Anna Larson   March 2009

Afghanistan's New Democratic Parties: A Means to Organise Democratisation?

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About the Author

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Overview[1]

In established democracies[2], political parties are institutions in which groups of people define and articulate collective political interests in the form of a platform, which is then widely associated with the name of the party.[3] Voters are generally familiar with the platforms, past performance and leadership of different parties and support those they consider to best represent their interests. In general, parties gaining the most votes in an election win a corresponding majority of legislative seats. In this sense, parties have two basic functions: first, to organise public interests into identifiable blocs, and second, to represent these interests at the national level.[4] As such, they constitute a key means of facilitating democratic politics. This paper focuses on the first of these two functions[5], assessing how new democratic political parties (NDPs) in Afghanistan could contribute to a process of organising Afghan democracy.[6]

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[1] Data for this study was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with political party leaders, party members, elected members of the *Wolesi* and *Meshrano Jirgas*, and representatives of the international community working with parties and the elections. Forty-one interviews were conducted in total between August 2008 and January 2009.

[2] This term is used here to denote societies in which democratic institutions are functional and "established" to the extent that an extensive number of electoral cycles have passed and power changed hands without these institutions being damaged in any way.

[3] Based on Melvin J. Hinich and Michael C. Munger's definition, cited in Herbert Kitschelt, "Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Politics," *Comparative Political Studies*, 33, no. 6/7 (2000): 845-879 (definition on page 848).

[4] See Peter Mair "Political parties: What sort of future?" in *Central European Science Review,* 4, no. 13 (2003): 6-20.

[5] The second key function—representing public interests—will be the focus of a forthcoming briefing paper from AREU.

[6] The terms "new" and "democratic" are ambiguous due to the fact that many parties have connections to previous ones and that most parties, regardless of their background, now espouse some kind of democratic agenda. However, there is generally considered to be one current of political activity, mainly comprised of the parties involved in the National Democratic Front (NDF), which for the most part exists to promote democratic principles (Thomas Ruttig, *Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Centre: Afghanistan's Political Parties and Where They Come From (1902-2006)* (Kabul: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2006) retrieved from http://www.

Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
CEPPS	Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening
	CSO Civil Society Organisation
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MP	Member of Parliament
NDF	National Democratic Front
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NDP	New Democratic Party
NDS	National Directorate for Security
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
SNTV	Single Non-Transferable Vote
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Since the fall of the Taliban regime and the start of the Bonn Process in 2001, Afghanistan has embarked on the technical and political process of democratisation. This has involved the establishment of a mixed presidential and parliamentary system, a bi-cameral parliament and an electoral cycle, in which one round of elections has been completed.[7] The Government of Afghanistan (GoA) and the international community have focused on the technical formation and development of these democratic institutions, but others, such as political parties,

have been sidelined.[8]

Political parties are controversial in Afghanistan. Associated with recent conflict and ethnic or military factions, they are not considered a potentially positive force by the public or the GoA. From the Government's perspective, it is feared that encouraging parties may fuel civil tensions and contribute to the already deteriorating security situation.[9] This is not unusual in countries emerging from conflict, where it has been shown that parties can exacerbate existing ethnic tensions, especially when ethnic divides correspond with the unequal distribution of economic resources.[10] Even if parties are given the space and encouragement to form, limited resources, negative perceptions, an absent middle class and a general lack of prioritisation of party activity could also hinder the extent to which they can function effectively. This paper maintains, however, that parties are necessary for democratisation and that Afghan NDPs in particular have a role to play, as a result of their stated commitment to the process.

Democratisation is a lengthy and highly politicised process, involving many stakeholders with different agendas. Within this process, however, parties can provide a means to organise the institutional foundations of democratic politics. In channelling divergent interests into identifiable and organised categories, they can encourage public participation in elections by allowing voters to more easily associate those competing for power with their principal interests. Parties can gather and group public needs and interests before representing them nationally, and in doing so they provide an interface between the public and the government. Further, when national level politics are organised on a party basis, there is the potential for productive discussion and legislation due to the fact that legislators themselves are

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swp-berlin.org (accessed 8 August 2008). Many of the parties interviewed for this paper were members of the NDF.

[7]   These are generally accepted as having been free and fair.

[8]   Interviews with national and international commentators.

[9]   This is reflected in the way the Government has placed enormous emphasis on "national unity" and on preventing groups forming in Parliament on the basis of ethnicity, region, language or other potentially divisive factors.

[10]   Frances Stewart and Meghan O'Sullivan, "Democracy, Conflict and Development—Three Cases" (Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper series 15, Oxford: 1998) retrieved from http://www3.qeh.ox.ac.uk/RePEc/qeh/qehwps/qehwps15.pdf (accessed 14 August 2008).

organised into identifiable groups.[11] By extension, established parties allow relationships between different groups (such as pro-government and opposition) to be clearly recognisable.

It could be claimed that the current environment in Afghanistan is not conducive to the support of parties and that other demands on government and donor resources (such as security) should be prioritised. It could also be argued that even if parties were formally supported, they would be limited by high levels of corruption in government institutions and a weak rule of law, while decreasing security levels would enforce self-censorship and a limited scope for party political activities. However, it is argued here that the only way to arrive at the implementation of successful, legitimate elections in the future is to start building a culture of democratic participation now—and that parties provide a key mechanism through which to do this. This paper calls for a reassessment of the constructive contributions parties could make, specifically in terms of organising democratic politics. It argues that with a strong focus on organisational issues, better political representation of public interests could follow.[12]

After a brief introduction to the background of Afghan political parties, the paper focuses on the organisational challenges they face in the current context, addressing: legal provisions; political culture and security issues; and parties' current connections to the legislature. All Afghan parties are affected by these issues but in different ways. References to the ways in which NDPs in particular are affected are made throughout the paper. Subsequently, it addresses NDPs specifically, analysing their motivations for forming, current activities and financial and technical resources.

NDPs, as they currently function, are not contributing effectively to long-term democratisation efforts, but the following key recommendations are given as a starting point to suggest how this contribution could improve[13]:

Parties

Electoral system: In the short-term, given the likelihood that the next election will use the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system[14], NDPs must organise strategically by, for example, choosing one candidate per geographical area within a constituency so as to make the most of the system. In the medium to long term, it is crucial to replace the SNTV system with some form of proportional representation or party list system to encourage party membership and development. To this end, NDPs must continue to lobby the GoA.

Detailed analysis of shortcomings: A constructive retrospective analysis of parties' shortfalls, conducted by parties themselves, could be instrumental in identifying key needs and areas for assistance. The international community can only provide assistance if specific technical needs are identified. These should be compiled by parties and produced in an accessible written format.

NDP activities: In spite of a lack of funding and security restrictions, NDPs must increase public activities if they are to be seen (by the Afghan public and international community) as a credible political force. This is easier said than done but could involve active encouragement of voter registration or raising awareness more generally about the importance of elections. With at least a year before the parliamentary elections are due to take place, there is still enough time to make a considerable impact.

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[11] Russell J. Dalton, "Political Parties and Political Representation: Party Supporters and Party Elites in Nine Nations," *Comparative Political Studies* 18, no. 3 (1985): 269.

[12] Of course, merely focusing on technical or institutional factors will not be enough to ensure the progress of democratisation and, while it may provide impetus, a strong commitment from the GoA and parties themselves will be needed to take the process forward.

[13] Forthcoming research from AREU on this subject will build on these basic recommendations.

[14] Under the SNTV system for Afghanistan, voters cast ballots for individuals rather than political parties. This means that if collectively a party wins a majority of the vote, it does not necessarily win a majority of the seats—the number of seats won depends on whether individual candidates within the party have performed well. Today SNTV is used only in Jordan, Vanuatu, the Pitcairn Islands and (partially) in Taiwan. For more information see Andrew Reynolds and Andrew Wilder, *Free, Fair or Flawed: Challenges for Legitimate Elections in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004), 12-16.

Government of Afghanistan:

GoA recognition of parties: The GoA must publicly and actively recognise the potential contribution of all parties to the country's democratisation, primarily by changing the electoral system to one that requires some degree of party activity.

Parties Registration Commission: An independent body, such as a Parties Registration Commission, must be created to replace the role of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) in registering parties and monitoring their activities. To maintain independence, senior posts within the Commission should be selected by committee and not by presidential decree. The transparency of the process of selecting leaders should be emphasised through parliamentary ratification to avoid perceptions of compromised independence. Furthermore, the Commission should be allocated adequate budget and legal powers to implement punitive measures, should parties fail to comply with legal requirements. If the resources are not available to initiate this Commission, significant reforms to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) could be made in order that it could undertake the role of party registration.

Party financing: NDPs cannot function without funds. In future, state-funded incentives could be provided to parties based on membership numbers or percentages of votes gained, provided that the allocation of these incentives is carried out by an independent body such as a Parties Registration Commission (as suggested above). The GoA could also provide advertising opportunities for all parties in the form of televised or radio broadcast debates. This would contribute towards levelling the playing field by allowing smaller parties to access otherwise expensive advertising resources.

