



How to cite this article:

Ahmadi, M. H., Darvishpour, H., & Ashrafi, A. (2026). Analysis of Patterns and Trends of Political Participation in Afghanistan During the Republic Period (2002–2021). *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 4(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.413>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 11 August 2025

Revision Date: 03 December 2025

Acceptance Date: 10 December 2025

Publication Date: 01 January 2026

Analysis of Patterns and Trends of Political Participation in Afghanistan During the Republic Period (2002–2021)

1. Mohammad Hamayun. Ahmadi ¹ : Ph.D. Student, Department of Political Science, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
2. Hojatollah. Darvishpour ^{2*} : Department of Political Science, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
3. Akbar. Ashrafi ³ : Department of Political Thought and Iranian Issues, CT.C., Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

*corresponding author's email: h.darvishpour@iauctb.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

Following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the international community and Afghanistan's political elites found an opportunity to establish a political system based on democracy and political participation. The Republic period represented the most significant and longest-lived experience of political participation in Afghanistan's contemporary history. The first presidential election was held with broad public participation and was regarded as an important step toward the institutionalization of political participation. With the holding of several rounds of elections, participation-oriented institutions such as civil society organizations, Parliament, provincial councils, and political parties were established. Women also entered the political arena, including by standing as presidential candidates and gaining representation in Parliament. Despite these achievements, however, structural deficiencies—including the centralization of power, the influence of local commanders, security instability, the continuous decline in popular participation, and a crisis of legitimacy within electoral institutions—posed serious challenges to the consolidation of political participation. Although the constitutional framework provided mechanisms and opportunities for political participation, the absence of sufficient political will for genuine decentralization, widespread insecurity, and repeated instances of electoral fraud in Afghanistan contributed to a decline in political participation.

Keywords: *political participation, Republic, Afghanistan, elections, civil society institutions, political legitimacy*

Introduction

Today, achieving political participation and political development is regarded as one of the essential requirements of all countries, particularly peripheral or developing countries commonly categorized as part of the Global South. The development of democratic thought and the modernization of political structures in developed societies have led such countries to be regarded as models for developing states. Accordingly, democracy and democratic governance are considered among the most important components of political development and political participation. Nevertheless, there are still countries that, despite progress in education, the economy, technology, and other fields, continue to be classified as developing countries. The political systems of many such countries remain nondemocratic and authoritarian, while the role of citizens in political affairs is limited. Therefore, achieving



political development and political participation requires the establishment of a democratic system founded on the collective will of the people. (1)

Afghanistan is also among the countries in which a substantial segment of the population has historically lived within traditional patterns of thought. Moreover, the historical experience of the country demonstrates that political authoritarianism has constituted one of the most significant features of its political culture and has persisted for a long period. Political power has also frequently been transferred through coercion and violence. Consequently, the role of the population in the political system has historically been extremely limited or virtually absent. Following the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the establishment of a new government and democratic political system in Afghanistan, the Constitution was adopted in 2004 by representatives of the people. The Constitution recognized such matters as freedom of association and political parties, freedom of expression and mass-media activity, freedom of trade and movement, the right to elect and to be elected, and equal access to employment for all citizens. It also addressed the protection of fundamental rights, the principal responsibilities of citizens, and the modernization of governmental structures. (2)

The Constitution of Afghanistan recognized political participation as a citizenship right of Afghan nationals, under which citizens were entitled to participate actively in the political sphere. Political participation is one of the essential elements of democracy and democratic governance. It encompasses any individual behavior or action intended to influence public policymaking, the election of political leaders, or the relationship between political leaders and citizens and, more broadly, the processes of decision-making and the articulation of demands between society and the state. Political participation is largely a phenomenon of the modern era and is commonly discussed within the literature on modernization and political development. According to Article 4 of the Constitution, "National sovereignty in Afghanistan belongs to the nation, which exercises it directly or through its representatives." The right of citizens to determine their own political and social destiny requires their comprehensive and practical participation in political decision-making. Transformation in contemporary political systems cannot be meaningfully realized without citizens' active involvement in decision-making processes. Political participation is therefore a key component of political development and plays a decisive role in consolidating democracy, enhancing political legitimacy, and strengthening representative institutions. Despite domestic efforts and extensive international support, political participation in Afghanistan encountered numerous challenges, including weak civil society institutions, the absence of a participatory political culture, insecurity, administrative corruption, ethnic and gender discrimination, and widespread public distrust of the government. Many policies adopted to strengthen political participation were either not fully implemented or proved unsuccessful in practice. (1)

