

# The Electoral Performance of Afghan Political Parties: A Comparative Analysis

*Afghan Siyasi Partilerinin Seçim Performansı: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz*

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## Anahtar Kelimeler:

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Afghanistan İslam  
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Demokrat Partisi  
(Afghan Mellat),  
Mücahitler,

## ÖZET

Bu makale Taliban yönetimi sonrası Afghanistan'da iki Afgan siyasi partinin seçim performansını mukayeseli bir biçimde analiz etmeyi hedeflemektedir. Araştırmanın referans çerçevesi, "Jamiat-e İslami Afghanistan" (Afghanistan İslam Toplumunu) ve "Afghan Mellat" (Afghanistan Sosyal Demokrat Partisi) partilerinin seçim başarılarına odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma özü itibarıyla temel, öğretici ve mukayeseli bir analizi bünyesinde barındırmakta ve nitel araştırma tekniği tatbik edilerek birincil ve ikincil kaynaklardan edinilen verilere dayandırılmaktadır. Netice olarak araştırma söz konusu iki partinin tarihsel gelişimine temas ederek her iki partiyi yönetimleri, yapıları, kampanya stratejileri ve kayırma ilişkileri bakımından ele almaktadır. Çalışma, Mücahitler, yerel otoriteler ve güçlü seçmen desteğine sahip etnik liderle bağı olan siyasi partilerin seçim başarılarının daha fazla olduğu sonuca ulaşmaktadır. Bu bakımdan söz konusu güçlü bağlara sahip olan "Jamiat-e İslami Afghanistan" (Afghanistan İslam Toplumunu) Partisi'nin bu irtibatlardan mahrum olan "Afghan Mellat" (Afghanistan Sosyal Demokrat Partisi) Partisine göre daha avantajlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Zira Rus işgalcileri ülkeden kovulan Mücahitlerin oluşturduğu kast sistemiyle kurulan yakın ilişkiler teşkilatlanmada kullanılabilir zengin mali kaynaklar üzerinden sağlam bir zemin oluşturmakta ve partinin müstakbel başarısını garantiye alacak imkân ve kabiliyetleri teşkil etmektedir.

## Keywords:

Electoral Performance,  
Afghan Political Parties,  
Jamiat-E İslami  
Afghanistan (Islamic  
Society of Afghanistan),  
Afghan Mellat (Afghan  
Social Democratic  
Party),  
Mujaheddin,

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the electoral results of two Afghan political groups in the former and post-Taliban periods in Afghanistan. The study's main objective is to evaluate the electoral victories of the Afghan Social Democratic Party (Afghan Mellat) and Jamiat-e İslami Afghanistan (the Islamic Society of Afghanistan). Basic, deductive, and comparative analysis is used in the study, which is mostly conducted by examining the primary and secondary data that are already accessible. In order to get to a conclusion, the study examines how the two parties listed above have changed historically and looks into their organizational structure, communication plans, and clientele relationships. This article explains the conclusion that political parties with connections to prominent local figures—Mujahidin and ethnic leaders have substantial political and electoral support bases—generally do better in elections than organizations with less connections. Accordingly, Afghan Mellat, which has poor relationships with the local notables, Mujahidin and ethnic leaders, is experiencing less electoral success than Jamiat-e İslami Afghanistan, which has strong ties to the local notables, Mujahidin and ethnic leaders. Building relationships with the Mujahidin provides a platform for bolstering organizational and financial resources, which are important elements increasing the possibility of electoral/party victory.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties are crucial organizations in freshly formed democracies because they allow for the consolidation of political interests onto a single platform for governing. They are the best weapon for democratization since they encourage people to participate in politics and advance democratic ideals. Political parties might serve two fundamental purposes: representing public interests at the national level and expressing public interests in a cohesive and collective way. Afghanistan, which just recently achieved democracy, has a lengthy history of political parties dating back to the early 20th century. Political parties have existed and been active in Afghanistan in some capacity since 1911. Following the constitutional changes made under King Zahir Shah's (1933–1944) reign, political parties are now formally permitted.

Afghan political parties have recovered the ability to register and participate in politics following the American invasion of the country and the installation of an interim administration. They had the chance to start organizations and assemblies, seek for office, and organize resistance. Despite this momentum, it doesn't appear like the Afghan political parties are doing a good job of democracy and serving as a voice for the general populace. The major causes of this ineffectiveness include the political parties' own inefficiency and lack of competency, as well as the absence of inter-party policies and processes (Larson, 2009:13). Second, parties do not have adequate governmental or international assistance to carry out their functions (Larson, 2009:13).

Thirdly, challenges like the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) electoral system, which does not require party affiliation, and the lack of a separate party registrar institution are among the factors that prevent Afghan political parties from acting as an effective catalyst for democratization and as a means of representing the needs of the public (Larson, 2015).

