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Breaking, Not Bending: Afghan Elections Require Institutional Reform

By Staffan Darnolf and Scott S. Smith



A worker stacks ballot boxes and election materials in a warehouse in Jalalabad for the October 2018 parliamentary elections. (Photo by Parwiz Parwiz/Reuters)

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Summary

- The decision to base Afghanistan's future political order on democracy required the creation of institutions to oversee elections. The international community devoted significant resources to set up and maintain the Independent Election Commission (IEC), both because the institution was required to organize elections in the post-Taliban era and to serve as an example that independent institutions could thrive in Afghanistan.
- Political modernization, on which Afghanistan's postconflict transition is predicated, requires the creation of impartial institutions that can transcend more primal loyalties. These institutions depend on the rationalization of authority and the specialization of tasks, and they require behavioral changes from political actors.
- The October 2018 parliamentary elections demonstrated a failure of institutionalization with regard to the IEC. In its efforts to organize and oversee the elections, the IEC was unable to exhibit any form of resilience to both knowable and unknowable risks.
- The IEC also failed at the level of planning, of organization, and of crisis response. The dismissal by President Ashraf Ghani of all seven electoral commissioners in February 2019 was a clear sign that international investment in institutional development had not paid off.
- Other processes, such as the effective organization and holding of elections for Community Development Councils, suggest that the problem is not with the idea of elections or democracy per se, but with the alignment of incentives. If there is an opportunity through a peace process to redesign Afghan institutions, these lessons will need to be taken into account.

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report analyzes the performance of Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission during the 2018 parliamentary elections through the lens of both political modernization and organizational resilience theory. Supported by the Asia Center at the United States Institute of Peace, the report examines the implications of the failure of electoral institutions on the larger need for the creation of modern political institutions in Afghanistan.

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Afghan election workers count ballot papers at a polling station in Kabul during the October 2018 parliamentary elections.
(Photo by Mohammad Ismail/Reuters)

Introduction

The legacy of Afghanistan's five electoral cycles since 2004 has been one of democratic disappointment and institutional entropy.¹ The two are related. While disappointment in Afghanistan's democratization has been widely commented on, the institutional failure has been taken as a given—accepted as part of the low expectations for Afghan institutions in general. In some ways, however, the failure of Afghanistan's electoral institutions is more consequential than the disappointment of its democrats. Every democracy, even those with efficient and trusted institutions, has debates about how representative and democratic they actually are. These debates can be salubrious; in the best of cases democratic doubt propels democratic development and improvement. But the abject failure of Afghanistan's electoral institutions in the October 2018 parliamentary elections, despite years of significant financial investment and capacity building, forces the question of whether real political institutionalization is possible at all in Afghanistan.

The question is fundamental. Afghanistan's post-2001 political transition was premised on the creation of “modern” political institutions. It was understood that habits formed during decades of internal war would make it difficult for political actors to transition to institutionalized politics. Yet, while astute observers understood that this transition would not happen quickly, some institutions could not wait, and the international community prioritized their development. One of the institutions that needed to prove itself early on was the Independent Election

Commission (IEC), the constitutionally mandated body tasked with administering and supervising Afghanistan's national elections. As Scott Smith wrote in 2011,

The work that was put into creating [an electoral management body] that could actually be independent was intended to build an institution that could credibly referee the rules, once these rules were agreed upon by political consensus. In fact, a salient feature of post-conflict situations is that in the best of cases electoral institutions form a sort of scaffolding for the entire transition process, or short-term proxies for the sorts of durable institutions that liberal democracies require.²

It is now clear that this strategy of creating an institutional scaffold that provides a demonstration effect while mediating politics at the highest level has failed. The dismissal of the commissioners of both the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) in February 2019 for their dismal and possibly corrupt performance accentuates that failure and bodes ill for the twice-delayed presidential election, now scheduled to occur on September 28, 2019. Yet Afghanistan's electoral landscape is not altogether bleak. Between June 2017 and March 2018, nearly five thousand locally organized and administered Community Development Council (CDC) elections were held, featuring high voter turnout and few complaints or disputes. These elections involved the participation of essentially the same electorate and the same principles of democratic representation, but they were conducted in vastly different ways by different institutions, and with significantly different levels of international support and guidance. The relative success of the CDC elections shows that there remains a strong democratic impulse in Afghanistan. The failure of the 2018 parliamentary elections demonstrates, however, that this impulse has been thwarted by national institutions, despite strong support for them from the international community.