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Political participation refers to all activities undertaken voluntarily by nongovernmental citizens, either within or outside an organization and at the national or local level, with the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing the selection of governmental officials or the determination of their policies and courses of action. (3) The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* defines political participation as the voluntary activities of members of society in selecting leaders and participating directly or indirectly in policymaking. (4)

Samuel Huntington and John Nelson provide a definition of political participation according to which political participation encompasses the efforts of nongovernmental citizens to influence public policies. This perspective emphasizes the role of competition in defining political participation and regards political participation as the

existence of peaceful competition and contestation among different sectors of the political community for the acquisition of power, the expression of societal will, and the definition of the public interest. (5)

Easton defines a “political system as a set of interactions through which values, services, and goods are authoritatively allocated among all sectors of society.” Easton’s concept of allocation focuses on the authoritative distribution of such values and resources. (6) He examines every political system through the perspective of inputs and outputs and does not primarily analyze how policies are formulated and implemented within the governmental apparatus. The comprehensiveness of the systems model lies in its inclusion of all major political actors beyond formal governmental institutions. The systems model therefore constitutes a comprehensive analytical approach that facilitates a better understanding of how governmental institutions operate. (7)

According to Huntington, the indicators of political institutionalization are as follows:

1. **Complexity of political institutions:** Institutional complexity contributes to enhancing the effectiveness and functionality of political institutions.
2. **Autonomy of political institutions:** This refers to the capacity of political institutions to accommodate different social groups within a common political framework, thereby contributing to the creation of legitimacy in society.
3. **Adaptability of political institutions:** This refers to the ability of political institutions to adjust to changing circumstances and everyday transformations while preserving their principal functions.
4. **Coherence of political institutions:** This refers to the degree of internal integration, coordination, and consistency among political institutions. (8)

Table 1. Public Participation in Afghanistan’s Elections (2004–2019)

Type of Election	Year	Number of Candidates	Men	Women	Total Voters
Presidential	2004	18	17	1	8,128,940
Provincial Council	2005	3,025	2,778	247	6,408,324
Parliamentary	2005	2,775	2,440	335	6,408,324
Presidential	2009	41	39	2	4,823,090
Provincial Council	2009	3,180	2,847	333	4,823,090
Parliamentary	2011	2,566	2,150	406	5,602,690
Presidential, First Round	2014	11	11	0	7,018,890
Presidential, Second Round	2014	2	2	0	8,109,493
Provincial Council	2014	2,713	2,404	308	6,979,092
Parliamentary	2018	2,500	1,999	441	Comparison
Presidential	2019	18	18	0	1,823,948

Source: (1)

Political Parties

Political parties constitute one of the most important mechanisms for organized political participation in democratic systems. In democracies, political parties are closely connected with virtually all dimensions of politics, particularly electoral participation. By organizing the political ideas and tendencies present within society, political parties simultaneously function as mechanisms for differentiating, classifying, and organizing citizens into different political currents and for integrating various individual and social tendencies within relatively coherent ideologies, attitudes, identities, and political patterns. Political parties transform electoral competition from an essentially individual activity into a social, cultural, organized, and sometimes ideological process.

