

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Afghanistan

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-66</td> <td>-66</td> <td>x</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>-66</td> <td>-66</td> <td>x</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>-66</td> <td>-66</td> <td>x</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>0</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	-66	-66	x	Democ:	-66	-66	x	Autoc:	-66	-66	x	Durable:		0		Tentative:		No		
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
Polity:	-66	-66	x																						
Democ:	-66	-66	x																						
Autoc:	-66	-66	x																						
Durable:		0																							
Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	AFG	CCODE	700	Date of Report	1 October 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
-66	-66	-66	-66	-66	-66																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		7 October 2001		Begin Date																					
Polity Fragmentation: Yes, 10-25%																									
Constitution	2004																								
Executive(s)	President Hamid Karzai; initially selected as Chairman of the Transitional Administration in December 2001 following the forced ouster of the Taliban regime and appointed by a <i>Loya Jirgah</i> (Grand Assembly) as president of a transitional government in June 2002; directly elected 9 October 2004 and 20 August 2009 in elections severely marred by irregularities																								
Legislature	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>House of People (no more than 249 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 18 September 2010)</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Non-partisans: 249, members are identified mainly by ethnic group, 96 Pashtuns, 61 Hazaras, 53 Tajiks, 15 Uzbeks, 8 Aymaq, 8 Arabs, and 8 seats to other groups</p> <p>House of Elders (102 seats; one-third elected from provincial councils for four-year terms, one-third elected from local district councils for three-year terms - provincial councils elected temporary members to fill these seats until district councils are formed, and one-third presidential appointees for five-year terms; the presidential appointees will include 2 representatives of Kuchis and 2 representatives of the disabled; half of the presidential appointees will be women)</p>																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Summary of Interruption: (-66)

Executive recruitment in Afghanistan has long been dominated by autocratic rulers and tribal politics. Up until the 1973 coup, Afghanistan was governed under a monarchical system that had its foundation in the Mohammadzai clan of the Durrani Pashtun Tribal Confederation. Afghanistan's last king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, reigned from 1933 to 1973 and oversaw a brief experiment with political liberalization in the mid-1960s. However, deep ethnic, class and ideological divisions within Afghanistan triggered the 1973 coup by former Prime Minister Sardar Mohammad Daoud and brought an abrupt end to the process of democratization in this country. The demise of the monarchy in 1973 ushered in an era of chronic political instability that would last for much of the next three decades and would result in the invasion of Soviet troops, the formation of an Islamic theocracy and, ultimately, the economic and political collapse of Afghani society.

During the 1960s and '70s the Soviet-backed Communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) became increasingly active in Afghani politics and, ultimately, gained power in a 1978 coup under the leadership of Nur Muhammad Taraki. The PDPA, however, was plagued by chronic factional in-fighting between the Khalq (Masses) group led by Taraki and Hafizullah Amin and the Parcham (Banner) faction led by Babrak Karmal. While the radical Khalq faction had its roots in the rural, tribal-based sector of Afghani society, the Parcham faction had closer ties to the military establishment and the Dari speaking urban elite that pursued a more moderate political agenda. Unable to control the rising tide of political violence in Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin staged a bloody coup against Taraki in September 1979. However, Amin's rule proved to be short-lived as Babrak Karmal, leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA, gained control of the Afghani state in December 1979 with the help of Soviet military forces. Despite its initial support, Soviet displeasure with the Karmal regime led to its demise in May 1986. Muhammad Najibullah replaced Karmal as the Soviet's puppet leader in Afghanistan.

While the Soviets withdrew their military forces from Afghanistan in 1989, the Soviet-supported Najibullah regime did not collapse until the defection of Abdul Rashid Dostam and his Uzbek militia from the ruling coalition in March 1992. After a 10-year civil war that claimed over 1 million lives, executive power in Afghanistan was taken by a coalition of anti-Soviet, Peshawar-based mujahidin groups headed by President Burhanuddin Rabbani. Amidst intense in-fighting within the mujahidin leadership between 1993-1995, the coalition gradually disintegrated into warring factions based on ethnic, clan, religious and personality differences. In this power vacuum a new Islamic militant group from the southern town of Kandahar, the Taliban, burst upon the scene in 1994 and quickly spread its control to most of Afghanistan. In September 1996 the Taliban ousted the Rabbani government and set up a ruling council in Kabul, the country's capital. By the end 2000, the Pashtun-backed Taliban controlled close to 95% of the country's total territory, with the exception of a north-eastern district still held by ethnic-based (Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara), anti-Taliban forces known as the Northern Alliance.