Postconflict Institution Building

There is a significant literature on institution building and institutionalization, but surprisingly little on how to apply these processes to postconflict societies. This is surprising because the history of the modernization of political orders is the history of their institutionalization—and whether it is made explicit or not, all postconflict “statebuilding” projects are based on the creation of institutions that are intended to limit violence, create representation, provide justice, and deliver services. Institutions inject predictability into human interactions, reducing transaction costs and creating frameworks of cooperation that allow for the implementation of increasingly complex tasks. In this way, as Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani has said, rules are resources.³

To the late political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, political modernization is characterized by the rationalization of authority (under the rule of law), the differentiation of structures (i.e., specialization), and the expansion of political participation. “Institutions,” Huntington wrote, “are stable, valued, and recurring patterns of behavior.”⁴ Or, as the economic historian Douglass C. North put it, they are “the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.”⁵ Modern institutions result from the establishment and entrenchment of these patterns of behavior on the basis of rationalized authority and differentiated structures. Statebuilders in Afghanistan have tended to look at institutions in terms of buildings, staffing tables, work plans, and budgets—but these can

Attendees are searched before entering a political rally in Kabul, on August 2, 2018, a few months before the 2018 parliamentary elections. (Photo by Jim Huylebroek/The New York Times)

be no more than forms if patterns of behavior are not also changed.

Patterns of behavior developed during extended periods of crisis, such as the past four decades in Afghanistan, tend to focus on the short term. They also tend to be based on lack of trust of outsiders, are prone to violence and other desperate measures, and are resistant to specialization. Modern institutions, on the other hand, are intended to endure and

require specialization.⁶ They are fundamentally based on trusting people for the functions they fulfil rather than the social groups or networks they belong to.⁷ It is far more difficult to change behaviors than to fix a building or fill in an organigram. It is not surprising then that, in Afghanistan, the patterns of behavior have determined the functioning of the institutions. Grafting the formal aspects of institutions upon patterns of behavior that were molded for survival during the civil war was, in hindsight, too optimistic. As a result, what occurred can be described as the “isomorphic mimicry” of institutions—that is, institutions with form but little function.⁸

North, writing with John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast in 2009, posited that all societies since the beginning of recorded human history, as well as a large majority of societies today, can be characterized as “limited-access orders”—political orders in which elites negotiated shares of power among themselves to prevent access by others. Elites in such a system controlled the means of violence but agreed not to use them in order to preserve the rents that they divided among themselves. Then, in the nineteenth century, a world-historical transition took place in some countries “when elites [found] a common interest in transforming some elite privileges into impersonal elite rights shared by all members of the elites.”⁹ In open-access orders, elections are the means by which this access to elite rights is attained. However, this only works when electoral institutions are sufficiently autonomous to deliver a result that is credible to political stakeholders and capable of withstanding challenge.

States with electoral institutions that are not autonomous have been referred to as “illiberal democracies” or “semi-authoritarian regimes.”¹⁰ These states retain a democratic or participatory character, but it is the regime that ultimately decides. The function of elections in fragile, limited-access orders is different still. William Byrd has argued that Afghanistan’s 2014 presidential election represented a “clash of logics,” with the win-loss logic of elections interfering with the give-and-take logic of elite negotiation. In the end, the entrenched power of the elites allowed



the negotiation logic—in the form of a brokered, power-sharing National Unity Government—to prevail over the win-loss logic of the ballot box.¹¹

The negotiated outcome of the election—in which rivals Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah were named president and chief executive officer, respectively—was required to avoid deepening a political crisis. The crisis resulted from the fact that Afghanistan’s electoral institutions did not have the credibility or authority to confront the real power of individual political actors and that the means of violence had not been monopolized by the state. The problems of 2014 led to a call for reforms. The reform process that followed led to a comprehensive set of recommendations by the Special Electoral Reform Commission (SERC), some of which were enacted into law in 2016 (as will be discussed in more detail below). Despite the recognized high stakes of these elections, the individuals in charge of the electoral institutions apparently could not rise above personal interests and short-term perspectives—and all this after one and a half decades of intensive, highly resourced efforts at capacity building.

