



# An Evaluation of Election Process in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Paktia Province

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## Abstract

International organisations consumed seriously in the construction of institutions and fragile state in order to help democratic elections, because Elections are the core of democracy or democratic government, most relatively Bonn Agreement was the base for democratization process and as well as for the first presidential election in Afghanistan, according to this agreement transitional government has been brought to the country and Karzai was selected as president of Afghanistan in the year of 2001. In a broader concept this study is an attempt to help the readers to have a general idea about the election process in the mentioned country and specifically it emphasises more and more on the election process within Paktia province, this academic work is carried out through mix method (Qualitative and Quantitative), with the help of questionnaire and certain interviews with citizens, election system specialists and professors of the universities. Secondary data is collected from the election commission of Paktia province, independent election commission of Afghanistan, ministry of justice, independent election grievances commission of Afghanistan and previous researches and reports from internet, and furthermore some proper solvation or ways are determined and suggested by this particular study.

**KEY WORDS:** Afghanistan, Democracy, Elections and Paktia

## Introduction

This study evaluates the elections process in one of the important Asian country which is called Afghanistan, it is a country which is having a long history and its wonderful location in the world's map takes the eyes of the superpower countries, economically it can be counted as a poor country in the world but from natural resources point of view it is among the richest countries in the world and the unique culture of afghan society gives more shines and makes it a country full of traditions.

Democratization and elections are two recent processes which have been applied in the starting of 21st century in this particular country, an election is a recognised group decision making process through which people chooses an individual to rule public office It is generally used in Democratic nations. Elections were the ordinary tool by which current representative democracy has functioned since the seventeenth century, Elections may fill offices in other portions of the government such as legislature, judiciary and executive for local administration.

This process is also used in many other private organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and companies. Afghanistan especially our area of study (Paktia province) is diverse in term of population and ethnical groups, different types of elections are there such as presidential elections, parliamentary elections, election for provincial council and etc. Furthermore, challenges, impact of elections on democracy, cultural constraints for elections and back round of elections in Afghanistan will be studied in depth by this academic work and in the end some proper ways or salvations are suggested or determined by the research for a fair process of elections in Afghanistan particularly in Paktia province.

## **Review of Literature**

Number of studies have been conducted about elections and its process in Afghanistan for the purpose of evaluation and analysing different aspect of Electoral process and to find ways for the obstacles, there for various studies have been critically reviewed in order to evaluate the process of elections in Paktia province. Eli Berman, Michael Calen, Clark Gibson and James D. Long have analysed the fairness of elections and government legitimacy in the context of Afghanistan and they found that the politics of Afghanistan is influenced by different elements such as; religion, class, ideology and apart from this insecurity was measured as the main challenge for the unfair process of elections.

Michael Callen and James D. Long have studied institutional corruption and fraud in elections there for they visited 471 polling centers and they have found that the link between political network and electoral institutions is threat to democracy and they suggested the adoption of new technology in order to overcome this particular problem. Timor Sharan and John Heathershaw have analysed the role of Bonn agreement and the state building process of Afghanistan. Timor Sharan has conducted a study in order to measure conflicts within political atmosphere in the context of Afghanistan because many groups and political parties were/are working in this particular country which opens a window for political conflicts among the leader and their followers.

Nils B. Weidmann and Michael Callen conducted an academic study of violence and fraud in election process and further more they made efforts in order to find out the impact of fraud on elections within Afghanistan in the end they found that fraud and insecurity are two major threats to the fairness of electoral process. Martin Hess, Therese Pearce Lannela and William Maley have studied and analysed challenges in the process of election within Afghanistan they have observed various polling station and they interviewed large number of citizens as a result they found that uncertainty, instability and fraud in election process are the main challenges and these are serious threats to democracy and fairness of elections. Noah Coburn and Anna Larson have

conducted a study in order to analyze 2009 elections and the reasons for its disaster these researchers have studied three main areas of Kabul province (Dasht -i Barchi, Qarabagh and istalif) in the end the investigators found that 2009 elections were not fair and three main reasons were aimed for the failure of these elections namely; fraud, insecurity and delay in the announcement of electoral result.