Improve parliamentary functions: Significant changes need to be made to the way that Parliament functions to provide more incentives to parties to operate as organisational mechanisms for democracy. This could be achieved by altering the Parliamentary Rules of Procedure. Specifically, the names of Members of Parliament (MPs) voting should be recorded in Parliament (if not electronically then perhaps by name-cards put into different boxes). Parties should be encouraged to vote as recognised blocs in plenary elections by, for example, lowering the number of members required to form parliamentary groups.

International community:

Recognition of parties: The international community should acknowledge that Afghan parties could contribute towards broader goals of sustainable elections and stability. To date, the short-term focus of international agencies on elections has been insufficient to encourage substantive, broad-based democratisation. Further technical support between elections, such as the kind already provided by some nongovernmental institutions—including training and capacity building for all parties—would promote their organisational role. This support would need to be complemented, however, by a commitment from the parties concerned to use it effectively. One example of active international community recognition of parties would be to invite them to conferences and discussions on social issues which, up to now, have been largely aimed at NGOs or civil society organisations (CSOs).

Donor coordination: International support to parties has been limited but well-coordinated. This level of donor coordination should be maintained and encouraged with the formation of a parties' support network or coordination group.

I. Background

The term "political party" (*hezb-i siasi*) has a number of connotations in Afghanistan.[15] It does not necessarily denote an organisation that is politically active in the way parties are in established democracies. While distinguishable, ideological currents of political activity exist, few parties hold individualised, identifiable platforms or have cohesive internal structures.[16] Many have connections to ex-mujahidin military factions or tanzims previously active in civil conflict.[17] As Thomas Ruttig notes, a more accurate term for these parties is "proto parties," as they lack the institutionalisation more commonly associated with parties in the conventional sense.[18]

Political parties have long been a source of contention and conflict in the country. From their inception in the early to mid-20th century until 2001, with a few minor exceptions, there has not been an era in which Afghan parties could compete freely as political institutions in opposition to a ruling regime.[19] This has shaped the ways in which parties have formed, and has resulted in a culture of political ambiguity in which information about parties and their membership is not widely publicised (see "Political culture and a lack of security"). Furthermore, allegiances between parties, groups and prominent individuals in Afghanistan have been characteristically fluid, shifting according to the convictions of leaders rather than determined by a single ideology.

Zahir Shah's modernisation policies in the 1940s-50s led to the creation of a number of parties. This was followed by a provision in the 1964 constitution legally recognising their right to form. The development of these parties was limited, however, by their own inability to engage the public in political activity, their lack of promotion of national interests and a tendency towards extremism.[20] These factors contributed to the King's refusal to sign the Parties Law and his later reversal of earlier liberalisation policies.[21] Under the following regime of Daud Khan, the Parcham branch of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was used as a political tool against the threat from the Islamist right. Parcham was later forced underground after Daud's shift in political stance rendered the group opponents of the government.

In 1978, a PDPA-orchestrated coup[22] (the so-called "Saur Revolution") overthrew Daud, following which power was equally divided, at least at first, between the Khalq and Parcham factions (although Khalq was essentially in control). The Khalqis, however, were just as intolerant of opposition as their predecessors and took extreme measures to enforce their own policies. They incited local resistance, which was later co-opted by Islamist parties, which in turn prompted the 1979 Soviet intervention, the de facto establishment of a one-party state, and the later installation of Parcham in power. Ironically, it was only after this time that the Islamists really rose to significance,

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[15] For a comprehensive analysis of the history of political parties in Afghanistan see Thomas Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center"; National Democractic Institute, "Political Party Assessment: Afghanistan" (2006) retrieved from www.nimd.org/documents/P/political_party_assessment_afghanistan_2006.pdf (accessed August 2008); and International Crisis Group (ICG), "Political Parties in Afghanistan" (2005), accessed at www.crisisgroup.org. Only key events are mentioned here.

[16] Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center" and Ruttig, pers. comm.

[17] The terms "ex- mujahidin faction," "tanzim" and "Islamist party" are used throughout this paper to denote larger parties or groups in Afghanistan that were established before the NDPs, and that are often associated with recent civil conflict. None of these terms are ideal, however, in that they imply a homogenous group of parties: included in these categorisations are diverse political groups that cannot easily be grouped together. Nevertheless, when they are used throughout the text they are intended to signify groups of parties that stand in contrast to the NDPs.

[18] Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center," 1.

[19] Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center," 1.

[20] With thanks to an anonymous reviewer for contributing to this point.

[21] ICG, "Political Parties in Afghanistan," 2.

[22] The question of which faction of the PDPA did in fact stage the coup was debated at the time, although it is now generally recognised that the Khalqis took the lead. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for clarifications here.

benefiting from substantial military and financial aid flows from the USA and Saudi Arabia through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Pakistan.[23]

Najibullah became President in 1986, opening the political environment formally with a new law on political parties. Essentially, however, the majority of parties choosing to take part in this "controlled democracy" were leftist and the elections in 1988 were fixed to favour PDPA candidates.[24] In retrospect, the new law was introduced too late: by the end of the decade the Soviets had left and the PDPA government had collapsed.

Up to this point, leftist parties had been politically active, often printing publications and establishing women's wings and youth movements, but they were not a unified or institutionalised political force. Islamic parties had a broadly consolidated ideology of opposition to the PDPA and later the Soviets, but they dispersed quickly with the absence of a common enemy in the early 1990s. It is clear that neither leftists nor Islamists were disposed to tolerate opposition and that violence served as a key political tool. Indeed, as one report states, during and after this period the major political groupings "functioned for all practical purposes as armed factions rather than parties."[25] Parties maintained this reputation throughout the civil war that followed, alienating a large proportion of the population through brutality and the frequent targeting of civilians. In the wake of this, the Taliban were welcomed in some areas with their commitment to restoring order and Islamic principles, but they would tolerate opposition no more than previous regimes. In the decade that comprised the civil war and the Taliban regime (1991-2001), there was a vacuum of political activity in which no party could function effectively. It is in this context that the so-called new political parties have, in the years following the 2001 Bonn Conference, formed, re-formed or registered.

New Democratic Parties (NDPs)[26]

NDPs comprise a current of political activity[27], which came to prominence in the wake of the Bonn conference. Not all of the parties categorised under this heading are new, but they generally began to function openly (and solicited international attention) after 2001.[28] Some have connections to the previously active PDPA factions, but they have recently made commitments to political pluralism and democratic principles. Common characteristics include: a stated commitment to encouraging democratisation; an anti-fundamentalist stance; a preference to justice over amnesty in the judging of war criminals; and a general desire to work with the international community.[29]

Nevertheless, NDPs have not yet been able to form a consolidated or influential political force. As this paper will explore, there are many factors hindering their activities—both external, contextual factors related to the political environment in Afghanistan and internal issues such as a lack of capacity and organisation. In spite of the concerted encouragement of several international agencies prior to the 2005 elections, not one of the NDPs was able to win a seat in Parliament.[30] This was probably the result of a combination of factors, but it nonetheless demonstrates the relative weakness of NDPs in comparison to their ex- mujahidin, Islamist counterparts. It also contributes to the way in which these parties have been considered marginal by international actors and thus not a priority for technical assistance. However, while NDPs did not meet international expectations in terms of their capacity to mobilise voters for the elections, many NDPs were expecting much

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[26]   For a list of parties interviewed, please see Appendix 1.

[27]   Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center."

[28]   Some, however, were active during the Taliban regime and made their activities known to the UN and other members of the international community at the time (Thomas Ruttig, pers. comm.).

[29]   It is not possible for this study to identify individual parties as NDPs or non-NDPs, given the political nature of this kind of statement. However, we refer to NDPs as parties that generally possess the common characteristics identified here.

[30]   However, some NDPs have won the support of MPs since their being elected.

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[23]   Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center," 10.

[24]   Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center" 13.

[25]   ICG, "Political Party-Assessment," 3

Table 1. List of NDF parties (current as of 29 January 2009)

Party name	Leader
Hezb-i Kar wa Tawsea-i Afghanistan	Omed
Hezb-i Azadi wa Democracy	Kohistani
Hezb-i Afghanistan-i Wahed	Rahimi
Hezb-i Milli Afghanistan	Aryan
Hezb-i Rafa-i Mardum Afghanistan	Gul Wasiq
Hezb-i Democrat-i Afghanistan	Ranjbar
Hezb-i Liberal-i Afghanistan	Ajmal Sohail
Hezb-i Azadi Khwahan Afghanistan	Naseri
Hezb-i Tafahum wa Democracy Afghanistan	Ahmad Shaheen
Majma-i Milli Falin Solhe Afghanistan	Ainuddin
Hezb-i Taraqi-i Watan	Baktash
Hezb-i Sadat-i Mardum-i Afghanistan	Peroz
Hezb-i Nuhzat-i Hakimyat-i Mardum Afghanistan	Sobkhani

List compiled by Anna Larson and Asif Karimi, AREU 2009. With thanks to members of the NDF Executive Committee for providing the information.

more support from the international community in order to promote a democratic agenda. It appears that there were unfulfilled expectations on both sides.