If institutionalization is fundamentally about shaping patterns of human behavior, then the question of personnel—the actual humans involved—becomes paramount. An unavoidable conclusion from any analysis of the IEC’s recent performance is that resources cannot compel the recruitment or appointment of adequate personnel, especially when, in the case of Afghanistan, those appointment procedures are out of the hands of the donor organizations providing the resources. The feast-or-famine approach that international donors have followed over the past fifteen years has contributed to this problem.¹² The withdrawal of funding after an election is over has led to the departure of the most competent staff, preventing the development of an experienced and informed cadre of officials.

This raises the question of where the locus of failure lies: in the individuals endowed with great responsibilities who failed to rise to the occasion, or in the international community’s assumptions of how likely it was that such institutions would function as designed in such traumatized societies (and a related failure to devise more appropriate assistance strategies)? If, as North, Wallis, and Weingast suggest, that in the course of thousands of years of human history the vast majority of societies never made the transition to open-order societies, how realistic was it to expect that this transition could be made in a society as damaged as Afghanistan in such a short period of time? Even a cursory look at the failure of its institutions during the 2018 electoral cycle raises serious questions about the approach taken so far by both Afghan elites and the international community.

Institutional Resilience

One of the most common ways of analyzing or even measuring institutionalization is through the concept of resilience. The International Organization for Standardization defines resilience as “the ability of an organization to absorb and adapt in a changing environment to enable it to deliver its objectives and to survive and prosper.”¹³ While this is a broad definition that applies to *all* organizations, within the class of organizations known as electoral management bodies (EMBs) there are several different models of resilience. Operational environments differ, internal

TABLE 1. RESILIENCE PROFILES FOR ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES

	Withstand	Adjust	Recover
Goal	Avoid impact from threat without losing critical level of operational capability	Operate through a threat with minimal loss of capability	Minimize time required to regain critical level of operational capability
Characterized by	Robustness and redundancy	Operational flexibility	Reaction capability, resources, and speed

Source: Adapted from Krista Langeland et al., “How Civil Institutions Build Resilience: Organizational Practices Derived from Academic Literature and Case Studies,” RAND Corporation, 2016, table 1.

risk tolerances vary, and expected impacts from risks materializing can also be vastly different from country to country.¹⁴

For example, the Electoral Commission of Ghana, which has managed several highly competitive elections since it was formed in 1993, has been able to absorb and bounce back from problems created by the introduction of new election technologies.¹⁵ This can be attributed partly to the commission’s professional staff and widely respected leadership, but also to an increasing tendency among political candidates to resolve differences using dispute-resolution mechanisms in the election laws rather than resorting to threats and violence. The May 2018 parliamentary elections organized by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in Iraq, however, displayed a markedly different level of resilience. Attempting to introduce a new, complex electronic voting system for casting and counting votes and transmitting results, the leadership of the IHEC was unable to overcome operational challenges and the subsequent distrust of the results by various critical stakeholders.¹⁶ A nationwide manual recount of all eleven million ballots was ordered by the Iraqi parliament after remedies undertaken by the IHEC were deemed insufficient. The IHEC’s inability to quickly recover from such a severe setback caused the government to lose trust in the IHEC’s Board of Commissioners, and the resulting forced resignation of all nine members paralyzed the commission’s work.¹⁷ These two examples illustrate the wide range with which EMBs can demonstrate resilience, or a lack thereof, in the face of challenges. Given the importance of elections for the legitimacy, representativeness, and quality of governance, the role of EMBs cannot be overstated: they effectively govern the link between elections and democracy. And given the high political stakes of elections, EMB resilience is paramount.