Political parties are among the most organized, powerful, visible, and perhaps unavoidable actors and forces within political life, accounting for a substantial proportion of political activities. Political parties are, in fact, a particular form of organization through which social forces are mobilized and structured. (9)

Mass Media

Freedom of expression is recognized as another fundamental pillar of a democratic system. It provides equal opportunities for all citizens to communicate their demands, needs, criticisms, and proposals to the government and other institutions. Mass media constitute one of the most important instruments for reflecting the voices of citizens. The media are recognized as institutions of civil society and as the “fourth estate” of democracy within the political system. By functioning as the voice of the people vis-à-vis the state and by reflecting public opinion, the media can exert a substantial influence on the institutionalization of democracy. The power exercised by the media is essentially a form of soft power; by providing information regarding events and developments occurring in different areas of social life, the media contribute to public awareness and enlightenment among citizens. (1)

Education

Education is one of the most fundamental resources of political development and human development and an important foundation for political participation. A country that is unable to develop the knowledge and skills of its population and effectively employ them in processes of political participation and modernization will be unable to meaningfully experience the discourse and practice of development, modernization, and political participation. Political scientists generally maintain that the characteristics and trajectory of a country's political and social participation are ultimately determined to a considerable extent by its human resources.

The more deeply education becomes institutionalized in society and the higher the literacy level of citizens becomes, the greater the opportunities for development, modernization, and political participation. Afghanistan, however, has historically experienced very low literacy rates. According to statistics published by the relevant authorities, more than 70% of the country's population at the time lacked even basic reading and writing skills. Afghanistan's prolonged internal conflicts also contributed to the emigration of significant numbers of educated citizens, thereby further intensifying the chronic problem of illiteracy. (1)

The Role of Women in Political Participation

Women constitute approximately half of society and should participate alongside men in social affairs. Indeed, achieving modernization and meaningful political participation without women's presence and contribution is considered impossible. In countries that have attained relatively favorable levels of political participation, women and men generally enjoy equal rights and opportunities and work alongside one another to achieve common social objectives.

In traditional countries where restrictive and deeply rooted customary values continue to prevail, women are often still treated as second-class citizens whose expected roles are confined to obedience to men and domestic responsibilities. Consequently, a boundary is drawn between the activities regarded as appropriate for men and women, and women's participation in public life faces numerous restrictions. (1) Throughout Afghanistan's history, women have been among the most vulnerable groups in society. Cultural underdevelopment and social backwardness contributed to the persistence of patriarchal structures, within which men exercised power in various

ways to maintain superiority and authority over women. Women consequently remained socially and culturally disadvantaged and were deprived of many opportunities for advancement. For this reason, many women were deprived of the effective enjoyment of their human and social rights. Because Afghanistan has historically been a traditional society strongly attached to specific ethnic customs and practices, relatively little importance was attached to women's roles and positions in political and social affairs. Women were therefore largely prevented from playing meaningful roles in determining their social, cultural, and political destinies. (10) Historical documents indicate that there is insufficient evidence of substantial social and political participation by women before the restoration of Afghanistan's independence and the rule of King Amanullah Khan (1919–1929). During this period, women participated alongside men in representative political activities for the first time. For example, a delegation of approximately eight to ten women was selected to participate in the Third Loya Jirga, convened on August 28, 1928. However, following the collapse of Amanullah Khan's government, women's social and political participation was effectively curtailed during the governments of Habibullah Kalakani and Nadir Khan. The approximately forty-year reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah is regarded as an important period in the political and social awakening of Afghan women and the expansion of their participation in society. During this period, the women's awakening movement became active in three principal areas: education, participation in the workforce, and political participation, including the establishment of women's associations. (10)

The Role of Economic Conditions in Political Participation

Economic development constitutes one of the principal foundations of political participation in a country. In poor countries where citizens experience severe economic hardship, the achievement of political participation is directly related to the extent to which people have access to the basic necessities of life. When people live in poverty and their primary concern is survival, they have little opportunity to consider democratization or the establishment of a democratic political system.

Afghanistan has unquestionably been one of the world's poorer countries, with a substantial proportion of its population living in absolute poverty. Nevertheless, following the establishment of an elected government, the socioeconomic situation of citizens showed some improvement compared with previous periods. Afghanistan's economic growth over the approximately twenty-year Republic period reportedly reached approximately 10%. (1) Such economic improvement was potentially significant for modernization and political participation; however, Afghanistan's economic growth was largely based on a consumption-oriented rather than a production-oriented economy.