Another potential problem with the NDPs is that they are not particularly representative of the population as a whole, in terms of class at least. They are largely comprised of the educated elite and have limited connections to rural Afghanistan. To their credit, NDPs in general have a stated commitment to bridging ethnic divides and have not resorted to increasing support networks on the basis of ethnic representation. This does not mean, however, that their relationships with each other are not affected by ethnic concerns—NDPs that relate to previous PDPA factions, Khalq and Parcham, have a history of ethnic opposition because these divisions were emphasised by Soviet influence and operations. Nevertheless, the NDP representatives interviewed for this study reflected a mixture of different ethnicities and were keen to prioritise ideological, as opposed to ethnic, stances.

With no historical blueprint of solid, democratically organised institutions, NDPs have (re)developed and adopted many of the characteristics of previous political entities, albeit with different opportunities in a new environment. It is easy to see, for example, the remnants of PDPA approaches in the emphasis placed on party newspapers and women's committees in some NDPs. NDPs are still formed on a hierarchical and top-down model, and thus their development cannot be directly compared to that of European mass parties formed in the wake of industrial or agrarian revolutions. This does not necessarily render Afghan NDPs ineffective—rather, it demonstrates that their initial role in democratisation may differ to that of the early European parties, given the current political context of Afghanistan.

This study focused primarily on NDPs because they have expressed a strong interest in contributing to democratisation. One of the key reasons for this is that that their ability to function publicly (or indeed function at all) depends on the strengthening of a democratic culture in Afghanistan. Since the last elections, international actors have paid little attention to NDPs and it is the contention of this paper that more emphasis should be placed on the issue of how the playing field might be levelled (by NDPs, the GoA and international actors) in order that they can compete effectively as a credible political force. This focus on NDPs is not to suggest that ex-mujahiddin factions-turned-parties or *tanzims* have no role to play in democratisation. The way in which these older groups function and interact with NDPs will be the subject of further AREU research.

II. Organisational Challenges in the Current Context

The National Democratic Front (NDF)[31]

The NDF now exists as a coalition of 13 democratically oriented parties. This is the latest result of several attempts to form a consolidated group of these parties over the last six years. Previous attempts have been unsuccessful due to the large number of parties interested (up to 50 according to some sources) and the inherent differences among them. While parties inclined to join this front have had a generally unified stance on the need for peace, the upholding of democratic principles and an anti-fundamentalist approach, they have diverse stances on other issues, such as the relationship between Islam and the state, and state-level economic management. Furthermore, there are different kinds of NDPs within the current NDF—some with previous connections to the PDPA factions, some with Maoist ties, and some completely new parties without these associations. Tensions among these groups have caused some parties (such as Hezb-i Jumhori-i Khwahan and Hezb-i Hambastagi-i Milli Jawanan-i Afghanistan) to leave the Front. It should be emphasised here also that the NDF does not comprise all the NDPs, and that it is difficult to categorise some NDF parties as NDPs due to the strength of their connections to previous parties.

Essentially, a move to consolidate the parties in the NDF into a more cohesive group would be a positive step forward, but any attempt to encourage this must acknowledge the complexities in the relationships among member parties. Identifying clear groupings within the Front could potentially have a positive result, but might also serve to re-emphasise differences which the NDF has attempted to overcome.

The establishment of the Bonn Process after the fall of the Taliban provided an unprecedented opportunity for political parties. A new party registration system was established in the MOJ in 2003, after which a large number of different kinds of parties applied to register. At the time of writing (January 2009) approximately 85-100 parties are registered or in the process of being registered[32], but the registration rate is decreasing.[33] Furthermore, not all registered parties are thought to be active. This section assesses key factors affecting party formation and activity in the current context: legal provisions; "political culture" and lack of security; and connections to the legislature. These factors affect the functioning of all Afghan parties, but they also have particular effects on the NDPs.

Legal provisions

Political Parties Law/Registration

The current law on political parties was ratified by Presidential decree in October 2003.[34] It includes prescriptions, such as the number of members required for a party to form (700) and rules concerning who may or may not join a party.[35] The law states the rights of parties to include: "independent political activity" and "open and free expression of opinions," but also lists activities in which parties cannot legally participate. It is illegal for parties to pursue objectives that are opposed to the holy religion of Islam, for instance, and to have connections with military organisations.

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31   Of the parties interviewed, eight were members of the NDF, and another had been an NDF member previously. Information for this section was gathered from interviews with party leaders and international observers, along with documentation such as the Rules of Procedure for the National Democratic Front.

32   There are currently 84 officially registered parties listed in English on the MOJ website and 102 parties listed in Dari. However, both lists are currently in the process of being updated. Other sources (UNAMA, NDI interviews) state that between 90 and 110 parties existed in Afghanistan at the time of writing.

33   MOJ representative, interview.

34   MOJ, www.moj.gov.af

35   Members of the Judiciary, and members of the security forces, for example, may not join a party during their term of office. Political Parties Law, accessed at http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/_nonUN%20Docs/_Electoral%20Docs/Afghan-Docs/Political%20Party%20law%20ADOPTED_corr.pdf and Thomas Ruttig, pers comm.

Parties must register with the Department of Coordination[36] at the MOJ, which is problematic given the potential interference of the Government in party affairs. Having a direct line ministry responsible for the registration of parties could lead to the hindering of some parties' registration due to a perceived clash of interests with government priorities. Indeed, one respondent (representative of a number interviewed) reported that this had affected the registration process for their own parties, "For two years [the Government] did not let us register our party, then finally they let us. A new Minister of Justice came and we explained our party to him and he was happy with us."[37]

Whether parties are allowed to register should not be dependent on the personal judgments of individual ministers. A parties registration board (comprised of MOJ, Ministry of Defence (MOD), United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS)) exists to monitor registration and compare parties with their record for disarmament and connections to illegal armed groups. However, there is no mechanism in place to protect against the Government preventing parties forming for ideological reasons.

As it stands, the party registration process involves the completion of an application form, declaration of the financial assets, provision of the ID cards (*tazkera*) and membership forms of 700 members and statement of party platforms and objectives. The MOJ processes the application and has the authority to refuse authorisation if it considers the party activities to be in conflict with the law.

The law ostensibly encourages the existence of parties. Indeed, according to the MOJ,

> *Political parties play a vital role in the politics of any nation. Societies lacking powerful political parties do not possess political knowledge and motivation, and similarly, fail to provide for the welfare of the people, development and progress to a nation*[38].

This is a significant statement given the recent history of political activity in the country and indicates a formal commitment on the part of the Government to facilitate political party development. This commitment was recognised by the majority of respondents in interviews for this study who considered the existence of a Parties Law a positive step forward. Most, however, called for the further implementation and oversight of the law:

> *We have a very good law on political parties. We are happy with it, but I see no practice of this law. Most of the parties are acting against the law. I suggest that the law on the political parties should be enforced by the government.*[39]

> *We already have the political party law, which is a very good law for us, but unfortunately I don't see any political party implementing this law.*[40]

This perceived lack of implementation and monitoring is emphasised by the way in which the role of the MOJ does not extend beyond the registration process: the ministry has little connection with parties or knowledge of their activities after they receive authorisation to function.[41] Even during the registration process, the MOJ is considered to be weak in the extent of its power to implement party law, as shown by the following statement from an independent organisation conducting a study on party financing:

> *The law says that parties are not allowed to get resources from outside the country. We went to the party registration office in MOJ and told them that they should register the party assets, but they said that [some] parties were too powerful, that they could not ask them this.*[42]

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[36] The complete title of the department is The Department of Coordination, Assessment and Registration of Social Organisations and Political Parties, which was established in 2002. MOJ, www.moj.gov.af

[37] Interview, party leader (of a party which used to belong to the NDF but left).

[38] MOJ, www.moj.gov.af

[39] Political party leader (non-NDF party), interview.

[40] Political party deputy leader (NDF party), interview.

[41] MOJ and independent organisation for elections monitoring, interviews.

[42] Independent organisation for elections monitoring, interviews.

NDPs in particular expressed the view that the older, ex-mujahidin parties or *tanzims* were treated with impunity and were able to operate above the law. It is evident that, while the GoA is in principle supportive of parties, it has not taken proactive steps to ensure that the party law is implemented impartially across the board.

At the time of writing, various revisions to the party law were being discussed in Parliament.[43] One of the potential changes to the law is in the number of members required to form a party. The general rationale would be to make party registration more difficult, to reduce the high number of parties that currently exist. Most party representatives interviewed saw this as a welcome change that would force a reduction in party numbers and perhaps induce more coalitions to form. One respondent, however, considered the measure inadequate:

> *There are some people who collect the tazkera of the people, saying that they will receive some help from NGOs, or find some job opportunity for them, but actually they brought these* tazkera *to the MOJ to show them that they have this number of followers.*[44]

It seems reasonable that increasing the number of required members would lead to a reduction in the number of parties. Collecting ID cards illegitimately, however, is relatively easy and so expanding membership requirements alone may not prove an effective mechanism to reduce the numbers of parties (or improve their quality once they register). The increase of required tazkera must be accompanied by a means to validate methods of gathering them. Furthermore, if this mechanism is implemented, it will not affect all parties in the same way: larger, ex-mujahidin groups will presumably be able to collect the increased number of ID cards more quickly than their new democratic counterparts.

