

What Democracy for Afghanistan?

**An Analysis Utilizing Established Norms and Five
Non-Western Case Studies**

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Foreword

In 2009 the Obama administration and NATO allies have scaled back expectations for a democratic form of government¹ in Afghanistan, at least for the time period in which the international presence might be sustained at its current level.² A growing number of policy analysts and academic experts agree.³ Nonetheless, despite renewed emphasis on security and a downplaying of Afghanistan's prospects for democracy in 2009, intense preparations for the August 20 presidential elections demonstrate that the international community has not discarded its intent to leave behind at least the seeds of participatory government.⁴ Yet the juxtaposition of lengthening and costly commitment and a new sense of realism raise the question, what level of democracy is possible in Afghanistan before international support wanes?

This study looks at democratic governance and what might be expected to take root in a society such as Afghanistan. More than 7 years into the presence of the United States and the UN, and more than 5 years into NATO's mission in Afghanistan, it is worth analyzing the state of governance in that country and examining how—and to what extent—the goal of democracy might be achieved. Key research questions are:

- What can the international community hope to leave behind in terms of democracy?
- What will it take in terms of time and resources?
- What related tasks must be achieved for democracy to take hold and flourish?
- What are the realistic prospects for success?
- What are accepted criteria for knowing when we get there?

Our analysis attempts to answer these questions. It sheds light on what is necessary, as a minimum, for democracy to take root. It also suggests replacements for goals that may be simply unattainable, such as an Afghan democracy held to an unrealistic Jeffersonian standard. Finally, it aims to impart a sense of what can be accomplished before international political will runs out.

Afghanistan's political history, compartmented geography, underdeveloped infrastructure, diverse tribal-ethnic makeup, and persistent insurgencies suggest the need

¹ By “democratic form of government” we mean a system that provides for public participation to carry out societal decision-making. Such participation may take the form of a Western representative democracy, a form of direct democracy, a consensus-based system of group deliberation found, or some combination of these practices. We consider democratic government and “participatory government” to be synonyms in this paper.

² See for example Karen DeYoung, “Obama Seeks Narrower Focus in Afghan War” *Washington Post*, February 4, 2009; Peter Walters, “No Western-style democracy in Afghanistan: Angus Houston” *The Australian* February 26, 2009; “NATO can't beat Afghan insurgents alone: Harper” *The Canadian Press* March 1, 2009

³ J Alexander Thier, ed., *The Future of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2009); Kenneth Katzman, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance (Washington, D.C.: CRS, May 2009).

⁴ Results will be announced by September 17. In the event that no candidate receives at least 50 percent of the vote, a runoff will be scheduled for early October. <http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/progress-progres/elections.aspx?lang=eng>

to lower our expectations for a blossoming of democracy in the near term. However, while a western style democratic system seems distant, we find strong participatory themes in Afghanistan's longstanding informal institutions of governance. This suggests that in order for a modestly democratic national government to be relatively successful, it should share resources and decisionmaking power with participatory local institutions. That is, a participatory government should be designed to rely upon rather than replace, parry, or weaken the existing authority held by the leadership at the village level, through informal community institutions such as *Jirgas* and *Shuras* that already have a representative character.

Such government would embrace a robust degree of autonomous local authority. The central government should provide broad national services, including national security, trans-province public goods and services, monetary and fiscal management, law making, international relations, and internal rule of law, exercised in coordination with provincial and village authorities. Kabul, in coordination with local leaders, should determine what services it can reliably provide and what authority it can successfully exercise. It should set out to do both most credibly, and with greater transparency and far lower levels of corruption than at present. The rest of governance should be carried out in conjunction with subordinate entities, particularly at the local level, with Kabul serving in a complimentary role. Such a system has the best chance of becoming a sustainable Afghan government that meets the international community's norms of participatory governance within the window of finite international engagement. In the longer term, as the central government becomes more capable, greater centralization may be warranted and desirable by mutual consent of the governed.

Executive Summary

Well into its eighth year, two assumptions about the conflict in Afghanistan have become accepted wisdom. First, the goals of Afghanistan and its international supporters cannot be achieved by military force alone; effective, civilian-directed elements of power are also needed in abundance. Second, both the political goal of establishing a viable democratic government and the military objective of defeating the Taliban and other insurgents may have to be more modest than heretofore declared. This study examines the stated goal of creating basic democratic or participatory governance in Kabul in light of internationally accepted measures of success and five possible models from the developing world. It concludes with findings and policy recommendations to help answer the important question being asked by leaders and policymakers: what type of government is possible in Afghanistan?

A prominent goal of the international intervention in Afghanistan has been to see some level of representative government flourish as the system of choice for the Afghan people.⁵ The Bush administration linked a democratic Afghanistan to NATO collective security interests.⁶ It has been suggested that the Obama Administration's March 2009 strategy for Afghanistan deemphasizes democracy in favor of security goals.⁷ However, the prominent place of the recent presidential and upcoming parliamentary elections in Obama's treatment of Afghanistan suggests that while expectations may have been lowered, putting in place at least the rudiments of participatory governance remains the end goal for Afghanistan's government. If international withdrawal from Afghanistan anticipates leaving such a democratic Afghanistan behind, what minimal political progress and achievements are required to constitute a democracy in Afghanistan, and how can the international community foster such progress with reasonable prospects for success?

This paper examines the internationally recognized core elements of democratic governance as might be created in any state, and assesses progress toward those criteria in Afghanistan. The assessment considers the particular challenges facing Afghan democratization, and highlights gaps between the end goal and the current state of Afghan democracy. In sketching a path from today to a successful democracy, our research applies case study lessons from other attempts at post conflict democratization and the melding of democracy with Islamic values. The final section outlines what aspects of democracy can realistically be achieved in Afghanistan.

Our research shows that, measured against recognized criteria and the scholarship of experts, Afghanistan is far from a minimal democracy today. It clings tenuously to initial attempts at the most basic representative activity: its first presidential election in October 2004 and subsequent parliamentary elections in September 2005. These outward signs of representative government have not been followed by lawful administration and effective

⁵ Riga Declaration, Article 4; Bucharest Summit Declaration, Article 6.

⁶ George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses Progress in Afghanistan, Global War on Terror" Address at AEI, Feb 15, 2007. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/02/20070215-1.html>

⁷ See for example "Widening Afghan mission, Obama narrows goals" *AFP* March 29, 2009

provision of even the most basic services. Public confidence in Kabul has ebbed to a low level for two reasons: an inability to provide security throughout the country and an almost epidemic level of government corruption. These are inextricably interwoven problems. Unless the government can deal with both in the near term, Afghans will look elsewhere for some sense of order: even though the Taliban are disliked by most of the population, they are increasingly seen as an alternative to gross corruption and dysfunctional bureaucracy. Presidential elections scheduled for August 2009 and parliamentary elections in 2010 might help to get Afghanistan back onto the right track. However, democracies in particular demand much more than periodic elections. Their constituents expect lawful, responsive, and participative government.

As a fresh group of leaders around the world assume positions that will influence both Afghanistan and the mission of the international community, the international community should reflect on what a viable democracy in Afghanistan could look like, and what steps—on the part of Kabul as much as its international supporters—will be required to succeed. Whatever the choice, closing the gap between the current Afghan state and a minimal working democracy is destined to take a significant amount of time. Comparative studies suggest that successful development of a minimum level of democracy in post-conflict states without a democratic history on average takes 7–10 years. And much of Afghanistan has not yet achieved a post-conflict environment. Even when successful, young post-conflict democracies tend to be fragile and subject to reversal. As one classic work on democratic transitions suggests, political democracy “... emerges from a nonlinear, highly uncertain, and imminently reversible process.”⁸

The Obama administration’s review of American policy in Afghanistan has rightly focused on setting attainable goals that advance the core U.S. mission in Afghanistan: “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.”⁹ In order to achieve the objective of preventing the return of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, Afghanistan must be successful in establishing a stable, working, and at least rudimentary democratic government. This it can do within its declared framework as an Islamic republic.

In considering what Afghanistan’s democracy should look like, what goals are attainable given the challenging environment? What models should Afghanistan try to emulate? In examining the realistic prospects for grafting democratic principles onto an Islamic state, we should look more broadly for models to follow. The most familiar Western models of democracy found mainly among NATO members are of little relevance to Afghanistan. Rather, for lessons on transitioning from conflict to a semblance of democracy, the imperfect experiences of states in the developing world such as Nicaragua and Mozambique may be more instructive. Lessons on emerging from conflict to establish democracy under the curse of illegal drugs as a national crop can be found in the recent experience of Colombia. For insight into melding Islamic customs, beliefs, and laws with democratic principles, what has been achieved thus far in Indonesia and Malaysia may have more to offer than Western theories. These cases, described in this paper, rather than

⁸ Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 70.

⁹ Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt, “White House Debate Led to Plan to Widen Afghan Effort” *New York Times* March 27, 2009.

Western models, are where new ideas can be found. In Afghanistan it is not a question of modifying the state's Islamic identity but a question of how to wed democratic principles to the diverse understandings of Islamic law and customs held by the mainstream of Afghanistan's many communities. Some respected scholars assert this cannot be done. We take exception based on recent but reasonably successful experiences. Afghans should seek advice from those who have preceded them.

Kabul must guard against overly high expectations, especially in the near term, and concentrate on delivering the most needed services effectively to as much of Afghanistan as it can. Achieving an atmosphere of general public security and the rule of law for most and eventually all of Afghanistan should be the top priority. An important second goal should be to involve as many minorities and opposition groups as possible in the political process, including reconcilable members of the Taliban. Historical experience shows that a military defeat of an insurgency alone is unlikely to result in lasting success. Yet negotiations with disaffected militants are most likely to bring results when offered from a position of strength that makes political tools more appealing than violence.

Equal to the provision of public security and political inclusiveness, as the third leg of a triangle, is the need to reverse the abysmal administrative performance of the current Afghan government. Successful post-conflict democracies retain grave problems, but all our case studies show marked progress in ridding themselves of the greatest excesses of official corruption. Afghanistan will have to move from a situation where corruption controls all levels of government with impunity toward a system that, while flawed, places some effective sanctions on corruption and restricts the subversion of state functions by personal graft. Similarly, while the bureaucracy of post conflict democracies always remain in need of significant improvement, key Afghan institutions will have to establish an acknowledged degree of competence and working systems that provide requisite services.

Finally, the Afghan state must develop a structure of government that takes into account the primacy of local identity in Afghanistan. In a country long accustomed to autonomous local authority over much of Afghan life, and with a population infused with a complex set of overlapping identities, any attempt to impose a strong central government that seeks to direct most domestic policy without a good measure of freedom for and the tacit cooperation of informal institutions at the local level is unlikely to succeed. Instead, the national government should focus on effectively providing security and a focused set of essential, nationally defined key public goods. Inasmuch as local leadership at the village and sub-district level accepts a division of authority between the national government and local leadership, shuns the Taliban, and plays by a set of basic norms, local communities should be given greater discretion to determine how local government is organized and given broad control over local issues. Regional authorities appointed by or under the authority of Kabul, from the level of provincial governments to officials at the district and sub district levels should work in coordination with local authorities, and village-level institutions accountable to local populations should be given financial resources and responsibility for local projects. For projects at the village and district level, local leadership should be given responsibility for allocating funds

The government in Kabul should concentrate on being lean and effective, and commit to performing a clearly defined set of functions that local authorities cannot perform for

themselves. The government should exercise a monopoly on the use of force and provide for the security of all its citizens directly and often indirectly in close cooperation with existing local authorities.¹⁰ The central government should provide for all groups to have an assured, legitimate political voice, seeking to include all but the most irreconcilable in its government. It should worry less about extending control over all facets of governance to every corner of Afghanistan. It will have to attack corruption within its own house, particularly among the police and the judicial system. Beyond these challenges, it will also have to begin to provide limited essential public goods in the form of infrastructure, economic regulation and human services such as health and education.

What the government does matters; it must perform these tasks at an acceptable level of performance. What the central government does not do also matters. Rather than attempting to replace local autonomy with unfamiliar and untested policies and structures of a national government, Afghanistan's democracy should include local authorities by offering them broad latitude in matters not related to the core responsibilities of the central government. Working with institutions that exist in Afghan society, such as tribal authority structures, village councils, and local notables, the government should allow locals to direct the course of local life in the many areas outside of the mandate of the central state. Government directives that must be promulgated should be compatible with local customs to the greatest extent possible, and it may not be wise or necessary to standardize solutions for all locales alike, but allow for the particular circumstances of Afghanistan's diverse population of local communities. Government at the provincial level should not be a place for local groups to compete for patronage from the central government, but rather a platform for integrating local cooperation. The result will be a government less dominated by its center on domestic issues, at least initially, and in that respect at least, the model of the early United States will be useful.

These changes will still leave Afghanistan far from a first-rate democracy. However, they represent a path by which to achieve "the end of the beginning" of the democratization of that country. It will be the first step toward a democracy that may be possible. If achieved, it would vastly improve the chance of a successful state taking hold in Afghanistan.

¹⁰ Concern over the autonomous power of regional warlords is a serious matter. Internal conflict between the private militias of warlords certainly contributed to the resurgence of the Taliban (See Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos* (New York: Viking, 2008), 125-144). However, housing police power in the hands of the national government, which should restrain to some degree the ability of warlords to seize control of parts of the country, does not require centralization of all facets of governance to the same degree. Assisting local authorities at the village and sub-district level is not the same as helping regional warlords to carve out separate spheres of influence.

A Vision of Democratic Governance in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's leadership and its external supporters should agree to a vision of future democracy that is rooted in existing formal and informal local institutions, and imported only insofar as relevant cases studies provide true models on which Afghans can draw. The central government should preside over a government that delegates more authority to local and regional entities that it regards as partners to be served and supported. The degree of central control should be harmonized with the views and requirements of lower echelon leaders, some of which may be strong while others are weaker. Therefore, the level of central engagement need not be the same from one region or locale to another. The guiding theme should be for Kabul to provide essential and carefully limited government service, and to do so dependably, free at least of the most egregious, overt, and visible corruption.

Five areas related to governance should receive the highest priority and emphasis in the investment of international resources: strengthening security; building a path for current enemies to become political participants; fixing dysfunction in key institutions; taming the worse and most visible corruption across the central government; and developing a workable, mainly decentralized form of government. The absence of economic development from this list in no way suggests that we believe that economic development is not a vital task in Afghanistan, but rather that, given that economic development is not directly connected to developing participatory governance, an extensive treatment of development is beyond the scope of this paper. Much of the conflict resolution literature has rightly argued that economic development is essential to developing lasting peace in post conflict situations. In the case of Afghanistan, economic opportunity is essential to long-term peace.¹¹ Measured according to our democracy metric, the current situation in Afghanistan fails to rise to the level of even a mediocre democracy. Numerous obstacles stand in the way of meaningful participation, insecurity is high, institutions are feeble, and corruption is rife. Our comparative study of moderately successful post conflict democracies offers several conclusions and policy recommendations for a way forward.

¹¹ See Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a discussion of Afghanistan in particular, see Ali Jalali, "The Legacy of War and the Challenge of Peace Building" in Robert Rotberg, ed., *Building a new Afghanistan* (Cambridge: World Peace Foundation, 2007), 48-52. However, it is important to note that even states with poor economies and widespread unemployment have successfully developed participatory governance. See Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) for an early formulation of this position.

Conclusions

1. Democracy takes a long time to develop—policymakers must be realistic about what can be achieved in Afghanistan, particularly while conflict has yet to be ended. Democracy such as we experience in the United States or its NATO allies is not the most immediately relevant model for seeding similar participatory governance in Afghanistan.
2. State security as well as public security—law and order—are both essential to any lasting democracy.
3. In order to achieve security, political as well as military solutions are necessary. Workable solutions require involving opposition groups. It may also require compromise on some aspects of democracy, at least in the near term.
4. Key institutions must be stood up and function effectively. This is a lengthy process. Competency in public safety and justice is vital for a functioning state. Therefore developing competent law enforcement and a strong judicial system are critical priorities.
5. Corruption must be contained. Afghans, like many cultures, experience and tolerate some corruption, however the extent of corruption emanating from the central government in Kabul is unacceptable. In spite of their past atrocities, it triggers support for alternatives such as the Taliban.
6. Non-Western models of transition to democracy after conflict, in particular, states with a majority Muslim population, provide the best roadmap and lessons for Afghanistan. There are several such examples but they apparently are not being utilized by either international planners or Kabul.
7. The initial years of transition to democracy often do not look very good—uneven performance is to be expected. However, this must not become an excuse for abysmal governance, failure of institutional establishment, or a lack of security.

Policy Recommendations

Controlling Violence

1. NATO ISAF and U.S. Operation *Enduring Freedom* forces must be strong enough and capable of focusing sufficiently on insurgents to check their advance and inflict telling damage on their military capacity. Afghanistan needs a respite of 2–3 years from attacks to develop and consolidate governance. In military operations, avoiding the adverse impact of collateral civilian casualties must continue to receive the highest command consideration.
2. The Afghan National Army should press hard to establish and maintain the highest quality, especially among core cadres at every organizational level. It has to weigh the pressing need for a larger ready force against the patience and careful selection processes required to engender professionalism. It will be easier to set and maintain quality than to reverse unacceptable performance later. With this proviso, every effort should be expended to put in the field the most capable forces as soon as possible.

3. The first responsibility of the Afghan National Police should be public safety and security. The ANP must be free of egregious visible corruption and capable of gaining public trust. In addition to responding to local civilian authorities, it must be capable of teamwork with the military when necessary. The ANP should include some highly responsive and robust paramilitary elements in order to reinforce local police units when military force is inappropriate or not immediately available
4. Pakistani forces operating from the Pakistan side of the Durand Line are also critical to controlling violence inside Afghanistan. Government of Pakistan cooperation with the ANA might best be effected via international intermediaries, and take the form of military-to-military contacts, information sharing, and cooperation aimed at mutual confidence building. These initiatives should be fostered whenever the possibility is present.
5. International intelligence sharing should be pursued to allow collaboration as much and as often as possible in locating and targeting insurgent forces. Governments and militaries should seek opportunities to learn from each other's operations in order to improve the overall effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations.

Incorporating Enemies

1. Any reconciliation effort requires advances in counterinsurgency—opponents of a regime would not agree to join in if they are winning. The ballot box has to present a more likely chance of success than the battlefield.
2. Alongside successful counterinsurgency operations, past efforts of offering amnesty must be improved. A systematic, national program that offers a chance of meaningful political involvement must be developed alongside military advances. A wholesale “us against them” approach must be avoided.
3. Careful attention should be given to the resolution of local grievances in recruiting militants and ex-militants.

Corruption and Institution-Building

1. The national government should remove corrupt officials found in the national government at high levels whenever possible, rather than the current practice of moving them around. Cleaning house should be made public. Restoring confidence in government institutions should be a top priority
2. Local leaders can be rewarded with patronage for “good behavior.” Appearance of fairness as well as promulgation of “the rules of the game” is appropriate on a judicious scale. However, while a small advantage for cooperative leadership is one thing, corruption cannot be gross and must not extract from the property of citizens.
3. Wages for police, judges, and other key administrative officials should be sufficient to provide a living for officials without obliging them to resort to extortion.
4. The United States and the international community should clearly cast their support for individual officials as being wedded to the Afghan national interest, as demonstrated by performance, and specifically, to honest expended effort. Unreasonable goals of success are counterproductive, but often-limited progress in the provision of services adds to public trust and confidence in Kabul.

