

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



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## The Role of the Political Parties in Deepening Democracy in Afghanistan

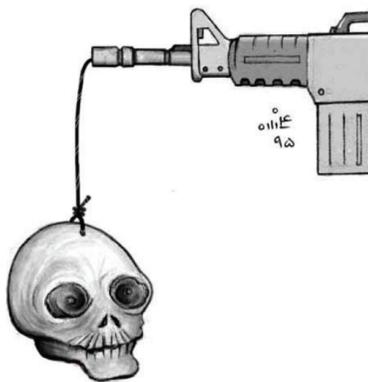
Political parties are vital features of representative democracy. On the basis of a certain ideological worldview, political leaders organize their followers and ordinary people in the party, create opportunity structure for the redistribution of the cake between the classes coordinate their behavior, formulate strategies and programs, structure electoral choice, administer power, and exert pressure for desirable policy outcome. Afghan political parties that mainly arose out of democratic struggle have assumed these functions and played a crucial role in coalition-building and political transformation. To mobilize and represent the heterogeneous social and cultural landscape of the nation, they have framed issues, nurtured civic and human rights, fired people with the imagination of human condition and initiated structural change of the state, polity, and economy through bellicose enthusiasm.

Moreover, Afghan parties have also carried out political modernization and democratization through political education, social mobilization, staffing of leadership and aggregation, and articulation of public interest. By acting as a transmission belt and projecting societal interest into decision-making, they have performed effective communication functions between the political system and the citizens and proven political will and cooperative action for the restoration of democracy. They, however, appear weak to maintain a democratic dynamic between the inputs and outputs of political system, stoked over-expectation of the people and consequently face rationality deficit in performance while in the seat of government. Similarly, their clientelist networks, based on neo-patrimonial structures, have produced tension for the representational system and the process of political mediation. They also appear feeble to consolidate the state, "a state in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and utilize its power to reduce poverty, income inequality and political conflicts, and increase the scope of livelihood. Defining a single universe of democracy, peace, and development in Afghanistan is another central challenge to transcend their competing partisan lens.

The declaration of popular will is a key strategy of citizens to influence national politics, law-making, and development policies. Afghan parties as the institutional safeguard of people can deepen democracy if their leaders are capable of protecting the freedom, security, and dignity of citizens and creating a rule-based easy-access order. Afghanistan has a tremendous potential to unravel its energy for development—strategic geography, diverse topographical landscape, demographic dividends, hydropower, tourism, and cultural diversity. Deepening democracy entails the optimal utilization of these potentials for welfare-oriented programs for Afghan citizens with special emphasis on the weaker sections of societies so that they feel a greater stake in maintaining and sustaining the democratic institutions and a civic culture of tolerance of diversity bestowed by national heritage. In Afghanistan, however, in the post-democratic moment, due to high power dynamics, average people are mostly sidelined from democratic dividends.

Expanding democracy in Afghanistan requires democratization of the inner life of parties and the utilization of its historically evolved national ethos that supports social pluralism. It is important to foster a culture of inclusion, listening, deliberation, and negotiation of conflict of interests, ideologies, and identities. Politics is public realm because it helps to produce a common ground for various partisan interests which tend to stratify the population in the binary code of "we" and "they." National politics democratizes the public institutions through the negotiation of a post-conflict social contract which means leaders and citizens cannot act arbitrarily against the laws of the land. The subordination of every aspect of life to the imperative of politics is authoritarian because it undermines the checks and balances of power.

Growth of a dense network of intermediary institutions provides political parties an opportunity to engage citizens in various walks of political life and increases their stake in democracy. Factionalism, split, leader-for-life, dominance of hereditary elements, social and gender bias, network-based and vertical patron-client relationship characterize the political culture of Afghan political parties. These trends have encouraged the emergence of regional, ethnic, religious, and indigenous based parties which play with the politics of difference and impose obstacles for social and national integration.



## The Government Proceed to Prosecution of Electoral Offenders appreciated

By: Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Following the election shortcomings the government authorities has broken their silence. The interior ministry has informed of arresting 80 people in connection with electoral fraud so far. The day before, Nosrat Rahimi, the Deputy spokesman for ministry of interior told the media that the 80 arrestees include observers, voters, police officers, and IEC officials who were blamed for electoral fraud and interferences in the affairs of the Electoral Commission. According to him, 44 detainees are residents of Kabul and the rest are from other provinces of the country. However, he did not provide further details and said the detainees were brought to the prosecution.

