*, The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, Working Paper 141, June 1990

32. Ishiyama, John T., *Comparative Politics: Principles of Democracy and Democratization*, Singapore: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012, p 157

33. Aras, Bulent, and Sule Tuktas, “Afghanistan’s Security: Political Process, State-building and Narcotics,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XV, No. 2, Summer 2008, pp 39-52, p 43

34. King, Anthony, “Political Parties in Western Democracies: Some Sceptical Reflections,” *Polity*, Vol. 2, 1969, pp 111-41

On the other side, President Karzai and his technocrat team supported a Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system. Karzai attributed the past violence to the political parties and indicated to their negative role in the past three decades of conflicts and ethnic confrontations. According to the International Crisis Group's report the Karzai administration justified its support for SNTV on a number of grounds: "It argues that it will prevent large regional or ethnic parties or parties associated with violence, illegal militias or the drug trade from entering and controlling the parliament through bribery and coercion, that votes can be counted more easily, and that it would also be easier to convey election results to a largely rural and uneducated population."³⁵ Although, considering the bitter realities of past and bad experiences of the parties, Karzai was not alone in mistrusting the former political parties, but the emphasize on SNTV that obviously disadvantaged the political parties, emanated from the larger official view that opposed a party system, and rather favored a centralized government with weak political parties unable to challenge it. The Karzai administration in the absence of parliament (yet not established) approved the SNTV system for parliamentary (Wolesi Jirgah)³⁶ elections and the creation of the JEMB. The decision was criticized by major political factions and as well international organizations, namely ICG released a report in which warned the Karzai administration on the negative consequences of the SNTV system and among a number of recommendations asked for change of the electoral system to the PR model.³⁷ The adoption of the SNTV system disadvantaged the political parties and resulted to their sidelining in political competition. Although, the presidential elections of 2004, prior to the parliamentary elections of 2005, proved the persona-centric political tendency that caused the leading candidates to mobilize ethnic support and rely on their ethnic core vote. The ethnic voting pattern in 2004 presidential elections was interpreted by many political circles as head-counts of ethnic groups in the absence of a national census.³⁸

In sum, the adoption of the SNTV reduced the chances of a dynamic and accountable party system development. In addition, as Riphenburg notes, "this system does not force party amalgamation or encourage coalitions between parties."³⁹ An electoral

35. International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: From Presidential to Parliamentary Elections, Asia Report 88, November 23, 2004, p 6

36. Wolesi Jirgah is the official name of the lower house; therefore in this article I use the Parliament and Wolesi Jirgah interchangeably.

37. International Crisis Group, op. cit. p ii

38. Hamid Karzai was independent candidate. He is a Pashtun but had wide support among other ethnic groups as well. He won with a wide margin of 55.4% (4,443,029 votes); Yunus Qanoni the former member of Jamait and a Tajik run the elections as representative of Hezb-e-Nuhzhat-e-Mili Afghanistan, and received 1,306,503 votes (16.3%); Haji Mohammad Mohaqeq the leader of a faction Hizb-e-Wahadat and a Hazara was also registered as independent candidate and received 935,325 votes (11.7%); Abdul Rashid Dostum the former leader of Junbish run as independent candidate and received 804,861 votes (10.0%). The total valid votes were 8,024,536, based on the certification of results. See: JEMB, "Decision of the Joint Electoral Management Body (No. 2004-102)," Afghanistan Presidential Election Results, November 3, 2004, at: http://www.iec.org.af/public_html/Election%20Results%20Website/english/JEMB_Decision_03-11-04.pdf (Accessed on March 15, 2012)

39. Riphenburg, Carol J., "Electoral Systems in a Divided Society: The Case of Afghanistan," British Journal of

system that encourages the creation of coalitions and political alignment between groups of political parties is in long term conducive to de-ethnicization of political parties and the emergence of cross-ethnic coalitions. De-escalation of the ethnic hype is an important issue for the success of democratization and peacebuilding process. In addition, given the persona-centric nature of the political parties in Afghanistan, the elections in general and under the SNTV in particular, exacerbate the problem of focusing on individuals rather than parties. In other words, the SNTV system under such circumstances “provides a very public platform for the self-promotion of these individuals.”⁴⁰