Electoral system
The electoral law prescribes SNTV for Afghan elections. SNTV is seldom used in other countries, but was chosen for the first elections because it is relatively simple to implement in a post-conflict setting and does not require political parties, which at the time were considered by the GoA and international stakeholders to be highly unpopular with the general public.[45] SNTV dictates multi-member constituencies (provinces, in the case of Afghanistan) in which an unlimited number of candidates may stand for election.[46] Party affiliation is not required. Indeed, in the 2004 presidential and 2005 parliamentary elections, candidates were not allowed to mention party affiliation on the ballot paper, even if they wanted to.[47] This will probably change in the 2009 and 2010 elections, but the system of SNTV is likely to remain. The addition of a party list to SNTV was discussed in Parliament in 2008, after it was previously proposed by a number of parties (NDPs and others), but it was rejected in favour of keeping the system in its original form.[48]

At first glance, SNTV limits the extent to which parties can be successful in the elections, because there is no formal incentive for candidates to join parties when they can stand and win seats independently.[49] However, as became clear after the 2005 electoral success of many older, ex-mujahidin or Islamist parties (such as Jamiat, Junbesh, Hezb-i Islami, Wahdat), it is possible

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[45] This is still widely believed. The issue will be explored further in a forthcoming AREU paper on party representation.

[46] For further details on SNTV and its usage in Afghanistan, see Andrew Reynolds, "Constitutional Engineering and Democratic Stability" in *State and Security in Afghanistan Building*, ed. Wolfgang Danspeckgruber and Robert P. Finn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[47] International commentators, interviews.

[48] Interestingly, in 2008, there was a considerable amount of support in Parliament for the parallel system of SNTV and a party list, but pressure from the Executive led to the bill being dismissed. For more information on the forthcoming elections, see Grant Kippen, *Elections in 2009 and 2010: Technical and Contextual Challenges to Building Democracy in Afghanistan* (Kabul: AREU, 2008).

[49] To this end, many commentators at the time of the first elections strongly critiqued the GoA's choice of SNTV, suggesting that some form of proportional representation or at least party list system would be more beneficial. These systems also have their own problems and would have been difficult to implement in 2004 to 2005 in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, they would have encouraged the development of parties as political institutions.

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[43] This is part of a process in Parliament of reassessing all laws set down in the Constitution. Amendments to the party law were thus not put forward by any specific individual or group.

[44] Political party leader (non-NDF party), interview.

for parties to out-manoeuvre the constraints of the system. The methods with which these parties did this in 2005 are not entirely clear and could have involved either or both coercion and vote buying. However, a legitimate way in which NDPs could play the system to their advantage would be to strategically select their candidates by geographical area. As one international respondent explained:

Under SNTV there is a need for parties to divide up a province and decide collectively who will run in each area. But this requires organisation and communication. If parties did this, however, SNTV could be used to build stronger parties.[50]

It is unsurprising that in 2005, the armed mujahidin factions-turned-registered parties with greater access to resources were able to evade the constraints of SNTV in this way, and that the newer democratic parties were not. In spite of the fact that SNTV will be used, the forthcoming elections could provide an opportunity for the NDPs, *if* they were able to generate enough voter support and draw on it strategically.

Having said this, there is still an overwhelming perception among these parties that SNTV will hinder if not prevent their successful participation in the next elections:

We are against the SNTV system of voting, it is difficult and it is expensive and it is difficult to gain representation.[51]

We don't support this system [of SNTV] because there is no role for the political parties in this system. This system is complicated, expensive and with it we could not reach all the population in the country.[52]

There appears to be a resignation among smaller, newer parties that there is little they can do to compete effectively in the elections, due to a lack of resources and influence. While this may be a valid shortcoming, with greater organisational capacity and combined forces, these parties could run successful campaigns (and achieve at least some parliamentary representation). Furthermore, while it is easy to blame the

electoral system for the difficulties these smaller parties face, some of the key issues hindering their activity are not merely institutional concerns, as one respondent explained:

You can get too caught up in the system. Everyone complains about the system, we focus a lot of attention on it. Yes, the system is bad, SNTV is not a helpful system, but really we need to understand that Afghanistan's problems will not be solved and a stable democracy created by merely tweaking institutions.[53]

It will be necessary for NDPs to move beyond a critique of SNTV and actively organise to take advantage of it in preparation for the forthcoming elections.

"Political culture" and lack of security

Political activity within Afghan civil society has a considerable history (Section 2) and is familiar to the population (particularly that of urban areas).[54] Although there is an absence of a "politics of the masses," there are CSOs, lobbyists, pressure groups and, of course, parties in existence which have actively campaigned for certain interests to be represented. This has physically manifested itself in the form of demonstrations outside Parliament and UN buildings by teachers, tradesmen, members of certain ethnic groups and political parties.

Having said this, among parties in particular there is a certain tendency towards a culture of political ambiguity, in which information about the party—particularly if it is a new or small party without a well-known leader—is not widely disseminated. This was clearly found to be the case in interviews for this study. Respondents were often unwilling to talk about the number of party members and were reluctant to give the names of the MPs representing their party in Parliament:

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[50] International commentator, interview.

[51] Political party member (non-NDF party), interview.

[52] Party deputy leader (NDF party), interview.

[53] International respondent, interview.

[54] Political parties have in the past mobilised voter networks in rural areas also, but there is a significant lack of information concerning how parties function in these areas at present (Thomas Ruttig, pers. comm.) This will be explored to some extent in a forthcoming AREU briefing paper in this series.

Example 1:

Researcher*: Could you tell us how many members you have in your party?*

Respondent: *In the Western countries, there are two things you cannot ask people – their age, and their salary. This is also a number like that.*[55]

Example 2:

Researcher: *Do you have MPs representing your party?*

Respondent: *Yes, we have four.*

Researcher: *Can you tell us their names?*

Respondent: *We will tell you the female names but not the male names, because the male ones have very important positions in Parliament.*[56]

Example 3:

Researcher: *Would you mind telling us who the MPs are that you have representing your party?*

Respondent: *I am sorry but it is better not to give their names for security reasons.*[57]

This attitude towards naming MPs as representatives was not only found from the parties' perspective—MPs were also not forthcoming in declaring their party allegiances.[58] One party leader perceived this a considerable hindrance, voicing concerns about his party's representation in the next elections:

We have sympathisers in Parliament but after the next elections we need strong members who will say openly that they are part of [our] party…We see that in the parliament,

we have only independent people, and they don't say they represent parties even if they do.[59]

This culture of political ambiguity does not sit comfortably with notions of how parties should function in established democracies, where one of the key reasons for the existence of parties is to achieve publicly acknowledged parliamentary representation. This does not seem to be the case in Afghanistan ("Connections to the legislature").

There could be many potential reasons why parties and MPs talk in these ambiguous terms about their allegiances in Parliament, one of which could be linked to patron-client networks. Parties in Afghanistan have been (and continue to be in many cases) vehicles of patronage.[60] It could be that MPs informally agree to represent certain parties, but may bargain with these parties for some kind of return. They could also keep a number of parties on hand to find the best offer or to benefit from more than one party simultaneously. In this way, their allegiance to a party could shift at any time. This seems to have been reflected in general trends of political support, as one respondent described:

There are two kinds of parties - ones which are not in power, and ones which are. Many people became members of Daud's party when he was in power but when he lost power, they left… People join only to gain something.[61]

This could in part explain the reluctance with which MPs and parties alike disclose their political allegiances. These allegiances, especially for the NDPs[62], are often not formalised, and it is not possible to make absolute statements confirming them.[63] One reason that NDPs do not disclose

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[55] Party leader (NDF party), interview. This comment was made in jest to some extent and was a self-conscious allusion to party weaknesses. Indeed, throughout the interviews conducted it became clear that parties are very much aware of their own shortcomings. This statement was also meant to convey that parties are not comfortable with giving out this kind of information.

[56] Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[57] Party deputy leader (NDF party), interview.

[58] This was found also in a previous study for AREU on gender interests in Parliament see Anna Wordsworth, *A Matter of Interests: Gender and The Politics of Presence in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga* (Kabul: AREU, 2007).

[59] Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[60] International commentator, interview.

[61] Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[62] In the few interviews conducted with older, ex-mujahiddin parties, respondents were generally more comfortable disclosing the names of their MPs. This may be due to the fact that those who support these parties are generally well known already.

[63] It is not intended to suggest here that all MPs only join parties for potential material gain—some have demonstrated commitments to the particular cause of parties. Given that many causes or platforms are not articulated in a distinguishable manner, however, it is likely that some form

party membership numbers could simply be that they do not know how many members they have.