Afghanistan has had three parliamentary elections since the Bonn Conference, with very little electoral success for political parties. A total of 2,707 people stood for office in the 2005 parliamentary election, including 328 women (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). Political parties were not seen as necessary political entities at the time because of the election system in place; all the candidates were independent. A new electoral legislation that recognized political parties was established in Afghanistan by 2009. A small number of candidates ran for office in the 2010 parliamentary election on party lists. Only 35 candidates out of the 2,577 405 women listed their political party on the ballot (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). Only 8.5% of Afghanistan's MPs have officially revealed their party affiliation in the current parliament.

Political parties assert that they have a significant number of seats in the parliament, however the facts supplied by other national and independent international sources show that these figures are significantly different. The culture of ambiguity that now exists between parties and parliamentarians is one factor contributing to this dispute. They frequently keep their relationships with political parties, candidates, and MPs a secret.

Election success is crucial for political parties in a newly democratic country like Afghanistan. Few things affect Afghan political parties' election performance, even though it has historically been quite low. Links to prominent local figures with Mujahidin and ethnic roots and substantial political and electoral support are among these variables, and they are crucial. Political parties with strong relationships to prominent local figures typically fare better in elections than those with weak linkages. In this regard, Afghan Mellat, who have poor relationships with the local notables, Mujahidin and ethnic leaders, are having less electoral success than Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan, which has strong ties to the local notables, Mujahidin and ethnic leaders. The justification is that establishing ties with the Mujahidin provides a platform for bolstering organizational and financial resources, which are essential elements improving electoral/party success.

This study compares the reasons that led to the election success and failure of two political parties, Jamiat-e Islami and Afghan Mellat, and investigates what criteria predict the electoral success of Afghan political parties in the post-Taliban, post-2001 Afghanistan. The justification for choosing these two parties is that although having a similar political and social past, they have quite distinct election histories and outcomes. This fact forms the basis of the ongoing investigation of the reasons behind and justification for the electoral success of Afghan political groups.

Second, both of the aforementioned parties -which are the topic of this study- are national and multiethnic, with different party manifestos that provide a strong foundation and justification for a comparative case study in a newly democratic post-conflict state like Afghanistan. Additionally, the paper examines the development of Afghan political parties since the 1900s and their historical context. The research examines the party administration and structure, membership, financial resources, campaign methods, clientelist relationships, and

electoral fraud activity of the two political parties stated above in order to study their election performance. To reach its conclusions, the study looked at the affiliations the two parties stated above had with local notables, such as ethnic and mujahidin leaders. It found that the strength of a party's links to local notables had a significant impact on both the performance and results of elections.

The political landscape in Afghanistan has been shaped by various political parties that have emerged and evolved over the years (İnaç, 2021:93). One prominent political party in Afghanistan is the Afghan National Unity Party (ANUP), which played a significant role in the post-Taliban era. ANUP is known for its progressive stance on issues such as women's rights, education, and democratic governance. The party emphasizes inclusivity and aims to build a united Afghanistan by bridging ethnic and cultural divisions.

Another influential political party in Afghanistan is the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), which draws its support from conservative factions. The IRP advocates for the implementation of Islamic law and seeks to maintain traditional values and cultural practices. It has a strong base among religious conservatives and has been critical of Western influence in the country (İnaç and Erdoğan, 2006:15).

The Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) is another notable political party in Afghanistan. Led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, HIA has had a complex history, ranging from being involved in armed conflict during the Soviet invasion to signing a peace agreement with the Afghan government in recent years. The party has its roots in Islamist ideology and aims to establish an Islamic state in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan (JIA) has played a significant role in Afghan politics. Founded by prominent Afghan leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, JIA has been instrumental in shaping the political landscape of the country (İnaç and Ünal, 2013:230). The party draws support from the Tajik ethnic group and has been known for its emphasis on ethnic representation and power-sharing.

Other political parties in Afghanistan include the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (NIMA), which is a moderate Islamist party that advocates for social justice and national unity. The Afghanistan Millat Party (AMP) focuses on Pashtun nationalism and promotes the interests of the Pashtun community in the country. Additionally, there are several smaller parties representing various ethnic groups and regional interests, contributing to the diverse political landscape in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that the political dynamics in Afghanistan have been greatly influenced by the security situation, ethnic divisions, and external factors (İnaç and Sada, 2021:87). The country has faced numerous challenges, including the presence of extremist groups, political instability, and ongoing conflicts. The role of political parties in Afghanistan has been crucial in navigating these challenges and shaping the future direction of the country.

As Afghanistan continues to grapple with the complexities of nation-building and democratic governance, political parties will play a vital role in shaping the political landscape. Their ability to address the diverse needs and aspirations of the Afghan people, promote inclusivity, and work towards a stable and prosperous Afghanistan will be key to the country's future development (İnaç, 2007:28).

## **2. THE HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN AFGHANISTAN**

Afghanistan, which just recently achieved democracy, has a lengthy history of political parties dating back to the early 20th century. Political parties have existed and been active in Afghanistan in some capacity since 1911 (Teijgeler, 2009:2). During King Zahir Shah's reign (1933–1944), political parties were formally permitted as part of constitutional changes. According to this era's legal definition, a political party was any organized group of individuals who came together with the goal of gaining political power (Teijgeler, 2009:2). In accordance with the press freedom law of 1964, political parties in Afghanistan were given the legal green light to operate. A low level of educated class of three different political parties existed in Afghanistan by the middle of the 1970s.