In the absence of a well established party system, even coalitions are created based on ethnic criteria. An example was the alliances and coalitions emerged in the wake of the 2009 presidential elections. President Karzai allied with major political parties and leaders of Hazaras, Uzbeks and a political faction of Tajiks led by Marshal Fahim. The alliance was created from ethnic addresses to win the support of ethnic groups. On the other side, another coalition was build around Buhanuddin Rabbani the former president in the same manner supporting Dr. Abdullah for the presidential elections. But the results of the votes appeared to be sharply divided along ethnic lines. Among the political parties only three were active during the election campaigns (Jumbish-e-Milli, Hezb-e-Wahdat, and the United National Front) that pursued a strategy of attracting ethnic votes.⁴¹

Political coalitions that emerged outside the government and acted as opposition groups also couldn't overcome the sharp ethnic divides in politics. While a party system was non-existent, most of coalitions were built by co-opting politicians from different ethnicities or political parties. In some cases a single political party had members in different coalitions at the same time. Therefore, without exception all coalitions didn't last long and were short lived because the very reason for the creation of such coalitions was an instant reaction to certain political events, lacking a broad and long-term perspective and political platform. In other words, as Larson notes, “The shifting and un-established nature of parties in Afghanistan is both contributing toward and caused by the political instability fuelled by elections.”⁴²

When the nature of political parties is not established through a party system, ethnic political leaders often resort to manipulation of social cleavages for mobilizing social support and utilize the strategy of retreating to ethnic support bases, resulting to reinforced ethnic political environment. With ready ethnic vote blocks at their disposal,

Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Apr., 2007), pp. 1-21, p 16

40. Larson, Anna, *The Wolesi Jirga in Flux, 2010: Elections and Instability 1*, AREU Discussion Paper, September 2010, p 14, at <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1030-The%20Wolesi%20Jirga%20in%20Flux%202010%20DP%20Web.pdf> (Accessed on March 18)

41. EU Election Observation Mission, *Final Report: Presidential and Provincial Council Elections (August 20, 2009)*, p 26. At http://eeas.europa.eu/afghanistan/docs/2010_election_observation_afghanistan_final_report_0809_en.pdf (Accessed on March 10, 2012)

42. Larson, op. cit. p 14

traditional leaders are able to negotiate for positions and quotas within the system and enter agreements with other leaders and parties that serve the best their goals and provide them the means to achieve their ends. In this sense, SNTV electoral system perpetuates manipulation of social cleavages and dwarfs youth endeavors to gain importance and social recognition as decisive political force. Because youth vote are usually dispersed nationwide and they lack such ready vote blocks, while SNTV do not allow transferring or counting of votes from one constituency to another to compile votes enough to win a seat in the Provincial or District Councils and more importantly in the *Wolesi Jirga*. Instead, youth fell prey to ethnic leaders' manipulation as noted in a recent report of RAOD research center: "During elections, young people are perceived as vote blocks and are courted by local leaders and power brokers for influence in return for political favors."⁴³ In contrast, a proportional electoral system provides more space for youth and enables them to compete in political and social realms without having access to ready clusters of votes. Under a PR system, newly mobilized youth groups are able to compile every vote dispersed throughout the country and make it count for winning a seat in the parliament or provincial and district councils. In addition, a PR system is conducive to emergence of strong and broad-based political parties able to win a certain percentage of votes that would allow them to win seats in the parliament.