Centralization and Local Relevance

1. Notwithstanding provisions of the 2004 constitution that call for centralization, informal arrangements that provide more space for local governance as well as more provisions for local control over some resources should be established. This would not require any explicit change in the constitution, but it should result in a change of emphasis on the part of the government in Kabul as well as its international supporters. The formal structure of government in Afghanistan has been described as “one of the most centralized states in the world.”¹² Such centralization is not the best fit for Afghanistan. The national government should refocus on a more limited portfolio of essential functions, and gradually win the support of the populace by working with local authorities on other issues.

2. More autonomy should be given to village and sub-district level informal institutions. These are often representative councils that govern well, shun the Taliban and are averse to poppy cultivation and drug labs. More autonomous local councils should quickly realize positive effects in terms of public support and in their working relations with the central government. Local accountability will also improve the administrative performance of government projects. The Community Development Councils formed through the current National Solidarity may be a useful model of local autonomy.¹³

3. The central government must determine a few priority service areas that it can execute well in the near term. Law and order are critical but are not enough. Steady progress toward infrastructure expansion and reliable delivery of services, most critically road, power, and telecommunications, will demonstrate competence over time.¹⁴ Clean water, medical facilities, economic development programs that bring jobs, regulation of trade, and facilitating education are appropriate priorities as well.

4. Knowing what can be achieved and what international norms consider a working democracy are essential in crafting policies to succeed in Afghanistan. The twin pillars of growing a democratic Afghanistan are: 1) security and 2) a capable central government working in tandem with existing village, district and provincial authorities. Democracy should not seek to replace Afghanistan’s existing authorities and informal institutions, but rather work with local authorities and the seeds of democracy present in traditional Afghan culture. International assistance will be needed for a long time for such an enterprise to succeed. However, within a number of years it should within our collective means to quell insurgent attempts to kill off representative government before it can take root. The rest will be up to the leaders in Kabul and the resilience of the people of Afghanistan.

¹² Sarah Lister and Hamish Nixon, “The Place of the Province in Afghanistan’s Subnational Governance” in Rotberg ed., *Building a new Afghanistan*, 206.

¹³ Ehsan Zia, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, “Development in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Plan and Beyond” presentation at CSIS, Washington D.C, February 26, 2009. Projects administered through local leadership have reduced levels of corruption.

¹⁴ Some initial successes has been achieved in infrastructure projects, such as significant progress on the ring road and power initiatives importing power from Uzbekistan to Kabul and from Iran to Herat, with the assistance of international donors.

What Does Establishing Democracy Mean?

How the World Identifies Democratic States

In both academic literature and the policy realm, the criteria used to identify a particular state as democratic varies significantly. Even when similar definitions of democracy are adopted, the classification of a particular nation often depends on the classifier. For example, Article III of the Charter of the Council of Europe requires states to adhere to democratic principles, listing respect for the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms as mandatory for members.¹⁵ Freedom House, a think tank best known for its yearly assessments of freedom in the world, gives a similar set of expectations for states it classifies as free. Yet in 2001, the Council of Europe admitted Azerbaijan at the same time that Freedom House downgraded its assessment of the country due to a boycott of elections by the opposition and increased governmental repression of independent media outlets.¹⁶ The Azerbaijan example highlights the importance of developing a careful set of standards across several organizations. Our own assessment attempts to make progress toward that goal by synthesizing a set of metrics from criteria used by leading academics, organizations, and think tanks to define and measure democracy.

Two groups produce widely consulted rankings that seek to measure the quality of democracy in given countries. New York based Freedom House issues its annual Freedom in the World report, which ranks the level of freedom in each nation based on scores for political rights and civil liberties developed from a series of indicators. Freedom House gives the following list as necessary elements for a democratic society: a competitive political system with more than one party; universal adult suffrage; regularly contested elections conducted by secret ballot, with a secure voting process that honors the choices of the electorate; access for all major political parties to voters through media access; and an open political campaign.¹⁷

The Polity IV index, a project housed at the University of Maryland, has developed a set of indicators that places each country on a 21-point “regime authority spectrum.” The Polity IV user’s manual offers the following definitions of a democracy: “[a] mature and internally coherent democracy, for example, might be operationally defined as one in which (a) political participation is unrestricted, open, and fully competitive (b) executive recruitment is elective (c) constraints on the chief executive are substantial.”¹⁸

Freedom House develops its “freedom index” of all states by first assigning them a value between 1 and 7 in two categories, political rights and civil liberties. From this, a composite score is determined between 2 (most free) and 14 (not free). “Free” or democratic states have scores between 2 and 5, countries classified as “partly free” score

¹⁵ Statute of the Council of Europe, Article II, section 3. Available online at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/001.htm>

¹⁶ Freedom House, “Azerbaijan” in *Freedom in the World 2002*, available online at www.freedomhouse.org

¹⁷ Freedom House, “Methodology” <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=35&year=2006>

¹⁸ *Polity IV Project: Dataset Users’ Manual*, 14. Available online at www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2007.pdf

between 6 and 10, and states with a rating between 11 and 14 are “not free.” The Polity IV index ranges from a low of minus 10 to a high of 10. A democracy scores between 6 and 10, scores between 5 and -5 represent a middle (partly democratic) score, and authoritarian or non-democratic states score between -6 and -10. The Polity IV index also scores states in the midst of disorder or under the control of a foreign power as unclassifiable. Table 1 shows the ranking of Afghanistan and key states on both scales.

Table 1. Rankings of Selected States

Freedom House (2007)		Polity IV (2006)	
United States	2	United States	10
Norway	2	Norway	10
Brazil	4	Brazil	8
Nigeria	8	Nigeria	4
Afghanistan	10	Afghanistan	N/R
Russia	11	Russia	-1
China	13	China	-7
Syria	13	Syria	-7

Source: FH www.freedomhouse.org; IV <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

In the latest ranking schemes show above, the United States and Norway both rank nearest the best possible scores. Brazil represents a less solid democracy. Nigeria and Russia are indicative of states in the middle, with Nigeria closer to democracy and Russia ranked as a more authoritarian state. Syria and China are both firmly in the authoritarian camp. On the Freedom House scale, Afghanistan is closest to Russia, suggesting a political system that has only a minimal degree of freedom, closer to authoritarianism than democracy. Notably, the Polity IV criteria rates the level of unrest in Afghanistan and extent of foreign control of government so significant that the country cannot be properly evaluated.

Among the plethora of academic authors who have treated democratization, the contributions of two figures deserve special consideration.¹⁹ The criteria of Robert Dahl, a Yale political scientist considered to be a founder of democratic theory, are frequently cited within the literature as a starting point. Dahl proposes five process-based criteria in his classic work *On Democracy*. Dahl’s criteria are: a democracy should allow for effective participation and equal voting by all citizens; all citizens should have access to information; citizens should have “final control over the agenda,” that is, the final ability

¹⁹ The focus here is on “thin” rather than “thick” definitions of democracy; thus, we have not selected definitions which seek to lay out criteria for an ideal democracy, but rather a working definition for a basic, or minimally functional and reasonably enduring democracy. Other important authors in the literature which have influenced our thinking include Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, Samuel Huntington, Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Adam Przeworski. Summaries of most of the key arguments presented by these authors can be found in the *Journal of Democracy*.

to set the politics of the state; and finally, the electorate should include all, or at least most, adults.²⁰

The late Colombia University sociologist Charles Tilly identifies state capacity as a key factor that shapes the course of a democratic transition. Tilly finds that low state capacity limits the development of a democracy beyond minimum levels.²¹ This is an important contribution, as state capacity and the quality of institutions are often omitted in discussion of democratic quality. State capacity is particularly crucial in terms of post-conflict democratization; University of Ottawa professor Roland Paris has made a compelling argument that democratic reconstruction without a minimum level of institutional capacity tends toward instability and failure.²²

Discussions of state legitimacy frequently refer to the state as providing representation, security, and welfare. Democratic theory often considers these factors as disparate, directly addressing only principles of representation. However, representation with a populace terrorized by insecurity or unable to meet its basic needs is unlikely to last.²³ Thus, by “state capacity” we mean *the ability of the state to provide security* (does the state have a monopoly on violence, per Max Weber’s requirement), *and provide an environment in which the populace is able to meet its basic needs* (does the state fulfill a social contract, as proposed by Locke and others).²⁴ In addition to a state’s ability to provide security, state capacity refers to the quality of the institutions of the state.²⁵ It is not enough, for example, for a court system to exist in the constitution. Rather, a court system must play a role within a functioning justice system. Clearly, establishing such a system is a lengthy endeavor. In the case of Afghanistan, success in establishing democracy does not anticipate perfect institutions; however we expect functioning institutions in key areas such as the judiciary and police, as well as limits which constrain the ability of high level officials to appropriate public funds.

In addition to think tank and leading academic definitions, it is instructive to consult what international agreements on Afghanistan (table 2) say with regard to democracy and what (if any) timelines these agreements set for goal achievement. A number of such agreements codify the goal of establishing a democratic government in Afghanistan. In addition, elections have been held and future elections are scheduled under the auspices of the international community. While elections alone, as we shall see, are only the most rudimentary indicator of democratic potential, the fact that they have been a high priority underscores the international community’s interest in leaving behind a democratic Afghanistan.

²⁰ Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 37-39. See also Dahl *Polarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²¹ Charles Tilly, *Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

²² “Towards more effective peace building: a conversation with Roland Paris” *Development in Practice* 15:6 (November 2005); See also Roland Paris “Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism,” *International Security* 22 (Fall 1997): 54-89; Paris, *At War’s End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²³ Abraham Maslow sets out this theory, known as the hierarchy of needs, in his classic article “A Theory of Human Motivation” *Psychological Review* (50): 370-396

²⁴ Sarah Lister, “Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan,” 2.

²⁵ Samuel Huntington makes the classic formulation of this argument in *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

The 2001 Bonn Declaration, held under the auspices of the UN (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan), the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, co chaired by the UN and the United Kingdom, and the 2008 Paris Conference all express the expectation in their text that Afghanistan will become a democracy in their text. However, democracy is vaguely defined in all three documents, and accompanies a long laundry list of expectations. The portion of the Afghanistan Compact dealing with “governance, rule of law, and human rights,” for example, listed accomplishments in the following areas to be achieved by 2010: Public Administrative Reform, Anti-Corruption, Census and Statistics, National Assembly, Elections, Gender, Rule of Law, Land Registration, Counter-Narcotics, and Human Rights. Advances that strengthen the quality of institutions are seen as important, but the connection between democracy and other related benchmarks is unclear. The lengthy list of promises is both too broad, because it promises rapid achievements in many areas with prioritizing, and too narrow, because it fails to explain what a democracy is beyond elections.

Table 2. International Agreements on Afghanistan

	Bonn Agreement 2001	Afghanistan Compact 2006	Paris Conference 2008
Statements Directly Addressing Democracy	“Acknowledging the right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice”	“Democratic governance and the protection of human rights constitute the cornerstone of sustainable political progress in Afghanistan.”	“We underlined the importance of the holding of elections in 2009 and 2010 as a crucial step to consolidate democracy for all Afghans. The international community pledged its strong support to help make the elections free, fair, and secure.”
Related Provisions	1964 constitution will serve as model (except for portions pertaining to the King)	Related benchmarks include advances in public administrative reform, anti-corruption, census and statistics, national assembly, elections, gender, rule of law, land registration, counter-narcotics, and human rights. However, these are not explicitly identified with a democratic Afghanistan	Additional goals of development, infrastructure investment, strengthen government institutions, combat corruption, improving human rights and rule of law etc. However, these are not explicitly identified with a democratic Afghanistan

Indeed, in his first congressional testimony under the administration of Barack Obama, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates contended that the international community’s expectations for a democratic Afghanistan were too broad and demanded too much of Afghanistan in a short period of time. Gates instead insisted that the United States and the international community need a set of limited, realistic goals linked with security and a legitimate government.²⁶

²⁶ Thom Shanker “Gates: Modest Goals, More Strikes” *New York Times* January 27, 2009

From the above we have seen that criteria used to determine if a state is a democracy varies widely. However, a combination of different norms can be used to develop a robust framework for analyzing the quality of a state's democracy and understanding credible goals for a post-conflict democracy. In the following section we develop a democracy matrix from a synthesis of the criteria presented above, and apply these criteria both to Afghanistan and other post-conflict democracies. From this analysis we can develop a small set of realistic goals in line with the experiences of successful post conflict democracies.

Tasks and Time to Achieve Democracy: A Comparative Perspective

A Comparative Examination of Post-conflict Democratization

This section considers the possible results of post-conflict democratization, referencing “best cases” and evaluating the extent of progress in these countries against our metric.

Using data on intrastate conflicts and democratization from the Correlates of War Project, the Polity IV Regime Trends data set, and Freedom House, we found 17 nations that experienced a transition to a more democratic form of government following the cessation of an intrastate conflict that ended between 1980 and 1997.

Tables 3 and 4 on the following pages provide data that considers the current progress of states that successfully transitioned to democracy. Table 3 outlines basic details about these transitions to democracy and shows key criteria that distinguish successful democratizing states from states that fail to democratize. Table 4 displays how these states fare when evaluated by our matrix. This data provides a comprehensive reference on what relatively successful post conflict democracies have been able to accomplish, in terms of the length of transition, state capacity, and democratic quality.

Note that the category of political participation—the holding of elections—is rated as “good” for all democratizing states, suggesting it can often be invoked early in the democratization process, as it has been in Afghanistan, but follow through to reach real democracy is inherently more difficult. Other criteria may be more telling with regard to progress over the long view; elections are a necessary but insufficient component of democracy.

The average length of time between the end of a conflict and the arrival at a baseline level of democracy suggests that establishing a democracy takes a significant amount of time *after* the end of internal armed conflict if a state is not already a democracy. Of the 17 countries, eight of the states had not met the minimum standard of a democracy by 2006, when the Polity IV data set was collected.²⁷ Of the nine remaining states, three had already met the criteria for democracy by the time they began transitioning from intrastate conflict, suggesting democratization had already begun during the lead up to a peace accord.²⁸ Of the remaining states, the average time to reach a minimum level of democracy was 9.5 years. These latter nine states represent the best case for democratizing after internal conflict such as in Afghanistan, given that the other eight countries did not achieve a democracy during the entire time studied.

²⁷ This chart follows the Polity IV definition of democratic of state ranging from 6-10 on their Polity scale which ranges from -10 to 10.

²⁸ Both Nicaragua and the Philippines experienced events that brought their countries somewhat closer to democracy in 1984. The classification of El Salvador as a successful democracy during the 90s is likely a instance of erroneous coding; several students of El Salvadorian politics have argued that the quality of democracy during the 90s has been overstated. See for example Elisabeth Wood, “Challenges to Democracy in El Salvador” in Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring ed. *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005),

Table 3. Attempts at Post-conflict Democratization, 1980–2006²⁹

State	End of Conflict	2007 Polity Score	2008 Freedom House Score	Years to Democracy (Polity IV)	Years to Democracy (Freedom House)	Level of insecurity (World Bank/ Foreign Policy) ³⁰	Level of Corruption (TI 2008)	Institution Quality? (World Bank)
Angola	1995	-2	11	N/A	N/A	High	V. High	Low
Bosnia	1995	5	7	N/A	N/A	Med	Med	Low
Cambodia	1993/ 1997	2	11	N/A	N/A	Med	High	Low
Congo-Brazzaville	1997	-4	11	N/A	N/A	Med	High	Very Low
Croatia	1992	9	4	11	8	Low	Med	Med
DRC-Kinshasa	1997	5	11	N/A	N/A	High	V. High	Very Low
El Salvador	1992	7	5	0	5	High	Med	Med
Ethiopia	1992	1	10	N/A	N/A	High	High	Med
Guatemala	1984	8	7	14	N/A	High	Med	Med
Liberia	1996	6	7	11	N/A	Med	High	Low
Mozambique	1992	6	6	3	N/A	Low	High	Low/Med
Nicaragua	1990	8	6	0	N/A	Low	High	Low
Peru	1995	8	5	8	6	Low	Med	Med
Philippines	1992	8	7	0	4	Med³¹	High	Med
Rwanda	1994	-3	11	N/A	N/A	Med	Med	Med
Serbia	1992	7	5	10	10	Med	Med	Med
Sierra Leone	1996	5	6	N/A	N/A	Med	V. High	Low

Bold text denotes a country that successfully democratized by either the Polity IV or Freedom House criteria.

²⁹ Degrees of change vary from author to author. Morton Halperin and his coauthors argued for one point of movement in *The Democracy Advantage* (London: Routledge, 2004), while other scholars have argued for as much as six points of movement. We used a cutoff of a two-point advance on either scale following the end of a conflict as evidence of a move toward democratization

³⁰ The World Bank political stability and violence indicators and the 2007 Foreign Policy Failed State Index were used as the foundation for this column but final judgment for this column is that of the authors.

³¹ The continued insurgency in the south of the Philippines is largely confined to islands in the south, thus accounting for the Philippines' rating.

Table 4. The Democracy Matrix Applied³²

State	Is political participation open to all adults? (FH, Polity IV, Election reports from electoral studies)	Are citizens allowed effective participation in national and local political processes through competitive elections and access to relevant information?	Does the political process respect the rights of minorities and out-groups?	Are citizen decisions free from arbitrary interventions—do the decisions of the populace rather than some other factor determine the political reality of the nation?	Does sufficient state capacity exist to provide for security, rule of law, and the implementation of state projects, as well as ensure the basic welfare of citizens?	Do important elements of society have disincentives to participating in the new government? Have former enemies become part of government?	Are the institutions of government primarily responding to the will of the governed as a whole rather than to individuals or groups who influence officials illicitly with money, favoritism or threats?
Afghanistan	Good	Poor/Fair	Poor/Fair	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor
Bosnia	Good	Good	Fair	?	Good	Fair	?
Croatia	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good
El Salvador	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Poor	Good	Good
Guatemala	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair
Liberia	Good	Fair	Fair	?	Fair	?	Fair
Mozambique	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Nicaragua	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Peru	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Philippines	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	?	Fair	Fair
Serbia	Good	?	?	Good	Good	Poor/Fair	Fair

Data from Freedom House suggests a slightly faster time of transition; democratizing countries averaged just less than 7 years to consolidate a democracy after the cessation of conflict. However, the Freedom House data is more restrictive in what countries it considers to be democratic; only five of the 17 states in the sample meet Freedom House's standards for a classification of "free." This confirms the traditional understanding that democratization in a post-conflict environment is a lengthy and

³² To develop this chart, the authors have consulted numerous indicators, including the Work Bank Indicators, Quality of Governance Indicators compiled by the University of Gothenburg (<http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/>) and the SPIRI database at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (<http://www.sipri.org/databases>). We have also utilized accounts of elections and political systems in the journal *Electoral Studies*, as well as work by area experts. Ultimate responsibility for these judgments lies with the authors.