Thus, President Ghani criticized on IEC during a visit to Helmand, "I call on the Independent Election Commission to find out why polling stations in Helmand did not open on time and why materials did not reach on time." He also stressed that mistakes happened in the parliamentary election cannot be repeated in presidential vote. The parliamentary election, which was held after years of delay over reforming the system, was marred by a series of technical and organizational failures that forced delays.

Lessons will be learnt," Ghani said during his visit to southern province of Helmand. He suggested that people should not be deprived of voting and cast ballot in a free manner and without facing delays. He said that people in Helmand were concerned that a winner candidate might be failed. "If anyone fails them, he himself would be failed," Ghani warned. "Meddling is not acceptable," Ghani said. "I have not meddled even once because I believe that the people would resist."

In the meanwhile, some members of parliament call on the two electoral commissions to fulfill their commitments regarding a transparent election. Abdul Raouf Ebrahimi said on Monday that people largely took part in the October 20 legislation election because the Independent Election Commission had earlier vowed to use the biometrics system in order to prevent fraud. "We hope that the Independent Election Commission and Independent Electoral Complaints Commission to carry out based on the law and fulfill their commitments over the transparency of election, so that the results of elections be acceptable for people," said Ebrahimi.

The electoral watchdogs also warn that confrontation between the two commissions would put negative impacts on the results and would hamper the next year's presidential election. "The two commissions have to solve their problems based on their rights and authorities. They should not accuse each other through news conferences because some politicians will misuse their differences," said Yousaf Rashid, head of the Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA).

Anyway, the best solution is implementation of the law but regardless of any consideration; according to the Criminal Code, any kinds of action such as threats, defamation, harassment, pressure on the voters, candi-

dates, observers, media staffs or bribery to influence the electoral process will end up to five years imprisonment. In addition, receiving any forms of financial assistance from illegal or foreign sources will be punished for up to five years' imprisonment.

It is also mentioned in the Criminal Code that for the purpose of concealing the forms, the results sheets and the ballot papers will have three years imprisonments, and the perpetrators of buying and selling the ballot, changing or disposing of election documents, including the book of records, results papers and ballot papers in opposition or in interests of any nominees will be sentenced to a medium term imprisonment of three years, and the prevention of observers, watchdogs and the media will be convicted to short term imprisonment.

Based on the public demand and criticism, the ministry of interior promised that the arrests will be going on and several others against whom already filed complain will be arrested soon. Any impunity from implementation of law will leave its worse consequences in the next elections. The election crimes specified in the electoral law of the country and the punishment thereof are included in Chapter 6 of Articles 422 to 435 of the Penal Code. It is also mentioned that any perturbing action or withdrawal from action will also be considered as electoral crimes.

The new government proceed has caused some optimism in the community; Vedin Safi, a professor at the law and political science of faculty at Kabul University, considers the arrest of individuals involved in election offence or crime is effective. He urges the government to enforce the law above these people, because if the rule of high electoral fraud and wrongdoing is implemented, Afghanistan can have better elections in the future, because the punishment for these people will be a lesson for others. According to him, if the law is not applied on the offenders, in addition to the fact that the next election will be full of fraud, the prestige of the government will also be damaged and lose its credibility among the people.

To end with, creating transparency and ensuring fair and free election is the right of citizens in democratic systems. Hereon, the IEC is the first accountable entity to help justice system for clearance of what has damaged the voting process. Almost, everyone has a question why the shortcoming of election repeated in second and in the third day of election. Why they could not overcome the shortcoming in the next days as most polling centers opened at ten o'clock or later and in some cases, the biometric devices were not operating well; the same mistakes repeated in Qandahar after a week. What is the guarantee it may not repeat in the next elections. Because of over-repetition of mistakes, it is hard to restore the public trust unless apply the law over the big and small electoral offenders and criminals.

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## America's Midterm Elections Turn Menacing

By: Elizabeth Drew

With the approach of this year's midterm elections in the United States, domestic terrorism is starting to dominate the political landscape. First, barely two weeks before Election Day, an angry supporter of US President Donald Trump began sending 14 bombs to prominent Democrats and others whom Trump has frequently attacked. (None of the bombs exploded.) Then things became much worse, with the murder, on a Saturday, of 11 Jews in a Pittsburgh synagogue. Today, a polarized and anxious American public finds itself with a president totally unsuited to, and not very interested in, comforting the nation, much less trying to lead it away from the hate and deadly partisanship that he has stoked.