Political parties were permitted to form and become active following the US invasion in Afghanistan and the establishment of the interim administration. They had the chance to start organizations and assemblies, seek for office, and organize resistance. Despite these forerunners, Afghan political parties continue to struggle to reflect the needs of the people and to advance democracy. This inefficiency can be attributed to a few key causes: Party operations are ineffectual for two reasons: first, the political parties' own lack of effectiveness and competency, and second, the absence of domestic and foreign support. Thirdly, the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) electoral system, which does not require party activities, and the lack of an independent party registrar

institution prevent Afghan political parties from operating effectively as a tool for democratization and as a means of representing the needs of the public.

Afghanistan has had three parliamentary elections since the Bonn Conference, with very little electoral success for political parties. A total of 2,707 people stood for office in the 2005 parliamentary election, including 328 women (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). Political parties were not legally recognized at the time due to the voting system, hence all the candidates were independent. A new electoral legislation that recognized political parties was established in Afghanistan by 2009. A small number of people ran as party candidates in the 2010 legislative election. Only 35 candidates out of the 2,577 405 women listed their party membership on the ballot. Only 8.5% of the members of Afghanistan's current parliament officially stated their party affiliation (FEFA, 2019:4).

Election success is crucial for the political parties in a newly democratic country like Afghanistan. Despite being quite low, just a few things affect it. Campaign spending and party administration are crucial among these variables. Parties that are well organized, have a large national presence, and spend a lot of money on election campaigns are faring better than others. Only a few of the 88 political parties that have been registered exhibit the traits. They often have a large number of seats in the parliament as a result. The historical history of the Afghan political parties from the 1940s until 2020 is covered in this chapter of the essay, along with an analysis of their evolution, difficulties, and electoral results.

## **2.1. The Emergence of Afghan Political Parties**

The constitutionalist (Mashrutiat) movement, which was started by a group of young Afghans known as Afghanan-e Jahan, or Young Afghans, who fought for constitutional changes and resisted the rule of King Amanullah Khan (1919-29), is where Afghan political parties first emerged in the early 1900s (Larson, 2015:1). Political parties were later founded in the 1940s because of King Zahir Shah's (1933-1973) modernizing initiatives; nevertheless, it wasn't until the 1960s that these parties reached their full maturity (Tejjeler, 2009:2).

Afghanistan's constitution from 1964 made it lawful for political parties to be formed, which helped the establishment of various communist organizations there. Although they were legally recognized under the constitution, the breadth of their actions and effect were limited by their inability to interact with people and politics. Political parties at the time were unable to advance the public good and essentially followed radical agendas (Tejjeler, 2009:2). King Zahir Shah refrained from signing the Party Law and amending his first party modernization changes as a result of their incapacity and opposition to the administration.

The National Democratic Party was openly led by Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan, his brother Sardar Mohammad Naim Khan, and Abdul Majid Khan Zabuli, a powerful Afghan businessman who provided financial assistance for the party. Their major objective was to become prime minister, which would give them the most political clout. Finally, Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan was given the chance to hold the position of prime minister for two terms totaling five years.

However, he was ultimately prohibited from holding this role since Afghanistan's new constitution forbade the King's family members from having positions in any of the three main bodies of government. Political activities were resisted by the government after the 1973 overthrow of the King by former premier Mahammad Daud Khan, and the opposition organizations were compelled into hiding. The government resisted them and closely monitored their activities.

The communist parties came to power as a result of the Saur revolution in 1978. As one of the two superpowers in the world following World War II, Russia had the greatest impact on Afghanistan. For about more than three decades, Russia's presence in Afghanistan had a significant impact on the political and social affairs of the nation. Seven Mujahidin parties organized armed oppositions in Pakistan to oppose the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, which was led and represented by PDPA, after the Saur Revolution of May 1978, which was headed by PDPA as one of the communist parties of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union appointed Dr. Najibullah Ahmadzai as president of Afghanistan in 1986 and established a new political climate by passing legislation allowing political parties; nonetheless, the majority of parties opposed the democracy and election of 1988 (Tejjeler, 2009:2).

Many parties were forced into exile in Pakistan and Iran as a result of the government's persistent suppression of any opposition party. In order to fight the Soviet army that invaded Afghanistan, they established ferocious

opposition groups. The emergence of Sunni and Shia Mujahidin factions aided by the intelligence services of Pakistan and Iran resulted from the exile of these groups in nations like Pakistan and Iran. In addition to two factions of Hezb-e Islami led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar and Yonus Khalis, Pakistan mainly sponsored Sunni Mujahidin organizations including Jamiat under Burhanuddin Rabbani, Sayyaf (Tanzim-e Dawat), Mujaddidi (Jabha-e Najat), and Gailani (Mahaz-e Milli) and parties. Iran, on the other hand, aids Shia organizations like Afghanistan's Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami, which is commanded by Mazari (Teijgeler, 2009:3).