The Taliban regime, led by Mullah Mohammad Omar, established a strict Islamic government based on a fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran and traditional Pashtun tribal code. In their effort to establish a pure Islamic state based on religious dictates, the Taliban became increasingly tied to Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network, to which the regime had given refuge since 1996. In the aftermath of the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., carried out by al-Qaeda operatives, United States and Northern Alliance forces waged war against the Taliban regime and effectively drove it from power.

In the wake of the demise of the Taliban, efforts were made to establish a new, broad-based government in Kabul. After a series of negotiations a new leader, Hamid Karzai, was selected by an ad hoc group of political and tribal leaders to preside over a 6-month interim government. Karzai, an anti-Taliban Pashtun from Kandahar, was subsequently elected by a grand council of Afghani political and social leaders – the Loya Jirga – in June 2002 to administer an interim government under direct US supervision until scheduled elections in 2004 (ultimately delayed until 2005). Political violence and assassinations marred the months prior to the convening of the Loya Jirga as regional warlords actively sought to manipulate the process by which the members of this informal government body were elected. Pressure by

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

the United States was also present during this process. Under significant US pressure the popular former King, Mohamad Zahir Shah, decided neither to take a place in the transitional government nor seek a return to the monarchy. After the former king decided to support Karzai, Burhanuddin Rabbani, a former president and the only serious contender for head of state, decided to withdraw as well. Karzai, with the backing of all major groups in Afghanistan – the monarchists, the Islamists, the tribal chiefs and, above all, the US – was elected transitional president in a landslide victory.

A second loya jirga was held in December 2003 to design a constitutional order for Afghanistan. The constitution, which established a strong presidential-parliamentary system, was ratified in January 2004 and paved the way for the holding of parliamentary and presidential balloting in March 2004. After a series of delays, presidential elections were finally held on 9 October 2004 while parliamentary elections were postponed until the spring of 2005 (however, these elections were subsequently pushed back until September 2005). Eighteen candidates vied for the office of president in a campaign that was primarily carried out through the media. Transportation difficulties, limited logistical support, and persistent security issues made it impossible for any of the candidates, including interim President Hamid Karzai, to campaign outside of their respective regions of power. In a reasonably fair electoral process unmarred by violence, Hamid Karzai was elected with 55% of the vote. Yunus Qanauni (an ethnic Tajik from the Panjshir Valley) won 16% of the vote, while Hajji Mohammad Mohaqiq (an ethnic Shia Hazara) won 12% and Abdul Rashid Dostum (an ethnic Uzbek from northwestern Afghanistan) garnered 10% of the total tally. Surprisingly, Karzai drew support from a broad base of Afghan society rather than exclusively from his own Pashtun constituency. Given that Karzai won over 50% of the vote, no runoff election was required. Karzai was sworn into office on 7 December 2004. Subsequent presidential elections held on 20 August 2009 were seriously marred by irregularities and widespread electoral fraud. In an attempt to defuse tensions, UN authorities declared the election inconclusive and organized a run-off election between Karzai and his principle opponent, Abdullah Abdullah. On 2 November 2009, Abdullah withdrew his candidacy citing the authorities' inability to ensure fair elections and Karzai was declared winner by default.

Under Taliban rule political authority was highly concentrated in the hands of Mullah Mohammad Omar and a small group of Islamic clerics based in the southern city of Kandahar. Upon seizing power in 1996, the Taliban abrogated the constitution, dissolved the legislature and reorganized the judicial system based on a fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran. Under the Bonn Agreement, signed by the competing political factions in Afghanistan after the forceful removal of the Taliban in late 2001, Afghans retained national sovereignty under the military security of the US and NATO forces. NATO assumed command of the country's security on 16 April 2003, through the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Currently, more than 5,000 soldiers from more than 20 countries patrol the streets of the capital while the private militias of regional warlords control most of the countryside.

In addition to establishing Hamid Karzai as head of a 30-member interim power-sharing government, the Bonn Agreement also established a timeline for the creation of a new constitutional order in this war-torn society. In February 2002 President Karzai oversaw the partial restoration of the 1964 Constitution. The "liberal" 1964 constitution had given the country a "decade of democracy" which ended with the 1973 republican revolution. Efforts to restore constitutional order in Afghanistan in 2003 resulted in the adoption of a new constitution in early 2004. While the 502-member Constitutional Loya Jirga ultimately promulgated this new constitution, deep disagreements over the power of the presidency, the relationship between Kabul and the provinces and the adoption of official languages threatened to undermine the entire process. Delegates from the Uzbek, Tajik, Hazara and Turkmen minorities expressed concern that the new constitutional order would undermine their political influence in Afghan society. The new constitution was largely supported by the Pashtun delegates, who represent 40% of Afghan society. The new constitution established a parliamentary system with a powerful president. The presidential elections of November 2004, the subsequent inauguration of Karzai as Afghanistan's first elected chief executive in December of that year, and the National Assembly elections of September 2005 reestablished constitutional authority in Afghanistan, although the government continues to have difficulty enforcing control over territory outside of Kabul and the parliamentary division of power is problematically based on ethnic and tribal loyalties.

