

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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Assessing the SNTV Electoral System

It is evident that the choice of Electoral System for any country is one of the most important institutional decisions for any democracy. And it has a profound effect on the future political life of the citizens of the country concerned as electoral systems, once adopted, often remain fairly constant as political interests solidify around and respond to the incentives by them.

However, while conscious design has become far more prevalent recently. Some experts hold that Afghanistan has not selected its electoral system consciously and deliberately. And the recent demand of the political parties calling for a change to the electoral system has exacerbated this notion. Thus, they have suggested shifting from the current SNTV electoral system to a multi-dimensional representation (MDR) system, because the MDR system would give political parties more weight in the upcoming parliamentary ballot. Further, they claimed that all political parties and coalitions had reached to the conclusion that the current electoral system would have no result for the people of Afghanistan excepted failure and a new crisis, if the current system was used.

With keeping in my mind the above mentioned points, it is necessary to have a look to positive and negative points of the SNTV and providing a viable solution to this issue.

Advantages of SNTV

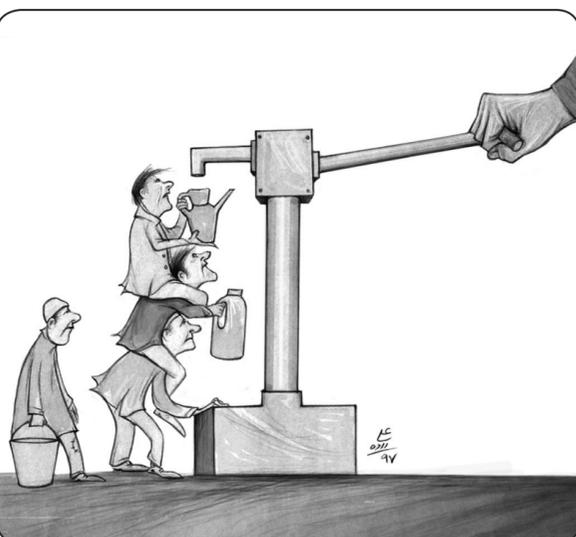
The most important difference between SNTV and the plurality/majority systems is that SNTV is better able to facilitate the representation of minority parties and independents. Considering the social fabric of Afghanistan, it can better ensure the representation of the minorities and independent candidates in Afghanistan. Further, the larger the district magnitude (the number of seats in the constituency), the more proportional the system can become. As a result, there are opportunities for the political parties to benefit from the incentives of SNTV to maximize their representation. To do so, they shall be highly organized and instruct their voters to allocate their votes to candidates in a way which maximizes a party's likely seat-winning potential. SNTV gives voters a choice among a party's list of candidates, it fragments the party system less than pure PR systems do. In addition, SNTV easily accommodate independent candidates and is easy to use and understand.

Disadvantages of SNTV

Based on the SNTV, parties whose votes are widely detached are likely to win fewer seats than otherwise and larger parties can receive a substantial seat bonus which turns a plurality of the vote nationally into an absolute majority in the legislature. Such consequences can lead to significant protests against the results and the system. Although the proportionality of the system can be increased by increasing the number of seats to be filled within the multi-member districts, this weakens the relations between voter-members of the parliament and other elected bodies which are highly valued by those who advocate defined geographical districts.

In addition, it may highlight the internal party fragmentation and party discord may be accentuated and it can serve to promote clientelistic politics where politicians offer electoral bribes to groups of defined voters to secure their votes. Also, parties need to consider complex strategic questions of both nominations and vote management; putting up too many candidates can be as unproductive as putting up too few, and the need for a party to discipline its voters into spreading their votes equally across all a party's candidates is paramount. Electoral analysts argue that SNTV gives voters only one vote, the system contains few incentives for political parties to call to a broad spectrum of voters in an accommodatory manner; because as long as they have a reasonable core vote, they can win seats without needing to appeal to 'outsiders'. Thus, they could win more seats by wooing voters from other parties by putting up candidates acceptable to them. Also, SNTV usually gives rise to many wasted votes, especially if nomination requirements are wide-ranging, enabling many candidates to put themselves forward.

SNTV as any other electoral system has advantages and disadvantages. However, considering the argument of the political parties calling the government to introduce an electoral system more conducive to political parties and terming the SNTV as old and unresponsive; the Afghan government shall look for other electoral options as well. In addition, considering the limited time to the Parliamentary and District Councils' election and also lack of extra budget to adopt the MDR, there is no time to change the electoral system and also it needs sufficient time to be justified for the donors to support it. In addition, changing the electoral system requires to change the electoral law, which is a very political and sensitive issue that requires to consider different aspects and consequences of such a change that is impossible to come to a conclusion given the two and have months remaining to the National Election Day that on that day Afghans will elect their representatives to the House of Representatives (Wolesi Jirga) of the National Assembly and to the district councils.