These terrorist organizations succeeded in having the Soviet soldiers removed from Afghanistan ten years later. These parties were successful in overthrowing the existing administration, but they were unable to establish a cohesive, communal government. The Mujahidin administration was toppled by differences about the structure of the government. They sparked a brutal civil war that resulted in the deaths of millions of Afghans and the exodus of millions more to neighboring nations. The seven Mujahidin organizations engaged in the bloodiest civil war, which resulted in their gaining a "*reputation of brutality and military excess*" (Teijgeler, 2009:3) that is still remembered by the public and limited the influence of political parties on the politics and administration of the nation. Following such a precarious scenario, certain areas of the nation welcomed the Taliban, who were thought to bring back order and a government founded on Islamic principles. But they behaved in the same manner as the earlier governments. In the Taliban government, the unstable system and lack of political activity persisted.

Examining the origins and development of political parties in Afghanistan reveals significant differences between those parties and those founded in other well-established democracies on democratic principles. This discrepancy stems from both the factors that led to the parties' birth and their electoral success. The history of political parties in Afghanistan demonstrates that these groups have not always manifested and pursued their objectives in a righteous and legal manner. The fact that the parties disintegrated when the founders passed away indicates that the political parties' short-lived existence in Afghanistan was mostly driven by the connected leaders' political agendas. On some times, it is clear that despite the fact that a political party had a role in the emergence of a political course in Afghanistan, when that party attained its height of power, it curtailed the activities of its rival political parties. One notable example of such a strategy is the National Democrat Party, which is run by Sardar Mohammad Dawood Khan.

In other parts of the world, the important roles that a party should play in the nation include: offering a favorable environment for the younger generation to emerge and improve in the nation's political system, effective election campaigns, directing public votes, governing, and taking on governmental duties, developing public policies, offering training programs, and influencing public opinion, among other occasions. Unfortunately, none of the aforementioned occurrences could be satisfactorily seen in Afghanistan's political party history. Political parties are one of the primary democratic foundations and have the potential to fundamentally alter how democracies operate in various nations. However, in a nation like Afghanistan where a political party would not succeed in gaining support from the populace, and the government would be led to authoritarianism.

The emergence of political parties in Afghanistan has been a significant development in the country's political landscape. Following decades of conflict and instability, the establishment of political parties has allowed for the formation of organized groups with distinct ideologies and platforms. The process of party formation gained momentum after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, as Afghanistan embarked on a journey towards democracy and political pluralism. This period saw the rise of parties representing diverse interests, including those based on ethnic, religious, and ideological affiliations. Political parties have played a crucial role in advocating for democratic principles, promoting human rights, and voicing the concerns and aspirations of various segments of Afghan society. They have served as vehicles for political participation, fostering debate, and providing platforms for citizens to engage in the political process. The emergence of political parties in Afghanistan has been instrumental in shaping the country's political discourse, facilitating the peaceful transition of power, and fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy.

## 2.2. The Post-2001 Political Parties

Following the 2001 Bonn Conference, Afghanistan entered a new political age in which the constitution and the government acknowledged a wide range of political activity, including the establishment and training of political parties. Political parties had a fantastic chance at this time to organize activists and publicly establish the opposition. Two primary factors, in Rene Teijgeler's opinion, contributed to the emergence of political parties in the nation. First off, political parties had plenty of opportunistic openings and places to seize control. Second, the time period gave people an opportunity to create new political parties as a result of conflicts with

the leadership of the more established ones (Tejjeler, 2009:3).

Political parties in Afghanistan's post-2001 political era had the chance to create organizations and assemblies, seek for public office, organize oppositions, and interact with various racial and religious groups. The new political parties tended to be more multi-ethnic and less allied with specific ethnic or religious groups or ideology as compared to the older ones after 2001 (Özkan, 2022a:212).

Afghanistan has had three parliamentary elections since the Bonn Conference, with very little electoral success for political parties. 2,707 people stood for office in Afghanistan's 2004 parliamentary elections, including 328 women. Afghanistan utilized a single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system since it was the only available electoral system at the time. Political parties were not regarded as necessary political institutions as a result. As a result, each candidate was independent. But via its unofficial candidates, political parties were able to win the majority of seats (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31).

Following the 2005 parliamentary election in Afghanistan, political parties held 99 seats out of 249 seats, according to statistics from the National Democratic Institution (NDI). The leading parties at the time were the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan Junbish with 33 seats, Jamiat-e Islami with 20 seats, and the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan Hezbe Wahdat with 13 seats (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31).

The data cited by NDI is very debatable and frequently deviates from data presented by other sources. Candidates were not having to be members of a political party under the SNTV electoral method that was used for the presidential and legislative elections in 2005. Candidates had no incentive to align with parties, and parties had little desire to support candidates' campaigns since there was no space on the ballot paper for candidates to disclose their affiliations with political parties. Due to the high violence image developed during the interwar period and in part to quell dissent to the new administration, Afghan and foreign players purposefully picked the SNTV voting system to exclude parties (Larson, 2015:3).