The Constitution of Afghanistan characterized the country's economic system as a market economy. Within this framework, private institutions invested in various sectors, and significant numbers of unemployed Afghans obtained employment in construction, road building, telecommunications services, manufacturing enterprises, and other activities developed by the private sector. International support also created opportunities for investment in different sectors and generated employment opportunities in multiple areas. According to official statistics published by the Central Bank of Afghanistan, Afghanistan's per capita income was approximately USD 199 in 2002 and had increased to approximately USD 599 by 2013, representing an increase of about USD 400 in per capita income. Nevertheless, the distribution of this increase was highly unequal, and a majority of Afghans continued to experience economic poverty. Moreover, because of the continuing shortage of employment opportunities within Afghanistan,

many young people migrated abroad through irregular channels in order to provide for themselves and their families. (1)

Ethnic Quota Allocation of Political Power

The most significant document associated with the ethnic allocation of political power in Afghanistan was the Bonn Agreement in Germany. The agreement, concluded under the mediation of the United Nations, accepted a form of power sharing in order to promote stability and prevent ethnic retaliation. Given the weakness of civil society institutions and limited social trust, ensuring the representation of all powerful ethnic groups within the government was viewed as an important mechanism for preventing renewed violence. This form of power sharing operated at three levels.

Macro Level

An unwritten but widely recognized model emerged. Under this arrangement, the presidency was generally allocated to a Pashtun politician, while the vice-presidential positions were assigned to representatives of other ethnic groups.

Intermediate Level

This form of power sharing was extended to ministries, directorates, provincial administrations, and the security forces. Ethnic considerations played an influential role in key institutions such as the Afghan National Army, the police, and the national security apparatus. For example, command of certain major army corps was assigned to commanders associated with specific ethnic constituencies. Provincial administration was also frequently entrusted to individuals affiliated with the dominant ethnic group in a particular area.

Social Level

One of the most controversial manifestations of ethnic quota politics concerned the *Kankor*, the nationwide university entrance examination. Pashtun political figures advocated quota arrangements as a means of compensating for the educational disadvantages of predominantly Pashtun regions and increasing their representation in universities. Other ethnic groups, however, regarded such proposals as overt discrimination and as an attempt to restrict their educational advancement. This controversy demonstrated that even educational issues had become deeply intertwined with ethnic politics.

Ethnicization of Politics

Few problems have been more complex than those arising from Afghanistan's ethnic composition and its social, economic, and political structure. Linguistic, ethnic, cultural, religious, and political divisions have frequently intersected with tribal, clan-based, and other traditional social structures. A history of political instability and underdeveloped communication systems impeded the development of political participation and the emergence of a cohesive and integrated political culture, perpetuating parochial attitudes and weakening prospects for social unity and national integration. (11)

One of the major challenges arising from Afghanistan's ethnic diversity in relation to nation-building and state-building has been the instrumental use of ethnic diversity by political leaders. The ethnicization of politics in Afghanistan has repeatedly encouraged political leaders to use ethnicity instrumentally. Such leaders have often attempted to preserve the ethnic character of politics so that they can present themselves as ethnic representatives and transform ethnic identity into a source of legitimacy and political power. Consequently, the ethnicization of politics during Afghanistan's Republic period constituted a major obstacle to political participation, state-building, and nation-building. Even where nationalist ideas existed among different political and social actors in Afghanistan, they often assumed the form of ethnic or ethnocentric nationalism rather than an inclusive national nationalism. (12)

Political Distrust

Political trust constitutes an aspect of social trust, while social trust itself represents an important dimension of human relations and provides a foundation for political participation and cooperation among members of society. Social trust facilitates participation in political, economic, and cultural spheres and increases individuals' willingness to cooperate with different groups within society. The transformation of human societies from rudimentary and traditional forms toward modernity depends on the increasing complexity and density of social relations and reciprocal interactions, processes that are facilitated by social trust. Without trust, democratic political systems, social order and stability, cooperation, solidarity, and social cohesion are difficult to sustain. Trust is therefore considered one of the fundamental prerequisites for political, economic, social, and cultural participation in any society. (13) Accordingly, the absence of social trust constitutes a crisis and a challenge to social coexistence, preventing citizens from developing a shared national identity. It can also obstruct political participation and political modernization. (1)