Entering Parliament in Afghanistan; A Big Dream for Gaining Unlimited Power

By Hamidullah Bamik

Introduction

With the advent of the issue of guaranteeing individual freedoms in the society, the limitation of the absolute power of the rulers and the division of power between people and the government is raised. The division of power is used as one of the means by which people achieve a kind of political, social and civil liberties. Basically, the notion of creating a parliament also originates from this stimulus, and for this reason, the parliament is considered an institution of the people's will.

In Afghanistan, for the first time, the idea of creating a parliament that was more inspired by the developments in the region and the world was initiated at the time of Shah Amanullah Khan. In other words, the ground for the National Assembly in Afghanistan is pertaining to the era of Amanullah Khan, whose initial foundations were laid down in his Basic Rulebook - Nezamnama Amanullah. But the first contemporary parliament that was rampant in the international community, was based during the reign of Mohammad Nader Shah in 1311. It had two Houses, the House of Representatives (Wolesi Jirga) and the Senate (Meshrano Jirga). The Afghan National Assembly, also known as the legislature of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is the supreme legislative institution in Afghanistan. The Afghan National Assembly from its inception until the Dawood Khan coup, all its members were appointed by the King rather than being selected by the people's votes. Later during Najibullah's reign, the National Assembly again began working after 14 years. This parliament continued only for one period, with the collapse of Najibullah's government and the establishment of the Mujahideen's regime and the Taliban until the current Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Afghanistan lacked the legislative power (National Assembly).

When Hamid Karzai got the power, Afghanistan was replete with numerous economic, social, political problems along with security challenges, and still it is struggling with various problems. Among all the prevailing challenges in Afghanistan, the Afghan weak, dysfunctional, and ineffective parliament is more disappointing than any other issues. Because this is a legislative institution, in other words, the most supreme body in a country. Unfortunately, studies and reports conducted by national and international research institutes echo that Afghanistan's parliamentarians are steeped in misusing their jurisdiction, illegal extractions of mines, and other unauthorized activities. The current paper aims to briefly analyze some of the most abusive and unauthorized instances carried out by representatives over the past years.

Afghanistan's Parliament and Corruption Involvements

The Afghan parliament, along with its responsibility to oversee the functions of the government, has a major responsibility to fight corruption. But it seems that the Afghan parliament itself is engulfed in corruption. In a recent report on corruption in Afghanistan, the United Nations says that the over past years, despite the efforts of the government and the justice sector (the judiciary) of the country, the Afghan parliament has not done anything to fight corruption. The United Nations Office of the Representatives of the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) report echoes that corruption in Afghanistan is massive, inhuman, and embarrassing. The volume of corruption and the serenity of those who perpetrate the consequences of illegal, financial and social scandal have paralyzed the entire Afghan government's body. Even UNAMA goes beyond this issue and argues that the Afghan parliament itself is part of the corruption problem.

In addition to being involved in corruption, the Afghan Parliament milieu is anti-democratic values. Several times, very obviously, the Afghan Parliament stood and even voted against democratic voices and reformists political discourse. The most salient and harsh one is referred to Malalai Joya's removal from parliament because of her critique regarding background and performances of her colleagues in parliament. She was fired from the parliament on May 21, 2007. The Afghan parliament suspended the membership of Malalai Joya for three years, for her critique regarding the Afghan parliament. Later on, Malalai Joya, who was illegally fired by the Afghan Parliament, told an interview with Swedish International Radio on March 22, 2010, that the Afghan parliament is against democratic values.

The Afghan parliament is replete with mafia groups and corrupt warlords. The majority of representatives in the parliament are gunmen who are accused of violations of human rights. They are drug traffickers. There are many such instances related to Afghan parliament's stance against democratic and human rights-oriented voices. In the Afghan Parliament, there are many prominent, scholarly, and sympathetic representatives; however, over the course of time, the government, with the use of money and governmental leverage, greatly reduced the independence and authority of the parliament, and the voices of these reformists got weaker and weaker too. Furthermore, the number of democrat and honest servants of the people in the Afghan parliament is a handful. So, since they are minority, it is hard to expect the Afghan parliament to fulfill their promises that they give to their adherents during their election campaigns or act as per the international and democratic principles.