Afghanistan replaced its 2003 party legislation with a new one in 2009 that contained provisions aimed at reducing the number of political parties in the nation as well as new registration requirements for all currently existing organizations. In contrast to the prior requirement of 700 signatures, the new Party Law required all political parties to gather 10,000 signatures from their members nationwide. The number of political parties decreased as a result of this scenario from more than a hundred to sixty-three (Larson, 2015:3). However, the new Party Law increased donations to political parties, allowing one contributor to give up to five million Afghanis instead of the previous two million (Ruttig, 2020).

However, due to the absence of a suitable and focused system to regulate party funding, this state is rather difficult to monitor. A third modification to the Party Law allows political parties to engage in activities like fundraising outside of the nation, which was previously forbidden. However, the parties are still not permitted to establish offices abroad (Özkan, 2019:1741). The new legislation, like the previous one, mandated that all political parties adhere to Islamic principles and Afghanistan's constitution and refrain from having military organizations.

The 2009 Party Law decreased the number of political parties in existence, but it restricted party political activity rather than promoting them. For instance, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) effectively connects registration to the implementation of government policy by mandating that parties register with the MoJ rather than a separate organization. However, parties continue to view official registration as a valuable asset and make active efforts to guarantee that they re-registered in accordance with the updated standards when the new law was implemented. They highlighted how government certification is considered as a crucial feature of parties' existence as legitimate players, separating them from informal groups, regardless of their degree of legal, political stance within the mechanism, or any formal impact in politics (Larson, 2015:3).

Political parties and Afghanistan's civil society have made multiple attempted attempts to reform the nation's electoral laws since 2009, but none have succeeded. A new bill that combined SNTV and a party list was submitted to the parliament in 2013 and contained a hybrid election system. This was eventually rejected, albeit somewhat predictably given that an electoral system change may have made it more difficult for sitting lawmakers to win reelection (Larson, 2015:3).

A small number of candidates ran for office in the 2010 parliamentary election on party lists. Only 35 candidates out of the 2,577 405 women listed their political party on the ballot (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). The same as in 2004, SNTV was the electoral system used for the 2010 legislative elections. The numbers provided are not totally accurate since party politics and parliament members are not always obvious. However, the National Democratic Institution (NDI) reports that 76 of the 249 seats were filled by political

parties, with Jamiat-e Islami holding the majority (17 seats), followed by the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan (Hezbe Wahdat), with 11 seats, and the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (Junbish), with ten seats (FEFA, 2019:4). The statistical data cited by NDI is extensively disputed and differs from the statistical data presented by other sources. Political parties did, however, lose one-third of their seats in 2010, according to NDI figures comparing the parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2010.

Only 8,5% of the members of the current Afghan parliament, which was elected in 2018, publicly stated their party affiliation, according to statistics from the Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan Organization (FEFA) (FEFA, 2019:4). Jamiat-e Islami (3,6%), the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan - Junbish (3,6%), and the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan - Hezbe Wahdat Islami (2,7%) account for 8,5% of these top parties (FEFA, 2019:4).

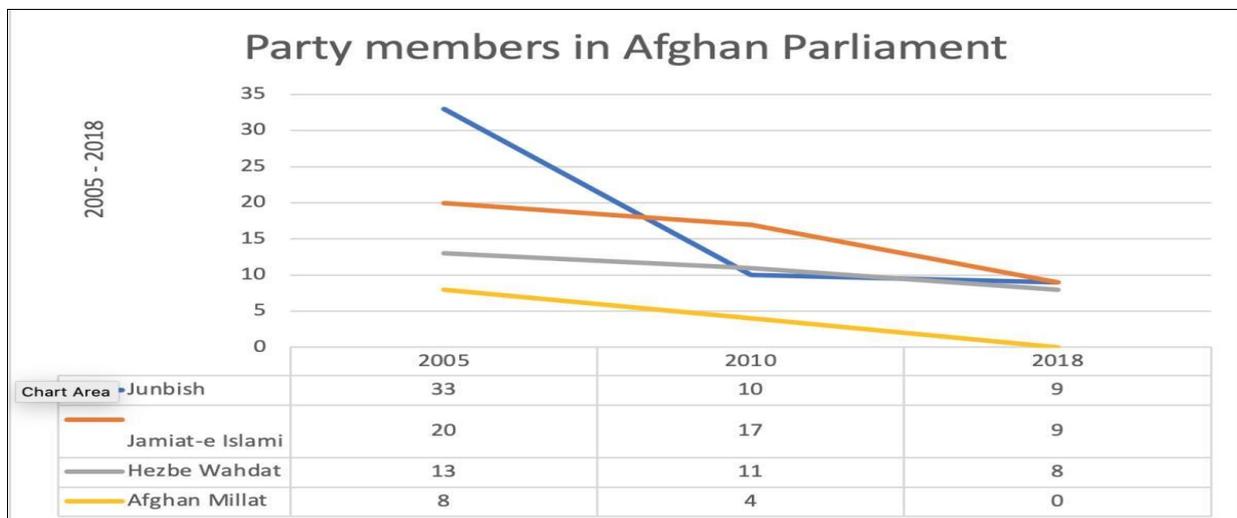
Additionally, varied responses have been given by House of Representatives members when asked if they had ever been affiliated with any political party (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). While 23,4 percent of MPs have admitted to having previously belonged to political parties, 76,6 percent of delegates have stated that they have no history of doing so (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). Jamiat-e Islami, Junbish, and Hezbe Wahdat were the three parties that 7,6% of MPs said they had previously been affiliated with (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31).