Good denotes acceptable quality, *fair* indicates an area with significant difficulties, *poor* indicates a very low level of performance, a question mark indicates that insufficient information exists for an assessment or contradictory information makes a judgment hard to render. A score of good should not be considered evidence of the best possible practice, but merely as an indication that the standards of minimal acceptability have been met.

complex process that requires both a secure peace and time to achieve even modest success.³³

Security versus Insecurity

Our research suggests that successful democratizing states make important advances in this 7–10 year period of transition. A reduction of the level of insecurity, the performance of key institutions, the extent of corruption, and the inclusion of former enemies in the political system set successful post-conflict democracies apart from other states that have tried but failed to establish a democracy. A high level of insecurity threatens to undermine both the public's ability to participate in a democracy and necessary levels of trust in government and society. Our matrix suggests that the ability of citizens to participate *effectively* in shaping their polity is central to a democracy. Violence inhibits the ability of citizens to participate in a democracy; in effect it turns participation into a lie. In a society where violence is rampant, local political life and the daily reality of public life is decided by local groups of armed men who are unaccountable to a constitution, justice system, or parliament. Elections may be "free and fair," but participation makes no practical difference at either the national or the local level. Such "democracy in name" marginalizes citizen's participation despite a democratic structure, because force rather than government decides public policy.³⁴ Violence reduces trust in institutions, and increases in-group solidarity and mistrust of others, leading to a xenophobia that makes building democratic society in a multi-ethnic environment very difficult.³⁵ Low levels of trust in other citizens and in the government tend to retard the development of a democracy with staying power.³⁶

Further, when a government is unable to protect the lives of its citizens, not to mention their liberty or assets, citizens are disinclined to support it. Such a government risks losing legitimacy. Even an advocate of absolute monarchy such as Thomas Hobbes argued that a government that cannot protect the safety of its people does not warrant allegiance.³⁷ In the contemporary failed states literature, the inability of a state to control its territory, and the lawlessness that results from such failure, is a key example of a failed state.³⁸ The national government appears feckless and unworthy of loyalty.

It is thus unsurprising that most successful democratizing states have relatively low levels of insecurity. In Guatemala and El Salvador, the two cases of democratization where high levels of insecurity remain, the insecurity is considered by area experts to fundamentally

³³O'Donnell and Schmitter, 70; Roland Paris "Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism" :54-89. For a contrasting perspective see Leslie Anderson and Laurence Dodd, *Learning Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³⁴ See for example Terry Karl and Philippe Schmitter, "What Democracy Is... and Is Not," in Marc F. Plattner and Larry Diamond, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Ronald Inglehart, Mansoor Moaddel, and Mark Tessler, "Xenophobia and in-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity" *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (2006):495–505.

³⁶ The classic formulation of this theory is Putnam's theory of social capital put forth in *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (Collier: New York, 1962), 110–111.

³⁸ Robert Rotberg ed. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), chapter 1.

threaten the tenure of the state's democracy.³⁹ While insecurity in both of these states is significant, it does not approach the level of violence in the south and east of Afghanistan. Establishing and maintaining a reasonable level of security is vitally important for the longevity of a democracy emerging from conflict.

The Penalties of Corruption

Most democratizing states have made some gains in the areas of governance and institution-building. The only state in our chart that has relatively low levels of corruption and relatively strong institutions, and has not democratized, is Rwanda. These gains are typically modest. States that do not have endemic levels of corruption retain a significant amount of corruption; countries with a medium level of quality in their institutions still have a long way to go toward effectiveness. In terms of corruption, while corruption at high levels lingers on, successful young democracies criminalize corruption and establish procedures for prosecuting corrupt officials. In Nicaragua, for example, Arnoldo Alemán, a former president, was prosecuted for corruption. The inability of the system to convict Alemán and his inner circle, due to political intervention, demonstrates that the system is still in need of significant improvement. But the fact that charges were publicly made and public figures were tried and in some cases convicted is an example of progress.⁴⁰

When the courts and the police force in a state are organized to enrich officials rather than serve the public, such wholesale rapacity can undermine essential public support for a government. Judicial and police corruption is not equivalent to a routine cost in obtaining government services, such as the payment of a small bribe to expedite a service that government is obliged to provide. While the prevailing trend in corruption research holds that corruption is usually detrimental to overall economic performance,⁴¹ petty corruption, when it remains at an affordable level, can at least motivate service within an indifferent bureaucracy.⁴²

Police and judicial corruption, however, are purely extractive. Further, far from serving as a routine cost, corruption in law enforcement adds unpredictability and terror to daily existence. When the judicial branch gives decisions based on bribes and influence, it undermines both public confidence in government and the ability of the government to secure order. Corruption in the long term is never desirable, but the effects of corruption in law enforcement and the judicial system serve to undermine both confidence in the state and the capacity of the state to provide order and fundamental services.

³⁹ See Wood, "Challenges to Democracy in El Salvador," 194-197; José Miguel Cruz, "The Nature of the Political Transition" in Cynthia J. Arnson, ed., *El Salvador's Democratic Transition Ten Years After the Peace Accord* (Woodrow Wilson Center: Washington, DC, 2003), 23.

⁴⁰ See Samuel R. Greene, *State Donors and Grand Corruption in Nicaragua* (M.Phil Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006).

⁴¹ Pranab Bardham, "Corruption and development: A review of issues" *Journal of Economic Literature* 35 (1997): 1320-1346; Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴² This is Samuel Huntington's argument in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 69. See also Silvio Borner, Aymo Brunetti, and Beatrice Weder, *Political Credibility and Economic Development* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 58-60.

Similarly, highly visible cases of unpunished corruption by high-ranking officials tend to diminish public support for a government, particularly when coupled with ineffective public services. The symbolic power of the mansions of government officials, which the public knows cannot be acquired by public pay or other legal means, goes a long way toward engendering cynicism. This is certainly evident in Afghanistan, where the monthly rent of many mansions recently built by high-ranking government officials cost more than twice the monthly salary of Afghanistan's president.⁴³

While successful democratizing states still struggle with high levels of corruption and institutional weaknesses, in comparison with states that have not succeeded in democratizing, they have made important first steps. In particular, most states have strengthened their police forces and courts, as well as reducing the amount of corruption faced by their citizens in their everyday lives.

Including Enemies in Government

Finally, in all of the successful democratizing state on the list except for states which arose out of a partition (the Balkan states)—El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, and the Philippines—groups that had opposed each other with guns now sit together in a legislature. In some cases one player was forced to acknowledge defeat or an inferior military position, while in other cases both sides negotiated from a position of equals, but in every case elements that had worked to destroy the government became a part of it. This suggests that winning a military conflict is not sufficient. Rather, the end state of a conflict must be managed to allow most former combatants to become participants in the society.⁴⁴

Including former insurgents in a participatory government is a difficult undertaking. However, the perceived justice of the place for former rebels inside the political system is often the determining factor that explains if a peace agreement holds or unravels. The contrast between Portugal's former provinces in Southern Africa is instructive. In Angola, UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) leader Jonas Savimbi believed that elections were unfair and the government had no intention of truly including his movement in government. Savimbi returned to the bush to continue his guerrilla war, and the ensuing civil war derailed the Angolan peace process for nearly ten years. In Mozambique, by contrast, the RENAMO (National Resistance of Mozambique) leadership, despite some irregularities in the electoral process, believed that the FRELIMO (National Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) government was taking adequate steps to include them in the political system of Mozambique.⁴⁵ The difference between these two states in table 4 is significant. Mozambique has been able to develop some working institutions and has established a reasonable level of security, while Angola has made little progress.

⁴³ Dexter Filkins, "Bribes Corrode Afghans' Trust in Government" *New York Times* January 1, 2009.

⁴⁴ Many former enemies, ranging from Hizbi Islami to former communists, sit together in parliament. However, peace also requires some success integrating the government's most recent opponents.

⁴⁵ See Martin Meredith's discussion of this in *The State of Africa* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2005) 600-616. For a detailed discussion of Mozambique, see Carrie Manning, *The Making of Democrats* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

All of the states in table 4 have achieved better results on our inventory than Afghanistan. Most successful democratizing states have limited the amount of violence in their society and made modest improvement to their public administration. Their governments allow a reasonable form of participation. They are far from perfect, but provide a starting point from which a better state can eventually be achieved. The following sections consider how far the current situation in Afghanistan differs from the situation in successful democratizing states, as well as the specific context of democratization in Afghanistan. It then turns to specific cases that offer suggestions for how Afghanistan might move forward in each key area we have identified.

The Current State of Democracy in Afghanistan: Assessments and a New Metric Set for Measuring Progress

The current state of democracy in Afghanistan is assessed in recent detailed reports by the two widely used sources we have referenced thus far, Polity IV and Freedom House. In 2006, Polity IV evaluates Afghanistan as a state in transition, giving Afghanistan a classification of “interregnum,” reflecting the intervention of a foreign power (U.S.-led Operation *Enduring Freedom*) that removed the previous government in 2001. The Polity IV data manual notes that an interregnum score indicates a period of breakdown: “The identification of an ‘interregnum’ period is especially important in the identification of an abrupt or disruptive regime transition, described below. Interregnum periods are equated with the collapse, or failure, of central state authority, whether or not that failure is followed by a radical transformation, or revolution, in the mode of governance.”⁴⁶

Freedom House scored Afghanistan as a 14 in 2001, the worst score possible on its index. By 2005, Afghanistan’s Freedom House score had risen to 10, the bottom rung of the “Partly Free” category, the same score as the troubled states of Yemen and the Central African Republic. The score indicates democracy in Afghanistan, while making limited progress until 2005 (see table 5), has stagnated since then at the lowest measurable level of partial freedom by global criteria.

Table 5. Afghanistan on the Freedom House Scale, 2001-2007

Changes in Freedom House scores of Afghanistan: 2001-2007		Countries with Freedom House score of 10 in 2007
2001	14	Bahrain
2002	12	Central African Republic
2004	11	Djibouti
2005	10	Ethiopia
2006	10	Togo
2007	10	Yemen

Source: www.freedomhouse.org

Though the most recent Freedom House numbers in Afghanistan have improved relative to 2001, its narrative report offered a gloomier assessment of the situation in Afghanistan, suggesting a downward trend in freedom of government. According to the 2008 country report, “little progress was made on various governance issues, including attempts by the central government to combat corruption, improve transparency, and strengthen the judicial and law enforcement services. In a prevailing atmosphere of impunity, numerous human rights abuses—including attacks on aid workers, political and social activists,

⁴⁶ Polity IV Project, *Dataset Users’ Manual*, 17.

journalists, and schools, as well as systematic violations of women's rights—were reported during the year.”⁴⁷

The conclusion these two indexes suggest is that even the limited progress toward democracy thus far may have stalled. One report concludes that external international controls coupled with disorder inside Afghanistan renders the state too unstable to allow for a true evaluation of Afghan democracy, while the other concludes Afghanistan is in a stalled or possibly deteriorating situation, barely clinging to the lowest rung on the ladder toward democracy.

Expert assessments of Afghanistan by policymakers and academics similarly suggest that democracy in Afghanistan is tenuous and weak. In written testimony at her confirmation hearing, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton described Afghanistan as a “narco-state” that is “plagued by limited capacity and widespread corruption.” Richard Holbrooke, the President's special envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, also delivered a lengthy list of criticisms in his assessment of the performance of Afghanistan's democracy: “It is weak; it is corrupt; it has a very thin leadership veneer; it is internally divided; it has never arrested any major drug lords.”⁴⁸

Recent academic works by experts from the United States,⁴⁹ Pakistan,⁵⁰ and Great Britain⁵¹ reach similar conclusions. Journals with as diverse perspectives as the left-leaning French publication *Le Monde Diplomatique*⁵² and *Foreign Affairs*, a journal of the Washington policy community,⁵³ have called the viability of the current government into question. Reports issued in 2009 by the USIP and CRS also called for modest expectations about the quality and authoritative reach of Afghanistan's central government.⁵⁴ Many Afghan voices concur. Several former government leaders have described the situation in terms like that of former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani, who stated “this government has lost the capacity to govern because a shadow government has taken over.”⁵⁵

The net assessment from this diverse collection of voices is a pessimistic report. The following section examines the reality of Afghanistan today against the goals set by the international community as assessed by our democracy metric. This assessment provides a more detailed explanation of why the current democracy in Afghanistan is performing poorly.

Evaluating the Status of Democracy in Afghanistan Against the Democracy Metric

Drawing on the democratization literature previously reviewed, we have developed the following series of questions with which to measure emerging democracies in detail.

⁴⁷ Freedom House, “Afghanistan” in *Freedom in the World* 2008. www.freedomhouse.org

⁴⁸ “Clinton signals new line on Kabul” *Financial Times* January 16, 2009.

⁴⁹ See as one example the work of NYU scholar Barnett Rubin, *Afghanistan's Uncertain Transition from Turmoil to Normalcy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Rasul Bakhsh Rais, *Recovering the frontier state : war, ethnicity, and state in Afghanistan*, (Plymouth: Lexington, 2008); Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (Viking, 2008).

⁵¹ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2007).

⁵² Chris Sands, “Afghanistan: chaos central” *Le Monde Diplomatique* February, 2009.

⁵³ Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, “From Great Game to Grand Bargain,” *Foreign Affairs* Nov/Dec 2008

⁵⁴ J Alexander Thier, ed., *The Future of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: USIP, 2009).

⁵⁵ Dexter Filkins, “Bribes Corrode Afghans' Trust in Government” *New York Times* January 1, 2009.

Figure 4 presents a chart outlining the questions asked by this metric, and the performance of successful post conflict democracies according to these questions. The metric will be used to evaluate Afghanistan's performance in depth and to highlight gaps by considering its performance in the following areas:

- Is political participation open to all adults?
- Are citizens allowed *effective* participation in national and local political processes through competition between at least two political parties⁵⁶ and access to relevant information?
- Does the political process respect the rights of minorities and out-groups?
- Are citizen decisions free from arbitrary interventions—do the decisions of the populace rather than some other factor determine the political reality of the nation?
- Does sufficient state capacity exist to provide for security, rule of law, and the implementation of state projects, as well as ensure the basic welfare of citizens?
- Do important elements of society have disincentives to participating in the new government? Have former enemies willing to participate in the political process become a credible part of government?
- Are the institutions of government primarily responding to the will of the governed as a whole rather than to individuals or groups who influence officials illicitly with money, favoritism or threats?

Is political participation open to all adults?

By law, political participation is open to all adult Afghans, both in terms of voting and standing for office. A gender representation law requires 20% of elected officials to be female. However, in practice, several factors inhibit participation, most notably: 1) the poor security situation can cause potential voters to be dissuaded by intimidation, either from the Taliban or other anti-government forces or a particular local power center. “Night letters” from insurgents backing the Taliban warned that voters who participate in elections would face deadly consequences.⁵⁷ 2) Many Afghan women are forbidden from voting, let alone standing for parliament, by their husbands; in a survey conducted by the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, 38% of Afghan woman who did not register to vote ascribed their abstention to a lack of permission from their husband.⁵⁸

Political participation is frequently manipulated by local notables, particularly in remote areas. Many groups at tribal and clan level are almost entirely autonomous, and have carved out an existence largely free from the oversight of a national government.⁵⁹ Given that local leadership is often in *de facto* political control over their areas, and given

⁵⁶ At the local level of tribal *Jirgas* or *Shuras*, competition would not require formal competition between parties, but rather a choice of candidates.

⁵⁷ Declan Walsh, “‘Night letters’ from the Taliban threaten Afghan democracy” *The Observer* September 19, 2004

⁵⁸ Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, “Take the Guns Away,” 15. Available online at <http://www.afghanadvocacy.org/documents/TaketheGunsAwayEnglish.pdf>

⁵⁹ For one example, see M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani, *The Kirghiz and Wakhi of Afghanistan : adaptation to closed frontiers and war* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

Afghanistan's scant transportation and communications infrastructure relative to its harsh geography, guaranteeing political participation is quite difficult. Local decision-making bodies such as Community Development Councils, used to administer aid at the village level, have had some success at involving Afghans at the local level.⁶⁰ Further, during the Jihad period and follow-on civil war, local villages largely resumed governing themselves because the central government essentially failed.

Are citizens allowed effective participation in political processes?

Competitive elections in 2004 and 2005 have been largely free from overt manipulation. Presidential elections are scheduled in August of 2009 and parliamentary elections in 2010. The cumbersome single nontransferable vote (SNTV) system of voting has rendered parliamentary elections needlessly complex. Under SNTV, voters choose a single candidate from their district rather than a party. Each electoral district elects a number of candidates. In Afghanistan's multi-candidate districts this can result in victorious candidates elected with a small percentage of the popular vote. Further, voters must choose purely based on the identity of candidates rather than by party platform. When voters are presented with a complex list of candidates, many unknown to them, without party information, their ability to make meaningful choices is limited. Thus, SNTV may have inhibited the development of an effective parliament by stunting the growth of political parties and weakening the development of a robust political system at the national level. Voting on largely ethnic lines might have been prevented by a better electoral system. The resulting parliament has been roundly criticized as ineffective, and some analysts have concluded the body does not have a structure that allows for the bargaining and compromise necessary in a democratic system.⁶¹

Perhaps more importantly, in much of the country, decisions made at the level of the national government have little impact on the daily lives of citizens. About 60% of the country is estimated to be under the control of local authorities of various shapes and sizes.⁶² The relationship between democracy and local government, both formally and via informal institutions, must be reconciled. If the national government's de facto jurisdiction is limited to Kabul and provincial and district capitals, state capacity cannot come solely from the national government. Formally, Kabul's authority extends to most small municipalities, including district centers where sub governors are appointed from the capital. In practice, working arrangements must be made with local institutions, rather than a one-way top-down model driving policy from Kabul.

Access to the information a population needs to make political decisions is limited by several factors. Low literacy rates and lack of experience outside a person's immediate area of residence is a problem in this regard. Afghanistan's geography and poor

⁶⁰ Ehsan Zia, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, "Development in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Plan and Beyond" presentation at CSIS, Washington D.C, February 26, 2009.

⁶¹ Andrew Reynolds, "The Curious Case of Afghanistan" *Journal of Democracy* 17 (April 2006); International Crisis Group "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work" Asia Report N°116, May 15, 2006

⁶² Deborah Tate, "US Official Says Afghan Government Controls Only 30 Percent of Country" *Voice of America News*, February 27, 2008 <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-02/2008-02-27-voa67.cfm?CFID=33832939&CFTOKEN=42290926>

infrastructure limit many rural Afghans from connections with the rest the country.⁶³ This also reflects the point made above about the reach of the government beyond Kabul and provincial capitals. Further, the ability to effectively campaign and participate politically is constrained by the security situation. Participants in the political process have been warned to desist, intimidation is common, and prominent political figures have been assassinated.

Does the political process respect the rights of minorities and out-groups?

Insuring that the Pashtun population believes it has a role in the new government is vital. Rasul Bakhsh Rais argues that American support for members of the Northern Alliance in the new government, which was (and remains) mostly comprised of Tajik and Hazara, was perceived by many Pashtun as an ethnic bias in the composition of the new government. While Pashtun who have committed atrocities connected to the Taliban were excluded from government, members of the Northern Alliance with dubious records of murder and criminal behavior were included.⁶⁴ President Karazi's nomination of Marshall Fahim to serve as 1st Vice President continues this trend. As well, an imbalance in the Afghan National Army (ANA) exists in favor of Tajiks; more than 50% of officers and NCOs are Tajik.⁶⁵

In many areas a perception exists among minorities that their political rights are still being compromised far too often. Members of the Hazara Shi'a population, for example, have contended that their political representation at the national level does not match their numbers in the overall population.⁶⁶ Lack of a proper national census encourages claims of under-representation from many ethnic groups

Are citizen decisions free from arbitrary interventions? Do the decisions of the populace rather than private or privileged influences determine the political reality of the nation?

