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**Keywords:** Constitution, Political System, President, Legislature, Ethnic Accommodation, Coalition-building.

**Examining Ethnic Accommodation and Coalition-Building Under Alternative Forms of Government in Afghanistan**

**Abstract**

Since the initiation of constitution-making following the Bonn Conference, the viability of a presidential system for an ethnically divided Afghanistan has been subject to dispute. The two main criticisms against the presidential system has been that (a) this system is not inclusive to all ethnic groups, and that (b) this system is not conducive to party development. The critics have been mainly ethnic Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and other minorities, who have advocated for a parliamentary or a semi-presidential system. The proponents of the presidential system have been primarily ethnic Pashtuns, who have promoted the adoption of a strong presidential system to unite the country and to overcome challenges posed by the warlords.

Interestingly, the divide over whether to adopt a presidential constitution was not merely a domestic one. International allies of Afghanistan picked sides during the drafting of the Constitution, often recommending the political system that resembled their own. For example, experts and diplomates from the United States including its ambassador, Zalmai Khalilzad, advocated for a presidential constitution, whereas the European experts and diplomats pushed for a parliamentary or a semi-presidential system. Eventually, a presidential system was adopted with a concession that the *Wolesi Jirga* (WJ) should have some oversight power over the executive. This concession, however, has not satisfied the skeptics of presidential system in Afghanistan.

The issue with dominant legal and political discourse has been that the politicians as well as scholars have only focused on whether to keep the current presidential system or adopt an alternative; the prospect for reforming the current system has barely attracted scholarly attentions. It is true that the Afghan presidential model has had some weaknesses; however, failures of this system do not necessarily indicate the need for adoption of an alternative. Therefore, in addition to examining alternative political systems, this article explores adapting the current presidential constitution to the socio-political needs of Afghanistan.

To measure the optimality of these different political systems, this article conducts a temporal analysis of different Afghan constitutional arrangements. In its two short periods of democratization, Afghanistan has experienced all three types of political regimes: a parliamentary constitution, a presidential constitution, and a *de facto* semi-presidential system. In its first period of democratization (1963-1973), Afghanistan embedded a parliamentary system in its – still monarchic – Constitution of 1964. This system, as well as the Constitution, lasted only for a decade, followed by communist regimes, civil war and Taliban. By the fall of Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan began to experience a presidential system, which later was adopted in the Constitution of 2004. However, since the presidential election of 2014, which led to a political crisis, the two front-running candidates decided to form a National Unity Government, in the form of a *de facto* semi-presidential system. These brief experiences of different political systems are extensively examined to assess whether Afghanistan should keep its presidential system or replace it with an alternative.