Afghanistan is a multiethnic country in which tribal codes and ethnic loyalties have long defined the dynamics of politics. Traditionally, while the southern-based ethnic Pashtuns (who comprise 38% of the total population) have dominated the central government, their authority has been limited by the reserved domains of power held by the country's northern-based ethnic groups: Tajiks (25%), Hazara (19%), and Uzbek (6%), and the clan structure that is found throughout the country. Given the power of clan and

regional identity groups in Afghanistan, historically, the country has been run as a loosely knit federation with the central government in Kabul having only minimal authority and control. This decentralized system of control was fundamentally altered with the “Saur revolution” of 1978 in which the Communist Party of Afghanistan seized power in a coup against President Mohammed Daoud. One of the primary objectives of the Saur revolution was to centralize political leadership in the country in order to pursue a radical restructuring of social relations in Afghanistan. Despite repeated efforts by the PDPA to weaken the powers of tribal leaders and warlords, the communist leadership was unable to fully centralize political authority through a program of state terror. With the collapse of PDPA rule in 1992, political authority in Afghanistan reverted to local and regional tribal leaders as the country descended into political anarchy and violence.

With the seizure of power by the Taliban in 1996, centralized political control was largely restored. Disillusioned with the arbitrary and repressive policies of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek leaders in the post-Soviet era, the Taliban quickly gained public support throughout the vast majority of the country. The Taliban’s political authority was further enhanced by their successful efforts to stamp out corruption, restore peace and allow commerce to flourish. However, these political successes came at a high cost to political liberties and human rights. After the Taliban took control of the country they banned all political parties and political freedoms, including freedoms of speech, press and association, were effectively restricted. Women and non-Pashtun minorities, particularly the Shia Hazara, were subjected to intense discrimination at the hands of the Taliban.

With the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2001, the future of political participation in Afghanistan remains uncertain. While the interim government seems to be committed to the idea of centralizing political authority under a broad-based coalition of ethnic and social actors (including women), many regional and local tribal leaders have voiced their concerns over the reassertion of control by the central government in Kabul. Despite the rhetoric of inclusiveness and democracy in the post-Taliban era, the prospects of factional warfare remain high as central control over most of Afghanistan remains very limited. Beyond the capital, large areas of the country are controlled by regional strongmen who finance their power through opium trade and support the central government only in theory.

Starting in mid-2002, Afghani society witnessed an increasing number of attacks against both the central government and US/NATO forces, particularly in the southern and eastern Pashtun strongholds. Vice President Haji Abdul Qadir was assassinated in July 2002 while President Karzai narrowly escaped assaults on his life in both 2002 and 2004. Efforts to disarm the country and establish institutionalized political parties have largely stagnated while the production and trafficking of opium has dramatically increased. Attacks by the Taliban increased in number and intensity in 2006 and 2007, suggesting growing determination by the Islamists in undermining the regime supported by the NATO forces. Especially problematic has been the ability of insurgents to take refuge across the eastern border with Pakistan and stage attacks from those bases, prompting increasing tensions with Pakistan authorities. Although NATO forces asserted a greater presence in the southern provinces in 2005, the ability of the Karzai regime to extend its authority to the provinces and weaken the political influence of regional warlords remained weak.

Four groups currently challenge the political authority of the Karzai regime: (1) the Taliban; (2) angry civilians upset by the endemic corruption within his regime and the violence associated with NATO’s counterinsurgency campaign; (3) rival political elites within the traditional power structures of Afghani society and the emerging democratic civil society; and (4) criminal gangs that have prospered under the lawless and chaotic political environment of recent years. While the Taliban is reported to have more than 20,000 members, it is not a unified political movement with clear lines of political authority and strong party discipline. Three distinct groups can be identified within the Taliban movement. First, there are the hardline followers of Mullah Omar that are closely tied to the political goals, military tactics and organizational structures of al-Qaeda. Second, there are members that have no interest in the transnational jihad of al-Qaeda but who, nonetheless, resist the occupation of their country by foreign forces on both nationalistic and religious grounds. Finally, the third group, which constitutes the bulk of the low level Taliban resistance fighters, represents those individuals that have joined out of a combination of patrimonial obligation, social pressure and a lack of other viable economic alternatives. Efforts to split the Taliban resistance by brokering political and socio-economic deals with the second and third factions while, simultaneously, stepping up the military campaign against the first, has been the cornerstone of the government’s counter-insurgency campaign in recent years. The military campaign against the Taliban was escalated in December 2009 when President Obama chose to boost U.S. troop levels in the country by