Depth of political participation is frequently controlled by local notables. Legislation passed by the national assembly often fails to affect the local level. The cultural structure of Afghan society places local identities first. A democratic government must be meaningful in terms of local realities. This makes establishing a centralized government extremely difficult in the decentralized Afghan society. Rory Stewart, describing his travel through Afghanistan shortly after the fall of the Taliban, observed that "the villagers I met were mostly illiterate, lived far from electricity or television, and knew very little about the outside world."⁶⁷ Stewart noted that within the distance of only a few days travel on foot, he found a plethora of different forms of local organization and attitudes toward government, ranging from a feudal village controlled by a local headman to villages organized on Iranian lines. Stewart recognized that "these differences between groups [are] deep, elusive, and difficult to overcome. Village democracy, gender issues,

⁶³ One area which shows improvement is radio communication. However, the Neo-Taliban have also used radio, CDs, and other methods of communication to spread their message.

⁶⁴ International Crisis Group "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work" Asia Report N°116, May 15, 2006

⁶⁵ Giustozzi, 187.

⁶⁶ Chris Sands, "In Kabul, rituals highlight progress" *The National* January 08, 2009; Minority Rights Group International, "Hazaras" in *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, 2008. Online at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49749d693d.html>

⁶⁷ See Rory Stewart's account in *The Places in Between* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2006), 246.

and centralization would be hard-to-sell concepts in some areas.”⁶⁸ Afghanistan’s National Solidarity Strategy has enjoyed some success in involving local communities in governmental processes by convening assemblies of leading local citizens to determine to course of development projects, which was the typical process prior to the war in the 1970s.⁶⁹

Corruption is endemic; Transparency’s 2007 assessment placed Afghanistan at 172 out of 179 countries evaluated while the World Bank Governance Indicators placed Afghanistan in the bottom 10 percentile.⁷⁰ Worryingly, the Afghan courts are considered to be the most corrupt institution in the country.⁷¹ The Afghan National Police are also high on the list of most corrupt institutions; the police are undermanned, undertrained, and receive inadequate pay. The Dutch government threatened to slash funding for police training unless effectiveness improved.⁷² New York Times journalist Dexter Filkins reported that Sherpur, one of the most exclusive districts of Kabul, is full of government officials who have become wealthy off their positions. “What is perhaps most remarkable about Sherpur is that many of the homeowners are government officials, whose annual salaries would not otherwise enable them to live here for more than a few days.”⁷³

Does sufficient state capacity exist to provide for security, rule of law, and the implementation of state projects?

One metric of a sovereign state, following Weber, is the existence of a state monopoly on the use of legitimate force in its territory.⁷⁴ One way to assess effective governance of a government over a state is the degree of control it exercises over its national territory, particularly in terms of exclusive use of legitimate force.⁷⁵ The level of violence means that the central government in practice controls little of the country. Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell estimated in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee that only 30% of the country is under government control.⁷⁶ The government’s ability to project itself in the south and east of the country is increasingly limited.⁷⁷ University of Ottawa professor Roland Paris describes the situation in Afghanistan as an attempt at peace enforcement rather than peace building.⁷⁸

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Frederick Barton, *et al*, “Afghanistan and Pakistan On The Brink” CSIS Report, February 21, 2009.

⁷⁰ The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index is available online at http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2007/cpi2007/cpi_2007_table and World Bank indexes

⁷¹ ⁷¹ UNDP, *Afghan Human Development Report* (Islamabad :Army Press, 2007) 61.

⁷² Ed Johnson, “Afghanistan’s Future Threatened by Poor Police, Balkenende Says” *Bloomberg* June 9 2008 <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=a2ASs6.BS7Mc&refer=home>

⁷³ Dexter Filkins, “Bribes Corrode Afghans’ Trust in Government” *New York Times* January 1, 2009.

⁷⁴ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* Trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 154.

⁷⁵ This should certainly not be taken to equate effectiveness with democracy. A state such as China has relatively efficient institutions but is in no way democratic.

⁷⁶ Deborah Tate, “US Official Says Afghan Government Controls Only 30 Percent of Country” *Voice of America News*, February 27, 2008 <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2008-02/2008-02-27-voa67.cfm?CFID=33832939&CFTOKEN=42290926>

⁷⁷ Carlotta Gall, “Taliban Gain New Foothold in Afghan City” *New York Times* August 26, 2008

⁷⁸ “Towards more effective peace building: a conversation with Roland Paris” *Development in Practice* 15:6 (November 2005).

The security situation in much of Afghanistan has significantly worsened. For example, IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attacks increased by more than 70% from 2006 to 2007, reaching a total 2,615 incidents.⁷⁹ In addition, international aid workers have pulled out of much of the south and east of the country,⁸⁰ and many Afghans find it impossible to live normal everyday lives, let alone participate politically. According to the Asia Director of Human Rights Watch, “Security is the first pillar of the compact, but tens of thousands of Afghans don’t feel safe enough to lead normal lives. Life is so dangerous that many Afghans are unable to go to school, get health care, or take goods to market.”⁸¹ As Gen. Barry McCaffrey succinctly put it, “Afghanistan is in misery.”⁸²

In addition to the poor security situation, the institutions of the Afghan government are still exceedingly weak. The justice system and enforcement of the rule of law are limited, even in areas under government control. The Afghan Human Development Report reported that many Afghans believe that the formal legal system is “...designed to oppress and exploit the powerless whenever they came into contact with it.” Much of the public believes that the politically connected act with impunity, and corruption and favoritism mar the legal processes.⁸³

The basic needs of much of the populace are unmet. In 2005, unemployment was estimated at 40%.⁸⁴ Food shortages were widespread, and as much as 80% of the population was without any access to electricity.⁸⁵ In Kabul, the Boston Globe reported that residents received an average of three hours of electricity per day, while international businesses paid monthly bribes for continuous power.⁸⁶

Does the public support democracy? Is support for government divided along regional or ethnic lines?

Democracy is supported in theory by a strong majority of the opinion polls. The Pashtun are the most skeptical but a majority supports a theoretical democracy. The insurgency draws overwhelmingly from Pashtun population; however, as the government has been unable to provide basic services such as electricity, even in urban areas, support has precipitously declined among all ethnic groups.⁸⁷

⁷⁹Department of Defense, “Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan” June 2008.

⁸⁰ Nick Meo, “Leaked aid map of Afghanistan reveals expansion of no-go zones” *The Times of London* December 5, 2007.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Slow Progress on Security and Rights” January 29, 2007. <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2007/01/29/afghan15223.htm>

⁸² Gen. Barry McCaffrey, Presentation at West Point, July 30, 2008, page 3. <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/mccaffreyafghanistanaarjuly2008.pdf>

⁸³ UNDP, *Afghan Human Development Report*, 42-43.

⁸⁴ CIA World Factbook, “Afghanistan” <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>; Paul Garwood, “Attacks, unemployment plague Afghanistan” *Washington Post* May 9, 2006. *Washington Post* May 9, 2006.

⁸⁵ Jason Campbell and Jeremy Shapiro, “Afghanistan Index”, 29

⁸⁶ Jason Straziuso, “Kabul gets 3 hours of electricity a day” *Boston Globe* January 27, 2008

⁸⁷ Asia Foundation, “Afghanistan in 2007”, 79, 84 <http://asiafoundation.org/publications/pdf/20>; World Public Opinion “WPO Poll: Afghan Public Overwhelmingly Rejects al-Qaeda, Taliban” January 30 2006.

Do important elements of society have disincentives to participating in the new government?

Afghans profiting from the drug trade have a significant incentive to oppose the creation of an effective government. Mosis Naim argues that widespread criminal activity can completely undermine the infrastructure of a state. This is a particular problem when criminal activity is linked with an anti-government insurgency.⁸⁸ Links between the Taliban and drug trafficking are clear.⁸⁹ More worrying are links between members of government and the drug trade, suggesting that the danger of a state capture, which occurs when the apparatus of government functions primarily to seek rents for officials, is high. Ashraf Ghani (the former finance minister) has described Afghanistan as a “narco-mafia state.”⁹⁰ A short growing season and inhospitable terrain encourages the production of easy to grow crops such as poppy rather than food staple crops (see map 2 in appendix). Some trends are encouraging—alternative production of wheat has increased significantly, and the difference in profit between wheat production and opium has been reduced from 10:1 to 2:1.⁹¹ The development of high revenue agriculture for export also shows promise—NBC suggests that pomegranates may be more lucrative than poppy for some Afghan farmers.⁹² Afghanistan has good potential in other high value horticultural crops such as raisins and fruits; in the 1960s and 1970s, such products formed nearly 50% of Afghanistan’s export revenue.⁹³ However, the CIA still ranked opium as Afghanistan’s most important export, illustrating the depth of the problem⁹⁴

The equitable distribution of honors and recourses among sub-groups is also an important calculus. Groups that feel unrepresented or underrepresented in government are less inclined to cooperate with it. In some cases this has caused significant consequences. At both the national level, where many Pashtun have expressed a feeling of exclusion from a government dominated by other interests, and the local level, where a delicate calculus of local balances can be easily upset, preserving a sense of fairness is an important task.⁹⁵

In the following section we explain in more detail why Afghanistan remains far from a democracy by considering the particular challenges facing democratization in Afghanistan. By examining specific difficulties in areas such as insecurity, corruption, out-group involvement, and decentralization, we set the stage for a set of realistic recommendations, informed by the hard-won experience of similar post-conflict democracies and the context of Afghanistan’s fragmented, rural state. In the spirit of Secretary Gates’ criticism that the international community has tried to do too much, we focus on the art of the possible.

⁸⁸ Moisés Naím, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

⁸⁹ Fisnik Abrashi, “UN: Taliban could clear \$500M from 2008 drug trade” *AP* Nov 28, 2008.

⁹⁰ Dexter Filkins, “Bribes Corrode Afghans’ Trust in Government” *New York Times* January 1, 2009.

⁹¹ UNODC. “Drugs finance Taliban war machine, says UN drug tsar” November 27 2008
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/press/releases/2008-11-27.html>

⁹² Lester Holt, NBC Nightly News “Cash Crop” February 21, 2009.

⁹³ FAO, “Profile: Horticulture” http://www.fao.org/world/afghanistan/prof_hort_en.htm

⁹⁴ CIA World Fact Book, “Afghanistan”

⁹⁵ Giustozzi, 19-21, 187. A sense of exclusion among Pashtuns may come from their traditional dominance of Afghanistan’s government, leading a lack of control to be equated with exclusion.

Key Challenges Facing Democratization in Afghanistan

Many factors, ranging from Afghanistan's unforgiving geography to her ethnic composition, present unique challenges to establishing a working government, especially one where a strong central authority aims to dominate governance of many aspects of society. The following section first outlines ten important challenges, and then provides a more detailed analysis of key issues.

- Afghanistan's multiplicity of ethnic identities and linguistic divisions makes forging a national democracy a particular challenge. Afghanistan's population of 32.7 million⁹⁶ includes two major ethnic groups: Pashtun, comprising about 40% of the populous and Tajik, between 25 and 35%. The Hazara and Uzbek ethnic groups each accounts for over 5% of the remainder (some estimates put the number of Hazaras as high as 20%), while the final 10-20% is made up of many smaller ethnic groups (See map 1 in the appendix for a graphical breakdown of Afghan regions by ethnic group.)⁹⁷ In addition to the two national languages of Pashto (spoken by Pashtuns) and Dari (the native language of the Tajik, spoken by most residents of Kabul and Afghans in the North and West), several other languages are recognized as official in parts of the country. Baluchi, Pashai, Nuristani and Pamiri, which are all distinct from Pashto and Dari, are recognized as official languages in areas where speakers make up a majority of the population.⁹⁸ While it is not uncommon for minority speakers of these languages to speak Pashto or Dari, some speakers either do not speak a language of wider communication or are illiterate in that language.⁹⁹
- Pashtuns, particularly in the south, feel marginalized in spite of Karzai himself being a Pashtun. Indeed, many Pashtun see Karzai as a figurehead president representing external rather than Afghan interests. Correcting this sense of exclusion is a vital challenge.¹⁰⁰ The high portion of government positions filled by Tajiks and other non-Pashtun causes many Pashtun to view the new government through an ethnic prism, likely because they traditionally dominated the government.¹⁰¹ In effect this means that Karzai's political support base includes many groups who either distrust or oppose the government he leads.¹⁰² The Pashtun/non Pashtun dynamic has historical undertones. Historically the

⁹⁶ The CIA's estimate may be high. Some estimates are as low as 26 million; due the lack of a definitive census, these figures should be considered an estimate

⁹⁷ CIA World Factbook, "Afghanistan"

⁹⁸ See Article 16 of the Afghanistan Constitution

⁹⁹ See for example Ju-Hong Yun, "Pashai Language Development Project: Promoting Pashai language, literacy and community development" http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/parallel_papers/ju-hong_yun.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Rasul Bakhsh Rais, *Recovering the frontier state: war, ethnicity, and state in Afghanistan*, (Plymouth: Lexington, 2008), 212.

¹⁰¹ S Frederick Starr, "Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Afghan Nation-Building" in Frances Fukuyama ed. *Nation-Building : Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 109-110.

¹⁰² Rais, 210-212.

Pashtun had the greatest amount of power; this changed with the new order following the fall of the Taliban government. However, it is important not to cast Afghanistan's insurgent conflict solely in ethnic terms—many Afghans identify first of all with a local tribe or sub-tribe, rather than the overarching ethnic community.¹⁰³ Further, a quarter of Pashtun believe that their economic circumstances have declined since the fall of the Taliban, while only 28% believe their circumstances have improved. Forty % of Afghans of other ethnicities, by contrast, believe that the fall of the Taliban has made them more prosperous, while only 8-14% believes they have become less prosperous.¹⁰⁴ Thus perceptions of economic prosperity reinforce an ethnic understanding of the new government.

- Opposition to the government is mainly centered among Pashtun citizens of Afghanistan, and the Taliban insurgency has been able to make its strongest inroads in Pashtun territory in Afghanistan's East and South. However, the majority of Afghans from all backgrounds oppose the Taliban, including Pashtun opponents of the current national government. In spite of this anti-Taliban sentiment, Afghan skepticism about the ability of the national government to govern as an honest broker and improve their lives causes many, especially Pashtun, to either sit on the sidelines or sometimes to passively support the Taliban.¹⁰⁵
- Low literacy rates inhibit the dissemination of knowledge necessary for democratic participation. Optimistic estimates put literacy at about 40%; female literacy is below 20%. Pessimistic estimates suggest that the national total of literate adults may actually be around 20% of the populace.¹⁰⁶
- The harsh geography of much of Afghanistan, combined with an urban/rural split of about 25-75%, means that much of the population lives in isolated rural areas.¹⁰⁷ National elections to a distant assembly in Kabul may mean relatively little to much of the population, given that many Afghans in rural areas have not traveled a significant distance from their birthplace in their lifetime.¹⁰⁸
- Afghanistan has a very limited history of liberalizing reforms. Tentative steps toward democracy at the national level were undertaken in 1949 and 1964. The 1964-1973 period resulted in a minimal level of democracy, with an elected parliament that Zahir Shah used for consultation. The 1964 constitution, suspended by the 1973 coup, provides only a minimal basis for the potential to nurture democracy in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹ However, in practical terms any nascent democratic institutions of that time at the national level have long since collapsed.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People," 40. Available online at <http://asiafoundation.org/country/afghanistan/2008-poll.php>

¹⁰⁵ The Asia Foundation, "Afghanistan in 2007: A Survey of the Afghan People, September 2007."

¹⁰⁶ CIA World Fact Book, "Afghanistan"

¹⁰⁷ UNSD Demographic Statistics, "Population by sex and urban/rural residence." Available online at <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=POP&f=tableCode%3A1> . This dynamic is changing as unemployed young people move to the urban areas.

¹⁰⁸ See Stewart, especially 245-248.

¹⁰⁹ Astri Suhrke, CMI Working Paper, "Democratization of a Dependent State: Afghanistan," 3.

- The quality of the first parliament after the fall of the Taliban government is marginal. A significant number of figures with ties to excesses during the 1990s are members. International Crisis Group argued that the parliament has more warlords and criminals than democrats. Even many pro-American figures have unsavory pasts which suggest a suspect commitment to democracy.¹¹⁰
- Narco-trafficking, resource plundering and other crime is widespread. Afghanistan's national government is rife with corruption; Afghanistan's performance on anti-corruption indicators is among the worst in the world; Transparency International ranked Afghanistan 176 out of 180 states,¹¹¹ Some analysts have suggested that the average Afghan spends 1/5th of his budget on bribes.¹¹² Pay for judges and police are inadequate.¹¹³ The amount of opium produced in Afghanistan in 2007 was greater than the total amount of opium produced in the world the previous year. In the south of the country, opium harvesting is the main industry; 70% of Afghanistan's opium is produced in the south.¹¹⁴ Thomas Schweich, formally Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, charged that Afghanistan was becoming a narco-state due to the complicity of government officials, including President Karzai.¹¹⁵ Ahmed Wali Karzai, the President's brother, has been implicated in drug smuggling.¹¹⁶
- Afghanistan's neighbors, particularly Pakistan, exert significant influence over the politics of Afghanistan. Pakistan has long viewed Afghanistan as part of its sphere of influence, and Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) sponsored the establishment of the Taliban in the mid 90s and has repeatedly been accused of aiding insurgents in Afghanistan.¹¹⁷ Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is complicated by support for the Taliban or complicity among many Pashtu tribes along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border, and the inability or unwillingness of the Pakistani army to control the border and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) inside Pakistan near the Afghanistan boarder. Most of this area was under *de facto* control of the local tribes, and some parts of it—particularly North and South Waziristan—now seem to be effectively under the control of the Pakistani Taliban

¹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work" Asia Report 116, May 15, 2006.

¹¹¹ Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is available at http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi

¹¹² Nathaniel Fick and Vikram J. Singh, "Afghans Are Losing Their Trust in Their Government" *New York Times* October 5, 2008

¹¹³ Laura Barnett, "Afghanistan: The Rule of Law" Canadian Parliamentary Information and Research Service <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0717-e.htm>

¹¹⁴ UNODC, "2008 World Drug Report," 228. http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR_2008_eng_web.pdf

¹¹⁵ Thomas Schweich, "Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?" *New York Times* July 27, 2008

¹¹⁶ James Risen, "Reports Link Karzai's Brother to Afghanistan Heroin Trade" *New York Times* October 4, 2008.

¹¹⁷ "Afghanistan 'holds Pakistani spy'" *BBC* Tuesday December 19, 2006. For an extensive account of the formation of the Taliban, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

- Violence and disorder across Afghanistan are widespread. The security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated to the point that a 2007 UN map suggests that nearly half the country is a ‘no-go’ zone for NGOs.¹¹⁸ The absence of safety for much Afghanistan’s population has numerous consequences, among which is an obvious weakening trust in democracy.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Nick Meo, “Leaked aid map of Afghanistan reveals expansion of no-go zones” *The Times of London* December 5, 2007.

¹¹⁹ This is a common theme of Chris Sands’ reporting in the *The National*. See for example Sands, “Afghans missing Taliban justice” *The National* November 24, 2008.

The Taliban Insurgency and the Significance of Local and National Identity

Religious influences in the Insurgency

The description of anti-government insurgents as “the Taliban” can sometimes lead Western analysts into the mistaken understanding that the insurgents form a monolithic group with unified beliefs and motivations.¹²⁰ In truth, even elements of the insurgency linked to the former Taliban government, frequently referred to as the Neo-Taliban in the literature, have changed significantly since the removal of the Taliban government by Allied forces. Understanding different motivations among insurgents for opposing the government can help explain how a particular group might be convinced to become part of government.