Although Afghanistan's political culture has historically exhibited authoritarian and ethnocentric characteristics, it has also been characterized by political distrust. Consequently, a deep divide has persisted between citizens and political rulers. One factor contributing to the diffusion of such distrust into political affairs has been the weakness of trust within social relations and the public sphere.

Distrust of Afghanistan's political structures contributes to the weakening of social commitment and the erosion of social and national identity. Moreover, distrust gradually extends into interpersonal relationships, ultimately producing social isolation.

Furthermore, distrust in Afghanistan has impeded the emergence of a strong sense of cooperation and collective responsibility among citizens. Political indifference, avoidance of responsibility, and pessimism regarding the possibility of constructive and positive change are among the consequences associated with the prevalence of distrust in the country's political culture. Smaller ethnic groups, as a result of this distrust in social affairs, may experience a sense of isolation and perceive themselves as detached from the political system. (11) Social distrust within Afghanistan's general culture, and particularly within the spheres of politics and power, has been a significant and persistent reality. It has encouraged citizens at different levels to regard one another with suspicion, while social relations have suffered from a lack of trust. Fragmented and discontinuous social relations generated by social and political distrust have challenged political participation in Afghanistan, while social identities have often been defined primarily along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. One of the most important challenges to political participation and nation-building is therefore the formation of a shared national identity. The failure to consolidate such an identity

in Afghanistan has been regarded as one of the major barriers to political participation, modernization, and political development. (1)

Ethnic Cleavages

Within the history of political and social thought, ideas of ethnic and racial superiority are among the oldest and most widespread forms of exclusionary thought. In multiethnic and multiracial societies, subordinated ethnic or racial groups have frequently invoked theories of natural rights and human equality, while unequal treatment has constituted an important source of ethnic dissatisfaction and resentment. (13) Ethnic and racial prejudice toward fellow human beings belonging to other groups, and the definition of the self through racialized values, constitute longstanding and outdated modes of thought experienced by many societies. Governments and political systems have frequently used ethnic and racial prejudices instrumentally. Political actors may generate social fragmentation and intensify social tensions through such prejudices in order to pursue political objectives and preserve their own dominance. (13)

Afghanistan, however, has faced longstanding challenges of ethnic confrontation and prejudice, and the identity boundaries of many inhabitants have historically been defined within ethnic communities. Ethnic and tribal culture has encouraged individuals to draw distinctions between “self” and “other” through the concept of *qawm* (ethnic or kinship group). “Every Afghan, at least in rural areas, tends to perceive himself or herself as belonging to a group unit known as a *qawm*,” a term used to designate a social group whose members are bound together through shared obligations. Ethnic cleavages in Afghanistan have functioned as active political divisions. In light of the realities of Afghan society, the political establishment and power structure have often adopted an instrumentalist approach toward ethnicity. Holders of political power have attempted to use ethnicity as a means of establishing, consolidating, and expanding their authority, even at the cost of intensifying ethnic cleavages. Such practices have positioned political authorities as defenders of particular ethnic constituencies while encouraging indifference toward the fundamental rights of other groups. Because of its ethnocentric character, this form of politics in Afghanistan has systematically intensified racial and ethnic divisions and weakened inclusive political participation. (11) The Constitution of Afghanistan recognized the following ethnic groups as constituting the Afghan nation: “Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Baluch, Nuristani, Aimaq, Arab, Kyrgyz, Qizilbash, Gujjar, Brahui, and other ethnic groups.” (2) Although the phrase “other ethnic groups” indicates that Afghanistan is home to more ethnic communities than those explicitly identified in the constitutional text, the principal groups are those enumerated in the country’s most important national legal document.

