



# DETERMINANTS OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN AFGHANISTAN

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## Abstract

Voters as customers behave and perform rationally when they are using their votes. They are struggling to maximize and make the best use of their gains from this procedure. As Afghanistan is practicing democracy newly and also Afghanistan is in a young age of democracy and elections, it is very important to know the behaviors of the voters in this particular country that what effects the voting. This article is trying to uncover the behaviors of the voters and the degree and evolution of this action's rationality in Afghanistan's context after 2004. The main purpose of the article is to test the rational choice and ethnicity and conflict theories as opposite arguments. Surveys that have been conducted regarding voting since 2004 first Afghanistan presidential elections show the results that the language, ethnicity, and education have a statistically significant effect on voting behavior in Afghanistan. While gender and age do not have any statistically significant effect on the voting decision of Afghan voters which is consistent with ethnic and conflict theory and inconsistent with rational choice theory.

**Keywords:** Rational Choice theory, Ethnicity, and Conflict, Elections, Election, Voting Behavior, Afghanistan, Asia.

## Introduction

After 2001 US lead NATO forces took over and occupied Afghanistan from the Al-Qaida and Taliban terrorist groups, from that particular period onward the country has gone through a huge and tremendous change in all aspects of people and citizen's life. One of the biggest changes was the political regime change and democracy came to practice and led by its huge pillar which is elections. From 2001 till now Afghanistan managed and conducted four presidential elections and three parliamentary and provincial councils' elections. But the parliamentary elections of Afghanistan can be traced back to 1931 from that time forward there have been 16 elections. As the new constitution's compulsory article there are also, provincial council elections.

Post-2001 era there had been conducted three provincial elections as well (IEC, 2014). For the first time in Afghanistan's history, the power was transferred from an elected president to the next elected president in 2014. That was a huge leap and an achievement forward of democracy for such a recent and young democracy practicing country. This article will further analyze the voting behavior of the voters in the last two decades elections which took place in Afghanistan.

The major distinguishing of the election of Afghanistan is that ethnic leaders are trying to form electoral groups and teams to compete and win in elections. In the last one and half decades of practicing democracy and elections, this was an obvious and clear act among the candidates. The structure and combination of the electoral teams were based on four big ethnic groups and tribes of Afghanistan which are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras.

Voting' is one of the most generally used terms in the modern age of democratic politics and countries. Voting behavior is an exchange of trust and power for fulfilling the services that voters want from the candidates. In this context, every individual tries to vote for those candidates whom, they think, will maximize their gains and fulfilling their interests along with preferences (Horowitz, 1985).

Several reasons are there behind the poor election process and affected voting behavior in the country and sabotage the electoral process and reasons and factors through which people are using their votes for the future and upcoming leaders and representative and these factors behind voting behavior are rationales behind the lack of transparency as well that the process of election is not much free and fair and the most important determinants factors in Afghanistan political life and election process are ethnicity, language, nationalism, and money factor.

## Literature Review

Regarding voting behavior and its models, there are several theories, like, psychosocial, rational choice theories and ethnicity and conflict theory. This research paper aims to analyze both the rational choice theory and ethnicity and conflict theory in the context of Afghanistan and in Afghanistan's perspective. For this, a brief description and explanation of both theories have been added below.

## 1. Rational Choice Theory

The Rational Choice theory can be traced back to (1957) with a behavioral scientist Anthony Downs, to put in place an Economic illustration of voting behavior and structure through his famous work “*An Economic Theory of Democracy*” placing and putting Political parties to a competition. It marked and highlighted the beginning point of the theory with the Economic work done by Kenneth Arrow in (1951) which is concerning for economic factors thus resources, goods, and technology, with the political outcome of choice.

Down (1957) claims that if the assumptions of rational choice are good enough and able to clarify and explain the market, then they can explain the functioning of politics. He establishes a direct similarity and linkage between consumers and voters, and between enterprises and political parties and groups. If companies seek to maximize profits and consumers act to maximize the utility, we can then theorize in the logic that voters seek to maximize the utility of their vote as the party’s activities to maximize electoral gains obtained from their political proposals and agendas.