The Taliban, both during their government and as insurgents, follow a revivalist strain of Sunni Islam within the Hannafi school known as Deobandi Islam. Deobandi Islam is, broadly, a universalist movement championing a very conservative interpretation of *Sharia*, with the goal of a return to traditional values and a strict rejection of modernity.¹²¹ The Taliban did not necessarily seek an ethnic government, although most Talibs were Pashtun. However, their interpretation of Islam is an absolutist understanding, which views other understandings of Islam with suspicion. Many students of ethnicity in Afghanistan find a correlation between the Taliban ideology and a Pashtun understanding of the world, particularly in rural areas. This is not to say that most Pashtun prefer precisely the same sort of order and same interpretation of *Sharia* as the Taliban government practiced, but that a strong sense of shared values from a school of traditionalist interpretation of Islam predisposes Pashtun to sympathize with a conservative Islamic regime. As one student of ethnicity in Central Asia puts it, “In traditional Pashtun society, Islam is practiced more or less as a way of life...The Pashtun population in general supported the Taliban for its religious fervor as well as for being close to the fundamental values of their society.”¹²²

Many other Afghans, no less Islamic according to their own traditions, found the Taliban’s appeal as a religious movement unconvincing. “The non-Pashtuns, some of them equally Islamists on their own terms, did not accept the Taliban’s self-projection as an entirely Islamic and non ethnic movement.”¹²³ The values of the Taliban frequently clashed with other ethnic groups. In particular, their puritanical strain of Islam viewed Afghanistan’s Hazara Shi’a as heretics, and persecuted them during their rule. Thus while

¹²⁰ The insurgency is clearly more complex than simply being a Taliban vs. Government conflict. Other groups, notably the Hizb-i-Islami, are important, as are outside actors, particularly the situation in Pakistan. The Taliban, however, remain central to the insurgency.

¹²¹ Barbara Metcalf, *Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis, and Talibs* (Leiden: ISIM, 2002), 1-3.

¹²² Rais, 76.

¹²³ Rais, 46

the Taliban tried to style themselves as Afghan rather than Pashtun leaders, religious differences magnified ethnic tensions.¹²⁴

Indeed, the particular Deobandi understanding of the Taliban is at odds with much of the Sunni mainstream, even among conservative Islamists. Much of the Northern Alliance, particularly Jamiat-i-Islami, was also Islamist. As one commentator noted, while “[many] Islamists strongly advocated women’s education and political participation (with the condition of wearing a veil and attending single-sex schools), the neo-fundamentalists want to ban any female presence in public life... They are the heirs to the conservative Sunni tradition of fundamentalism, obsessed by the danger of a loss of purity within Islam through the influence of other religions.”¹²⁵

The Composition of the Insurgency

The amount of cohesiveness within the current insurgency is much debated. Within the insurgency, Antonio Giustozzi notes that basic rules created by Taliban leadership governing operations are largely followed down through various echelons. However, local commanders have significant autonomy, and forces in a given province are usually recruited locally and interested in local issues. Further, different camps within the Taliban leadership, based in different provinces, have clashed over both tactics and ideology.¹²⁶ Different area commands also reflect differences. The eastern front is comprised of many foreign fighters, while the insurgents in the northeast of Afghanistan form a more cohesive group. Finally, the Taliban rely on support from tribes and sub tribal groups; while many of these Pashtun tribes are sympathetic to a conservative, traditional interpretation of Islam, their motivation tends to be grounded in their local reality. Some former members of the Taliban government have joined the government; prominent defections include Wakil Ahmad Mutawakkil, the Taliban government’s erstwhile foreign minister, and Mullah Abdul Salam Zaif, who served as the Ambassador to Pakistan.¹²⁷ Elements of the Taliban have also splintered from the main insurgency. However, the command structure of the movement is largely unified. These fissures have done little to impair the effectiveness of the insurgency,¹²⁸

Nonetheless, while the Taliban command is a largely unified structure, its area command and manpower comes from regional and local organizations, who may not be motivated by the Taliban’s ideology.¹²⁹ Thus, some successful bargaining should be possible at the local level, by addressing the particular circumstances of local issues. This is particularly relevant to the situation among insurgents in the South, who are comprised almost exclusively of recruits drawn from local populations and enjoy the support of local tribes, in contrast to the important role of foreign fighters, largely from Pakistan but including

¹²⁴ Rashid, *Taliban* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹²⁵ Olivier Roy, “Neo-Fundamentalism” Available online at <http://www.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/roy.htm>

¹²⁶ Giustozzi, 83-85

¹²⁷ Robert Crews, “Moderate Taliban?” in Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi eds. *The Taliban and the Crisis in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 266-271.

¹²⁸ Giustozzi, 83-86. Some analysts suggest that evidence exists of a coalescing of interests between the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban, and perhaps with Al Qaeda.

¹²⁹ Seth Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica: Rand, 2008), 41.; Gen. David McKiernan, speech at the Atlantic Council, November 18, 2008. Available online at http://www.acus.org/event_blog/general-david-d-mckiernan-speaks-councils-commanders-series/transcript

Uzbeks, Chechens, and others in areas in the east between the Pakistan/Afghanistan border and Kabul. While local fighters remain important in all theaters, foreign troops tend to be more influenced by ideological motivations. In theory, with skillful use of theological differences, it might be possible to help split the Taliban on assorted doctrinal lines.¹³⁰ It is important to understand that many elements that are cooperating militarily with the Taliban do not fully identify with their ideological goals or form an explicit part of their command structure. Their reasons for preferring the Taliban to the Afghan government are manifold. Ethnic solidarity provides one answer. Inter-tribal dynamics also play a role; a sense that other tribal or sub-tribal groups are receiving unfair advantages from the government may push some groups to opposition. Finances also motivate low-level Taliban fighters; the Taliban has at times paid young Afghans two to three times the daily wages of an ANA soldier in exchange for harassing NATO or government forces.¹³¹ Anger at the conduct of government officials can motivate local leaders to throw their lot in with the insurgency, particularly when government forces are seen as more rapacious than the Taliban.¹³² Civilian casualties, particularly from ISAF air strikes, can also push locals toward support for the Taliban; anti-American protests in response to civilian casualties allegedly caused by air strikes in Farah are one such example.¹³³ In such cases, locals support the insurgency not out of abiding support for ideological goals, but rather due to pragmatic reasons.

This suggests that insurgents have a complex variety of reasons for opposing the government. Therefore attempts at negotiating with elements of the movement at the local level are possible, even if leadership at the upper echelons remains intransigent. In time, a deteriorating strategic situation, combined with important defections on the local level, might both diminish the importance of the Taliban leadership, as has occurred with the FARC in Colombia, and increase the willingness of the Taliban, or elements within the Taliban, to compete politically rather than as insurgents.

The Afghan government has made several attempts to cooperate with various elements of the insurgency, and has been met with mixed success. As a result of a 2002 amnesty effort, a few relatively high profile persons who had been affiliated with the Taliban government or widely regarded as fellow travelers switched sides. However, such defections did not create serious fractures within the insurgency.¹³⁴

In 2007, President Karzai signed a controversial “National Stability and Reconciliation Act” which provides sweeping amnesty for most crimes committed by actors on all sides from the time of the Soviet invasion, in an attempt to encourage insurgents to join the government and heal the wounds of a quarter century of conflict.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Interview with senior U.S official and American expert. Giustozzi addresses this topic on page 52-55.

¹³¹ Jones, 41-43

¹³² See Filkin’s account in “Bribes Corrode Afghans’ Trust in Government” *New York Times* January 1, 2009.

¹³³ Fisnik Abrashi and Rahim Faiez, “US ambassador vows to limit Afghan civilian deaths” AP May 19, 2009.

¹³⁴ Crews, 238-273.

¹³⁵ Dad Noorani, “Afghanistan: Amnesty Law Condone Warlords’ Past Abuse” *IPS* March 23, 2007 <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=37056>

The Columbian example (see chapter 6) suggests that significant military success on the tactical level is required before cooperation will be successful. Insurgents are unlikely to join a government when they are convinced that they can achieve their aims through force. However, in addition to success on the battlefield, specific care must be taken to develop a realistic path for rebels to become part of the political system.

The admission that no parties in Afghanistan's nearly 30 years of conflict are blameless is important. However, along with this symbolic gesture, Kabul and the international community should address local grievances ranging from government corruption to civilian casualties from airstrikes, which have caused Afghans to oppose the government.

Local Identity and National Identity within Afghanistan¹³⁶

A second important factor in the development of a democratic state is identity. Unlike the citizens of well-established, more homogeneous traditional nation-states, Afghans have a complex layer of identities which start at the sub-clan or family level. Loyalty then follows a chain, starting with family and reaching the state only after several other ties are in place. The following is one common progression of identity: family-local leadership-tribe-ethnic group-state. Two experts on identity in Afghanistan put it this way: "A person's sense of self and place in the world works from the family outwards through ties of kinship... Beyond the confines of the family is a web of complex relationships, and from these spring the nitty-gritty of politics... In Afghanistan you know a person first by where they come from and to whom they are related, not by their work or claim to a particular social class."¹³⁷

An Afghan living in a village in Kandahar province, for example, would first have ties to his local leadership, and series of interconnected ties to his tribal group (often first a sub group, for example, Popolzai, and then a larger tribal group, for example Durrani) to his ethnic group, Pashtun, and finally to the state. Among the Pashtun, a myriad of tribal groups and sub tribes within these groups exist. Two prominent tribes among the many include the Durrani, (who provided Afghanistan's leaders from 1747 through 1978), and the Ghilzai, often considered to be largest Pashtun tribe. Many sub tribes are quite large; some estimates suggest that Popolzai number about 3,500,000.¹³⁸

Behavior codes form an important part of identity for many Afghans. Pashtunwali, a tribal code of behavior, governs the behavior of many Pashtun. It is a complex set of values that gives rise to expectations of hospitality, revenge, and honor. The idea of hospitality has led Pashtun tribes to shelter fugitives, from the days of British colonialism to the present. Revenge and honor govern family and community life.¹³⁹ Traditionally,

¹³⁶ The section has greatly benefited from the input of American and Afghan experts-their contributions are reflected in the text.

¹³⁷ Chris Johnson and Jolyon Leslie, *Afghanistan: The Mirage of Peace* (London: Zed, 2004). 30-31, 35. In interviews some experts have suggested that the national identity of many Afghans has been significantly strengthened during the war, giving it greater significance vis-à-vis identity with an ethnic group (e.g. Tajik).

¹³⁸ Library of Congress, "Ahmad Shah and the Durrani Empire" in *Afghanistan: A country study* For a detailed account, see Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan* (London: I.B Tauris, 2004).

¹³⁹ Victoria Schofield, *Afghan Frontier* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 116-120.

decisions (related to the honor code) are made by local *jirgas*, assemblies of tribal elders. In some cases this is understood to mean the entire community.¹⁴⁰

In urban areas such as Kabul, practice of Pashtunwali is less central to Pashtun identity than in rural areas. Further, practice also varies in different areas of the country. In areas where authority has been concentrated among local leaders, Pashtun identity may be less strong.¹⁴¹ In considering the importance of Pashtunwali among the Pashtun of Afghanistan, it is important not to consider it a monolithic system of values that leads every Pashtu to belief and act the same. Rather, like much of Afghan identity, local factors are paramount.

While much attention has been given to Pashtun values given their position in the conflict zones in the east and south of Afghanistan, other ethnic groups and sub groups also have important value systems. Rory Stewart describes the various local beliefs and systems of social organization that he encountered in travels throughout central Afghanistan as a myriad of beliefs and social structures that varied greatly even in the course of a few miles distance.¹⁴²

Struggles for influence between different sub-groups, and a desire for fair or favorable division of offices and patronage, are important factors which shape the political landscape. In Kandahar, local loyalties below the tribal level strongly affect the political situation.¹⁴³ Some Durrani tribes had supported the Taliban government in Kabul, including the Alekozai, Eshaqzais, and Norzais. Mullah Naquibulla, an Alekozai leader who had been part of the Taliban, switched sides to support the new government and in 2001 became the first governor of Kandahar. Two other prominent leaders who represented important populations in Kandahar were given positions of leadership in the province: Gula Agha Shirzai, a Barakzai, and Ahmad Wali Karzai, a Popolzai leader and the brother of the President. Much of the power struggle in Kandahar over the following years can be understood as part of a complicated calculus of tribal and sub-tribal maneuvering. An attempt to balance interests was not fully successful. The rise in influence of Wali Karzai, at the expense of the others led Naquibulla to withdraw for a time from his role in government, with disastrous consequences for security. Alekozais, the largest provider of security forces, were not inclined to support a government perceived to be biased in favor of the Popolzai. Only in the disastrous circumstances of 2006 were Wali Karzai and Naquibulla able to come to an agreement which brought Naquibulla back into government.¹⁴⁴

The example in Kandahar is just one picture of the patchwork of identities and interests that pull on Afghan's loyalties and operate outside the national government. Indeed, the United States has facilitated the independence of local power centers, both among non Pashtun groups and key Pashtun leaders, through providing weaponry, intelligence, and other assets. Though strengthening local strongmen was undoubtedly not the goal, the United States' assistance to local and provincial leaders has strengthened local power

¹⁴⁰ Willem Vogelsang, *The Afghans* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 24-26.

¹⁴¹ Schofield, 116-120; Vogelsang, 24-26.

¹⁴² Stewart, 58, 245-248.

¹⁴³ Giustozzi, 19-21

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

centers that are unlikely to disappear.¹⁴⁵ Successful democratization must take local identity and local strengths into account. Perceptions of “fairness” in the distribution of material benefits and honors between various local interests, both within a local district and at the provincial and national level, should become a key calculus in American decisionmaking.

Throughout Afghanistan’s history as a discrete political unit (typically dated from 1747), her rulers depended on kinship links, personal authority, ties via marriage, and other traditional links for authority. Attempts to impose centralization caused resistance, and leaders of the central government were unable to overcome local autonomy. As one expert of Afghan history put it, “most political conflicts in modern Afghan history...have stemmed from the attempts of dominant communally based elites to accomplish a high degree of centralization of power with the help of foreign patrons.”¹⁴⁶

Some commentators have suggested that despite Afghanistan’s rural and tribal history, her experience in the 1900s, particularly the 1960s and 70s prior to the Soviet invasion, provided a strong foundation for a centralized democratic government. Afghanistan’s half-century of relative peace did allow the development of some amount of a national identity. This identity may have been strengthened through the experience during diaspora of many Afghans who fled the country throughout the 80s and 90s. Many students of Afghanistan have noted that Afghans possess a stronger sense of Afghan national identity than many neighbors, including Pakistan, despite Afghanistan’s myriad of ethnic identities.¹⁴⁷

However, Afghanistan’s first “democratic experiment” (1964–1973) had a limited duration and scope, and did not lay a solid foundation for a centralized representative state. The “opening” of parliament following the promulgation of the 1964 constitution lasted only until 1973, when the King, Zahir Shah, was deposed by a coup. Further, the government under the 1964 constitution was essentially a monarchy with a token parliament. Zahir Shah and his advisors and senior members of the Royal Family pulled back from any substantive reform. Further, many gains from the 1960s and 1970s were subsequently swept away in more than 20 years of violence that followed (1978–2001).

While the national government did expand its formal control of much of Afghanistan prior to its nearly quarter-century of civil war, it did so by supplementing local authorities rather than overriding them. The lack of capacity of the Afghan national government meant that, while some national institutions were established, the depth of such institutions was modest. Following Afghan tradition, its government worked with local traditional authority, particularly in areas with significant tribal influence, leaving local formal and informal institutions intact.

The period of war from 1979 until the overthrow of the Taliban destroyed national institutions and the legitimacy of the national government. National institutions were not

¹⁴⁵ Rais, 141-143.

¹⁴⁶ Saikal, 1-15, quoted on page 9.

¹⁴⁷ Interviews with American and Afghan experts in Washington, June and July 2009

replaced; instead, the conflict empowered warlords with access to arms, financial resources, and patrons outside Afghanistan.¹⁴⁸

Thrice since 2004 Afghans have voted overwhelmingly to establish a strong national government in hope of avoiding further fragmentation at the hands of regional powerbrokers. However, the historical Afghan experience is not reflected in the current structure of Afghanistan's over centralized government, a top down organization in which authority is exercised from Kabul through the Provincial Governors down to the district and sub-district level. The current government does not enjoy the full allegiance of many Afghans due to its poor performance. Neither does it recognize the persistence of local authorities, despite the challenges of civil war, in much of the country.

Indeed, the formal process of Afghanistan's government today is one of extreme centralization. Budgets are determined and appointments are made by ministries in Kabul down to the sub-district level, and separate national ministries exercise official control over local and regional programs in areas that fall under their jurisdiction from Kabul.¹⁴⁹

While many Afghans would prefer a central government that has sufficient capacity to provide both quality and quantity of services, the current reality in Afghanistan suggests that traditional local institutions are most likely to administer programs well at the village and sub-district level. We concur with the analysis of two authors in the *New York Times*, who argued that "central authorities in Afghanistan [should] focus on providing services of national scope: an army and police force, roads, electricity, a postal service and the like.." ¹⁵⁰ Local institutions should be strengthened after their disruption by conflict and fragmentation, and be given more resources to address local matters. Further, the interface between truly local governance at the village level and the district and provincial levels of government needs to be strengthened. Rather than simply serving as a funnel to direct funds from Kabul, regional government should be a place for different local groups to cooperate, through the mediation of representatives of the national government.

Identity in Afghanistan is a complex mix of ties, many of them local. Afghanistan shares the characteristic of many developing states of strong informal institutions at the local level but weak formal institutions at the national level.¹⁵¹ Understanding the variety of local identities and working to ensure that various interests are treated equitably, and that national government does not work against entrenched local institutions and values, is of vital importance in the task of developing a robust government.

The importance of the local "voice" must be reflected in participatory governance in Afghanistan. Local and national governance need not be exclusive. If the formal institutions of the national government develop greater cooperation with local and district institutions, a degree of decentralization can help increase the legitimacy of the national government.

¹⁴⁸ Good accounts of the previous paragraphs can be found in Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan* and Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

¹⁴⁹ Lister and Nixon in Rotberg, 206-211.

¹⁵⁰ Nathaniel Fick and Vikram Singh, "Winning the Battle, Losing the Faith" *New York Times*, October 6, 2008

¹⁵¹ A classic account of this phenomenon is Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

Insights for Afghanistan from Case Studies

A closer examination of two cases, Nicaragua and Mozambique, helps outline a typical course followed by democratization after internal conflict, and the challenges such states face. An examination of democracy in Nicaragua, considered one of the most successful post-conflict democracies¹⁵², highlights many of the limitations facing even the strongest post-conflict democracies, providing a realistic outline of what might be accomplished and what problems might remain. An assessment of Mozambique outlines what that state achieved in transitioning from civil war to a democratic government. Studying Mozambique's achievements will help to paint a picture of the process of establishing a democracy.¹⁵³ We also underscore why these cases had more auspicious conditions to build a democracy than Afghanistan has possessed.