Had the 14 crude bombs, which the FBI called "potentially destructive devices," worked as intended, the bombmaker could have killed or gravely injured a who's who of Trump adversaries. The list included two former presidents (Bill Clinton and Barack Obama), Hillary Clinton, former Attorney General Eric Holder, a former CIA director, a former director of National Intelligence; two likely Democratic presidential candidates in 2020; a black congresswoman whom Trump frequently describes as "low IQ" (a common racist charge); two prominent Jewish billionaire philanthropists, one of whom, George Soros, is a frequent target of Trump and the subject of various right-wing conspiracy fantasies; and the actor Robert De Niro (who began his speech at this year's Tony Awards ceremony by declaring, "Fuck Trump").

Though Trump had frequently singled out many of the bomber's targets at his rallies – still attacking Hillary Clinton, his election opponent in 2016, for example, and then smiling as his audience chanted "Lock her up" – Trump's defenders tried to throw the spotlight elsewhere. The mail bombs, they claimed, were a "false flag" operation by the left, with some of the Democrats even sending the bombs to themselves in order to blame Trump.

So it was highly inconvenient for true believers when the would-be bomber turned out to be a fanatical Trump supporter who lives in Florida and drives a white van covered in hate-filled depictions of his targets. US law enforcement agencies – another frequent target of Trump – are extremely good at tracking down miscreants: the suspect was arrested four days after the first bomb was discovered in Soros's mailbox.

The most disheartening aspect of the entire episode was Trump's utter incapacity as a national leader. But that should surprise no one. How could a president who has thrived politically on dividing the American people, who has been spewing hate, sowing resentment, and at times even encouraging violence at his rallies, suddenly be – or even pretend to be – a healer? In fact, Trump's pattern of incitement and routine denunciations of the media as "the enemy of the people" had convinced many that some of his followers might resort to violence against members of the press.

The day after the discovery of the bombs sent to the Clintons and the Obamas, among others, a subdued Trump read a prepared statement at a prescheduled White House ceremony, condemning "acts or threats of political violence" and saying that the nation must unify.

It didn't last. By that evening, at a rally in Wisconsin, he was making fun of his "trying to be nice" act and blamed the media for the violence. And soon

he was back to whipping up fear of a caravan of refugees from Honduras. Though still roughly 1,000 miles from the US border, Trump portrayed the refugees as an imminent national security threat, warning, without evidence, that "Middle Easterners" were among them.

Trump's rallies are now almost a daily event, and his lies are even more frequent than before. With the entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate to be chosen on November 6, the upcoming midterm election is widely regarded as the most consequential in memory, perhaps ever. The Republicans' two-year lock on the entire US government – the House, the Senate, the presidency, and, with the recent addition of Justice Brett Kavanaugh, the Supreme Court – could be broken.

The midterm election following the election of a new president is often considered a verdict on the incumbent, and his party usually loses strength, particularly in the House. But Trump has made the midterms about himself to an unprecedented degree. He tells audiences that though he's not on the ballot, they should vote as if he were (though his approval ratings are in the low forties).

It has long been believed that the Democrats are more likely to win the House than the Senate, because several of the Senate seats in play are held by Democrats in traditionally conservative states. Trump's determination, or anxiety, that Republicans maintain control of both chambers is understandable. Should the Democrats take over the House, newly empowered committee chairmen, armed with subpoenas, will launch investigations of a broad range of administration actions and agencies, where extensive corruption is suspected.

But the real, almost palpable, fear on Trump's part is that a Democratic-controlled House will focus all manner of investigations on him personally: his acceptance of Constitutionally forbidden "emoluments" from foreign countries; his failure to separate himself sufficiently from the family business; his tax returns; his unauthorized foreign wars in Yemen and Syria; and of course his official and private dealings with Russia. At least the House is likely to have the conclusions of Special Counsel Robert Mueller to consider. In other words, no more lapdog Congress.

But if the Republicans maintain control of the Senate, there will be limits on what the Democrats can achieve. Even if the House were to impeach Trump – no sure thing – convicting him in the Senate would be extremely difficult. Whether a Democratic House would even proceed in that direction has been the subject of intra-party debate.

The nightmare election possibility for the Democrats is continued Republican control of both chambers. In that case, Trump will feel vindicated and more liberated than ever. He might then fire a raft of officials, treat immigrants still more harshly, and try to shut down Mueller's investigation of his campaign's possible collusion with the Kremlin and Trump's probable obstruction of justice.

The conventional wisdom may prevail, with the Democrats winning the House but not the Senate. But the polls have been fluctuating. And since Trump's stunning election victory in 2016, most observers have become more cautious about predicting outcomes.

Elizabeth Drew is a contributing editor to *The New Republic* and the author, most recently, of *Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall*.

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