Assessments of the resilience of EMBs can be broken into three components: the ability to *withstand* impact from a threat and continue to operate largely as planned, the ability to *adjust* to a vulnerability with only minor loss of capacity, and the ability to *recover* in a timely manner from a major setback (see table 1).¹⁸ All three components are to some degree related to the organization’s ability to accurately assess the threats it might face and therefore to mitigate risks from these threats.¹⁹

WITHSTAND THREATS

In some countries, election commissions display a very limited tolerance for failure and therefore put extraordinary efforts into avoiding crises in the first place. Institutions with low risk tolerance strive to identify threats in order to prevent risks from ever materializing. They pay special attention to learning from past failures and near misses, and conduct honest and in-depth post-mortems once an election is completed.

An EMB's ability to withstand risks to its operations can be measured in terms of the capacities of *robustness* and *redundancy* that enable it to resist impact. Redundancy generally takes the form of setting aside financial and human resources, or inserting a time “cushion” in the operational calendar, allowing sufficient time to adjust to the unexpected. Robustness refers to an institutional capacity to withstand stress without making significant adjustments (in contrast to “resilience,” which is the capacity to adjust to stress).

ADJUST TO ADVERSE DEVELOPMENTS

In a politically fluid environment, resilience is often achieved by relying on personnel with high levels of technical knowledge and expertise. These experts, who are usually found in the EMB's management team (the secretariat) at its headquarters, should be able to expeditiously implement mitigation approaches with acceptable disruptions to the standard operating procedures followed by the commission's field-based officials. Effective communications between headquarters and field offices is therefore of pivotal importance when adjusting to risks.²⁰ The timely and dependable flow of information is necessary both to aid in-house experts in developing and managing the measures to counter the adverse development and to inform the field-based personnel charged with implementing them. Still, the mere presence of an effective communications pipeline is insufficient in itself; there must also exist a staff able to absorb, process, and act upon the instructions conveyed.

RAPID RECOVERY FROM SETBACKS

At the other end of the spectrum from institutions that focus on early warning to avoid risks, resilience scholars describe a category of institutions that primarily focus on rapid recovery after a setback. Institutions often justify this kind of approach because of the often-exorbitant cost and difficulty of safeguarding a highly complex system as well as the relative efficiency of focusing on effective responses to threats as they materialize. Prioritizing recovery over the capability to withstand and the ability to adapt to electoral risks is not a sound strategy for most election commissions, however: only the most professional EMBs, as well as those operating in an environment of high political trust and enjoying very high standing with their external stakeholders, are likely to be able to rebound from, for example, a poor voter registration effort, widespread logistical problems on Election Day resulting in disenfranchised voters, or flawed results during the tabulation process.

Afghanistan's 2018 Parliamentary Elections: A Failure of Resilience

The five electoral cycles that have taken place in Afghanistan since 2004 have all been held under uncertain security conditions that have gradually deteriorated to the current low-intensity war. This has resulted in significant parts of the country being outside the central government's control. However, security is not the only challenge. Even in relatively secure environments, the IEC has been unable to effectively counter electoral fraud and malpractice.²¹ Regardless of its real extent, which is difficult to determine, fraud has become the dominant narrative of Afghan elections, and allegations of fraud have proven to be a potent political weapon for losing candidates in particular. Candidates who are likely to lose benefit from making allegations of fraud before an election in order to claim afterwards that they have been cheated out of victory. Until 2018, however, the electoral commission itself had escaped most of the blame for electoral fraud. Instead, blame was assigned to poor security, to the actions of candidates and their supporters, and to interference by the executive. Afghanistan's electoral institutions were seen as victims of low capacity and overwhelming political pressures more than as active and deliberate perpetrators of fraud. After the October 2018 parliamentary elections, far more attention is being paid to the institutional dimension of fraud.