Perhaps the most notable contributing factor to this culture of political ambiguity, however, is the lack of security. Given that there is little history of political pluralism and tolerance of opposition—indeed, that any form of opposition has been the subject of violent repression under most regimes in the past century—it is not surprising that Afghan parties now are cautious about advertising their activities and revealing the identity of those who support them. In Kabul, many parties have signs on their office gates, but in some provinces take a distinctly different approach:

> *We have offices in [many different provinces]. We also have underground offices in Zabul, Uruzgan, Kandahar, Khost and Kunar, but due to the security situation they are underground.*[64]

> *The first challenge is the security situation because there are restrictions on political activities due to this. Especially in the southern part of the country, in the districts, the political activists don't have freedom of activity.*[65]

> *We are seriously suffering from the present situation of instability in country, and this is useless for us because we have to censor what we say, censor ourselves.*[66]

Deteriorating security is likely to affect different kinds of parties differently. Many of the ex-mujahiddin *tanzims* may have the strength and influence enough to continue their activities in spite of an increasingly hostile environment. The very existence of the NDPs, by contrast, depends on the development of a democratic culture in which diverse political stances may be put forward safely.[67] At present, many NDPs are being forced to censor their platforms in order

to minimise security risks. One party interviewed had two platforms: one for its members, and one (decidedly less controversial) for media consumption.[68] Furthermore, it appears that while NDPs were quite outspoken in their demands for human rights, justice and freedom of speech at the start of the Bonn process, they have become increasingly quiet on these issues for fear of inciting opposition.[69] Evidently, the deteriorating security situation and corresponding culture of political ambiguity is significantly affecting the ways in which parties function. In established democracies, parties are inherently public organisations, which readily disseminate information about their activities. In Afghanistan, they are ambiguous, fluid institutions about which very little is publicly known.[70] This is especially the case with the NDPs.

Connections to the legislature

The way in which parties function in Afghanistan at present can be related to their connection (or lack thereof) to the legislature. While a number of parties have elected representatives in the *Wolesi Jirga*, they are often unwilling to disclose their names (Section 3.2) and do not have strong connections to them. Again, this is particularly the case with NDPs. Meetings between MPs and these parties are rarely formalised or regular, as the leader of one party described:

> *We don't have regular meetings with [our MPs] but sometimes we see them at functions like weddings and burial ceremonies, etc. If we want to discuss something particular then we call them...and we can make an appointment with them.*[71]

This statement (echoed by many party leaders interviewed) indicates, first, that NDPs do not have the resources to organise regular meetings of their

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of material incentive could be put forward to persuade MPs to join parties.

[64]   Party member (party which used to belong to the NDF but left), interview.

[65]   Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[66]   Party leader (party which used to belong to the NDF but left), interview.

[67]   With thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

[68]   Party leader (non-NDF party) and international commentator, interviews.

[69]   International commentator, interview.

[70]   For further reading on party institutionalisation, see Scott Mainwaring and Mariano Torcal, "Party System Institutionalization and Party System Theory: After the Third Wave of Democratization" (paper prepared for delivery at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1-4, 2005), *American Political Science Association* (2005).

[71]   Party leader (non-NDF party), interview.

own and so make use of informal opportunities; and second, that the connections between parties and Parliament are not fixed or formalised in the way that they are in established democracies.[72] This is partly due to the way in which Parliament itself functions—in both the *Wolesi* and *Meshrano Jirgas*, parties are represented, but not officially or formally. The leaders (and members) of the larger ex-mujahiddin *tanzims* tend to have a closer connection with their MPs than the NDPs, but this often involves informing MPs of party decisions on parliamentary votes made in the private houses of party leaders.[73] This kind of strategic, if informal, connection between parties and MPs constitutes one of the ways in which these larger parties have become highly influential in legislative decision-making.

In an attempt to formally organise MPs into identifiable voting blocs in both the *Wolesi* and *Meshrano Jirgas*, a parliamentary groups system was established. Individual MPs were invited to form issues-based groups, which were intended to lead eventually to the formation of parties. Various regulations were set down in the parliamentary rules of procedure detailing how these groups could be formed. These specifically prohibited groups based on region, ethnicity, gender or language and established a minimum number of members (23).[74] However, to date these groups have been for the most part superficial or dysfunctional, as one representative of the *Meshrano Jirga* (MJ) secretariat explained:

> In order to organise the Meshrano Jirga *there was a proposal from the Secretariat to make parliamentary groups. We formed eight parliamentary groups but unfortunately from the time of their establishment they have not been active...Political ideas are represented*

[in the Meshrano Jirga*] but not very clearly on behalf of parties - rather as the ideas of private members.*

There are essentially two main parliamentary groups in the *Meshrano Jirga* at present, but they are not directly related to parties. In the *Wolesi Jirga,* there are three to five groups, although their establishment has been a fluid and informal process that has not resulted in the organisation of votes.[75] There is little emphasis placed on ideology, with issues of leadership taking precedence.[76] Indeed, despite attempts to introduce this organising mechanism, both houses of Parliament function as they did previously, with most representatives voting, at least on the surface, as independents.[77] This creates a number of problems, such as significantly lengthening legislative procedures due to the need to accommodate the individual speeches of many independent MPs instead of those only of a party or group leaders. One *Meshrano Jirga* representative interviewed outlined this and other key issues created by the lack of official parties in Parliament:

> *Parties...could bring good management to the Parliament. Now, in both of the assemblies the people have their own individual ideas and the way they take sides is not based on national interests or political platforms...For instance now in the parliament, if 50 people are talking they have 50 different ideas. And also the independent people in Parliament can be easily persuaded with the expectation to receive something from the government or the opposition. But if they are party members, they will just express the party's ideas and so could not be easily persuaded to expect something.*[78]

This respondent goes so far as to imply that, with the introduction of official parties in Parliament, corruption and vote-buying (MPs "expecting" favours in return for their votes) would decrease. While it is not possible to say whether this would actually be the case, if parties were introduced

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[72]   This being said, other connections between the public and Parliament do exist, such as the lobbying of individual MPs by certain groups within their constituencies. This sort of patron-client system is beyond the scope of this paper but for more information see Keith Legg and Rene Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Development: a Preliminary Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 4, no. 2 (1972): 149-178.

[73]   International commentator, interview.

[74]   International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's New Legislature: Making Democracy Work," Asia Report No. 116, . www.crisisgroup.org, 2006, (accessed 11 December 2006). Anna Wordsworth, *A Matter of Interests* (Kabul/Brussels: 2007), 19.

[75]   Wordsworth, "*A Matter of Interests,*" 17, 23, 31.

[76]   Wordsworth, "*A Matter of Interests.*"

[77]   This is possibly due to the groups' inorganic, artificial structures as specified by the regulations in the rules of procedure. ICG, Asia Report No. 116.

[78]   *Meshrano Jirga* representative, interview.

officially, MPs and their actions could be formally accountable to them and thus, in theory, less at liberty to accept personal offers or favours. One way to encourage the official introduction of parties to Parliament would be to reduce the minimum number of parliamentary group members required, and rethink some of the restrictions to their forming. This would allow existing parties with smaller numbers of representative MPs to form parliamentary groups.[79]

The voting system in Parliament is also currently hindering the ability of parties to help organise democratic politics. At present, votes are held in the *Wolesi Jirga* and *Meshrano Jirga* on certain issues, and MPs raise hands or coloured cards to indicate their vote choices.[80] The numbers of votes are recorded, but the names of MPs voting for either option are not noted. UN agencies, the US embassy and some parliamentary leaders have proposed an electronic voting system, but this has been widely debated and delayed for a number of reasons. First, the system would be costly to implement (approximately US$1 million) and it is not a key governmental priority.[81] The current parliamentary building is said to be temporary and thus the expense of fitting an electronic system would not be justified. Second, and perhaps more important, a number of MPs interviewed, such as the one cited below, indicated that the recording of who votes in what way might be a sensitive issue and that, particularly when voting for or against specific individuals in office, such a system would be politically unwise:

For some things it would be good to record names, because this record would remain in history, but for other issues like deciding on ministers, we prefer not to record names because the minister would then know who voted for him and who didn't.[82]

MPs voting against certain influential individuals might lose favour with them. Furthermore, there is a general aversion among MPs to decision-making on a majority rules basis, in preference of consensus and compromise. One international commentator recalled observing a vote count in the *Wolesi Jirga* where, in spite of a marked difference in the number of green and red cards held up, the issue was declared undecided and sent back to a drafting committee.[83] Finally, in the current context of decreasing security, a public vote against such a figure could be considered highly dangerous.

Nevertheless, it is evident that without a mechanism to record how individual MPs vote, there is little to hold them accountable to the public they represent. Furthermore, there is little incentive for parties to formalise their connection with Parliament, if there is no means for them to prove their commitment to constituents through their MPs' recorded vote patterns. It appears that there is a self-perpetuating problem here—while the functioning of parliament is highly limited by its lack of political parties, the ways in which it does operate provides no incentive for parties to consolidate their connections to it, or to form in the first place. In order for NDPs to be able to contribute in any way to the organisation of democratisation, significant changes need to be made to the ways in which legislative decision-making takes place.