## **Democratization Process in Afghanistan**

After so long time states have realized the needs and wants of people in the governing process that up to what extend people wants freedom and participation in the governmental decisions, so it is why most of the governments return to democratic form of government, democracy had a lots of achievement and area of usage in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century the term democracy suggest a government based on people's participation and public support and democratization means a procedure through which a political system becomes democratic.

Democratization process in Afghanistan has started from the post Bonn agreement 2001, this particular agreement had provision for the transitional government in Afghanistan and first ever democratic elections and democratic institutions in the year of 2004 in the context of Afghanistan because before 2001 Taliban regime was governing Afghanistan since 1996 till 2001 but after September 11 USA attacked Afghanistan because of that terrorist attacks which happened in USA then Taliban regime has collapsed and according to Bonn agreement a democratic Government has been established which was led by president Hamid Karzai.

## **Historical Background of Elections in Afghanistan**

During 1949, Afghan (PM) Shah Mahmud allowed free national assembly elections, and the consequential seventh Afghan Parliament, which has recognised as the "Liberal Parliament", it has given a voice to the governmental department and traditional institutions, and as well as it has given a life to opposition, and some reform were introduced such as a policy for a free press, sixth was chosen from 1924-1945. The parliamentary elections in 1952 was counted a stage backward from 1949 as part of the state limit, during 1951 and 1952 ending liberalization, union of students in some university such as Kabul and Gazni were dissolved in 1951. Newspapers were closed and many chiefs of the opposition were jailed.

In (1964) Mohammed Zahir Shah announced Loya jirga – (a national assembly that comprised representatives from all parts of the society), the Legislature, in order to approve a fresh Afghan constitution. 167 members of the meeting were elected by the provinces, and 34 participants has been selected by the king. Shortly we can say that the Loya jirga of 1964 included representatives from all sections of the society in order to represent the full range of societal, political and religious opinion. After the elections of 1964 election were also held in 1965 and as well as in 1969.

Responsibility of parliamentary and presidential elections were imposed on Afghanistan in order to conduct these elections in 2004 for the purpose of substituting the transitional government headed by Hamid Karzai. According to the agreement presidential elections were held but parliamentary was delayed

till 2005, Hamid Karzai won the presidential elections 55.4% of votes. After this Afghanistan held elections of provincial councils and as well as parliamentary elections in 2005, but the result was delayed because of unfairness and fraud, then it was finally announced in the Nov 2005.

Previous commanders (Jihadi commanders) and their followers gained the majority of chairs in both the Wolasi jirga (house of representative) and the provincial council (which votes for the members of the upper house), women achieved 28% of the seats in the Wolasi jirga. This continuous process of elections was/is going on and as per the law of the country many time elections were held such as presidential elections in 2009, parliamentary elections in 2010, presidential elections in 2014 and finally Afghan parliamentary elections in 2018.

But after the announcement of result for each election some of the party or candidates were disagreed with the result and they were criticizing the elections for fraud and inappropriate interruption of the super power countries, along with the candidates, voters were also not satisfied with fairness of the elections and as well as with the result. Corruption, fraud unnecessary interruptions from other countries and insecurity were highlighted as the main reasons for their dissatisfaction.

Since the collapse of Taliban regime by USA in (2001) there were more threats to elections than any time because Taliban were the opposite side of afghan government and foreign forces which were operating in Afghanistan, these threats were not only for those who were trying to gain the power and contest in the elections but also for them who were costing votes for them, Taliban were/are giving warning to the people to not participate in elections, and in many cases we were witness of some very serious punishments to those who had participated in elections whether as a voter or a candidates, so as a summery we can say that elections have been held during 20th century in Afghanistan but the fairness of elections was always a question in the minds of the people within this particular country.

## **Typology of Elections in Afghanistan**

Elections are regarded as the backbone of a democratic society there are various types of democratic elections in the world it differs from country to country and from one political system to another, within those countries which follows parliamentary type of government elections for the prime minister position are the most important, but those countries which follows republic form of government presidential type of elections are the most important elections for them so according to political system of the countries it differs but generally elections are same nearly in all those countries which follows democracy and its principles.