30,000. However, he also stated his goal to begin withdrawing U.S. troop presence in the country, which constitutes the bulk of NATO's 140,000-member force, by 2011.

Contributing to the political instability within the country in recent years has been the increasing authoritarian tendencies exhibited by President Karzai. The August 2009 presidential elections, in which Karzai was ultimately declared the winner, was plagued by allegations of fraud and charges of intimidation against the U.N.-backed Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). The ECC had originally thrown out 1/3 of the votes cast to Karzai and pushed for a run-off election between Karzai and his nearest rival, Abdullāh Abdullah. Abdullah, who is Pashtun on his father's side, nonetheless, is more closely aligned with his maternal Tajik roots. His primary support is found in the anti-Taliban stronghold of the Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul. Abdullah subsequently pulled out prior to the holding of a run-off ballot in October 2009, accusing the Independent Election Commission (IEC) – which is appointed by Karzai – of bias. Karzai blamed foreign international observers as the source of the electoral discord and disarray and has increasingly sought to publicly distance himself from the both these international institutions and the U.S. government.

President Karzai stepped up his fight with the U.N.-backed Electoral Complaints Commission when he issued a decree giving him total control over this body in April 2010. The decree allowed Karzai to personally appoint the 5-member panel of the ECC. Under the previous law, three of the five ECC members were appointed by the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The political struggle between Karzai and the institutions in charge of promoting democratic consolidation in Afghanistan, however, did not end there. Electoral disputes once again surfaced during the conduct of the parliamentary elections of September 2010 (the second parliamentary elections since the removal of the Taliban in 2001). Originally scheduled for May 2010 but postponed because of security, logistical and financial issues, parliamentary elections were finally held on 18 September. Over 2,500 candidates participated in the electoral process (most running independent from any party affiliation) and over 40% of the public voted (despite 305 incidents of election related violence). Final results were issued on December 1 but were immediately challenged by the government, which argued that the elections should be cancelled due to endemic fraud. The government requested that the Supreme Court annul the elections, in which Karzai saw a significant decline in support, and issue sentences against 14 top officials who organized the vote and investigated fraud allegations. Both the IEC and ECC have argued that annulling the vote goes beyond the authority of the central government.

The disputed election results were posted by the IEC after the ECC tossed out 25% of the ballots and disqualified 24 winners, many of whom were Karzai supporters. Karzai's main political rival, Abdullah Abdullah, claimed that his supporters won more than 90 seats in the 249-seat Chamber. This represents a significant gain for opponents to the Karzai government in the Wolesi Jirga. The IEC also left 11 seats "unconfirmed" due to "technical problems" in the southern province of Ghazni, where Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns, apparently suffered a crushing defeat. Preliminary results gave the ethnic Hazaras all eleven seats. Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, favors a re-run of the elections in the region. Across the country, Pashtun candidates had won only 88 seats compared to the 112 in the last election (currently standing at 96 seats). As political tensions between Karzai and the IEC and ECC over the elections has escalated, rallies have been held in Kabul and other cities calling for the dismantling of these electoral bodies.

On the military front, 2010 saw the escalation of NATO efforts in the southern Taliban strongholds of Helmand and Kandahar and the holding of a jirga of 1,600 social elders and notables in June to push for reconciliation with the Taliban. Karzai, seeking to build on this momentum, established a presidential appointed Peace Council in September 2010. This Council, headed by mostly elements of the former Northern Alliance, has not attracted much interest by the Taliban and has been seen as little more than a political effort by Karzai to extend and consolidate his political base; the assassination of former-President Burhannuddin Rabbani on 20 September 2011 while he was acting as a government emissary in talks with the Taliban attests to their disdain for such efforts. Combat incidents in 2010 were up 300% since 2007 and up 70% since last year. Karzai has continued to endorse a timetable by which control of security forces would be transferred from NATO to Afghan forces by 2014. The US military has described the date of 2014 as an "aspirational goal" rather than a definitive deadline.