## 2. Ethnicity and Conflict Theory

Acting democracy and election in collections and voting behavior in some countries and societies are based on ethnical clan-based identities. The best theory of this special case is coming from Horowitz (1985). He in his book argues that ethnic groups are not only acting in collectives because of economic and political domination, but they are also struggling to stand against rival ethnic domination. For this reason, he argues that this behavior is a kind of psychological behavior of collective actions which he refers to as self-esteem. In most cases, the ethnic collections sacrifice economic advantage for that kind of comparative advantage over other ethnicities (Horowitz, 1985).

Down (1957) argues that if the assumptions of rational choice are able to explain the market, then they can explain the political functioning. He establishes a direct similarity between consumers and voters, and between enterprises and political parties. If companies seek to maximize profits and consumers act to maximize the utility, we can, then, theorize in the sense that voters seek to maximize the utility of their vote as the parties act to maximize electoral gains obtained from their political proposals.

Petracca (1991) argues that, Rational Choice Theory is an approach used by social scientists to understand human behavior. The approach has long been the dominant paradigm in economics, but in recent decades it has become more widely used in other disciplines such as Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. The rational choice approach to politics assumes that individual behavior is motivated by self-interest, utility maximization or more simply put goal fulfillment.

The operation of the model is based on three fundamental premises: (1) the rational decision of voters and politicians are guided by self-interest and utility maximization from the voting action. (2) The system is working in a manner which is consistent with decisions of voters and politicians and supports it. (3) Despite the consistency there is a level of uncertainty still exists, which allow various options in decision making (Antunes, 2010). Despite some criticism based on individualism approach, self-regarding interest and rationality, the theory still stands up to date (Blaise, 2000).

## The determinant of voting behavior in Afghanistan

What is voting behavior Samuel S. Eldersveld in his article „Theory a Method in Voting Behavior Research“ writes: “The term „voting behavior“ is not new. But it has been used of late to describe certain areas of study and types of political phenomena which previously had either not been conceived or were considered irrelevant.” Voting behaviors are not confined to the examination of voting statistics, records, and computation of electoral shifts and swings.

The behavior of a voter is influence by several factors such as religion, caste, community, language, money, political ideology, determination of the polls and election, the extent of the franchise and the like political parties and groups make use of these variables for the sake of winning the battle of the ballot box.

The voting process and the election was a new phenomenon after 2001 and people were not much understood about the term and it was a great achievement for the citizens of Afghanistan and the adult franchise become 18 years for both men and women in the country but the most important achievement was the voting right for women in the country and women participation in the political life of Afghanistan.

### Role of Afghan Women in election

Women were the most vulnerable class of society in Afghanistan. During the long and prolonged war, various factions targeted women based on their gender and ethnicity. Women suffered persistent human rights abuses such as sexual assault, abduction, and forced marriage. From 1994 to 2001, the Taliban controlled most of Afghanistan. This regime had a noticeable and highpoint of persecution against Afghan women. The Taliban’s regime stripped almost Afghan women of all their rights. It severely restricted their liberty and freedom. For example, they prevented the women to leave home without a family male relative and they prohibited them from working in the public sphere (except in the area of healthcare). They banned girls over eight years old from going to school.

Although at this time the Taliban is no longer in power, yet women still face serious problems of participation in the democratic process. Oppressive cultural customs and security risks still hinder women from speaking publicly about their voices, prevent them from participating in the reconstruction, and often prohibit them from accessing education, healthcare, employment, and other basic freedoms (Grenfell 2004). For the Taliban, women should live in the home and they are condemned to live in the home. In the name of Islam, the Taliban regime imposed anti-women rules and measures on society.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, Bonn Conference 2001 was signed, and the country’s transitional period started through the establishment of the interim Afghan Government. “Two out of the twenty-three listed delegates were Afghan women, and a number of some other women attended as observers. The Bonn Agreement states that the delegates selected the members of the Interim Administration with due regard to the significance of the contribution of women. The Agreement was for creating a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic, and fully representative government up to 2004; thus this was for opening up the possibility of women’s participation in the new political set up (Ibid).

The Emergency Loya Jirga of 2002 also made many efforts to ensure the participation of women in Afghan politics. Around 1500 delegates attended this meeting, of which 220 were women. Unfortunately, warlords and commanders dominated the conversation; they suppressed the voices of women. The Loya Jirga elected the new head of state, Hamid

Karzai. Women's participation at the Constitutional Loya Jirga, held in late 2003, was greater than ever before; around 20 percent of the 500 delegates were women (and seven out of the 35 members of the Constitutional Commission were women).