> *...while the functioning of parliament is highly limited by its lack of political parties, the ways in which it does operate provide no incentive for parties to consolidate their connections to it, or to form in the first place.*

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[79]   This has been suggested on a number of previous occasions (see ICG, Asia Report No. 116) but to date, has not been taken on board.

[80]   In the case of voting on sensitive issues, such as votes of confidence or no confidence in ministers, voting is conducted by secret ballot.

[81]   International and national commentators, interviews.

[82]   *Meshrano Jirga* representative, interview

[83]   International commentator, interview.

III. NDPs: Motivations, Activities and Resources

Having discussed some of the organisational challenges facing parties in general in the current context, it is now essential to look at why NDPs have formed and what they are doing. This section assesses NDPs' motivations for forming, their current activities, and the resources they have available to support these activities. These factors all significantly affect NDPs' potential contribution to the organisation of democratic politics.

Motivations for (re-)forming parties

Party leaders and members interviewed gave a number of reasons for parties forming or re-forming after the fall of the Taliban. Two key reasons, discussed below, are: new opportunities (and space for opportunism) in a new political era; and disputes with the leadership of parties to which they belonged previously.[84]

When asked why they formed their parties, party leaders' most common response was the new opportunity for political activity following the collapse of the Taliban regime and the start of the Bonn process. Respondents explained how this opportunity affected the decision to form their parties:

After the Bonn Conference there was an interim administration and they prepared the situation for the elections. They announced democracy with the support of the international community. Seeing that situation, we also felt that making a party would be a good way to raise the awarenes of the people of Afghanistan.[85]

This party was established in 1378 [1999] and at that time the name of the party was [X]. In the beginning 500 people decided to establish this party…In 1381 [2002], after the collapse of the Taliban regime, we registered this party under [a new name].[86]

During the Taliban times, in 1373 [1994] we had a shura*…This* shura *was active in that time and leaders of tribes, and thinkers or scholars were with us…After the new constitution came, in which political parties were given permission to exist, the founding members of the* shura *decided to register as a party.*[87]

As these quotations indicate, the post-Taliban opportunity for forming parties was taken by newly established groups, parties that had previously existed under different names and also civil society organisations that took the chance to upgrade. Indeed, it may have been politically expedient to use the opportunity to register as a party as soon as possible before consolidating a platform, given that there was a degree of uncertainty about how long this opportunity would last. For a number of democratically oriented parties which had been in operation during the Taliban era, the beginning of the Bonn process provided the freedom to conduct activities openly and to register formally.

Having said this, it is widely perceived by those interviewed—including commentators, members of the public and parties when discussing other parties—that many parties formed purely for opportunist reasons, as the following statements suggest:

I think most political parties were created for fundraising, just like the NGOs. Even in the right-wing and left-wing parties, both of these kinds of parties were created for fundraising.[88]

Many of these political parties have not been established for the kind of political activity

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[84] Other reasons given included a lack of satisfaction with existing parties, and the need to collect intellectuals who had fled the country into one reunited new party. One respondent talked about forming her party because of the needs of a particular interest group (women) and two specified the reason for forming as the desire to promote particular ideological agendas (liberalism and democratic politics in general), but these responses were not representative. However, while most respondents did not mention ideological issues as motives for founding their parties, they were nonetheless vocal about such matters during interviews.

[85] Party leader (party wanting to join NDF), interview.

[86] Party member (NDF party), interview.

[87] Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[88] Party leader (NDF party), interview.

that will benefit this country. Setting up parties has become a business here. Some people just set up parties to make money.[89]

Just as a culture of "suitcase NGOs," set up primarily to acquire access to foreign funds is thought to have emerged with the influx of international assistance; it is commonly perceived that the same has occurred with new political parties.[90]

The access to funds, however, is only one of the potential advantages to those hoping to secure personal gain through party establishment. Another key consideration is the formation of parties to create or further the political influence of an individual or group of individuals. This influence, once secured, could lead to significant advantages for these individuals in establishing patron-client networks. One observer analysed the reasons regarding the formation of a particular new party forming, in these terms:

They started the party two years ago, it was basically some professors who started thinking that in the next elections, the Government would need more support to win, and at the time, the United Front posed a threat. The academic component of the party has been assertive, and they are using the party as a vehicle to gain government positions. They themselves do not have connections to warlords and so they have no other power base through which to acquire these positions. The party is a self-promotion tool.[91]

For this party, the Government's success in the elections would mean potential access to senior positions in the Administration. Of course, to take advantage of patronage gains in this way, the required electoral outcome must be achieved. To this end, broad-based public support in elections is needed, which is not easily (or cheaply) acquired. According to one international commentator, this engenders "political profithood," whereby "anyone wanting to be involved in politics is looking for a formula to mobilise support on a

large scale."[92] For many of the newer and less influential parties, however, such a formula does not exist.

A second motivation given for forming new parties by respondents was the splintering of larger or older parties as a result of leadership disputes. This has been a feature of party history in Afghanistan.[93] One respondent explained how his party had been formed on the basis of a split in leadership, "This party was established recently— In June 1386 [2007] it was registered in the MOJ. The majority of the members of this party separated from [a prominent party leader], who is the leader of the [X] party."[94] Parties formed in this way face difficulties in establishing autonomy and appearing distinguishable to the public from their original groups, a problem already commonly encountered by Afghan parties. To some extent this will depend on the reason why the parties split in the first place, but many factions in the country have remained widely associated with the political leanings of the original party and are only distinguished by the name of the new leader.[95] While this may not pose a problem to the faction in question, it emphasises the top-down nature of party organisation and encourages a focus on personalities in leadership as opposed to longer-term platforms or collective interests.

The two key reasons—new political opportunities and leadership disputes—given by those interviewed as motivations for forming parties shed some light on the question of why parties formed post-2001. A factor to consider finally, however, is the distinct absence in the data of the desire to form a party in order to gain influence in Parliament (as distinguished from political influence more generally). Indeed, this does not appear to be a founding purpose or end goal of parties, as one international commentator explained:

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[89]   Civil servant, interview.

[90]   This is ironic in one sense due to the fact that many parties are struggling to exist as a result of a lack of funding (Section 4.3).

[91]   International commentator, interview.

[92]   International commentator, interview.

[93]   Ruttig, "Islamists, Leftists and a Void in the Center."

[94]   Party member (non-NDF party), interview. In this instance it was the deputy of the existing party who decided to split from the leader and form his own party.

[95]   For example, the Wahdat party led by Khalili was at one point the principal party associated with Hazara interests, but it has since split into a number of smaller groups still associated with these interests but widely identified according to leaders' names. Examples include factions led by Mohaqqeq and Akbari.

Someone could be elected for [a] province purely because his father was classmates with [the most influential party leader in the region] and could get in with the minimum amount of votes, but this wouldn't make him a top member of [the] party. Indeed, he would be totally reliant on the party for his position and would be considerably constrained in terms of what he could/could not vote for in parliament.[96]

While seats in Parliament were generally considered valuable by the party members interviewed, they were not mentioned as a reason for forming a party or as a key objective of party activities. It is evident that gaining seats in Parliament is not necessarily perceived as the best way to gain political influence. This might be the case for a number of reasons, namely, that the current parliament is a new institution in Afghanistan and, more importantly, one which is considered inherently flawed. Changing the way in which Parliament functions to accommodate parties more effectively will not prove the magic bullet to establishing party politics, but it may lead parties to consider legislative seats more desirable as an end goal, and thus an incentive to mobilise more effectively (Section 3.3).

Party activities

The kinds of party activities mentioned by NDP respondents in interviews varied but were not expansive. Respondents were keen to criticise the Government but were not forthcoming with ideas for how these criticisms might be channelled into effective political action. This is reflected in international criticisms of the NDPs, which commonly point to the distinctly in-active tendencies of a number of these parties. One specific criticism—identified by international commentators and parties themselves—was that party activities generally took place only prior to elections and that, in the interim period, parties were mostly idle. One respondent made this observation using an illustrative metaphor:

Parties are working like a bottle of 7-Up—they are excited during the elections when they get shaken up and the lid is opened—but they think their role is only during this time, and not in-between elections. The rest of the time they are quiet.[97]

This inactivity between elections was described by a number of sources, particularly by those who had attempted to encourage party activity after the last elections.[98] It also reflects the decline in international interest for working with parties both directly and through the Independent Elections Commission (IEC) during the interim period.[99] There is a clear need for recognition from both the parties themselves and the international community that interim activities are valuable to the development of a sustainable democratic culture. Current NDP activities taking place include the production of publications such as newspapers and pamphlets, although, due to a lack of funds, respondents claimed they could not publish these as often as they would like. A few parties talked about the issuing of membership cards, but very little was said about what the role of a rank-and-file member of a party actually entailed. One reason for this could be security: parties are reluctant to ask members to take an active role in party life, or members are hesitant to do so due to the risks they might incur as a result. Another related issue is that party platforms within the group of NDPs are vaguely formulated and very similar to each other. Without clear distinctions between party manifestos—at least within the democratic current—it is presumably difficult for party members to become actively involved in promoting them.[100]

Finally, it is possible to compare the current activities of NDPs and those of some of the older, ex-mujahiddin *tanzims*. It was noted by international commentators interviewed that some of these older parties in Afghanistan, such as Hezb-i Islami, have been recently making concerted efforts to actively mobilise voter networks and organise strategically. They have introduced party conferences, a democratic means of selecting representatives and planning for the tactical placement of candidates.[101] Of course, given that the larger parties are more likely to be able to provide protection for their

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[96]   International commentator, interview.