Achievements and Milestones of Political Participation

1. Fundamental Transformation of the Legal and Institutional Framework: The adoption of the 2004 Constitution, regarded as one of the most modern national compacts in Afghanistan’s history, provided the legal basis for establishing an Islamic republic with democratic characteristics. For the first time, the Constitution institutionalized principles such as universal suffrage, freedom of expression, the formation of political parties, separation and independence of the branches of government, and the reservation of 27% of parliamentary seats for women. The holding of several rounds of elections, despite recurring allegations and instances of electoral fraud, together with the establishment of the Independent Election Commission and electoral monitoring institutions, reflected a degree of institutional development that was unprecedented in the country’s political history.

2. Media Freedom and Civil Society: During this period, the space for freedom of expression expanded substantially. Approximately 1,500 print media outlets, 150 radio stations, 70 television networks, and 90 news websites reportedly operated in the country. Media organizations were able to criticize governmental performance without extensive systematic censorship and to function as the “fourth estate” of democracy. In addition, the emergence of hundreds of civil society organizations, including approximately 442 nongovernmental organizations focusing on women, reflected the dynamism of urban civil society and a growing inclination toward organized participation.

3. Unprecedented Presence of Women in Political and Administrative Spheres: In contrast to previous historical periods, Afghan women attained unprecedented levels of participation during the Republic period. In addition to their reserved representation in Parliament, women held senior governmental positions, including ministerial offices such as the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Ministry of Mines. These developments constituted tangible manifestations of efforts to advance gender equality at the highest levels of government.

4. Relative Improvement in Welfare and Economic Growth: Despite significant shortcomings, average per capita income increased from approximately USD 199 in 2002 to USD 599 in 2013. Infrastructure development, expansion of the private sector—particularly in telecommunications, construction, and services—and the inflow of foreign investment, although frequently consumption-oriented and accompanied by exploitative practices, contributed to lifting some segments of the urban population out of absolute poverty and facilitated greater social mobility among emerging middle-class groups.

Strategies for Achieving Political Participation in Afghanistan

To achieve meaningful political participation in Afghanistan, several major priorities must be addressed in order to activate the mechanisms of political participation and positive change and to facilitate constructive transformation across different social and political spheres.

1. Citizen Education: Afghanistan has historically experienced low levels of literacy and public education, and a large proportion of the population has faced illiteracy. Consequently, many public decisions have often been shaped more strongly by emotions and immediate sentiments than by informed and rational political judgment. By contrast, countries that have achieved relatively favorable levels of political participation generally possess populations with higher levels of literacy and social knowledge. Because education constitutes one of the most fundamental prerequisites for political participation and is also an important component of human development, many scholars argue that a country’s capacity to compete with other countries depends more on the quantity and quality of its human capital than on its material capital. Accordingly, knowledge has become so extensive and central to contemporary political participation that modern social and economic systems cannot function effectively without human knowledge and capabilities, including imagination, intuition, empathy, sensitivity, psychological insight, and other human qualities. (8) For this reason, the quality and effectiveness of education also facilitate the achievement of political participation. Although citizens’ education and knowledge constitute important priorities for political participation and political modernization, many children of school age in Afghanistan have historically remained deprived of educational opportunities. Institutionalizing the discourse of political participation therefore requires the universalization of education and the implementation of comprehensive educational programs. Furthermore, reforming the educational system and moving from a quantitatively oriented, credential-centered structure toward a

quality-oriented educational system constitute essential requirements for strengthening political participation in Afghanistan.