Generally there are six types of elections which are very popular in the world especially in Afghanistan these six types of elections include presidential, parliamentary, provincial council, elections for municipalities, district council and elections for village council, but from these six types only first three types have been experienced practically in the context of Afghanistan specifically in Paktia province remaining three types of elections (municipalities, district council and village council) are mentioned in

the laws but till now these are not conducted practically because of certain issues in rural areas of Afghanistan such as insecurity, lack of financial resources and etc.

**Table 1. Typology of Elections in Afghanistan**

Typology of Elections			Main Challenges in Electoral
Presidential Elections	Parliamentary Elections	Provincial Council Elections	
Elections for Municipalities	Elections for District Councils	Elections for Village Councils	

### Process of Afghanistan: A Case of Paktia Province

There are various challenges in the electoral process of Afghanistan particularly in the electoral process of Paktia province, because Afghanistan is a country which has suffered from internal and external wars for 4 decades and still it is suffering so in a country like this it is obvious that political processes will be challenged through many factors such as; insecurity, fraud, foreign interferences and etc. So here are some main challenges of electoral process within Paktia province and generally it exists in all over Afghanistan:

#### 1. Insecurity:

Insecurity or instability are the main challenges in electoral process not only in Paktia province nearly in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan because it has been 4 decades that there are internal or external wars in Afghanistan, many cases are registered that those people who were going to polling centers for the purpose of voting they were killed or from some of them their fingers were cut (those fingers that they are inking for voting) and apart from voters the personnel of elections are the main target for the terrorists in their lives are always in danger so in this kind of environment it is obvious that electoral result and the whole process of elections will be unfair and inappropriate.

#### 2. Electoral Fraud

Electoral fraud and insecurity are inter related with each other because it is insecurity which prepare the situation for fraud, fraud is a main challenge in the electoral process of Afghanistan it is also cleared from literatures that have been reviewed for this particular study most of them found that there was fraud in the electoral process and people were not happy with the result of elections, for instance bogus votes were used and counted and these bogus votes had very negative impact on shaping the result of the elections<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Election Grievances Commission of Paktia Province.



### **3. Foreign Interferences**

This is also one of the serious problem and challenge especially in the time of result announcement most of the people and candidates blaming all NATO countries particularly USA for interfering in electoral process, for instance in 2014 presidential election has been conducted in Afghanistan after the announcement of the result Dr Ashraf Ghani has been declared as the president of Afghanistan, But Dr Abdullah and his team were not accepting the result and they told that there was fraud in elections, after so long time (about 6 month) John Kerry minister of foreign affairs of USA has arrived to Kabul and according to his decision Dr Ashraf Ghani remained as the president but half of the authority was given to Dr Abdullah and he has been selected as a chief executive of Afghanistan without any elections, it is a common indicator of foreign interference in the electoral process and its result within Afghanistan. And furthermore some neighbour countries are also involved indirectly in the electoral process of Afghanistan because these countries were/are always against the development and self-sufficiency of Afghanistan.

### **4. Lack of Trained Personnel**

Lack of trained personnel is another challenge in electoral process of Paktia province of Afghanistan especially when it comes to electoral day, because for a fair electoral process there is need of well-qualified personnel in order to know all the dimensions of this particular process.

### **5. Lack of Public Awareness**

It is also one of the main challenge especially in rural areas of Afghanistan and Paktia province, the arrangement of public awareness programs is not a big deal but the implementation of these programs is very tuff for the government particularly in rural areas because in most of the rural areas of Afghanistan there are terrorist groups by the name of Taliban.