The FEFA is the only source that has mentioned or verified the figures that were previously mentioned. Political parties assert that they have a significant number of seats in the legislature, however the facts supplied by several national and independent international sources show that these figures greatly vary (National Democratic Institute, 2011:31). The culture of ambiguity that now exists between parties and parliamentarians is one factor contributing to this dispute. They frequently keep their relationships with political parties, candidates, and MPs a secret (Özkan, 2022b:234).

In conclusion, Afghanistan has a lengthy history of political parties dating back to the early 20th century. Afghanistan is a developing democracy. Political parties have existed and operated in Afghanistan since 1900. by King Zahir Shah's administration (1933–1944), constitutional amendments were made in 1963, and the press was given more freedom by a statute passed in 1964. Political parties were permitted to form and become active following the US invasion in Afghanistan and the establishment of the interim administration. Political parties were given a significant chance to develop, reform, engage in open activism, and create the opposition an opportunity never previously seen in the history of the nation. Despite this momentum, it doesn't appear like the Afghan political parties are doing a good job of democracy and serving as a voice for the general populace. This inefficiency can be attributed to a few key causes: the absence of inter-party policies and processes as well as the lack of effectiveness and competency within the political parties themselves (Larson, 2009:13).

The absence of governmental and international assistance, which prevents parties from working properly. Thirdly, challenges like the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) electoral system, which does not require party affiliation, and the lack of an independent party registrar institution are the other factors that prevent Afghan political parties from acting as an effective catalyst for democratization and as a way to represent the public interest (Larson, 2015:1).

**Figure 1.** MPs Representing the Above four Mentioned Political Parties in the Post-2001 Afghan Parliament



### 2.3. A Comparative Study of Jamiat-E Islami-E Afghanistan and the Afghan Millat - Social Democratic Party of Afghanistan

Burhanuddin Rabbani created Hezb-e Jamiat-e Islami-e Afghanistan in 1971, one of the country's first hardline Islamist groups. Sufi Naqshbandi Rabbani went to Pakistan after President Daud came to power in 1973 and launched a campaign against conservative Islamic organizations there (Teijgeler, 2009:25). He launched the first uprising against the imperial forces in Kabul. Despite the fact that Rabbani is the party's head, Ahmad Shah Massoud, who battled in the Panjshir Valley until his death on September 9, 2001, had the largest impact. The northern region of Afghanistan, where Tajiks, Uzbeks, and other ethnic minorities resided, is where the party has power (Teijgeler, 2009:25). Tajiks make up both Rabbani and Massoud's ethnic groups. It is somewhat progressive, but adheres to a communitarian worldview based on Islamic law. Instead of a presidential system, Jamiat prefers a parliamentary one in which governors are chosen by the people rather than by the president. These two goals formed the focus of the United National Front, led by Rabbani, which attempted to bring together numerous ethnic groupings and political parties under a single banner towards the opposition.

During the Soviet War and the civil conflicts, the party was one of the most well-known Mujahidin organizations. Following the collapse of the communist regime in 1992, Jamiat's forces were among the first to arrive in Kabul. A peace and power-sharing deal between Afghan armed parties led to a tentative agreement to nominate Burhanuddin Rabbani, who had lived the civil war in exile, as interim leader. By 1980, the initial "*Jamiat-e Islami*", "*Hezb-e Islami (Khalis)*", "*Hezb-e Islami (Gulbuddin)*", and "*Ittihad-e Islami Bara-e Azadi Afghanistan*" had divided into four groups. Each of these political groups had links to the Afghan organization Jamiat-e Islami, and they resembled local militias more than political parties. Since the party's founding, the Mujahidin leaders have always presided over Jamiat. Since the founding member and initial leader, Pro. Rabbani, all of the leaders have been former Mujahidin who still have significant influence. Ahmad Shah Massoud, Ismail Khan, Atta Muhammad Nur, Mullah Naqib, and Dr. Fazlullah are some of its key figures with a strong Mujahidin history. Jamiat-e Islami is the most active political party in the nation in terms of party management and organization. Out of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces, the party has regional offices in thirty-two of them, with support from Mujahidin-affiliated local leaders predominating (Teijgeler, 2009:25).