2. Poverty Reduction and Employment Creation: Countries that have achieved high levels of modernization, political development, and political participation have generally experienced economic development, while their populations have benefited from greater social welfare and comparatively lower levels of poverty. By contrast, in countries struggling with severe economic poverty, where citizens live below the poverty line and their primary concern is survival, democratic programs and the creation of representative political systems are often given less priority because the need for basic subsistence is more immediate than the demand for democracy. Afghanistan has been among the poorer countries of the world, and a considerable proportion of its citizens have lived below the poverty line. Chronic unemployment and the absence of stable employment opportunities have also contributed to declining public optimism regarding the future. Consequently, employment creation and poverty reduction constitute essential requirements for meaningful political participation. To achieve these objectives, the government should cooperate with the private sector in investing in major infrastructural projects, including mining and the establishment of manufacturing industries, thereby creating sustainable employment and alleviating economic poverty. Furthermore, improving employment and economic conditions in Afghanistan and moving, in Walt Rostow's terminology, from a traditional stage toward economic "take-off" require the government to encourage foreign investment and create conditions that enable major international companies to invest in infrastructural sectors. Such investment can both expand employment opportunities and increase state tax revenues. Reducing unemployment and creating sustainable jobs can enable citizens to move beyond conditions of severe economic deprivation toward relative social welfare, participate more actively in governance and major political affairs, and contribute to replacing traditional political structures with accountable and democratic government. Political participation can thereby become an integral component of citizenship. (14)

3. Strengthening Civil Society Institutions and Political Parties: Political parties are often described as the machinery or driving mechanism of democracy. The free activity of political parties aimed at acquiring, maintaining, or sharing political power constitutes an essential feature of democratic political systems. Such activity helps prevent the monopolization of political power and instead strengthens citizens' roles in national affairs and public policymaking.

Another important function of political parties is the political education of citizens and the enhancement of public political awareness, through which political parties can contribute to increasing citizens' political participation. Afghanistan therefore requires political parties capable of developing broad and inclusive political programs. However, political parties in Afghanistan have often failed to function in the comprehensive sense observed in consolidated democratic societies. Given the fragmented social structure of the country, many political parties have developed primarily around ethnic, linguistic, and religious cleavages and have been unable to present comprehensive political programs encompassing all Afghan citizens. Moving beyond ethnic and sectarian political parties is therefore an important requirement for strengthening political participation, enabling parties to serve as bridges between citizens and the state and to perform their principal democratic function of consolidating and institutionalizing representative government. Civil society institutions in Afghanistan have likewise not always fulfilled their expected social responsibilities. Many such organizations have adopted project-oriented and interest-driven approaches rather than long-term, process-oriented and citizen-centered approaches. Accordingly, active civil society institutions capable of representing the public interest and defending citizens' interests in relation to

governmental policymaking are essential for accelerating political participation and facilitating a transition from traditional and nondemocratic structures toward an institutionalized, accountable democratic system.

4. Promoting Interaction with Other Cultures: An examination of Afghanistan's historical experience suggests that relations with other cultures and societies have at times been characterized by confrontation and hostility. Yet cultural intolerance in the era of globalization—an era in which global interdependence has intensified and shared international values have developed—can itself constitute an obstacle to modernization and political participation. To accelerate political participation in Afghanistan, therefore, excessive prejudice toward external cultures should be reduced. Rather than adopting confrontational approaches toward other cultures and societies, Afghanistan should promote interaction and cooperation and draw upon constructive elements of other cultural experiences to mitigate restrictive or harmful aspects of its own social traditions. Cultures and civilizations develop through reciprocal interaction and exchange rather than through persistent confrontation and hostility. Accordingly, unless strategies toward the outside world move away from confrontation and toward tolerance and constructive engagement, the achievement of effective political participation in Afghanistan will remain difficult.

5. Promoting Social Tolerance and Moving Beyond Dogmatic Approaches: Dogmatism and rigid modes of thought have constituted significant features of Afghanistan's social environment and have hindered the development of social tolerance among citizens. Dogmatism, particularly when accompanied by prejudice, has challenged social solidarity and the emergence of a shared national consciousness. As a result, many Afghans have defined their identities primarily through linguistic, ethnic, and religious boundaries, directly complicating the process of inclusive political participation. Accelerating Afghanistan's modernization therefore requires moving beyond rigid and exclusionary interpretations rooted in social cleavages and organizing social relations according to principles of tolerance, mutual acceptance, and coexistence. Ethnic, linguistic, and religious claims of superiority should be rejected so that a shared national consciousness can develop among all citizens. Citizens should regard themselves as common inheritors of the country's history and culture, while destructive ethnic and religious sensitivities should be reduced. As long as Afghan society remains trapped in prejudice and discrimination and social relations are not organized on the basis of equal citizenship, political participation cannot produce sustainable positive outcomes. Moving beyond dogmatic and exclusionary thought is therefore essential to the modernization of Afghan society.