1.5.3.2. Voting pattern and the rejuvenation of the old-guard

Holding elections and exercising the right to elect representatives and the political leader of the country was a novel phenomenon for Afghans who experienced elections in 2004 for the first time. Therefore, the voting pattern has been shaped mainly by the existing social and political culture rather than democratic norms. As Katzman (2011) notes, patterns of "political affiliation by family, clan, tribe, village, ethnicity, region, and comradeship in battle often supersede relationships based on ideology or views. These patterns have been evident in every Afghan election since the fall of the Taliban."⁴⁴ Although, traditional social structure, religious, ideological (e.g. Islamists, leftist, etc.), and socio-economic factors also played role in shaping the voting pattern among Afghans, nevertheless, ethnic tendency has been prevalent.⁴⁵ Therefore, the candidates in either presidential or parliamentary elections have pursued campaign strategies designed primarily to assemble blocs of ethnic and geographic votes, 'although some

43. Maisam Wahidi, Youth Activism in Afghanistan, Research and Advocacy Organization for Development, Kabul, 2014, p 4

44. Kenneth Katzman, Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance, Congressional Research Service, December 12, 2011, p 2

45. See: Amiri, Ali & Abdul Jalil Benish, The First Experience: Voting Patterns and Political Alignments in Wolesi Jirga (2005-2010), Afghanistan Watch, September 2010, pp 17-20. The best example that demonstrates the ethnic voting pattern was in 2010 parliamentary elections in Ghazni province where Pashtuns turnout were low because of insecurity and the Taliban's discouragement of Pashtuns. Therefore, Hazara candidates won the whole 11 sets. The main reason for the Hazaras gain in Ghazni was a better security and higher turnout in Hazaras areas. President Karzai in reaction to the Hazaras' gains in Ghazni called for re-election but the call was rejected by the Independent Commission of Election.

have also sought to advance specific new programs and ideas'⁴⁶.

In the local scale, traditional structure of the society provided obstacles for exercising individual rights to decide to vote for a certain candidate. Asia Foundation (2011) in their survey of Afghan people reported that 56 percent of Afghans thought that they should vote the way his or her community votes, in contrast, 42 percent said that voting should be a matter of individual choice.⁴⁷ Such traditional pattern of voting creates clusters of ready votes to fill a ballot box for a certain candidates. This pattern in addition of being attractive to the candidates as easy targets that can be acquired by negotiation with the tribe elders, encourages political parties to pursue more ethnic agenda that enable them to accumulate these clusters under a larger collectivity. In addition, the lack of well organized larger political coalitions with defined agendas, provide rooms for the non-aligned maverick politicians to manipulate the socio-economic problems by giving promises that is far beyond their grasp to deliver. Such a cycle of hopeful promises and frustrations make the votes more fluid to some degree. While, socio-economic demands never receive responds, the astute ethnic leaders are there to interpret the frustration in ethnic terms, and mobilize the masses behind ethnic agendas. In other words, this trend when paralleled with the slow pace of change and improvement of the Afghan daily live and a dysfunctional government, perpetuate ethnic politics and keep the ethnic dynamics of the society activated. Thus the potential for more extreme behaviors remains a matter of concern.

This voting pattern provide fertile ground for the traditional ethnic political parties and leaders to enhance their position by attracting such ready vote clusters by negotiating with tribe elders, local strongmen and power brokers. Youth groups, however given the absence of political finance, lack the ability in political and financial terms to make deals with these local leaders and elders, as most negotiations hinges upon rewards such as position and financial support. This pattern of voting doesn't seem to change in the near future as long as the political structure and institutional design remain intact favoring traditional elites and parties. In addition, Afghanistan has been defined traditionally a paternal society in which age matters the most and social respect and influence are attached with tribe, clan, family, and so forth rather than personal merit and ability. Therefore, paternal mentalities affect the voting patterns as well as leadership which have been intertwined with elderly. As a society in transition, most observers believe that such behaviors and patterns will change in the long run and for the time being youth elites are gaining gradually importance and influence within the society.⁴⁸ Chaman Shah Etemadi, Ghazni MP says that:

Previously less importance was given to the youth and more to the wardrobe and beard (as signs of elderly and seniority), but currently the youth has proved to gain better

46. Katzman, , op. cit.; For more information on ethnic and geographic division of votes and ethnographic data of Afghanistan's elections see: Opening up elections in Afghanistan, at <http://afghanistanelectiondata.org/>

47. Rennie, Ruth, ed., Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People, Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2011, p 118