The conduct of the 2018 elections was supposed to have been improved by the reforms that followed the 2014 elections. SERC's proposed reforms covered a broad range of issues, from the establishment of a special selection committee responsible for identifying IEC and ECC commissioners, amendments to the current single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system, improvements to the voter registration process, and imposing a 25 percent quota for female representation on provincial and district councils.²² However, in the end the Wolesi Jirga voted down all eleven of SERC's recommendations that had previously been accepted by the National Unity Government in two presidential decrees. Subsequently, electoral reform efforts largely had to start all over.²³

A new law incorporating most of SERC's recommendations, as well as incorporating some additional reforms, was finally adopted by presidential decree in September 2016.²⁴ Some reforms affected the electoral system by attempting to make it more representative, while others were explicitly designed to make the system better able to withstand well-known risks to the credibility of the electoral process. These reforms included:

- New ways to form the IEC and ECC.
- Creation of a reliable voter register that can be accurately updated, as well as regularly updated polling station-based voter lists.
- Introducing new electoral crimes and penalties, and obligating the ECC "to investigate and identify electoral crimes and refer the perpetrators to the relevant authorities."²⁵
- Assigning teachers and civil servants to serve as polling station workers (a step intended to simplify hiring and decrease costs).
- Structural changes to the relationship between the commission and secretariat.



An election official scans a voter's eye with a biometric device at a polling station in Kabul during the October 2018 parliamentary elections. (Photo by Mohammad Ismail/Reuters)

One problem with carrying out functions such as risk analysis and mitigation in a highly politicized climate is that the politics tend to overwhelm the need for objectivity. For largely political reasons, SERC was unable to agree on the crucial issue of the electoral system. Moving from the highly criticized SNTV system to a proportional representation (PR) system has been debated since the first election law was adopted in 2004. SERC agreed that the lack of political party development meant it was premature to adopt a PR system. The group split, however, on whether to recommend a single-member district system or what was called multidimensional representation (MDR), a unique system designed for Afghanistan as a halfway step between SNTV and PR. (Two members of SERC who favored single-member districts resigned over the issue, and SNTV remained the electoral system by default.) Apart from the well-known democratic and representative distortions of the system and the problem of massively wasted votes, SNTV creates operational complexities, especially for ballot production and vote counting.²⁶ Adopting a simpler system would have been a clear example of a withstanding strategy. The September 2016 election law called for dividing provinces into smaller constituencies (which would be required for both MDR and single-member districts) but left further changes to the electoral system to the discretion of the IEC. A disagreement between the IEC and the cabinet

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over who was responsible for making the ultimate decision (neither wanted that responsibility) meant that the constituencies were not changed, making the implementation of an alternate to SNTV an impossibility.

There was one important aspect of the new election law that the IEC did strongly support in the lead-up to the 2018 elections: the creation of polling station–specific voter lists. In collaboration with the Afghanistan Central Civil Registration Authority (ACCRA), the commission launched a new voter registration drive in April 2018. In accordance with the new election law, citizens would have to use their *tazkera* (national identification card) to prove their eligibility to vote, and a sticker would be affixed to the card to indicate they had registered. They were also told that they had to vote at the same location where they had registered. Due to operational challenges within both the IEC and ACCRA, political parties and election observer groups expressed serious concerns regarding the integrity of the registration process, claiming that voter rolls were being inflated by thousands of fake *tazkeras* that would be used by unscrupulous politicians to create ghost voters.

Throughout the year, political parties had banded together to push for the introduction of biometric voter registration to ensure that every registration record could be backed up by uniquely identifiable characteristics of the individual voter (such as fingerprints). But there was neither the time to procure the biometric registration machines nor the interest from international donors to support the effort, so the parties were rebuffed. Nevertheless, in the final months before the election, after opposition groups blocked access to some IEC offices and threatened to reject the election results, the government used its own funds to hastily procure twenty-two thousand machines for a biometric voter verification (BVV) system, which would use technology to ensure that each vote was cast by a verifiable individual. The contract with a German supplier for procuring and maintaining the machines was handled by the Central Statistics Office rather than the IEC. This meant that the IEC was neither the signatory nor the manager of the contract—nor was it the owner of the data that resulted from the machines’ use. The IEC was not only pressured into accepting the system, it was also charged with adapting procedures and conducting the trainings to implement it within the space of a few months. Due to the extremely late decision to introduce the system, the machines were not properly tested prior to the October 20 polls, nor was there a sufficient number of machines available to train poll workers. Still, the IEC made an effort to integrate the system into polling day procedures, but it was evident on Election Day that many poll workers were not familiar with the BVV machines, and the resulting confusion caused significant delays.