Conclusion

Political participation is a voluntary, conscious, and collective process through which citizens become capable of contributing to the selection of leaders, the formulation of policies, and the oversight of governmental officials. An examination of different theoretical perspectives demonstrates that political participation is influenced not only by structural and institutional factors—such as the complexity, autonomy, and adaptability of political institutions, particularly in Huntington's approach—but also by individual and social characteristics such as education, urban or rural residence, organizational membership, and socioeconomic status, as emphasized by Lipset. Robert Dahl, through his concept of polyarchy, similarly identifies participation and electoral competition as fundamental components of democracy and highlights the psychological and rational factors influencing citizens' political engagement. Participatory democracy, through the expansion of voting rights, freedom of expression, equality, and the equitable distribution of resources, creates conditions in which citizens can participate not only in elections but also in local and national decision-making, thereby strengthening citizen autonomy and governmental

accountability. Political participation should therefore not be regarded as an isolated objective but as an instrument for social development, political stability, and the realization of justice in modernizing societies. Under the Bonn Agreement, an Interim Administration headed by Hamid Karzai was established for six months, after which a Transitional Administration was formed. Afghanistan's new Constitution was subsequently adopted in January 2004 and, in terms of its content, represented one of the most modern constitutional frameworks in Afghanistan's political history and among the constitutional arrangements of countries in the region.

During the twenty-year period of the Afghan Republic, the achievements experienced by the Afghan state and society in the fields of development and modernization were unprecedented in the country's recent history. Public participation in political affairs, which constitutes one of the principal components of democracy and political development and an important source of legitimacy in democratic systems, acquired particular importance during the Republic period. Under Article 4 of the Constitution, national sovereignty was recognized as belonging to the people. Consequently, a number of measures were undertaken to institutionalize citizens' political participation.

Citizens participated in several rounds of presidential and provincial council elections and four rounds of parliamentary elections. The expansion of political-party activities and civil society institutions, the growth of freedom of expression and mass-media activity, and the creation of opportunities for women's political participation were among the most significant achievements of Afghanistan's political system in the field of popular political participation.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

References

1. Mousavian SH. Pathology of Political Development in Post-Taliban Afghanistan: Khorasan-e Qadim Publishing; 2017.
2. Sharifi GR. A Discourse Analysis of Democracy in Afghanistan and the Obstacles to the Discourse of Democracy in Afghanistan. Kabul: Kateb University Press; 2013.
3. Esmaeili. Foundations of Political Participation. Tehran: Adineh Publishing; 2005.
4. Ebrahimi G. The Effect of Ethnicity on Political Participation. University of Tehran; 2004.
5. Bashiriyeh H. Political Science Education: Foundations of Political Science: Negah-e Moaser Publishing; 2007.
6. Ghavam SAA. Comparative Politics: SAMT; 2015.
7. Heywood A. Key Concepts in Politics: Scientific and Cultural Publishing Company; 2008.
8. Huntington SP. Political Order in Changing Societies 1996.
9. Heywood A. Politics: Ney Publishing; 2019.
10. Nazari S. Women's Rights Through the Course of History. Kabul: Saeed Publishing; 2013.
11. Sajjadi AQ. Political Sociology of Afghanistan: Khatam al-Nabiyyin Publishing; 2012.
12. Andishmand ME. Obstacles to the Formation and Stability of the State and Nation in Afghanistan. 2016.
13. Bashiriyeh H. Political Sociology. Tehran: Ney Publishing; 2009.
14. Khawati MS. Strategies and Challenges of Democracy in Afghanistan. Gofteman-e Now. 2009(22-23).