48. Interview with Nilofar Ebrahimi, Member of the Parliament, 5 June, 2015

position and earn social respect and political importance.⁴⁹

Currently, as a sign of frustration with the party politics in Afghanistan, despite the emergence of several youth-led political movements and organizations such as Afghanistan 1400, Afghanistan Green Youth National Coalition, and Youth Activists Network for Reform and Change, etc, Afghan youth have a dense presence within the civil society. Civil society organizations are mostly youth-led and voice youth concerns over policy issues or government initiatives. Afghan youth have been able to establish civil society as a core element of the nascent and fledgling democracy in the country and to act as check and balances system for ill-established democratic institutions. Today, in other words, youth have barricaded firmly within civil society organizations to challenge the old guard authority and to criticize their actions which illustrates best the non-institutionalized form of political participation. They have been able to solicit support from the society and impact policy making circles and procedures. Some have gain social and political reputation through civic activities to the extent that has enabled them to win elections and to earn a seat in the parliament or provincial councils. Even some has been elevated as the head of the provincial council such as Tayeba Khawari, a former civic activist who was elected as the head of Bamyan Provincial Council. In conclusion, today youth see civil society organizations both as the linchpin of youth activism and as a launch pad for political goals. Youth have set their goals to exercise non-institutionalized form of political participation through civil society organizations until they are able to impact directly the policy making process more directly through institutionalized forms.

1.6. Youth participation in the Past elections (2004-2014)

Afghanistan faces a growing youth population with two third of the country's population under the age of 25. Only in 2014, more than 3,8 million mostly newly voting Afghans, about a third of them women, received by April 1st, 2014 a new voter card during the IEC 'top-up' campaign.⁵⁰ Youth votes are vital in Afghanistan's elections, however within the context of ethnic politics and game rules set by the old guard youth groups have not been able to play a decisive role in changing the political landscape in the country. But the ethno-political divide or the changing nature of party affiliation with ethnic affiliation in the parliamentary and provincial council elections has created more room for young and independent candidates and the youths generally to participate in the elections as more proactive political force.

For example, in the Parliamentary elections of 2005, Pashtuns won 118 from the total 249 seats, Tajiks 53, Hazaras 41, and Uzbeks 20 seats. If we compare the party

49. Interview with Chaman Shah Etemadi, Ghazni MP, Jun 28, 2015

50. UNDP, Afghan youth votes in historic election, at <http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/successstories/AfghanYouthVotes.html> (Accessed jun 25, 2015)