Afghanistan's Parliament and Job Dereliction

According to the article 90th of the Afghan Constitution, the National Assembly (both Lower House and Upper House) of Afghanistan as a legislative power has the following authorities: (a) Ratification, modification, or abrogation of laws and or legislative decrees, (b) Approval of plans for economic, social, cultural, and technological development, (c) Approval of state budget, permission for obtaining, and granting loans, (e) Creation, modification of administrative units, (d) Ratification of international treaties and agreements, or abrogation of the membership of Afghanistan to them. And Article 81 of the constitutional law stipulates that the Wolesi Jirga (lower house), "as the highest legislative body, shall manifest the will of people as well as represent the entire nation."

But the previous and current parliament's performances project that the Afghan parliament has been so lagging behind its duty. Mostly the members of parliament don't attend the parliamentary meetings. When they are present, they are busy with routine issues, talking about redundant and repeated topics, and leaving the meetings amid discussions. The most important criticisms regarding Afghanistan's parliament performances is this that the Afghan parliament, as a democratic structure, failed to monitor the proper functioning of the government as their main duty, let alone tackling corruption, poverty, unemployment, or defend the principles and values of democracy and human rights. Moreover, it is argued that the absence of representatives from parliamentary sessions, their foreign travels and internal disputes among the members has prevented the parliament from performing its duties properly. It is also alleged that some of the delegates did not regularly contact their clients to hear their problems and needs. Allegation charges against drug trafficking and corruption have also been raised against a number of Afghan parliamentarians. Therefore, one can strongly argue that the Afghan parliament has not functioned in practice beyond the enactment of laws and voting for nominees.

Conclusion

Given the above-mentioned issues, Afghan citizens believe that their representatives are enjoying unlimited authorities, luxurious lives, limousine vehicles, tight security, excessive wealth, and expensive business inside and outside Afghanistan while they are struggling with poverty, insecurity and unemployment - just to name some of the problems in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, those who voted to these representatives did not experience sustainable and dynamic changes in their lives whereas the representatives' lives changed overnight upon entering the parliament even if it happened once in their lives. Additionally, passive reaction or even overlooking of the judicial power over the representatives' anti-law deeds such as not attending parliamentary meetings, usurping land and obtaining money from the government's proposed minister made them more bold and bestowed unlimited authorities and power. Therefore, it can be one of the main reasons that almost anyone who has some friends and to some extent pretty financial supports, nominated themselves for the upcoming parliamentary election in order to enjoy unlimited power upon entering the parliament.

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The Integration Imperative

By Elina Ribakova

In many countries, integrating refugees and migrants has become a key policy priority. Fearing higher fiscal costs and public resistance to immigration, some countries are more willing to accept groups viewed as having a "higher chance of integration."

Yet integration is rarely defined explicitly. Some researchers view it as a process of social inclusion that enables economic mobility. Others define it as acceptance, participation, and equal opportunity. But integration may not be seen the same across countries, and is usually not the same across metrics. Oftentimes social integration may lag skills integration.

Integration is not assimilation, even though these terms are often used interchangeably. Assimilation is closer to, let's say, losing all that you have learned before, and therefore, unsurprisingly, most often meets resistance by newcomers.

The definition that appears to give integration the highest chance of success is the one that emphasizes host communities' willingness to welcome, as much as the preparedness of refugees and migrants to adapt to a new lifestyle.

So how can integration be measured? A recent OECD study focuses on five areas: employment, education and skills, social inclusion, civic engagement like voting, and social cohesion. And the Migrant Integration Policy Index measures policies to integrate migrants in all EU member states and another ten countries across the world. It is a great tool to evaluate and compare what governments are doing in this area.

And different countries follow very different models of integration, ranging from doing nothing, or no policy, like we know is in the United States, to preventing newcomers from moving closer toward

citizenship unless they can prove a degree of integration.

One of the success stories is the Canadian approach, which is akin to a public-private partnership. Local communities and migrants themselves are trusted to shape the integration process. Multiculturalism is not seen as a dirty word, but it is a recognition and acceptance of differences rather than co-existence without interaction.

European cities that have been exposed the most to migrant flows are actually de facto already following this approach. Day-to-day interactions are regulated and adjusted in the absence of formal government policy, for example in a shop or at the hairdresser. In response to the most recent inflow of refugees, bottom-up integration projects have sprung up across the continent, focusing on creating opportunities for refugees to interact with other members of the community in a natural way, and also contribute their skills and talents.

Such projects focus on common interests, be it cooking, theater or football, and allow refugees to volunteer, for example to help repair a dilapidated soccer pitch or work with local low-income groups. But many gaps still need to be filled. Most European countries lack a national authority responsible for integration. And the views of refugees and migrants themselves are often absent in the design of integration policies. Worse, when government policy puts the onus of integration on newcomers, the message is clear that there is something wrong with them.

There isn't. Natural disasters, war and violence, and economic insecurity are a part of life, and they have driven humans to move since time immemorial. So we know that integration works, because it has defined who we are now.

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