Jamiat-e Islami-e Afghanistan has been one of the main political forces in Afghanistan since the events of September 11, 2001. Jamiat gained 20 seats in the Afghan parliament in the 2005 election. This was followed by 17 seats in 2010 (National Democratic Institute, 2011:42), and nine seats in 2019 (FEFA, 2019:5). Compared to other political parties in Afghanistan, these figures are the highest. Similar to this, the party backed Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, a prominent contender, in all four of the nation's presidential elections since 2001.

In contrast to the "*Jamiat*" party, the "*Afghan Millat*" is a Social Democratic Party that was established in 1966 by intellectual Ghulam Mohammad Farhad. Under the direction of Shams ul Huda Shams, the "*Afghan Nation (Shams)*" advanced. The opposite group has been commanded since 1995 by Anwar ul-Haq Ahadi, a former finance minister. He made an effort to grow his membership and run as a nationalist party rather than an ethnically-based one. Most of the Pashtuns that visit Mellat are educated. Mellat endorsed Karzai in 2004 and 2009, and in 2014 and 2019, the party supports Ashraf Ghani for president. There aren't many news on this party's activity in the Wolesi Jirga Provincial Councilor. There are thought to be eight seats in the Wolesi Jirga, which met in 2005.

The party's ties to the Mujahidin organizations have never been particularly strong after the Afghan Millat. An examination of the party's well-known figures, including Eng. Ghulam Mohammad Farhad, Dr. Mohammad Amin Wakman, Dr. Anwar-Ul Haq Ahady, Stana Gul Sherzad, Ustad Yaqeen Yousafzai, Dr. Syed Ghulam Farooq Mirranay, and others, demonstrates this reality (Afghan Millat, 2021). None of the individuals described above have ever belonged to a militia group, either before or after Afghanistan's civil war. They are all similarly well educated, holding doctoral or master's degrees. Even though Afghan Millat was founded before Jamiat-e Islam-e, it has had poor electoral success and was unable to get as many members in parliament. This failure is caused by the weak connection to the Mujahidin group.

### 3. THE ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF AFGHAN POLITICAL PARTIES

In a newly democratic country like Afghanistan, political parties must consider their chances of electoral victory. The degree of party contacts with local notables, also known as Mujahidin or ethnic leaders, who have substantial political and electoral support bases and/or involved in voter buying or ballot stuffing, has largely

determined the electoral success of political parties, despite their relative insignificance. The political parties or the local notables themselves may have started these relationships with the notables in the area as a required type of clientelism. The Hezb-e Jamiat-e Islami-e Afghanistan and the Afghan Millat-Social Democratic Party of Afghanistan are studied in this chapter's empirical investigation of the election performance of Afghan political parties.

The electoral performance of political parties in the post-2001 political environment is heavily influenced by their relationship with the erstwhile Mujahidin and ethnic leaders. The majority of the electorally successful winning parties were founded by or have close links to former Mujahidin leaders. For instance, the Mujahidin commanders themselves directly founded and currently run Jamiat-e Islami, which has won the majority of votes in the previous three parliamentary elections (Ruttig, 2020). The primary factor influencing this party's electoral success is its clientelist relationship with Mujahidin or ethnic leaders who enjoy broad political and electoral support. These leaders operate as middlemen between political parties and voters. The argument is that establishing connections with the Mujahidin provides a platform for bolstering organizational and financial resources, which are important elements increasing the chance of electoral or party victory.

In their 2011 report on Afghan political parties, the National Democratic Institution (NDI) notes that the majority of Mujahidin parties or those linked to them rely solely on money raised and spent by their leaders during the interwar period, which is still in these leaders' bank accounts but is hidden from other party members (National Democratic Institute, 2011:42). A party member from Kabul elaborated on this topic by saying the following in an interview with NDI (National Democratic Institute, 2011:42);

*"Jihadi parties have money left over from the time of the Jihad, and some of these parties have invested this money in things like running hotels, which helps the party somewhat with its finances. As far as I'm aware, [the party head] has also used some party funds for commercial ventures. The party does not get any aid from abroad, and during the communist and Jihadi eras, most of the guerilla finance came from individual donations. The event was dependent on donations from the public. But [the former party leader] spent the majority of party funds on religious institutions. No one approaches him because they are afraid he would get hostile if they do"*

The democratic process inside political parties is undermined by their reliance on a small group of people, yet Mujahidin leaders' financial backing has been essential for two primary reasons. First, it has been employed to advertise the party platform and administrative setup all throughout the nation. A party must engage with its constituents and voters, maintain regional offices and party representatives, and be actively present at social events. The funds obtained from the Mujahidin or ethnic leaders is used to promote all of these initiatives (National Democratic Institute, 2011:43). Second, the money given by Mujahidin leaders is used to pay for party candidates' campaign expenses during provincial, parliamentary, or presentational elections.