### **6. Lack of ICT Tools**

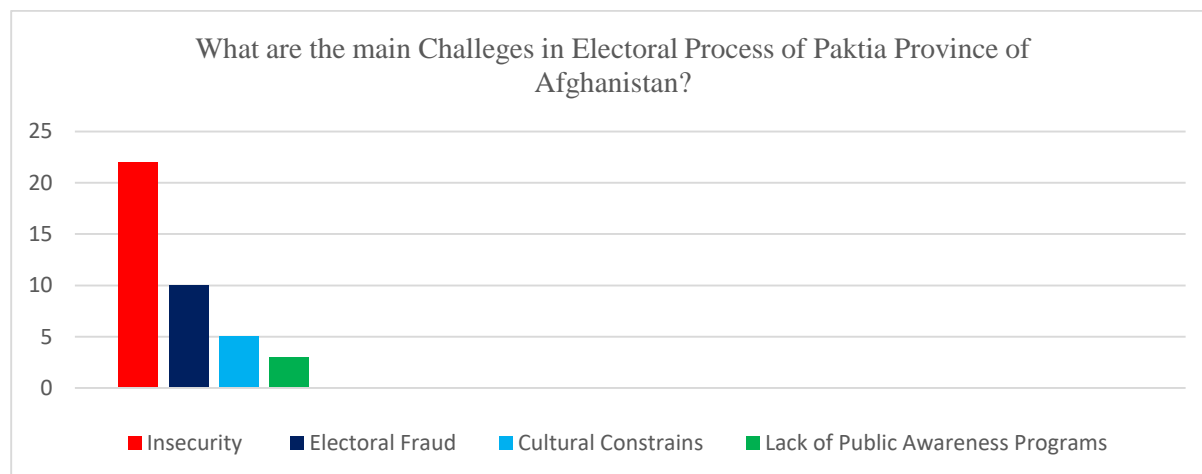
Use of technology is very important for the fairness of electoral process and for saving time, in Afghanistan biometric devices were used for the first time in last presidential elections but those devices were of no use and that was just a show, some of the devices were stolen by people or damaged by Taliban in the rural areas, and too much complains were received about electoral fraud more than any elections especially in Paktia province of Afghanistan, for the fairness of electoral process it is needed that there must be CC-TV cameras which are not experienced till now in any type of elections in Afghanistan, and further more government should provide the facilities for people to cost votes from their homes through ICT tools.

### **7. Cultural constrains for women participation**

This is noted in all elections of Afghanistan that women are not/less participating in the elections generally in entire Afghanistan and particularly in Paktia province, in capital (Kabul) and in some secure

cities women are going to polling centers but in rural area it is very difficult for them to participate in the elections, because in Afghani culture it is common that women should do only cooking, washing and child related tasks and men should fulfil all their basic needs of life, so if women go outside of their house for any kind of activity other people are taking it as a shame for their husbands, brothers and to their fathers and in some cases they are killed because of not obeying this particular culture especially when they get arrest by Taliban.

**Figure 1. Data Analysis**



## Key Findings

This study attempted to analyze electoral process within Paktia province of Afghanistan, particularly its main focus was to find out the main challenges of electoral process within this particular province, the result of this study indicates that people were/are not satisfied with the fairness of electoral process within Paktia province, 40 interviewees were the sample of this study and according to their interviews and field work it has been found that there are many challenges in electoral process of Paktia province which causes the unfairness of this particular process, these challenges are; insecurity, electoral fraud, foreign interferences, lack of public awareness programs, lack of ICT tools and cultural constrains for women's participation.

## Conclusion

Elections are one of the important factor or element of democracy and are regarded as a corner stone for government and people's participation in governmental decisions, first democratic elections have been conducted after Bonn agreement in Afghanistan which is regarded as a starting point of democratization process in Afghanistan. There are six types of elections in Afghanistan namely presidential, parliamentary, provincial, district council elections, elections for municipalities and elections for village councils but till now only first three types are experienced rest three are mentioned in the laws and regulations but till now these elections are not tested practically because of insecurity issues in the rural areas of Afghanistan

particularly in Paktia province, electoral process is a complex process and a process full of challenges in Afghanistan, because there is uncertainty in the country which is challenging people's participation in the country and as well as the fairness and result of the elections, women participation is very limited due to cultural constraints and because of insecurity in the country, so in order to overcome all these problem first of all peace is necessary and secondly a well-recognised technology is needed to be used in electoral process in order to prevent fraud.

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