We will also briefly examine Colombia, which was omitted from the previous table because the conflict there is still underway, and because Colombia has a lengthy, if imperfect, experience with democracy. Colombia is often cited as a good comparison for Afghanistan, given a complex security environment with multiple insurgent groups, extensive narco-trafficking, and areas of sanctuary for anti-state actors. Our examination focuses on the improving security situation in Colombia and what lessons it might have for Afghanistan.

Finally, we consider the experiences of Indonesia and Malaysia as models for Muslim-majority democracies. Though the democratic progress in both states is incomplete, the blend of Islam with democracy in both countries has important lessons.

Nicaragua

Nicaraguan democratization is often considered a success story. After a lengthy war between the revolutionary Sandinista (FSLN) single-party government and the right-wing *Contra* guerilla movement sponsored by the United States, a peace agreement provided for internationally monitored elections in 1990. Following a return to democracy and the upset victory of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro's UNO coalition over the FSLN government of Daniel Ortega in the election, Nicaragua has successfully elected three new presidents. A combination of international and citizen election monitoring has ensured that voting is largely free and fair, certainly a good result for a country of its income level.¹⁵⁴ The military, intensely politicized at the time of the 1990 transition to

¹⁵² Anderson and Dodd, 31-35.

¹⁵³ While this assessment will not dwell upon the many flaws in Mozambique's democracy, we do find that the ranking of the Polity IV index which places Mozambique at lowest possible score for a democracy, to be largely accurate.

¹⁵⁴ The Carter Center, "2006 Post-Election Statement" http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/nicaragua_preliminary.html

democracy, has become a largely apolitical institution, and citizens now have a good deal of confidence in the military.¹⁵⁵

In the 2006 elections, power shifted away from the right-leaning Liberal (PLC) party and back to Ortega's FSLN through a largely transparent election without significant violence. Perhaps most remarkable is the enduring low levels of violence after the tumultuous 80s. In 2004, Nicaragua's homicide rate was only 12.8 per 100,000. By way of comparison, homicides in the United States were 5.6 per 100,000 in the same period. Nicaragua's rate was lower than many countries with equivalent or superior levels of human development; her homicide rate was less than Mexico's and close to the rate of the Baltic nations in Europe.¹⁵⁶

Two well-respected students of elections claim that Nicaragua challenges theories which suggest that democratization necessarily requires a long amount of time to become established. Instead, they suggest that high levels of electoral participation and sophisticated decision-making among the electorate are evidence that Nicaraguan democracy now functions at a mature level.¹⁵⁷

Yet significant problems remain. Nicaraguan institutions remain weak. Courts and the justice system are widely regarded by Nicaraguans as corrupt; and the last attorney general had his visa to the United States revoked because of participation in corrupt acts. The tribunal which accredits political parties has made a number of bizarre, partisan rulings against political parties which are not represented on the board. We have seen that Nicaragua has attempted to prosecute high level corruption, but has achieved little success. However, reform has had some success on the local level; only 8% of Nicaraguans reported either themselves or a relative had experienced an act of corruption in the previous 12 months, a much better rate than the Latin American average of 15%.¹⁵⁸ Within the key institutions of the judiciary and police, 34% of Nicaraguans reported that they believed bribing a member of the judiciary or police would have a good chance of success. While these responses are better than the Latin American average, they suggest that important institutions remain prone to abuse by official functionaries.¹⁵⁹

Nicaragua has made some strides at developing a professional bureaucracy, including the development of a professional civil service law, but even relatively professional organizations with capable leaders are subjected to political interference in their operations.¹⁶⁰ 60% of Nicaraguans were unhappy with the provision of basic services that is the primary responsibility of the bureaucracy.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ "Informe Latinobarómetro," 2008. Available online in Spanish at http://www.latinobarometro.org/docs/INFORME_LATINOBAROMETRO_2008.pdf

¹⁵⁶ UN Human Development Report, 2007-2008.

¹⁵⁷ See Anderson and Dodd, chapters 8-9.

¹⁵⁸ "Informe Latinobarómetro 2008," 47.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁶⁰ Greene, *State Donors and Grand Corruption in Nicaragua*. For current information in Spanish see *Revista Envío*, www.envio.org.ni

¹⁶¹ "Informe Latinobarómetro 2008," 44.

Leading Nicaraguan political leaders routinely collude with each other for corrupt gain.¹⁶² The country's democratically elected president is attempting to undermine the constitution and tradition of free elections.¹⁶³ Close to twenty years after Nicaragua's transition, the ability of Nicaraguan citizens to effectively participate in the political process has improved, however decisions made via elections as well as codified law are still subject to arbitrary intervention and manipulation.

Nicaragua has successfully established a political system in which violence is not used to resolve political differences. However, like many post conflict democracies, Nicaragua has not advanced beyond this accomplishment to develop a strong democracy. Institutions have improved from the time of an authoritarian state. However, while citizens report lower levels of corruption than the Latin American average, the level of corruption remains a serious problem. Key institutions, particularly the judiciary, remain subject to manipulation, and many functionaries still use public offices for personal gain. Thus, one of the best successes of post conflict democratization still has serious weaknesses along with its modest successes.

Mozambique

Mozambique has many similarities to the situation in Afghanistan including: low rates of literacy, many different ethnicities and languages, significant poverty, and a legacy of both a colonial and an internal war. FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique-Liberation Front of Mozambique), a leftist revolutionary movement which took power in Mozambique after decolonization by Portugal in 1976, was opposed by RENAMO (National Resistance of Mozambique), a rightist insurgency sponsored by the United States. Civil war ravaged Mozambique for fifteen years; the end of the cold war encouraged both sides to agree to a settlement in 1992.

Michel Cahen argues that the development of democracy in Mozambique since the peace accord has been marginal; institutions are weak and politics corrupt. "The great success of these past fifteen years was the transition from a state of civil war to one of peace."¹⁶⁴ Other assessments of Mozambique such as Carrie Manning's work are guardedly more positive.¹⁶⁵ All treatments agree that the quality of the democracy, both in terms of political involvement and the quality of institutions, needs significant improvement. Many citizens do not participate politically. Both major political parties are controlled by small party elites, limiting the scope of political participation. The quality of many institutions is questionable, including important functions such as police; while professionalization of the police force has made some advances, 17 percent of Mozambiquans reported paying a bribe to avoid trouble with the police, 7 percent acknowledging paying a bribe "frequently."¹⁶⁶ The court system is considered to be largely independent and responsible, and is relatively well regarded by the populace. The

¹⁶² David Close ed., *Undoing Democracy: The Politics of Electoral Caudillismo* (Lanham: Lexington, 2004).

¹⁶³ *Revista Envío* "Sin ningún borrón y con muchas cuentas nuevas" January 2009.

¹⁶⁴ Michel Cahen, "Mozambique: Peace is not Enough" *Enjeux-internationaux* 11 (2006).

¹⁶⁵ Manning, *The Politics of Peace in Mozambique* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

¹⁶⁶ Afrobarometer 2005, "Mozambique," 32.

<http://www.afrobarometer.org/Summary%20of%20Results/Round%203/moz-R3SOR-19jan07-final.pdf>

confidence in the courts system is significant for the region.¹⁶⁷ Some progress has been made in improving the quality of government institutions through public sector reform. Corruption and maladministration remain problematic.¹⁶⁸ However, the Central Office for the Fight Against Corruption (GCCC), a body created by the national assembly, has been relatively successful. The body assisted the Public Prosecutor's Office in prosecuting officials accused of corruption and released detailed statistics on the prosecution of corruption to the public. This level of transparency is an important example of an advance in combating corruption.¹⁶⁹ The picture here is thus one of modest gains; serious problems remain, but some initial steps give reason for some confidence in the future.

On the other hand, the peace agreement and resulting level of security have provided a foundation for future progress. The negotiated settlement in Mozambique has provided RENAMO (National Resistance of Mozambique, which had launched a lengthy guerrilla war against the FRELIMO government, with a central political role in the future of the state. Despite an authoritarian political structure, RENAMO has attracted some members of the educated elite disaffected with the current path of government, and has had at least some amount of success at not being merely a negative force but rather an active political participant.¹⁷⁰ The integration of a guerrilla movement into a political actor and the end of violence stemming from the lengthy civil war is Mozambique's greatest achievement.

This period of peace has allowed the state to consolidate modest administrative gains. More importantly, the peace processes has provided a chance from Mozambique to consolidate a peaceful political system. Strikingly, despite RENAMO's poor showing in three elections against FRELIMO, RENAMO has not seen violence as a solution to its electoral difficulties. As Hermino Morais, a senior leader of RENAMO's military wing during the civil war put it, "there's no room for going back to war...we have to invest in permanent dialogue."¹⁷¹

As with Nicaragua, a period of peace has allowed modest improvements in important areas. Corruption is still a problem, but some visible improvements have been made. In comparison with the lawlessness and arbitrary justice of the civil war era, Mozambique has made significant progress.

The lesson Nicaragua and Mozambique has for Afghanistan is one of modest expectations. Both states have succeeded in making political participation the only legitimate method for seeking power and resolving disputes. At times this participation bends the established rules of the games—political influence and manipulation of the government infrastructure are fall backs if elections fail, while electoral victory can be an excuse to extract rents. But political maneuvering is surely preferable to civil war.

¹⁶⁷ CIRI 2007; Global Integrity Report, "Mozambique: Corruption Timeline"

<http://report.globalintegrity.org/Mozambique/2007/timeline>

¹⁶⁸ Ralf Lanwehr, "Tax evasion, fines and corruption in Mozambique"

http://www.transparency.org/content/download/4826/28533/file/Part%203_19_26_Research%202.pdf;

"Doadores questionam modelo de crescimento económico do país" Maputo, May 4, 2007

<http://www.open.ac.uk/technology/mozambique/pics/d76978.doc>

¹⁶⁹ "Mozambique: 31 Corruption Cases Tried This Year" *allafrica.com* September 4, 2008

¹⁷⁰ Manning, 64-71.

¹⁷¹ "Mozambique: 'No Alternative' to Dhlakama" *allafrica.com* January 12, 2009

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200901121516.html>

Both states have also made improvements to institutions. Both states have improved their delivery of services from when the country was rent by civil war. However, important institutions remain fragile and susceptible to corruption and maladministration. Both states outperform Afghanistan, but more than fifteen years after peace, both states remain a work in progress. That these states are among the brightest success stories of post conflict democratization outside of Europe should temper unreasonable expectations. However, at the same time, both states speak to the possibility of establishing enough inertia to take a young state down a path where future conflict is unlikely. Persistence institutional problems notwithstanding, the public safety record of both states are important successes.

Colombia: Turning Insurgents into Political Participants

The Colombian case serves as an example of how a state can go about turning anti-state actors into political participants. Unlike the post conflict democracies we considered earlier, Colombia has had a long tradition of democracy, with a history of representative government dating from the early 1830s. However, the scourges of civil war and the influence of narco-trafficking in government during the 80s and 90s threatened to undermine the state.

Much attention has been paid to the military successes of the Colombian Army and police under Alvaro Uribe against the FARC and organized crime. These successes are certainly an important part of Colombia's increased security; however, several other components of the Colombian government strategy were vital to the improved security situation in the country. First, the government has offered various amnesty and reintegration programs to both leftist insurgents and rightist paramilitary groups. These offers have typically included an admission of guilt and some element of punishment. However, punishment was usually far less than if the case had been tried under the normal criminal code, leading human rights groups to criticize the process.¹⁷²

Some of the criticism is well founded, particularly the focus on the ties of the Colombian government to some right-wing paramilitary groups involved in targeting noncombatants. However, reintegration initiatives have gone a long way toward sapping the fighting strength of both leftists and rightist groups. In particular, a significant stream of defections from the FARC, including both some highly placed militants and many rank-and-file guerillas, despite the intransigence of FARC leadership, suggests that such outreach can be effective.¹⁷³ It is also an important implicit acknowledgement that all parties to the conflict have taken part in atrocities. In both Colombia and Afghanistan, there are few truly white knights; many American allies have ugly résumés which rival the Taliban's for brutality, murder, and human rights abuses.¹⁷⁴ If searching for a solution to the conflict, actors must recognize that in most cases of successful post conflict democratization, political forgiveness is essential even if personal forgiveness will never

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch, "Breaking the Grip" November 17, 2008.

¹⁷³ Merle D. Kellerhals Jr. "Colombia's FARC Terrorist Group Faces Devastating Reversals" www.America.gov 23 July 2008

¹⁷⁴ International Crisis Group "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work" Asia Report 116, May 15, 2006

be forthcoming. Further, failure to provide a path toward reintegration for both leadership and the rank-and-file risks an endless cycle of conflict.¹⁷⁵

We have previously seen that the government of Afghanistan's attempts to negotiate with insurgents has met only limited success. Some high-profile defections occurred, but this did little to dampen support for anti-government activities. The United States has been ambivalent about such efforts, particularly Karzai's 2008 announcement that he was willing to negotiate with Mullah Omar. As jailing much of Afghanistan's current leadership for their past would be untenable, even senior members of the Taliban should not be excluded from such a program, provided they are willing to play by the rules of democratic participation. An amnesty program conducted at the same time as an aggressive military and police action against anti-government elements is a potent method for separating incorrigible anti-government elements from those who might be willing to participate politically. Defections tend to occur when a chance exists for reintegration in the political system. Negotiation is not a partition plan, but a roadmap for political participation and reintegration.¹⁷⁶

Further, the Colombian government has highlighted the effect of abuses on everyday citizens. By placing a spotlight on the worst atrocities committed by anti-government forces, particularly the killing of civilians, the Colombian government has been able to undercut popular support for rebels. Anti FARC rallies in the summer of 2008 are indicative of how successful the change has been; while the FARC originally had significant public support, most of the populace has been alienated by their attacks against civilians and their kidnapping campaigns, as evidenced by the anti-FARC rally in Bogota attended by more than 500,000 people.¹⁷⁷ Military and police forces should focus on reducing the operational capacity of anti-government forces, not eliminating the threat entirely. The goal is not annihilation of the opposition, but rather creating the conditions for a favorable settlement.

Indonesia and Malaysia: Muslim-Majority Democracies

The 2008 Afghanistan National Development Strategy declares that, by 2020, Afghanistan will be an "Islamic constitutional democracy at peace with itself and its neighbors, standing in full dignity in the international family" and by the same year Afghanistan will also be "a tolerant, united and pluralistic nation that honors its Islamic heritage and the deep seated aspirations toward participation, justice, and equal rights for all."¹⁷⁸ Moreover, Afghanistan's 2004 constitution describes Islam as the state religion, mandating that no civil law may contradict the beliefs or provisions of Islam, and specifically identifies Afghanistan as an Islamic state.¹⁷⁹ However the assertion that Islam

¹⁷⁵ Jonathan Morgenstein, *Consolidating Disarmament: Lessons from Colombia's Reintegration Program for Demobilized Paramilitaries*, USIP Special Report, November 2008, 217.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ "Colombians in huge Farc protest" *BBC* February 4, 2008

¹⁷⁸ "Afghanistan National Development Strategy, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 1387-1391 (2008-2013), A Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction." <http://www.afghanistanembassy.no/Doc/About%20Afghanistan-ANDS%20summary.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Chapter 1, Articles 1-3. In 1:7, the 2004 Afghanistan Constitution obliges the state to follow UN charters, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. See http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/af00000_.html for an English translation

and democracy can cohabitate has been met with skepticism by some scholars such as Sanford Lakoff, who have suggested that Islam, at least as it is commonly practiced, is incompatible with democracy. The debate has produced a volume of scholarly literature assessing the merits of the so-called theory of “Muslim exceptionalism.”¹⁸⁰ While the brand of Islam followed by the Taliban in governing Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 would be incompatible with principles of democracy, there are good reasons to believe that anti-democratic views are peripheral among Muslims, and that a state can be both Islamic and democratic.

Notable scholars of Islamic law and civilization have found a place for democracy in the practice of Islam. Noah Feldman’s study of both the history of Islam and public values in Muslim societies finds that Islam is by no means incompatible with democracy.¹⁸¹ John Esposito and John Voll argue that concepts of consultation and consensus provide a framework within Islam that can lead to a democracy consistent with Islamic values. They conclude that it is important not to conflate Western values with democracy. In particular, Western societies are highly individualistic, and therefore Western democracies place a premium on the liberal values of individual freedom. Islam emphasizes community, thus Muslims are likely to adopt a form of decision making based on community consensus that may weigh against the individual.¹⁸² Such an exercise of democracy may not be liberal, but it is not necessarily undemocratic in terms outlined by leading scholars of democracy.¹⁸³

Further, opinion polling throughout the Muslim world indicates that widespread support exists for democracy. Contrary to arguments advanced by scholars such as Sanford Lakoff that the Muslim mainstream does not support democracy, polls conducted by the Gallup World Poll find that large majorities supported not also a democratic form of government but also values such as woman’s rights.¹⁸⁴ Dalia Mogahed, in a work based on polling data from the Muslim world, notes that respondents to the Gallup polls expressed both a preference for democracy and acceptance of a place for *Sharia*, a system used to derive Islamic law based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, as a source of law in a democratic state. Esposito explains that such an interpretation does not involve any incoherence. *Sharia* does not refer to a single tradition of law, but rather a series of principles used to derive religious rulings. As former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid’s Libforall Foundation argues, among the diversity of

¹⁸⁰ See for example Bernard Lewis, “Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview,” *Journal of Democracy* 7 (1996): 52-63, and four replies; Abdou Filali-Ansary, “Muslims and Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 10 (July 1999); Sanford Lakoff, “The Reality of Muslim Exceptionalism” *Journal of Democracy* 14 (2004.):133-139; Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson “Arab, Not Muslim, Exceptionalism” *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2004): 140-146

¹⁸¹ Noah Feldman, *After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

¹⁸² John Esposito and John Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁸³ See fn 9 and 20. Indeed, James Ceaser has noted that a tension exists between liberal individualism and republican values. See Ceaser, *Liberal Democracy and Political Science* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992).

¹⁸⁴ John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks For Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York, Gallup, 2007), 29-63.

interpretations of *Sharia* that exist, a strong majority of Muslims favor a moderate interpretation that does not contradict the formation of a democracy.¹⁸⁵

Real-world models exist that show what an “Islamic democracy” might look like in practice. Both Indonesia and Malaysia are representative examples of possible endpoints (or at least guideposts; their own democratic evolutions continue) for an Islamic majority democracy.¹⁸⁶

Table 6: Rankings of selected states including Indonesia and Malaysia

Freedom House (2007)		Polity IV (2006)	
United States	2	United States	10
Norway	2	Norway	10
<i>Indonesia</i>	3	<i>Indonesia</i>	8
Brazil	4	Brazil	8
<i>Malaysia</i>	8	<i>Malaysia</i>	3
Nigeria	8	Nigeria	4
Afghanistan	10	Afghanistan	N/R
Russia	11	Russia	-1

Indonesia demonstrates that a country that is overwhelmingly Muslim can achieve a relatively successful transitioning democracy. Under Suharto’s authoritarian rule (1967 to 1998), Indonesia followed the ideology of *Pancasila*, a “middle way” between secularism and Islamism.¹⁸⁷ Under Abdurrahman Wahid, Indonesia’s first elected president following Suharto, who served as president from 1999-2001, Indonesia continued this course, despite the dual position of Wahid as the leader Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of the largest Islamic groups in the country. Wahid has become one of the foremost Muslim theorists arguing for a moderate interpretation of Islam compatible with a democratic government.¹⁸⁸ While some Islamicist hard line parties want to reverse Wahid’s position, Indonesia has largely resisted the implementation of Islamic laws at the national level. The poor results of Islamist parties in 2009 national elections have reinforced this moderate position.¹⁸⁹

Pancasila is an attempt to find a path between secularism and Islamism. It is a theistic ideology without adhering to any particular brand of Islam. Indonesia can be said to be a bad model because the Islam practiced there is vastly different from the orthodox Islam

¹⁸⁵ Libforall Foundation, “A Wide Spectrum of Cultures and Beliefs” <http://www.libforall.org/background-islamic-diversity.html>

¹⁸⁶ Senegal is also an interesting case of a Muslim majority state; while Abdoulaye Wade’s election in 2000 marked the start of a transition, his party has dominated the state’s political system to a significant degree. Nonetheless, its Freedom House score of 5 suggests progress has occurred. The example of Turkey is less useful due to the role of the military as long time guarantor of Turkey’s status as a secular state.