**Table: Women's Participation in the Electoral Process 2004-2014**

Year	Female Provincial council candidates	Female Parliamentary candidates	Female Presidential candidates	Female Voters
2004			1/18	37%
2005	8.2% (247/3025)	12.8 (335/2775)		41%
2009	10.3% (328/3196)		2/39	38.8%
2010		15.8% (406/2775)		39.1%
2014	11.3% (308/2713)		0/8	38%

Source: [https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/kasa\\_-\\_womens\\_rights\\_09.2014.pdf](https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/kasa_-_womens_rights_09.2014.pdf).

**Table: Percentage of Women's Participation in Afghan Elections**

Elections	Percentage of women voters	Total candidates	Female Candidates
2004 Presidential	37	18	1
2005 PC*	41	3025	247
2005 Parliamentary	41	2775	335
2009 Presidential	39	3196	2
2009 PC*	39	3196	328
2010 Parliamentary	39	2577	406
2014 Presidential	38	2713	8
2014 PC*	38	2713	308

Source: UN Women Report 2012, "Equal Rights, Unequal Opportunities: Women's Participation in Afghanistan's Parliamentary and Provincial Council Elections".

These charts above shows the participation of Afghan women in electoral process in last 20 years in the country and it was a great achievement for Afghan women and it is huge step toward political and social mobilization in the country.

## 1. Charisma

One of the most significant factors of voting behavior in all democratic societies and countries is Charisma. Charisma leads peoples mind to the quality, personality, and character of a leader and of course politicians and their qualification with a great background and past that can influence people mind to decide based on the charisma and the voters to use their vote in favor of a particular politician or leader. And also, it means the brilliant quality of a factor and overrides

group elements leader that becomes a source of attraction and reverence for the people in large numbers in the opposite sense.

This factor for the voting behavior we can mention is the best and admirable to a pushing factor in terms of winning the battle in polls and we can rarely find and marked this factor in developing countries and third world countries because they are not quite brilliant in practicing democracy because most of them are those countries that are in the third and fourth waves of democracy and their democracies are still young because in the context of these type of countries there is still the influence of tribes, clans, religion, lingual, and sub regionalism on politics and these factors dominated the politics and we can also mention election.

And the great and best personalities in the world we can mention, for instance, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Martin Luther King in united states, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Jawaharlal Nehru in India,

## 2. Clan

Clan continues to be a determinant of voting behaviors in Afghanistan. It has deep roots and background in society and country and it is an important base of all social relations and deals between citizens and people at all levels

There is four major and particular tribe or clan that dominate the political system in Afghanistan which are as follow Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek.

Despite the adoption of several provisions that prohibit action and discrimination on its bases, such as the Afghanistan constitution and universal human rights declaration and other civil movements clan continues to be a determinant of political behaviors. The politicization of clan and tribe in politics has been a well-known reality of the Afghan political system. The political parties and all candidates in Afghanistan, without any exception, while formulating their policies, programs and election strategies always keep in mind the tribe or clan factor. Clan and tribe are a factor in the selection of candidates for contesting an election from a constituency.

And the political parties, groups and politicians and candidates which are nominated for the election and they demanded voters and people in the name and the base of clan tribes and ethnic groups and motivate the voters for using their vote in polls on their particular political party or candidate's favor.

And it became a system and routine that all people use their vote on polls to their specific party of the candidate.

## 3. Religious Sect

we can mention this factor as religious as well and we could count this as the determiner of voting in Afghanistan but not a vital one but it has its influence and impact on voting and the competition in polls in a particular sense and people use their votes on the bases of the religious sect in their decision making during voting.

There are two main religious sects and groups in Islam religion in the context of Afghanistan which is Shia and Sunni and has its importance in the social and public life of citizens and especially during decision making for their future and election.

In this have been experienced many times in the past as well for instance in the parliamentary election from the Shia majority population areas the Shiite candidates became succeed and win the election and from the Sunni majority population areas the Sunni candidates.

The sect is vital and important because there is no religious diversity and only one religion is the majority and official religion of Afghanistan which is Islam.