[97]   National commentator, interview.

[98]   National and international commentators, interviews.

[99]   International commentators, interviews.

[100]   This is something that will be explored further in forthcoming AREU papers in this series.

[101]   International commentators, interviews.

members, they might also be able to ask more of them in terms of commitment to undertaking party activities.[102]

Financial and technical resources

Funding is essential to party activities, and yet in Afghanistan (as in other developing countries) acquiring it presents a considerable challenge.[103] Gathering funds from internal sources is problematic and collecting financial assistance from external sources is illegal. Technical support from the international development community is not always forthcoming. As such, Afghan NDPs face a significant problem.

Financial resources

In all of the interviews conducted, a lack of funding was considered the principal reason for NDPs' current inactivity and limited contribution to democratisation. NDP representatives also described difficulties in collecting funds from internal sources:

During the first two years our party progress was very good. We had regular meetings, and the absorption of members to the party was also very good. But unfortunately in recent years due to financial issues our activities became slower.[104]

In the last year the trend in the number of new members declined because of financial problems. Our party's only resources are the membership fees of some members and the donations of those members who have good salaries. For instance the leader of the party who has a good salary donated about US$1,000 to the party.[105]

Parties encounter extreme difficulty in trying to fund activities from the collection of membership fees, when only a very small percentage of the population can afford to pay them. A lack of a financially solvent middle class, with the time and disposable income to commit to party activities, is a key problem. Furthermore, given widespread expectations of patronage and service provision from members, parties are faced with the task of trying to acquire funds and of convincing potential members that their contribution to the financial (and other) resources of the party is reasonable. One respondent reported having to disband his party because his members were so outraged at the prospect of having to give money to further its activities.[106] On the one hand, it could be argued that now is not the right time, economically speaking, to insist on the introduction of membership fees to Afghan parties. On the other hand, the handing out of patronage payments or favours is a costly exercise and one that is not sustainable for the NDPs.

The option of legalising payments to parties from overseas sources is also undesirable. It is perceived that the practice of receiving funds from "outside" (foreign countries) is widespread among the ex-mujahiddin *tanzims*, but NDPs interviewed were unanimous in their condemnation of this as a threat to the autonomy of party activities.[107] Indeed, there is suspicion among respondents that neighbouring countries are conspiring to disrupt stability and development in Afghanistan through political interference, as these quotations demonstrate:

I can say that people who have influence in the political affairs of Afghanistan, they intentionally want this to be the situation, with many parties and disorganised, for their own interests...These external forces want the situation to be like this.[108] *There is just a Pashtun proverb, which says 'Har Khan khpel rabbabi lari,' which means that 'every Lord has his own rubab*[109] *player to make him happy.' There are some foreign people who have parties here,*

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[102]   Again, this is a subject outlined for further study in AREU's forthcoming papers in this series.

[103]   Vicky Randall and Lars Svåsand, "Party Institutionalisation and the New Democracies" (Paper for the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops, Mannheim: March 1999), 14, retrieved from http://www.essex.ac.uk/ECPR/events/jointsessions/paperarchive/mannheim/w3/randall.pdf (last accessed 6 August 2006).

[104]   Party leader (non-NDF party), interview.

[105]   Party leader (non-NDF party), interview.

[106]   (Ex-)party leader (wanted to be in the NDF), interview.

[107]   For some reason, the gathering of membership fees from party members abroad (such as in Europe or North America) is not considered equal to the acquiring of "outside" support and is perceived as a legitimate source of funding. Indeed, it is not specified in the Parties Law whether this kind of foreign support is, in fact, legal. As such, it is commonly practiced by parties fortunate enough to have members overseas.

[108]   Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[109]   A *rubab* is a traditional Afghan musical instrument.

and the parties work for them to make them happy…For example the Jihadi parties, which were established in Iran and Pakistan, are still receiving support from these countries.[110]

In other contexts, the state has made provisions to support parties and this would not be entirely implausible in Afghanistan.[111] Various financial incentives could be given, such as annual payments given to parties in bands according to their membership numbers (one baseline amount for under 1,000 members, a higher figure for 1,000-3,000 members), which would in turn encourage parties of a similar leaning to merge, if only for pragmatic reasons.[112] Another option could be a financial rewards system for the percentage of votes gained per party, although SNTV would need to be replaced first. Nevertheless, this kind of system would mean that it would be in parties' interests to distinguish themselves from one another. Furthermore, while financial rewards would not be big enough to make a difference to already established, larger parties, given their comparative financial security and access to other sources of funding, they could make all the difference to NDPs and could help to level the political playing field.[113] Another suggestion could be the introduction of either, or both, state-supported televised and radio broadcast debates, whereby parties publicly defend their platforms. This would provide free advertisement and could simultaneously encourage party consolidation.

With a new, independent body responsible for notifying parties and administering payments, these measures could provide some remedy to the current lack of funding available in a transparent and impartial manner. However, for any such scheme to be successful, the Government must first be convinced of the potential value of political parties. Moreover, to prevent the disbanding of newly merged parties soon after payment is given, some kind of punitive measure would need to be established, such as the repayment of any state funds paid to the party in question. The independent body established to monitor parties would need to be (and perceived as) truly independent, with appointments made by committee as opposed to by presidential decree. These concerns make the suggested reform measures highly ambitious, but they are not wholly impossible. Further, while incentives such as these are artificial and do not rely on organic party development, they may provide the starting point from which this development could take place.

International technical support

International support to parties has been limited to date, with focus and funding attached largely to the technical exercise of implementing elections. Elections are necessary in encouraging democratisation, but they do not constitute the achievement of democracy. A short-term focus on elections alone, without a realistic vision as to how they might be sustainable and organised by Afghans themselves, is misguided. Support for parties to encourage Afghan ownership of a democratic culture has been notably lacking.

Having said this, there are a number of key issues surrounding international support of party development in Afghanistan, as identified by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) in their conference paper on the subject.[114] There is a belief among some in the international community that parties should develop organically and should not be forced to form in response to outside pressure.[115] International interference in political matters is generally frowned upon due to the concern to respect the sovereignty of independent nations. As such, assistance tends to be ostensibly technical, as opposed to political, in nature. Technical and political issues are not

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[110]   Party leader (NDF party), interview.

[111]   States which currently provide some funds for parties include the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and Sweden. For more information on UK policy, see "The Review of the Funding of Political parties."http://www.partyfundingreview.gov.uk/htms/existfunding.htm, 21 July 2006 (accessed 15 December 2008).

[112]   This would, however, have the potential of encouraging the fabrication of membership cards.

[113]   These measures could only be considered successful if elections themselves were considered legitimate by Afghans and if all areas of the country were represented. This is a considerable "if" in light of concerns for the coming elections. For more information on these concerns, see Grant Kippen, *Elections in 2009 and 2010.*

[114]   Lotte Ten Hoove, "Political Party assistance in post-conflict societies. What to do in Afghanistan and Burundi?" (Report Expert Meeting Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2007).

[115]   International commentators, interviews.

always distinct from each other, but donor agencies are often unwilling to acknowledge the political implications of their technical interventions. Another issue is that bilateral funding directly to parties is illegal and so any support from donor governments must be channelled through sub-contracted implementing agencies. Finally, due to the highly politicised nature of international (and particularly bi-lateral) support, there is a need to remain impartial and to attempt to provide assistance to all parties equally. This is particularly problematic when a high number of parties are officially registered.

Nevertheless, some international support is currently provided to parties by a number of nongovernmental organisations, which often receive funding from their home governments.[116] At present, programmes for the support of political parties are limited in number and consist of those implemented by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Different European agencies such as the Heinrich Boll Foundation have also provided assistance to particular parties. UNAMA does not support parties officially, but it has been a member of the party registration board since 2005 and meets with party leaders regularly as a means to "encourage democratisation."[117] Various embassies are also in contact with parties, usually only in an advisory or information-gathering role. Embassy staff often attend party conferences as observers, meet with MPs in Parliament and monitor the political environment.