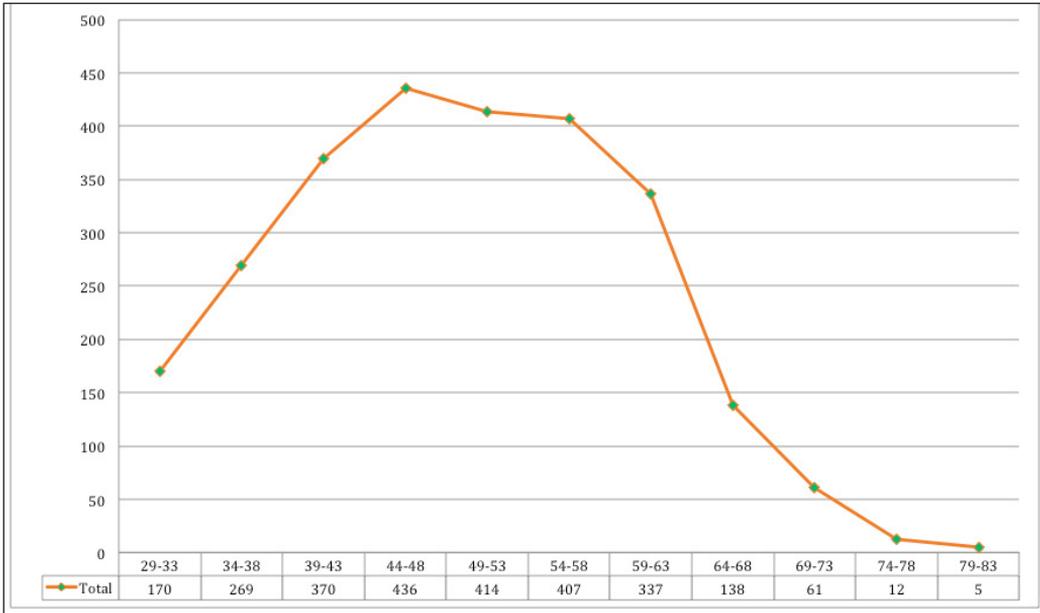


Figure 1: Candidates of 2010 Parliamentary elections based on age groups

affiliations with ethnic divisions in the Parliament, the ethno-political divide can be demonstrated more vividly. Among the Pashtun members of the parliament 49% were affiliated with parties (predominantly Pashtun parties such as Hizb-e-Islami and Afghan Mellat). The next three ethnic groups’ party affiliations were stronger: 70 percent of the Tajik members, 80 percent of Hazara members, and 100 percent of Uzbek members were affiliated with dominant ethnic political factions. Only 69 out of 249 members defined them as non-aligned with political parties or factions.⁵¹ The ethno-political division allowed the political parties and the *jihadi* leaders to create factions within the Parliament around ethnicity, and in their public rhetoric they heralded the elections as a test that proved the wide support of the Afghans to the *jihadi* ethno-political factions. But the ethnic division among the so-called jihadi parties was sufficiently strong to cause frequent deadlocks in the decision making process, for example over electing the Wolesi Jirga’s administrative members and its ethnic composition.

In 2010, the elections indicated a further decline of political parties. The number of party affiliated members of the Parliament declined from 72.3% in 2005 to 48.5% in 2010. Over 128 MPs defined themselves as non-aligned and independent, filling 51.4% of the total 249 seats in the Wolesi Jirgah.⁵²

The changes in the ethnic balance of the Wolesi Jirgah strengthened the position of

51. Wilder, Andrew, A House Divided? Analyzing the 2005 Afghan Elections, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), December 2005, pp 5-8

52. Hussein, Abbas, and Nurollah Faizi, The New Composition of the Parliament of Afghanistan, Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, 2011, pp 16-19