That is why religion is not that important in terms of being a determiner for voting in the context of Afghanistan.

#### **4. Language**

Afghanistan is a multi-lingual state and nation with lingual diversity there are more than 30 languages and two of them are known as official languages which are Pashto and Dari.

Linguist also serves as a factor in voting behavior. The variation of states on a linguistic basis fully reflects the importance of language as a factor of politics and as the determiner of voting in Afghanistan territory.

There have been problems in states like that of the status of one particular language in that state, or relating to the quality of the status of a language of a state. Since people have an emotional attachment with their languages, they easily get influenced whenever there comes up any issue relating to language. Linguistic interests always influence voting behavior.

And even it became a system and structure in Afghanistan since 2001 when democracy came to practice in the country for the presidential election that the candidate for being president must be either from Pashtuns and Pashto language speaker or the Tajik and Dari language speaker and the first vice president must be from the Uzbek and Uzbek language speaker and the second vice president should be from Hazara people and the Dari language speaker.

#### **5. Money Factor**

Afghanistan is a poor country with a large number of people living below the poverty line. Money as such plays a vital role in determining the voting behavior of the people in Afghanistan. A rich candidate or party has always better chances of winning the elections and battle in polls. But it is to be pointed out here that it happens only in normal circumstances and not during a wave election or when other key issues are involved. Despite organizing a very expensive election campaign, and spending money candidates can change the result in their favor through their money and high financial circumstances which they are in.

Simply we can mention they could buy the votes of people and the poor majority by their money and by their aids of daily need like oil, rice, flour, and other things in an exchange for the vote and using their vote in favor of the particular party or candidate.

#### **6. Sub-Nationalism**

Ethnic pluralism, communalism, regionalism, and sub-nationalism are the hard realities of Afghan society of late sub-nationalism has become a crucial factor in influencing the voting behavior of the people.

Sub nationalism is also a vital factor in terms of voting in Afghanistan people and political parties are using this factor as a winning tool for the election and polls at the national level as well as at province level. At the national level when parties and candidates are in their election campaigns, they are trying to motivate people and encourage them to use their

vote for a particular party or candidate regarding their region and having pledges with people that this is their responsibility and job to serve their people and region.

In-state or province-level parties and candidates are also having election campaigns in those regions that they don't have more followers and fans because they know that in their region all people will use their votes in the favor of their party or candidates.

## 7. Performance of the Party or candidate in Power

Each Political party contests elections based on an election manifesto, and after coming into power, it is expected to fulfill the promises made there in the election campaign. Good or bad performance of the ruling party, just based on the election promises made and promises fulfilled influence the basic behavior of the people in a big way.

This has happened mainly because of a corresponding increase in the number of „floating voter“ or „switchers“ who are mostly young men and women from an educated upper and middle class and are ready to shift their support from one party to another based on their performance.

And this became more vital from time to time cause the citizens need service and the parties and candidates should fulfill their pledges and promises that they had given to people in their election campaigns and if they didn't do well in favor of their people and citizens in next term and upcoming election the citizens will not trust on them and the party or candidate might lose the election that is why this one of the important factors in term of voting determiner.

## 8. Mass literacy

Mass literacy has been another factor of voting behavior in Afghanistan. It is because of this weakness of the people that political parties, communal groups, and militant outfits, are in a position to exploit the sentiments of the people in the name of clan, religion, region and another such factor. The votes of the illiterate constitute a big proportion of the votes polled and hence it plays a big role in determining the outcomes of elections. However, despite this feature, the common sense and maturity born out of the experience of the past have also been playing a big role in influence the voter's mind and actions.

And the literate majority in Afghanistan cannot judge the performance of a particular party or candidate because of this weak point that these parts of society have and also cannot analyze the situation and condition for the wellbeing of their country and their societies. And political parties and candidates use this weak point of people in their favor for winning the battle in elections and polls.

## 9. Factionalism

The Afghanistan Political life, from the village level to the national level, is characterized by factionalism. No political party, nor even the cadre-based candidates and parties and the new and young political parties is free from factionalism. It has adversely affected the strength of the democracy and election other parties are also suffering from factionalism. The voters are getting disenchanted with some of the political parties because of their inability to overcome factionalism. They



are turning to locally organized parties or regional parties which, because of their small organizational network and limited operational based are relatively less affected by factionalism.