¹⁸⁷ Douglas Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London: Routledge, 1995), 184-202.

¹⁸⁸ Bret Stephens, “The Last King of Java” *The Wall Street Journal* April 7, 2007

¹⁸⁹ Norimitsu Onishi, “Indonesia’s Voters Retreat From Radical Islam” *New York Times* April 24, 2009.

of Afghanistan. However, Indonesia actually has a great variety of practice, as well as a Christian minority. *Pancasila* was originally developed by Suharto, who wanted a state ideology that did not depend on a conservative form of Islam. Indonesia's variety of faith traditions is similar to Afghanistan's variety of Islamic traditions, ranging from strict Deobandali Sunni Islam in parts of the South and East to Sufi orders in Herat. The flexibility in *Pancasila* thus provides a useful example for a flexible state identity that does not privilege any one brand of Islam, and in particular avoids puritanical interpretations of Sharia.

In practice, *Pancasila* and the many iterations of Islam in Indonesia means that Indonesia does not follow any specific Islamic creed at the national level. However, at local levels, local authorities in Muslim areas have mixed Muslim law and practice as well as local traditions with local administrative law to fit local ethos.¹⁹⁰ Decentralization allows significant local autonomy.

Indeed, decentralization is an important reason for Indonesia's relative success. Gerry van Klinken has argued that Indonesia's flexibility has played an important role in preserving its stability. Autonomy encourages locals to act responsibly, in terms of playing within the rules of the established state, rather than encouraging separatists to mobilize against the government.¹⁹¹ In Indonesia this has encouraged relatively moderate leaders and practices at the local level, because the political system rewards moderate politics with significant autonomy.¹⁹²

Thus, Indonesian practice has two important lessons for Afghanistan. First, a vague theism of an Islamic verity which does not promote any of the many ideologies in Afghanistan as a national mobilizing force, has the potential to serve as a useful state identity without providing a legitimacy for the mobilization of extremes. It is important that such an Islamic identity be flexible and not allow radical interpretations of Islam to use the national constitution as justification for a national universal appeal to fundamentalism. Second, a degree of decentralization can encourage moderate behavior, particularly in relation to which groups take political power at the local level.

Malaysia, a state that, like Afghanistan, is explicitly Islamic in its constitution, also developed a functioning electoral system, though recent assessments have downgraded the quality of her democracy due to increasing authoritarianism. Malaysia's democracy should thus be regarded as a quite imperfect or partial democracy.¹⁹³

Malaysia's constitution identifies Malaysia as an Islamic state. Its constitution also guarantees freedom of religion. In practice, Malay Muslims are governed by a mix of Islamic and secular law, while religious minorities are not subject to the interpretation of *Sharia* held by most Malay Muslims. Human rights groups have complained that Malay

¹⁹⁰ Acha is an exception; the peace negotiations have allowed the Achense to explicitly apply *Sharia* law.

¹⁹¹ Gerry van Klinken, "Big States, Little Independence Movements" in Richard Tanter, Mark Selden, and Stephen Shalom ed., *Bitter Flowers, Sweet Flowers* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 209-225.

¹⁹² Acha is an exception, but in this case local movements had a longstanding radical ideology that predated decentralization. East Timor is also a case in which autonomy could not allow the realization of Timorese goals.

¹⁹³ See Karl and Schmitter, *op cit*.

citizens must be Muslim and are not allowed to convert.¹⁹⁴ The identification of the Malay ethnicity with a brand Islam is a weakness of Malaysian democracy not found in Indonesia.

Indonesia and Malaysia practice a system of community-based guarantee of rights, which respectively protects religious minorities in Indonesia and in Malaysia allows both non-Malay Muslims and other ethnic groups acceptable political space. Such community-based systems have the advantage of allowing local groups to follow their customs and interpretations of religion and law. However the system is far from ideal in either country. Some local authorities in Indonesia have contravened guarantees of rights found in the national constitution and attempted to impose a strict form of Islamic law on non-Muslims. In some areas of Malaysia, religious conservatives have attempted to impose a hard line form of *Sharia* on both non-Muslims and non-Malay Muslims.

Nonetheless, the relative success of both states in blending civil laws with an accommodation of principles from Islamic law points to a possible initial path for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, wherein democratic principles at the national level can still allow for collective decision making at the local level derived from a mix of Islamic thought, community values, and democratic principles.

Pashtunwali, a behavior code considered by many Afghan Pashtuns to be a core part of their identity, has been held up as an obstacle to democracy by some students of democracy. However, the concept of the *jirga*, a council that make decisions at the village level, is not necessarily opposed to some form of democratic governance. Indeed, this idea means that a model of representation and consent at the community level has long existed in Afghanistan—many of the features of a New England town hall meeting are present in a *jirga*. A system that takes local institutions into account should allow a form of democracy to take root.¹⁹⁵

It may be possible that even a deeply conservative Muslim society can practice a form democracy. Such a government would likely not embrace some of the Western liberal values related to individual autonomy. Instead, as Esposito has argued, it would be inclined toward a form of democracy rooted in communitarian values. Nonetheless, such a government could still meet the criteria presented in our democracy matrix for a functioning democracy. A democracy rooted in communitarian values could readily open political participation to all adults, allow all citizens effective participation in political processes, and free citizen decisions from arbitrary intervention.

Respecting the rights of minorities seems to be the most problematic factor. However, with the exception of a minority of universalist strands of Islam such as that espoused by the Taliban, the majority of Islam is community oriented. As such, an arrangement that identifies particular religious or ethnic communities, and guarantees their rights in a

¹⁹⁴ Freedom House, “Malaysia Country Report,” in *Freedom in the World*, 2008.
<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008&country=7440>

¹⁹⁵ Christian Brose has made this point; see
http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/02/12/the_pashtun_sources_of_democracy. Certainly *jirgas* have notable limits, but it is important to remember that colonial representation was often limited to male Caucasian holders of property.

communitarian context, is compatible with much of Islamic values.¹⁹⁶ Such an arrangement would allowed Afghanistan's diverse set of local communities to develop a mix of secular and religious law that fits the values of different individual communities. Both Indonesia and Malaysia offer imperfect visions of how this might play out in a future Afghanistan.

Summary

The cases of Nicaragua, Mozambique, and Colombia provide important micro-level examples of advances within reach of troubled democracies. Nicaragua and Mozambique both are comparable to Afghanistan, as young democracies with little previous experience attempting to build a democracy after a civil war. While both states still have significant problems, their advances in governance and key institutions are important indicators of their relative stability. As well, both states have reduced the level of violence and incorporated former insurgents into government. Colombia provides an example of how to bring former enemies of the state into government, through a combination of military success and political overtures. Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrate that it is possible for a democratic government to take root in a Muslim-majority country. That is encouraging news for the Afghan state. By following the examples of these states, Afghanistan can make important advances which will aid her in developing a democratic state with staying power.

¹⁹⁶ On the liberal/communitarian question, the work of Will Kymlicka provides a useful introduction. See especially *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

A More Realistic Vision of Afghan Democracy and Priorities for Progress

For the seed of democracy the international community has labored to plant in Afghanistan to take root it will have to be wedded to Islamic customs and laws as well as existing regional and local authority and customs. In essence, it must be adopted by what constitutes legitimate government today at all levels. It has to flower as a home grown, Afghan version of Islamic constitutional democracy. Even if genuine democracy takes hold, it can be expected to grow slowly for a long time as it melds with past concepts of governing, present customs and religious principles. The international community should re-appraise what aspects of democracy can take hold within the time, resources and prospects for change at hand, both for the Afghan people and with regard to the commitment of the international community, which is finite.

After almost eight years, a refined vision of what type of democracy can be achieved in cooperation with local authorities is the foundation on which the UN, WB, NATO, EU and other international players can clarify priorities for civilian and military assistance that will bring progress toward eventual completion of this part of their mission in this ravaged land.

A Vision of Democracy in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's leadership and its external supporters should agree to a vision of future democracy that is rooted in existing formal and informal local institutions, and imported only insofar as relevant cases studies provide true models on which Afghans can draw. The central government should preside over a government that delegates more authority to local and regional entities that it regards as partners to be served and supported. The degree of central control should be harmonized with the views and requirements of lower echelon leaders, some of which may be strong while others are weaker. Therefore the level of central engagement need not be the same from one region or locale to another. The guiding theme should be for Kabul to provide essential and carefully limited government service, and to do so dependably, free at least of the most egregious, overt, and visible corruption.

Services that the central government should provide exclusively include protection from adversaries at home and abroad, the conduct of foreign and economic affairs, the provision of air and surface infrastructure and traffic control, trade and markets, the provision of electric power, telecommunications and mail services, oversight of public media, a federal penal systems and judiciary, authority over monetary and fiscal policy, including the printing of money, and provision of the ultimate court of appeals for individuals. The elected government should begin to stand up a professional bureaucracy, educated and capable of providing honest public administration. The emphasis must be on quality over quantity of government services. The government must also have the power to levy appropriate taxes to provide essential services.

Authority over all manner of policy not explicitly agreed to belong to the central government should be allowed to reside with existing local authorities, principally at the village level, so long as they do not oppose the Kabul government by force or advocate blatant and sustained rejection of Afghan national laws. Provincial government should be a framework for local cooperation rather than a middleman for the disbursement of the central government's funds. The nature of the mix between civil and Islamic law could be determined flexibly in accordance with local and regional traditions. As with any government system, national laws need not address every, or even most legal matters. Most matters should be left to local authority and afforded wide latitude.

The goal should be to seek local embrace of a nationally elected central government that operates as much as possible in a nascent Afghan version of democratic political principles. The central government concentrates on providing the services local authorities and the people want from a central government, relatively effectively and without excessive corruption. A successful central government will refrain from encroachment on existing local prerogative. It will also refrain from pressing to extend its authority to communities for its own sake, and from seeking to remake Afghanistan in an external, foreign tradition of democracy. Such an arrangement, which draws upon existing participatory institutions native to Afghanistan, is the best the chance to start Afghanistan out on what will be a very long road toward an open, democratic form of government at the national level. Democracy at the national level can gain credibility only if it accounts for itself well in what it does initially, and waits patiently for greater acceptance and opportunities to grow over time

Priority Areas of Focus to Achieve Afghanistan's Vision of Democracy

Five areas for investment of international energies should receive the highest priority and emphasis: strengthening security; building a path for current enemies to become political participants; fixing dysfunction in key institutions; taming the worse and most visible corruption across the central government; and developing a workable, mainly decentralized form of government.

Strengthening Security

Much has been written from a military strategy perspective on improving the security situation in Afghanistan. Our contribution relates the importance of security to developing a resilient government. Simply, the central government in Kabul has to hold a monopoly on the use of deadly force by armed groups throughout the country. Violence in the enforcement of laws, exercised proportionately by police or lawful local militias controlled by legitimate regional or local governments will not undermine the central governments claim as the sole lawful authority exercising use of force. This is no different than any sovereign state.

In Afghanistan, insurgents challenge Kabul's monopoly on the use of force in many regions of the country. Until the central government can assert its authority over the insurgents, defeating them or co-opt them into the lawful political process, it cannot impose its own authority and political system, democracy or any other, on the country. A combination of tools must be employed, but military and political, to end the insurgency

against the central government. Without success in this endeavor, the international community cannot achieve its stated goal of a democratic Afghanistan.

Counterinsurgency warfare is unique and requires military as well as civilian skills notably different from conventional combat. NATO, as the primary military assistance force, should excel at counterinsurgency operations across the spectrum, including special operations, stability operations, training of local Afghan forces and other activities essential to defeating insurgents. However, NATO's military actions have to be closely matched by a public relations campaign to win over the populous, as well as government activities that demonstrate it is a far better alternative to the Taliban.

Security is also linked to a strategic communications campaign to immediately counter insurgent messages and to ameliorate lost credibility when military operations result in the loss of civilian lives. This campaign is perhaps one of the most overlooked in terms of resources. However it is one of the most critical to strengthening security.

Turning Insurgents into Political Participants

Anti-government forces that have little chance of winning a military conflict might still elect to fight if political participation is impossible. Therefore, outlier groups such as the Taliban should be given a genuine chance at political participation. Long ago, Sun Tzu noted the wisdom of provided the enemy a way out, lest he choose to fight to the death in the absence of alternatives.¹⁹⁷ Conflicts are rarely won unless a significant number of revisionists can be convinced to participate in the political system. A majority of the successful cases of post conflict democratization involved a transformation of anti-government forces from purely military actors to a political force. Only in cases where the opposition was marginal portion of the populace, such as the *Sendero Lumino* in Peru, did eliminating capacity via force alone find success. Even in that case, members of the group reemerged as unsuccessful political actors following their military defeat.

In Afghanistan, anti-government elements divide into neo-Taliban elements and less ideological tribal elements. Much of the core Taliban leadership is likely irreconcilable. However, our examination of Afghan identity suggests that local circumstances are prime motivators of many insurgents, just as they are for most Afghans. Much of the rank-and-file of various insurgent groups allied with and among the Taliban have been recruited at the local level and are motivated by local causes.¹⁹⁸ Can these causes be answered by the political process rather than the gun for Afghans outside the small core of Taliban loyalists?

Maulana Fazlur Rahman, a leading Taliban supporter in Pakistan, argued that Taliban could participate in elections in Afghanistan "so long as they were not labeled as terrorists [in the political process]." Even some hard-line Taliban supporters have distanced themselves from al-Quada.¹⁹⁹ Few terrorist and guerilla movements are truly irreconcilable, desiring nothing short of the complete destruction of their adversary. Most groups have particular goals tied to place as well as goals related to access and policy.

¹⁹⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* Trans. Lionel Giles (N.C.: Wilder, 2008), 45.

¹⁹⁸ Amin Tarzi, "The Neo-Taliban" in Crews and Tarazi, 306-307. See also David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹⁹ Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid, "From Great Game to Grand Bargain" *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 2008):30-44

Negotiations that afford excluded groups a path into the legitimate political process in exchange for ending the violence have a reasonable chance for success in such circumstances, though the process can be uneven and long.²⁰⁰ Yet insurgent groups have little incentive to negotiate when things are going well. As Robert Crews suggests, amnesty and political integration have not worked because “for many Pashtuns, the insurgencies straddling the Afghan-Pakistan border and sweeping across southern Afghanistan had become far more effective means to shape Afghan politics.”²⁰¹ In both Nicaragua and Mozambique, negotiations were successful when insurgents accepted that military victory was unlikely in the short term.

Achieving an environment wherein most elements opposed to the government are willing to try to shape the political system through participation rather than through violence is the essence of success. This requires both the ability to negotiate from a position of strength and making democracy meaningful at the local level. The cost of continued violence has to increase in parallel to the widening of opportunities to come into the process and achieve genuine results. Thus, along with the current increase of Allied military forces in Afghanistan, rank and file members of the Taliban must be brought into the political process.

Including the Taliban may seem inconsistent when the Taliban persist in espousing non democratic goals. Some orchestration of process, timing and the release of information to the public is required for the desired result to be achieved. Once able to pursue their interests politically, anti-government forces-turned-successful-political-groups tend to discard violent methods. Including the Taliban does not mean accepting their brutal form of Islamist government.²⁰² However, it would mean giving members of the Taliban and their sympathizers a chance to articulate their vision of Afghanistan, within the framework of a representative democracy.²⁰³

Their arguments will initially gain little support, as the Taliban remain deeply unpopular. However, a party based on conservative Islamic values within the context of a democracy could become a credible and popular political player.²⁰⁴ Many of these values articulated by such a party will not resonate well with Western values, or some members of the westernized Afghan elite, however they will resonate with many Afghans. As a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor put it, “in a place free of the prying eyes and culture police of the Taliban, I don't see any women not in burqas. It turns out it's a way of life for a conservative tribal society.”²⁰⁵ The acceptance of democratic rules, rather than any adoption of Western values, should be the only prerequisite for political participation.

In nearly every case of successful post conflict democratization, anti-government forces virulently opposed to the existing order became important players in a political process with their onetime foes, either by becoming an important political party or by joining an

²⁰⁰ Carrie Manning argues this point in *The Making of Democrats*.

²⁰¹ Crews, 273.

²⁰² Rubin and Rashid: 30-44.

²⁰³ Sources with a good knowledge of the Afghan government have suggested that the government is considering such an approach.

²⁰⁴ Hizb-i-Islami, the erstwhile party of Gulbideen Hekmatyar, is an example of such a party. It is informally represented both in the Executive Branch of Government and in Parliament.

²⁰⁵ Mark Sappenfield, “Backstory: An Afghan road less traveled” *Christian Science Monitor* March 2, 2007

existing political actor. This has included a diverse set of actors in the cases we have examined, ranging from committed Marxists in El Salvador to ultra-conservative rightists in Mozambique. Long-term success in Afghanistan requires a system where many of the committed opponents to the Afghan government become participants in the political processes rather than disruptors of this process.

Dispelling Rampant Corruption and Institution-Building: Lessons of Mozambique and Nicaragua

Much of the corruption literature suggests that incremental change is more likely than a swift change from a society where corruption is widespread to a society where corruption is acceptable to minimal. In the United States, corruption peaked in the 1870s, and then slowly declined through a period of over 60 years.²⁰⁶ Even in the most advanced societies, some level of petty corruption tends to remain.²⁰⁷ National corruption tends to disappear more quickly than corruption among local and provincial leadership.²⁰⁸

If successful governance programs will not eliminate corruption, what should improvement look like? Success should limit spectacular corruption at the highest levels, eliminate the routineization of corruption (in which citizens always experience corruption), and reduce corruption that compromises public safety and justice.

Nicaragua and Mozambique both continue to suffer from significant levels of corruption; however, both states have improved their performance in key areas. High level corruption is a problem in both states. We have seen that Nicaragua's attempts to prosecute corrupt officials have been met with significant difficulties, and political influence still remains in the justice system when luminaries are involved. Nonetheless, visible attempts to prosecute corrupt officials are an important break from impunity.

A second important difference is the performance of institutions connected with public safety. In Afghanistan, the court system is considered to be the most untrustworthy element of Afghanistan's government. Indeed, many respondents to opinion polls maintained that they would prefer justice administered by the Taliban to the cumbersome and corrupt process. Judges had minimal training, and salaries ranging from \$35-50 per month—insufficient to support a family.²⁰⁹ Confidence in police is likewise limited; the police are seen more as parasites that extract resources from citizens rather than providing important services.²¹⁰

In this regard, while Nicaraguan and Mozambiquen courts and police still are a long ways from excellent, they are not actively undermining public support for their government.