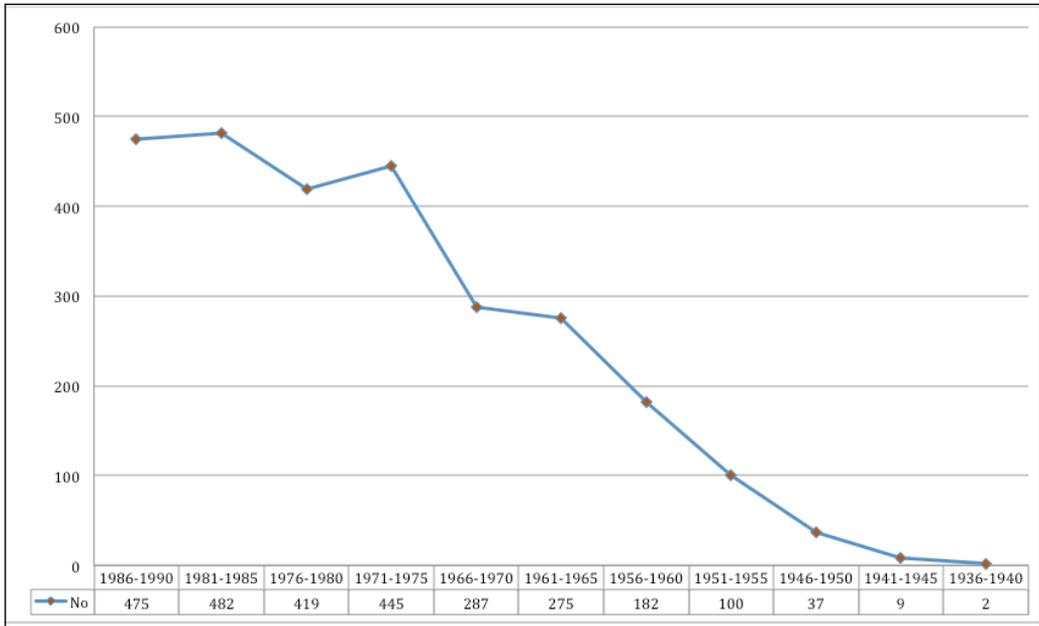


Figure 2: Candidates of 2014 Provincial Councils' Elections based on Age group¹

1. Analysis are based on the Independent Electoral Commission's data of 2010 and 2014 elections.

the non-Pashtun ethnic groups and caused certain political shifts. First, the political parties that experienced somewhat dramatic decline within the House took on a more ethnic appearance in order to create blocs that would support their position within the political structure. Although the political parties usually suffered from low organizational capacity and had difficulty bringing party members together as unified blocs, the loss of seats prompted the parties to further utilize ethnic divides. Despite excessive and successive manipulation of ethnic divides by the weakening political parties, political landscape became more fertile for youth activists to prompt into a gradual replacement of the old guard in both provincial councils and the parliament.

From 2004 to 2014 youth participation in the elections has grown increasingly and youths have changed from passive voters to active candidates, seeking to replace the older players. However, in the absence of an accurate and reliable data on youth political participation it is difficult to measure the progress and gage the change in nature of youth participation; existing reports confirm a gradual improvement of youth political participation and activism. Throughout the past decade, the youth have made advances in the provincial councils, especially in the major cities (i.e. Kabul and Herat). A key reason has been accessibility of the local vote for local youth that relied more on kinship and family ties and to some degree personal qualifications enabling young elites to solicit local support. In addition, with a more ambitious old guard seeking parliament seats, youths got a better competitive opportunity for the provincial councils.

Official data from the election commission shows that the average age of 2619 candidates

in 2010 parliamentary elections was 49 years old, while for the 2014 provincial council's elections the average age was 41.⁵³

In order to provide a more accurate analysis, first the candidates of 2010 parliamentary elections as listed in the IEC data base were sorted out into eleven groups based on simple age range pivot table (See figure 1). This result showed that the highest number of candidates belonged to age ranges of 44-48 with 436, 49-53 with 414, 54-58 with 407, 39-43 with 370, 59-63 with 337, and 34-38 with 269 nominees respectively. But in the provincial councils' elections of 2014, young candidates constituted a high percentage of the total nominees list. According to the IEC data base that listed the nominees based on their date of birth, 40% of the candidates were born between 1360-1369 (1981-1990) with ages ranging from 25 to 35 years old and 23% were born between 1360-1369 (1971-1980) with ages ranging from 36 to 44 years old. According to NDI report, youth candidates constituted higher percentage in 2014 elections with 70 percent of provincial council candidates being between the ages of 25 and 35. This represents an extraordinary achievement in a paternal society with strong traditional values embedded in its political culture.⁵⁴

This proves that first, youth elites opt for winning a seat in the provincial councils as the first choice, and second that the average age is getting younger, which shows increasing political activism among the youth and their willingness for active political participation in order to impact policy circles.

1.7. Electoral frauds and its impact on youths' trust

Since the 2009 presidential election—the first election run by Afghans—in which President Karzai won with 48% of the vote (less than the required 50% plus) after Dr. Abdullah's withdrawal from a run-off,⁵⁵ fraud became a more pressing problem. The 2010 Wolesi Jirgah elections was conducted with systematic fraud, including intimidation and ballot stuffing, which brought the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to throw out 1.3 million ballots, an estimated quarter of the total votes cast. The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) subsequently disqualified 21 winning candidates for electoral fraud.⁵⁶

In 2014 presidential elections, the country saw its worst electoral crisis since the inception of the Bonn Agreement. The government that came out of a deal between the two candidates brokered by John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, illustrated the

53. Data acquired by the author from the Secretariat of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)

54. NDI, National Democratic Institute's election mission for Afghanistan's 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections, Kabul and Washington DC, April 7, 2014