For a variety of reasons, the Mujahidin leaders frequently spend a lot of money on gatherings. Political parties get a favor when a member or contender for a post in government is required to repay the favor by selecting Mujahidin leaders' relatives or altering public policies to serve the interests of Mujahidin leaders, among other options. According to NDI, the aforementioned reality significantly affects the patron-client connections that party leaders have with their constituents, essentially establishing a governing hierarchy in which the party's leadership is responsible for all information, assets, and strategic contacts. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) asserts that similar claims hold true for some of the younger parties, whose organizational structures are also geared toward top-down decision-making and whose funding is mostly obtained from the connections of the leadership (National Democratic Institute, 2011:42).

Similarly, establishing relationships with the Mujahidin presents significant voter mobilization prospects that are not possible otherwise. Typically, ethnic or Mujahidin leaders have held positions of authority for so long that they have developed solid relationships with the local populace or have obtained resources to aid in voter mobilization. Therefore, political parties like Jamiat that retain a strong relationship with Mujahidin leaders often have a lot of opportunity to mobilize voters and have good chances of performing well in elections. Afghan Millat, in contrast, has little to no links to Mujahideen or ethnic leaders, which limits its ability to mobilize voters and reduces the likelihood of election victory (Haviland, 2002:137).

Additionally, some of these Mujahidin leaders are allegedly involved in vote-buying and election fraud, giving Afghan political parties an illegitimate means of electoral triumph. The Jamiat-e Islami-e Afghanistan, where the party's top figures accuse one another of fraud and corruption, is a clear example of this (Hamid, 2020). Vote buying by various candidates and political groups was the subject of several reports and instances during the 2005 legislative election. Similar incidents were recorded in Afghanistan's presidential and parliamentary

elections in 2010 and 2018. This form of scam typically occurs in remote regions where there is little access to the government. Vote buying has historically been done by direct payments or quid-pro-quo strategies in exchange for electoral support. Ballot stuffing is a tactic that parties and candidates in Afghanistan utilize, similar to vote buying, to rig elections. Similar to voting procedures, parties and candidates in Afghanistan utilize voting as a tactic to rig elections. Voting illegally for a certain candidate in a particular election district is known as stuffing ballots. The most remote and isolated areas of the nation are often where this is carried out since election observation teams there seldom go for logistical or security concerns. As a result, voting for candidates has become popular in certain regions of the nation (Amin, 2019).

As a result, Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan, which has strong ties to the Mujahidin and ethnic leaders in the region, has fared better in recent elections than Afghan Mellat, which has strained ties to these figures. The above-mentioned elements, such as financial backing, voter mobilization, or electoral support through illicit means, such as vote-buying or ballot stuffing, are absent from Afghan Mellat due to its tenuous links to the Mujahedin and ethnic leaders.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The election success of political parties has been a crucial problem for the political parties, the Afghan government, and the international community in a newly democratic country like Afghanistan. Political parties in Afghanistan's post-2001 political era have the chance to carry out open operations, participate in public discussions, seek for public office, and form oppositions. The election success of Afghan political parties has been very low despite all these new prospects. In this study, two Afghan political parties from the past that had similar socioeconomic and historical origins but had distinct election outcomes were compared. The two political parties are "*Afghan Mellat - Afghan Social Democratic Party*" and "*Jamiat-E Islami Afghanistan - Islamic Society of Afghanistan*".

According to the study, political parties with significant political and electoral support bases and linkages to prominent local figures with Mujahidin and ethnic origins typically outperform those with weaker affiliations. As a result, Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan, which has strong ties to the Mujahidin and ethnic leaders in the region, has fared better in recent elections than Afghan Mellat, which has strained ties to these figures. The justification is that establishing ties with the Mujahideen provides a platform for bolstering organizational and financial resources, which are essential elements for electoral/party success.

The research discovered that Jamiat's connections with the local notables, Mujahidin, and ethnic leaders have been quite firm, and that all of the party's founding members and leaders since the party's establishment were either from Mujahidin leaders themselves or were from Mujahidin families. This was accomplished by studying the historical context and the party institution and organization of the two mentioned political parties. This fact had a significant role in Jamiat's electoral triumph in Afghanistan's four presidential elections as well as the country's three most recent legislative elections. Similar to how the Jamiat's close ties to Mujahidin organizations greatly aided in supporting the party's election campaigns as well as its administration and organizational structure. The relationships with the Mujahidin organizations also greatly aided in voter turnout for the party, which strengthened Jamiat's electoral success as a major political force in the nation.

In contrast to Jamiat, the study discovered that the Afghan Millat has never enjoyed a close relationship with the region's notables; as a result, it lacks Mujahidin backing for greater electoral success. After researching the party's past, it was discovered that Afghan Millat had no notable Mujahid leaders or ties to Mujahidin families. Afghan Millat's inadequate ties to prominent local figures cost the party money for election campaigns, party administration, and underwhelming voter mobilization. The poor ties with the local notable so cost Afghan Millat to have weak electoral success in the post-2001.

As concluding remarks, it can be said that the Afghan politics depends upon the nobility, social elites and ethnic discriminations. This situation makes the political environment away from the democratic principles in Afghanistan. In comparing with the experiences of Western political parties, it is essential to establish a central government and provide the national unity in convenient with the universal values of democracy by means of political participation.

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