²⁰⁶ Edward Glaeser and Claudia Goldin, "Corruption and Reform: Introduction" in Edward Glaeser and Claudia Goldin eds., *Corruption and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 10-15.

²⁰⁷ Paula Tiihonen, "Good Governance and Corruption in Finland" in Seppo Tiihonen, ed, *The History of Corruption in Central Government* (Amsterdam and Oxford: IOS, 2003), 101-102.

²⁰⁸ The experience in the United States provides compelling evidence in this regard. See Greene, *Grand Corruption and State Donors in Nicaragua*.

²⁰⁹ Barnett, section 6.

²¹⁰ Andrew Wilder, *Cops or Robbers* (AREU, 2007).

http://www.areu.org.af/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=&task=doc_download&gid=523Chris Sands, "We want the Taliban back, say ordinary Afghans" *The Independent*, April 8, 2007.

Indeed, the police in Nicaragua are considered more trustworthy than political parties and most government ministries.²¹¹

Political will has been vital to the establishment of institutions designed to combat corruption and the strengthening of existing structures such as the police and courts.²¹² In Nicaragua, political will in the executive was an important element in many anti-corruption programs. Mozambique has also seen significant success in its judicial sector, developing a system with a reputation for relatively strong independence and impartiality

In Afghanistan, we question the political will of the Karazi government to address corruption and fundamental problems. Many figures close to Karazi, including his brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, have been linked to drug trafficking. The record of the government in dealing with the drug trade at high levels is abysmal. The government also has a record of simply moving corrupt officials from post to post. Political will cannot create norms or excellent prosecution by itself. But will is the difference between no anti-corruption efforts and some.

Corruption at the provincial level and below is high among local strongmen and others in positions of power. While problematic, such illegality is not likely to undermine public support for the central government unless it is linked to national ministries and employees. Unfortunately, the system of enshrining local leaders in government roles has involved the central government in the further corruption of provincial leaders. The government should separate essential government services from funds presided over by local leadership. Joel Midgel notes that one of the most dangerous failures of limited states is the cooption of government officials at the province level by local strongmen. For a flexible system to work, the defined instruments of the national government must be free from the manipulation of a particular regional interest.²¹³ At the same time, the most democratic of Afghanistan's institutions, local *Jirgas* and *Shuras*, should be given greater responsibilities in the allocation of government resources for local projects, as leadership at the village level is less prone to corruption.²¹⁴

As Hamilton remarked of the much weaker American federal government at the time of the republic's foundation, transfer of allegiance from the local to national will only occur over a significant period of time, and only if the national government proves itself more effective than then local leadership.²¹⁵

Decentralized Government

Finally, a democracy in Afghanistan must work with the reality of local indemnities and local structures of governance. We have previously seen that Afghanistan is comprised of a diverse population with a complex set of identities and interests, most of them at the

²¹¹ "Informe Latinobarómetro," 2007 and 2008.

²¹² The election of Daniel Ortega as president in Nicaragua threatens to undermine the gains Nicaragua has achieved, as Ortega previously worked with Arnoldo Alemán to circumvent the country's anti corruption legislation.

²¹³ Midgel, *Strong Societies and Weak States*. See especially chapter 7.

²¹⁴ Ehsan Zia, Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, made this point in conversation after a presentation.

²¹⁵ Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist* 17

local rather than national level. An Afghan democracy must recognize this reality both in developing support for the government and in building a system that works.

The primacy of local interests among most Afghans, including many opponents of the government, provides an opportunity to bring some militants into political participation.

At the same time, the government must carefully balance competing local interests and the recognition of existing power structures.

Centralized government is not the only option available to a democratizing country. Indeed, some studies of democracy have suggested that in societies with diverse local populations of different ethnicities and languages, a system with greater autonomy results in both better performance and greater satisfaction among the populace.²¹⁶ A federal system, in which the national government performs tasks related to security and the provision of public goods, while local leaders had a great deal of autonomy in regulating the affairs of their communities, looks quite similar to the United States of the 1700 and early 1800s.²¹⁷

One encouraging example of such governance is the National Solidarity Program. By working with a group of local notables chosen by populations at the village, known as Community Development Councils, the government can make wise aid dispersal decisions. By respecting local wishes and interests in development planning, the government is able to address local concerns through community involvement, rather than governing through a top-down mandate. Because of local participation, corruption at the province level is significantly reduced. Such active partnership between the national government and local government should be expanded, with local villages being given autonomy on matters not related to security and other essentials and control over sufficient resources to administer local initiatives.²¹⁸

At the same time, the national government must be seen as an honest broker between competing regional and national interests. Care must be exercised when rewards and honors are dispersed by the central government or the international community at the district and provincial level. The government must not create a perception of bias, or provide an ethnic or tribal group with sufficient resources with which to damage a rival. This is particularly important when plans are made to arm locals under the auspices of the national government.

Recap of Central Findings

Measured according to the democracy metric (page 20-26), the current situation in Afghanistan is far from even a mediocre democracy. Numerous obstacles stand in the way of meaningful participation, insecurity is high, institutions are feeble, and corruption

²¹⁶ See for example Arend Lijphart *Patterns of Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

²¹⁷ Ehsan Zia, "Development in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Plan and Beyond" presentation at CSIS, Washington D.C., February 26, 2009. Alexis de Tocqueville's description of the primacy of the local in *Democracy in America* is a key example.

²¹⁸ Zia, "Development in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Plan and Beyond." See also Seema Patel and Steven Ross, "Breaking Point: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan" CSIS report, March 29, 2007, and Frederick Barton, *et al*, "Afghanistan and Pakistan On The Brink" CSIS Report, February 21, 2009

is rife. However, our comparative study of successful post conflict democracies offers several conclusions and policy recommendations on a way forward.

1. Democracy takes a long time to develop—the United States and NATO allies must be realistic about what can be achieved in Afghanistan during their tenure, particularly when conflict has yet to end. Democracy along the lines of the United States or its NATO allies is not the best model.
2. State security and public security—law and order—are both essential to any lasting democracy
3. In order to achieve security, a political as well as military solution is necessary. Workable solutions require involving opposition groups. It may also require compromise on some aspects of democracy, at least in the near term.
4. Key institutions must be stood up and function effectively. This is a lengthy process. Competency in public safety and justice is vital for a functioning state. Therefore developing competent law enforcement and a strong judicial system are critical priorities.
5. Corruption must be contained Afghans, like nearly all cultures, experience and tolerate some corruption, however the level of corruption emanating from Kabul is intolerable. Such blatant graft triggers support for alternatives such as the Taliban, in spite of their ruthless past.
6. Non-Western models of transitioning to democracy after conflict, in particular, those states with a majority Muslim population and declared state religion of Islam, provide the best roadmap and lessons for Afghanistan. There are several such examples but it does not appear they are being utilized either by international planners or by Kabul.
7. The initial years of transition to democracy often do not look very good—uneven performance is to be expected. However, this can not be an excuse for abysmal governance, failure to establish appropriate institutions, or a lack of security.

Given the above conclusions, it is important to be realistic about what Afghanistan will look like in ten or fifteen year's time. Developing a democracy in a post conflict situation takes several years *after hostilities have largely ceased*. And that often the principal accomplishment of such democracies is preventing the reemergence of conflict among constituent groups. The institutions, quality, and capacity of the Afghan government are quite weak, and its inability to establish security demonstrates that conflict is not yet at an end. An Afghanistan with characteristics similar to a Nicaragua or a Mozambique would be a remarkable achievement. Establishing security and establishing real capabilities in essential institutions such as police and the judicial system are challenges of the first order. Basic services such as electrical power, communications, water supply, and infrastructure are other important indicators of a functioning government. As well, current opponents of the government should be constructively involved in the political process.

If a post conflict democracy can establish security and a basic level of competence in institutions, as well as include much of the opposition in an electoral framework, Afghanistan will be considered a success in the eyes of the world. A return to conflict will then be unlikely. This does not mean an end point to the need for international assistance, but it will bring a change in focus. Improving an imperfect democracy

requires a different type of assistance than providing security. Security would allow much of the NATO military mission to leave. Such an Afghanistan would not be an ideal democracy, but it would be the type of Afghan-tailored democracy achievable in the next ten to fifteen years.

Policy Recommendations

Controlling Violence

1. NATO ISAF and U.S. Operation *Enduring Freedom* forces must be strong enough and capable of focusing sufficiently on insurgents to check their advance and inflict telling damage on their military capacity. Afghanistan needs a respite of 2-3 years from attacks to develop and consolidate governance. In military operations, avoiding the adverse impact of collateral civilian casualties must continue to receive the highest command consideration.
2. The Afghan National Army should press hard to establish and maintain the highest quality, especially among its core cadres at every organizational level. It has to weigh the pressing need for a larger ready force with the patience and careful selection processes required to engender enduring professionalism. It will be easier to set and maintain quality than to reverse unacceptable performance later. With this proviso, every effort should be expended to put in the field the most capable forces as soon as possible.
3. The first responsibility of the Afghan National Police should be public safety and security. The ANP must be free of egregious visible corruption and capable of gaining public trust. In addition to responding to local civilian authorities, it must be capable of teamwork with the military when necessary. The ANP should include some highly responsive and robust paramilitary elements in order to reinforce local police units when military force is inappropriate or not immediately available.
4. Pakistani forces operating from the Pakistan side of the Durand Line are also critical to controlling violence inside Afghanistan. Government of Pakistan cooperation with the ANA might best be effected via international intermediaries, and take the form of military-to-military contacts, information sharing, and cooperation aimed at mutual confidence building. These initiatives should be fostered whenever the possibility is present.
5. International intelligence sharing should be pursued in order to allow collaboration as much and as often as possible in locating and targeting insurgent forces. Governments and militaries should seek opportunities to learn from each other's operations in order to improve the overall effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations.

Incorporating Enemies

1. Any reconciliation effort requires advances in counterinsurgency—opponents of a regime would not agree to join in if they are winning. The ballot box has to present a more likely chance of success than the battlefield.

2. Alongside successful counterinsurgency operations, past efforts of offering amnesty must be improved. A systematic, national program which offers a chance of meaningful political involvement must be developed alongside military advances. A wholesale “us against them” approach must be avoided.
3. Careful attention should be given to the resolution of local grievances in recruiting militants and ex-militants.

Corruption and Institution-building

1. The national government should remove corrupt officials found in the national government at high levels whenever possible, rather than the current practice of moving them around. Cleaning house should be made public. Restoring confidence in government institutions should be a top priority
2. Local leaders can be rewarded for ‘good behavior’ with patronage. Appearance of fairness as well as promulgation of ‘the rules of the games’ is appropriate on a judicious scale. However, while a small advantage for cooperative leadership is one thing, corruption cannot be gross and must not extract from the property of individual citizens.
3. Wages for police, judges, and other key administrative officials should be sufficient to provide a living for officials without obliging them to resort to extortion.
4. The United States and the international community should clearly cast their support for individual officials as being wedded to the Afghan national interest, as demonstrated by performance, and specifically, to honest expended effort. Unreasonable goals of success are counterproductive, but often limited progress in the provision of services adds to public trust and confidence in Kabul.

Centralization and Local Relevance

1. Notwithstanding provisions of the 2004 constitution that call for centralization, informal arrangements that provide more space for local governance as well as more provisions for local control over some resources should be established. This would not require any explicit change in the constitution, but it should result in a change of emphasis on the part of the government in Kabul as well as its international supporters. The formal structure of government in Afghanistan has been described as one of the most centralized states in the world.²¹⁹ Such centralization it not the best fit for Afghanistan. The national government should refocus on a more limited portfolio of essential functions, and gradually win the support of the populace by working with local authorities on other issues.
2. More autonomy should be given to village and sub-district level informal institutions. These are often representative councils that govern well, shun the Taliban and are averse to poppy cultivation and drug labs. More autonomous local councils should quickly realize positive effects in terms of public support and in their working relations with the central government. Local accountability will also improve the administrative performance of government projects. The Community

²¹⁹Lister and Nixon, “The Place of the Province in Afghanistan's Subnational Governance” Rotberg..

Development Councils formed through the current National Solidarity may be a useful model of local autonomy.²²⁰

3. The central government must determine a few priority service areas that it can and will execute well in the near term. Law and order is critical, however it is not enough. Steady progress toward infrastructure expansion and reliable delivery of services, most critically road, power, and telecommunications, will demonstrate competence over time.²²¹ Clean water, medical facilities, economic development programs that bring jobs, the regulation of trade, and facilitating education are appropriate priorities as well.

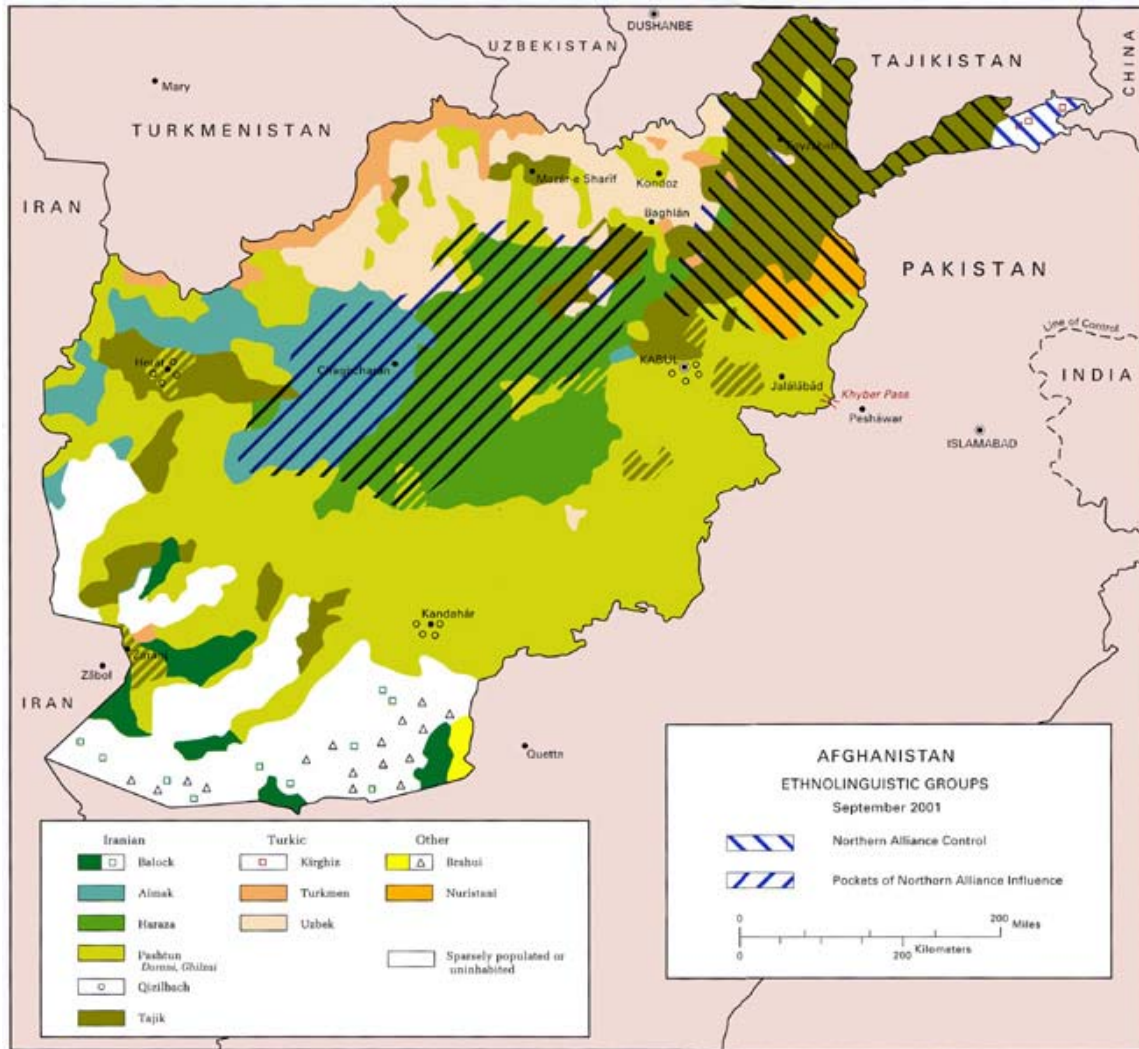
Knowing what can be achieved and what international norms consider a working democracy are essential factors in crafting policies to succeed in Afghanistan. Realistic goals should be articulated, and this research should help policy makers in doing so. The twin pillars of growing a democratic Afghanistan are security and measured, capable central government working in tandem with existing local authorities. Democracy cannot replace Afghanistan's authorities, but rather must be built into it by Afghans as they are able to accept the tenets of a new political philosophy. International assistance will be needed for a long time for such an enterprise to succeed. However, it is within our collective means within a number of years to quell insurgent attempts to kill off democratic representative government before it can take root. The rest will be up to the caliber of the leaders in Kabul and the resilience of the people of Afghanistan.

²²⁰ Zia, , "Development in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Plan and Beyond." Projects administered through local leadership have reduced levels of corruption.

²²¹ Some initial successes has been achieved in infrastructure projects, such as significant progress on the ring road and power initiatives importing power from Uzbekistan to Kabul and from Iran to Heart, with the assistance of international donors.

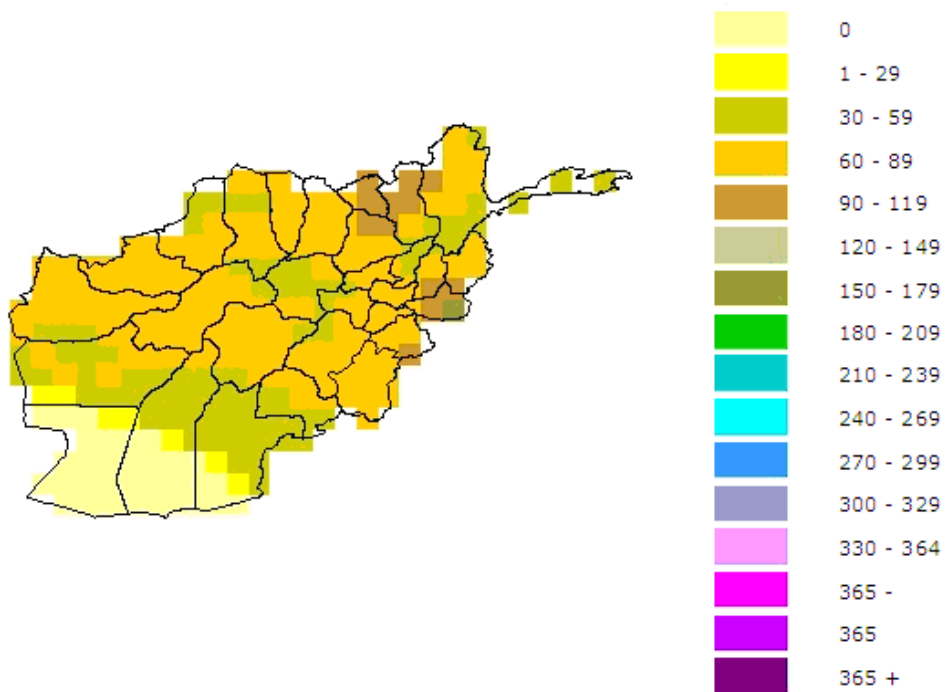
Maps

1. Ethnic Composition of Afghanistan



Source: *The United States Army in Afghanistan: Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, October 2001-March 2003*

2. Number of Growing Days



Source: FAO (UN)