55. See: NDI, "The 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections in Afghanistan," 2010, http://www.ndi.org/files/Elections_in_Afghanistan_2009.pdf (Accessed on August 10, 2012)

56. ICG, "Afghanistan's Election Stalemate," Asia Briefing, No.117, Kabul/Brussels, 23 February 2011, p1

deficiency of ill-developed democratic institutions and resorting back to old-fashioned traditional ways of negotiating a deal to form a government.⁵⁷ Fraud in the provincial council elections was more prevalent but as the focus was shifted toward the presidential elections, given its importance for the whole nation and its implications on stability and security in the country, most of the objections over fraud and complaints in provincial council elections went unheeded.

Fraudulent elections have had significant negative impacts on institutionalization of democratic values and procedures. First, it led to questioning the legitimacy of the new National Unity Government; and second, it contributed to the loss of trust over democratic procedures such as elections among Afghans and thus gave room to destabilizing forces.⁵⁸ For youth, constituting more than two third of voters, this loss of trust over democratic procedures and institutions had significant effect both in form of political participation they previously opted for, and also it caused the disillusionment of youth with democratic norms that they had fought for. This collapse of hope and trust on democratic norms and procedures has wide implications and effects on democratic consolidation in Afghanistan and will significantly impact the turn out in the upcoming elections if measures for reform and trust building is not initiated to address the institutional deficiencies. In addition, other factors such high rate unemployment in the country, especially among the educated youth has pushed them to the end of the edges. Two patterns are more obvious these days, first, exit from the country with a new surge in emigration of youth and a high rate of human flight; second, violence among the youth in the periphery and opting more non-institutionalized forms of political participation as a preferable choice that entails potentials for violence if not addressed in the long run.

Having this in mind, despite expectations for wide participation of Afghan youth and their willingness to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections, the main concern for youth as a leading member of a youth focus groups in Kabul states, is corruption, fraud and an active ethnic politics for ethnicization of the electoral process:

Afghan youth not only had wide political participation in the past elections but also they will take part in the upcoming elections both as voters and as candidates. But I am not hopeful about increasing youth presence within the parliament mainly because of corruption and fraud in the process and a better access to ethnic vote blocks by candidates affiliated to ethnic political parties and their ability to finance large campaign groups or to buy votes facilitated by corrupt staff within the commission.⁵⁹

57. For details on electoral fraud and its patterns in 2010 and 2014 Elections, see: Callen, Michael and James D. Long, Institutional Corruption and Election Fraud: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan, *American Economic Review* 2015, 105(1): 354–381

58. For more information on the 2009 presidential elections, see: Humayoon, Haseeb, "The Re-Election of Hamid Karzai," *Afghanistan Report No.4*, Institute for the Study of War, January 2010, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The_ReElection_of_Hamid%20Karzai.pdf (Accessed on August 11, 2012)

59. Interview with a member of youth focus group in Kabul, July 9, 2015

1.8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Afghan youth constituting two third of the country's population are expected to play an important role in democratic consolidation and bringing about a positive change in the political landscape. With the growing rate of literacy, new youth elites are potentially the main driving force of social and political change. But with all hopes vested in young generation, youths' political participation has been constrained by identity politics and a *de facto* consociational system. Current political and electoral design hinders youths' effective institutionalized political participation. In addition, persistent social norms, traditions, given the importance of age and seniority in gaining wider support and earning positions are the main factors delimiting youth political participation.

Considering all these obstacles dwarfing youth efforts for social recognition as a challenging force for change and reform, youth have taken strides in the past one and half decade. Their political participation has increasingly grown more peaceful and institutionalized, those affiliated with insurgent groups being an exception. Despite all frustrations caused by political shifts and drifts within the system and the play of communal card by the ethnic political parties for mobilizing resources and support, youth political participation has developed in both forms of institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms. In institutionalized form, youth participation in the elections has kept the pace with political development in the country. Furthermore, the youth grasping the opportunities has pushed forward for a more effective role and changed over time from passive voters to active ones playing an important role in pre-election deliberations and discussions. These deliberations has contributed to making better informed polices. There have been more youth candidates in the recent elections, especially in the provincial council elections. But youth ambitions for an effective role in shaping the system and re-defining the political landscape have moved beyond localities. They have had an increasing presence in the list of parliamentary candidates and a dense yet active role in the presidential elections of 2014.