NDI works closely with parties, providing technical support in the form of training on issues such as how to run campaigns, and how to compile party platforms and so forth. It began its work in Afghanistan in 2002. In 2009 it will

be updating its 2006 parties' assessment, which details characteristics of various parties, their support bases and approximate numbers of representatives in Parliament.[118] NDI's funding for the technical support of parties has, however, fluctuated, and in 2005 funding was reallocated towards Parliament.[119] While funds have been recently reassigned to a programme for parties, this break in financial support from NDI for parties was unfortunate, coming in the aftermath of the elections, when NDPs needed considerable encouragement to continue functioning. A number of respondents strongly critiqued this funding gap, but in doing so indicated the value of the organisation's initial efforts.

IRI supports the development of issues-based causes and social movements as opposed to parties themselves, and works to encourage the development of such groups in parliament and civil society. They also provide technical support to groups in the form of training and meet regularly with MPs, CSOs and parties. IFES has a more indirect role in its involvement with the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), the principal USAID mechanism for elections support. This involves a civil education programme in communities and coordination with NDI and IRI when working with parties. This demonstrates one of USAID's key agendas—building civil society to promote democratisation.[120] Such an agenda is an example of the blurring of technical and political support from donors to recipient states: While often useful in encouraging democratisation, this support cannot be considered impartial or apolitical despite an apparently technical approach.

Partly due to the fact that there are not many international agencies working in this area, coordination among them is relatively good. In interviews, all agencies' representatives were aware of the party-support activities of other organisations. This level of communication among international agencies is not often reflected in other areas in which international support is given in Afghanistan.[121] If support to parties is

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[116]   This can lead to the blurring of boundaries between governmental and nongovernmental organisations, especially if programme proposals must be ratified by a donor associated with government activity (such as DFID or USAID). For more discussion on this topic, see J. Howell and Pearce, "Manufacturing Civil Society from the Outside: Donor Interventions", in *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2001): 89-122.

[117]   International commentator, interview. How this encouragement is achieved and what exactly the organisation means by democratisation remains unclear.

[118]   NDI, "Political Parties Assessment."

[119]   International commentator, interview.

[120]   Howell and Pearce, "Manufacturing Civil Society from the Outside: Donor Interventions," 120.

[121]   For a critique of the lack of coordination between

to increase, the current coordination between agencies must be maintained, and could be encouraged by the formation of a parties' support network or coordination group.

This paper argues that it is the organisational role of parties that is most crucial at present to Afghanistan's post-conflict democratisation, and that the political representation of constituent interests could follow after an organised party framework has been established. The two areas are interconnected, but the organisational

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development agencies in Afghanistan, see Matt Waldman, "Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan," ACBAR Advocacy Series (Kabul: ACBAR, 2008.

side is more technical than political in nature and thus more aligned with the publicly-acknowledged aspects of donor approaches. As such, organisational support to parties might not be as difficult to justify as that of assistance for political representation—although one should, in time, lead to the other. Following the example set already by the agencies mentioned above, capacity-building through workshops open to all parties on matters of government oversight, successful lobbying and interpreting of legal documents could be one way in which donors could openly support party development.[122]

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[122]   This is an issue that will be explored further in future AREU briefing papers.

IV. Conclusions

Afghanistan's NDPs are currently not functioning as an effective means to organise democratisation. They are constrained by external, contextual factors, such as a historical lack of precedent for open-party competition, deteriorating security, a lack of support from the GoA and fluid or informal connections between parties and Parliament. NDPs are also limited by internal factors, such as an absence of funding to undertake significant activities, and a general lack of capacity and concerted effort to mobilise voter networks effectively.

These hindrances are significant, but they do not provide reasons for the GoA or the international community to discontinue, decrease or refrain from giving support to NDPs. Neither do they justify the decline in the parties' own activities. Conversely, they demonstrate that continued support and activity are highly necessary in order to allow NDPs to compete effectively in the political arena, but that actors giving support (and NDPs themselves) must acknowledge the current limitations that have restricted their activities to date.

With state-funded incentives to support all parties in an impartial and transparent manner, through an independent Parties Registration Commission, the NDPs could undertake substantially more activities and could contribute significantly to democratisation efforts. The GoA should put

significant effort into formalising the relationship between parties and Parliament. The international community must recognise the value in a long-term approach to building a democratic society in Afghanistan, complementing the attention paid during election time with greater technical support to parties in between election periods. International assistance should be aimed at all parties, but the support mechanisms chosen could be those that encourage a levelling of the playing field and encourage NDPs' activities. This could be overseen by a parties' support network or coordination group. Finally, NDPs themselves must recognise their own shortcomings and must mobilise to take advantage of the current electoral system. Gains made through increased parliamentary representation in 2010 should not be underestimated.

Essentially, a renewed and substantially increased commitment to party development is needed from the GoA, international community and NDPs themselves, in order to increase NDPs' role in the organisation of Afghan democracy.

Appendix: List of parties interviewed

Party name	Leader	Date registered*	NDF?	Political leaning
Hezb-i Nuhzat-i Bedari-i Falah-i Afghanistan	Ms Soraya/Eng Yasin Habib	1381 (2002)		Social democrat
Hezb-i Jumhori(at)	Mhd Karim Barahawi/ Zabihullah Ismati (passed away)	1386 (2007)		Pro-government
Hezb-i Kar wa Tawsea-i Afghanistan	Zulfeqar Omed	1383 (2004)	Y	Democratic, non-leftist, started by Hazara intellectuals
Hezb-i Mutahid-i Milli	Nur-ul-Haq Oloomi	1382 (2003)		Leftist/democrat, social democrat leanings; leader previous connections with Parcham faction of PDPA
Hezb-i Afghanistan-i Wahed	Mhd Wasel Rahimi	1381 (2002)	Y	Democrat, previous connections to PDPA
Hezb-i Milli Afghanistan	Abdurrashid Aryan	1382 (2003)	Y	Democrat, leader was a Minister of Justice under PDPA; from Khalq faction of PDPA
Hezb-i Niaz-i Milli Afghanistan	Fatima Nazari	1387 (2008)		Social democrat, Hazara-based party focused on women
Hezb-i Afghanistan-i Naween	Mhd Yunos Qanooni	1384 (2005)		Islamist, links to Jamiyat and the (now dissolved) Northern Alliance
Hezb-i Khedmatgaran-i Milli Afghanistan	Haji Mumtaz Hemat	1386 (2007)		Leftist/democrat
Hezb-i Nuhzat-i Faragir wa demokrasi Afghanistan	Bazgar	1384 (2005)		Leftist/democrat, links with Parcham faction of PDPA, recently formed alliance with Oloomi's Hezb-e Mutahed-e Milli. Links with former Patriotic Movement for Democracy and Progress in Afghanistan

Hezb-i Liberal-i Afghanistan	Ajmal Sohail	1377 (1998)	Y	Liberal democrat
Hezb-i Sobat-i Milli Islami Afghanistan	Samir Kharoti	1383 (2004)		Islamist, now a part of the United Front
Hezb-i Azadikhwahan Afghanistan	Mhd Zarif Naseri	1383 (2004)	Y	Leftist-democrat, past links to Maoist armed resistance against Soviets; has members from other leftist groups
Hezb-i Tafahum wa DemocracyAfghanistan	Ahmad Shaheen	1378 (1999)	Y	Leftist, past links with Parcham
Hezb-i Nuhzat-i Milli Islami Afghanistan	Mawlawi Mukhtar Mufleh	1383 (2004)		Islamist
Hezb-i Hambastagi Afghanistan	Abdul Khaliq Niamat	1383 (2004)	left	Leftist, Maoist and also Jihadi roots
Hezb-i Ettemad-i Milli Afghanistan	Kohzad	1386 (2007)		Pro-government, links with Jamhuri-at party (Barahawi). Separated from Latif Pedram (Hezb-e Kangara-ye Melli)
Afghan Millat (officially: De Afghanistan Sosialdemokrat Gund)	Anwar-ul-Haq Ahadi	1345 (1966)		Pashtun-Nationalist; calls itself social democrat (was member of Socialist Internationalist)
Hezb-i Taraqi-i Milli	Asef Baktash	2004 (1383)	Y	Leftist, past links with Parcham faction of PDPA
Hezb-i Sadat-i Mardum-i Afghanistan	Mhd Zubair Peroz	1377 (1998)	Y	Leftist/democrat, previous connections to PDPA, previously registered as the United National Front (distinct from United Front) formed in 1989
Hezb-i Mardum Afghanistan (no longer functioning)	Ahmad Shah Asar	1382 (2003)	Wants to join	Leftist; leftist-nationalist (Tajik/Uzbek)

 * "Date registered" refers to the official Ministry of Justice registration date, and not necessarily the actual origin date of the parties.

Parties previously part of the NDF include Hezb-i Jumhori-i Khwahan (Sanjar), Hezb-i Hambastagi-i Milli Jawanan-i Afghanistan (Jamil Karzai), Hezb-i Hambastagi-i Afghanistan (Niamat), and Sozman-i Islami-i Afghanistan-i Jawan (Sayed Jawad Hosseini). Information for Appendix taken from interviews and Ruttig (2006, and pers. comm). Many thanks to Thomas Ruttig for his assistance in compiling this information.