But at all factionalism played a vital role in the decision making of people and the battle in the polls between the political parties and the competitor candidates for the position and the winning in the election and their groups and small parties give them votes based of the factionalism and not on the bases of the qualification and the performance of the party or candidates.

### **10. Public Esteem of the Candidate**

This can be also counted as the determiners of voting behavior in Afghanistan and especially the young generation and the educated population of the society is concern and aware of this factor for using the vote for the particular candidate.

A candidate report with the people with a constituency or his or her known qualities or contribution in any value spread of activity always acts as a factor of voting behavior. Apart from his or her party's loyalty or opinion on various issues and problems, a voter while making his choice always takes into account the nature and level of his association with the candidate.

A positive image of a party's candidate is a source of popular support for the party. A voter prefers to vote for a candidate who is approachable and who can help him anyway.

### **11. Election campaigns**

Each party and candidate launch a vigorous and strong election campaign for influencing the voters in its favor. Use of such means as mass meetings, street meetings, personal contacts, posters, poster war, speeches by film stars, TV and Radio broadcasts, newspaper advertisement, handbills, processions, and propaganda, is made to win votes, mainly the fluctuating votes. Election Campaign is designed to make a voter believe that his interest can be best served by the party, the candidate of the party contesting from his constituency. The poll day before campaigning plays a role in influencing the choice of the voters A party which is in a place to generate an impression through its election campaign that it has a chance to win, can earn some additional votes as some voters try to side with the side which they observe to be a winning side.

## Conclusion

In conclusion and finally, we can claim that the election is the strong and vital factor of the pillar of democracy and the democracy can be practice and survive because of the election because in democratic states and countries every position and authority came into power by the majority role and idea of majority and selecting and choosing the authority through the election and election is the system of mechanism that people use their vote for their choice and their future without and force, compulsion, and restriction and no one can force someone to use their vote in someone else favor.

But there are some factors and dimensions and reasons that might influence on people and change their mind for giving the vote to some political parties or a particular candidate which we can mention them as the determinants of voting behavior in the political life of a particular country and of course it is vary from one country to other in context.

And this research paper is mainly about the determinants of voting behavior in Afghanistan and discuss all the factors and issues related to the voting behavior in Afghanistan which is still in a young age of democracy and practicing democracy since 2001 and there is still some issues and misunderstanding about the concept of democracy and people didn't believe on democracy and election but still the people of this country practice democracy well and participating in the elections very eagerly and they are keen to use their votes but this paper discuss all those factors which are the most reliable in terms of being the determiner for the voting behavior in Afghanistan and influence peoples mind to change their mind use vote in favor of a particular political party or a specific candidate.

In Afghanistan land of diversities in terms of language, ethnicity, tribe, clan, and regions we can easily find lots of reasons to win the mind of people and trust of people for the acting in your favor and use their vote for you.

The determinants of voting behavior in Afghanistan are several and various and played a big role in changing the results of the election and other national social and political causes and issues.

Ethnicity is one of the big factors and a term that most influences on people for changing mind and decision making in the regional and national level and mainly ethic based and clan-based politics is in the practice and people followed their leaders and politicians based on ideas and thoughts of the politician and leaders and ethnicity played a vital role in the political life of Afghanistan.

And other factors are as follow language, mass illiteracy, sub regionalism, money factor, election campaign, religious sect, public esteem of candidate, clan, and several other factors which are quite vital in terms of being a determiner in the voting behavior of Afghanistan and the election and democracy is mainly concern with these issues in Afghanistan the political life and situation of Afghanistan is made of all these aspects and factors which are changing and balancing the deal of election and politics.

There are both positive and negative factors in terms of voting behavior in all countries and Afghanistan the positives are good and we appreciate that and the next generation must work for it to make it more popular and strong in society because it will bring quality to the political knowledge and political life of the people but those factors that are negative and they are quite massive in changing the mind of people and voters and result of election like ethnicity, language, religion, sub-nationalism, regionalism, factionalism, and various other factors which caused in instability and chaos in the political sphere of the society the new and young generation must work hard and try to remove these undemocratic factors and issues which are treats for the wellbeing of democracy and election, to have a pure election and democracy based on the qualification and specification and a bright future of the country.

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