In non-institutionalized form of political participation, youth have contributed to the emergence the civil society in the post-2001 Afghanistan. Civil society organizations have been an important pillar of democracy in Afghanistan with a significant role in democratic transition and consolidation. Youth have been able to voice their concerns and social demands through civic activism and exercising non-institutionalized forms of political participation that have proved to have immense impact on policy making circles.

In sum, for a wider youth political participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections (currently scheduled for 2016, with a one year delay) certain recommendations can be made based on this study.

First, the government should embark on initiatives conducive to de-ethnicization of politics that hampers democratic consolidation in the country as well as youth political participation.

Second, de-personalization of politics that would bring an opening in the political system allowing the youth to compete better for offices and positions and to impact the policy making circles with a deeper involvement.

Third, as the commission for electoral reform has started their work to assess and make recommendations for reform of electoral design and elections commission, efforts should be dedicated to detect and solve the problems that have long hindered success of young and independent candidates in the elections. This reform should also include removing corrupt elements that have engineered the elections and with fraudulent acts have caused political frustration among the Afghans, especially the youth in order to regain the social trust on formal institutions responsible for holding elections.

Fourth, with a National Youth Policy in place, the government should expedite its efforts to establish the inter-sectoral committee with the Vice President as its head in order to take more effective initiatives for youth empowerment. With all criticism that has been raised against the current youth policy, its implementation is expected to bring the youth issues to the fore and facilitate addressing youth problems and concerns more effectively.

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Interview with Nilofar Ibrahim, Member of the Wolesi Jirga

Interview with leader of Labor and Development Party (Hezb-e Kar wa Tawseaa)

Interview with six youth focus group in Kabul

Interview with Faizi, civil society activist

Interview with Mohammad Milad Sekandari, civil society activist

Interview with Abdul Fattah Faieq, civil society activist

Interview with Najib Shieban, civil society activist

Interview with Din Mohammad Darwishi, civil society activist

Interview with Mohammad Nader Sultani, civil society activist

Interview with Mohammad Reza Qasemi, civil society activist

Interview with Mohammad Rafe Bayan, civil society activist

Interview with Akbar Danesh, civil society activist

Interview with Hares Amarkhil, civil society activist

Interview with Nasrin Hussieny, civil society activist

Interview with Zarif Safa Bakhtyari, civil society activist

Annex I: Questionnaire 1

The following questions were asked from the youth focus groups, MPs, civil society leaders and activists:

- 1- How do you evaluate youth political participation in Afghanistan?
- 2- What is your view on youth participation in the 17th round of parliamentary elections?
- 3- What solutions you suggest/propose for strengthening youth political participation?
- 4- How ethnic politics can affect youth political participation?
- 5- How do you evaluate women political participation in post-2001 Afghanistan?
- 6- How do you evaluate development of ethnic politics in post-2001?
- 7- Do you think ethnic politics has hindered democratic political process? If yes, please highlight elements that provided obstacles for democratic political process?
- 8- What solutions do you suggest for an effective de-ethnicization of politics in the country?
- 9- What role the tertiary and higher education institutions can play in institutionalization of democratic values and procedures?
- 10- What do you think on development of democratic political process and democratic consolidation in the Transformation Decade (2014-2024)?

Annex II: Questionnaire 2

This question forms was distributed among the participants of the workshops.

- 1- How do you evaluate youth political participation in the past elections?
- 2- What were the main challenges and obstacles for youth participation in the past elections?
- 3- What was the effect of ethnic politics and voting patterns on youth political participation?
- 4- How do you explain the reason behind the wider presence of the youth in Provincial Council Elections and their relatively limited participation in the Parliamentary elections?
- 5- What should be done for wider youth participation in the upcoming elections?
- 6- What are recommendations for the Electoral Reforms Commission?