Despite these reforms, and due to their imperfect implementation, the IEC faced a large number of additional risks with the potential to undermine its core responsibilities on Election Day. In addition to the extremely late introduction of the BVV technology, it faced risks related to security conditions, inadequate voter education, and recruitment and training problems. As a result of the requirement to use civil servants as polling-station workers, most polling staff were entirely new to the process—and many simply did not show up because they were not being paid. Polling and counting procedures given to workers did not require them first to verify that the number of ballot papers in the ballot box corresponded with the number of names on the

voter list—an elemental step in all elections to obtain correct results.²⁷ According to sources within the IEC, the commission was supposed to have printed so-called exclusion lists containing the names of voters deleted as duplicate, underage, or invalid for other reasons (such as having an incomplete registration form). Furthermore, the polling procedures were silent on how to process people missing from the voter lists but possessing bona fide registration documents. Had the commission followed the election law and made the preliminary voter lists easily accessible to the electorate, these problems could have been addressed well before Election Day.²⁸

The major integrity flaw of the BVV system became apparent only during the results process. The IEC had not clearly defined how to resolve discrepancies during the results aggregation process between number of voters processed using the BVV machine, names crossed out as having voted on the polling station—specific voter list, and the number of ballots found in the ballot box. Different provincial tally centers took different approaches on how to reconcile the number of ballot papers in the polling stations. This problem was further exacerbated by the IEC's inconsistent application of another fundamental results principle—what constitutes a valid ballot. The IEC vacillated between allowing only ballots with stickers generated by the BVV machines to be counted and allowing all ballots to be counted, and then reversing that decision soon thereafter. Unfortunately, these decisions, taken in quick succession, were poorly communicated to the provincial tally centers across the country, as well as to the IEC's own National Results Center. As a result, the IEC effectively lost control of the results process, as it no longer knew which results regulation had been applied by any given polling station. This loss of control contributed to a months-long delay in finalizing the election results, which for Kabul Province, by far the largest in terms of votes, were not certified until April 2019, six months after the elections.

ASSESSMENT OF THE IEC'S RESILIENCE IN 2018

Election administrators recognize that strategic planning is critical to holding successful elections that can withstand institutional risks.²⁹ The more complex and challenging the political environment and electoral processes are, the more critical planning becomes. Unfortunately, the IEC failed to meet even the most basic of planning requirements for conducting the 2018 parliamentary elections.

Major reform efforts designed to implement a new voter registration methodology, tackle widespread fraud, or overcome results tabulation problems from a previous election would normally form an integral part of a strategic plan for the next electoral cycle. The IEC developed a strategic plan ahead of presidential elections scheduled for 2014 and Wolesi Jirga elections scheduled for 2015 in close collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, which provides technical support to the IEC Secretariat. When that five-year plan expired in 2016, it was not replaced with a new one, nor was it updated following the implementation of the SERC reforms.³⁰ Given the importance attributed to strategic planning by UNDP, both in its global doctrine of electoral support and its ongoing support to the IEC, it is surprising that UNDP agreed with the IEC's leadership to delay the drafting of a strategic plan until after the 2018 elections.³¹

If a full-fledged strategic planning exercise was not feasible for financial and political reasons after the postponement of the 2015 elections, the IEC could have at least undertaken a risk-assessment exercise to strengthen its resilience. Such an assessment would have identified the

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types of risks the various components of the electoral process and the IEC as an institution were facing.³² This appeared to be another case of institutional unlearning. Prior to the 2014 elections, UNDP assisted the IEC in drafting an anti-fraud plan, which resulted in a stronger focus on the chain of custody of

sensitive election materials and procedures for identifying tampering.³³ Unfortunately, this effort was not repeated during preparations for the 2018 Wolesi Jirga elections. Eight months before the October polls, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems carried out a comprehensive integrity risk assessment. Its conclusions, however, were never integrated into the IEC's operational planning by the secretariat or its technical service provider.³⁴

An effective monitoring and evaluation capability would also have strengthened the IEC's ability to withstand threats. Without such a capability, election commissioners are unable to track progress in the field and address problems as they arise. UNDP invested in strengthening the IEC's communications system so that its headquarters in Kabul could communicate with all its provincial offices, yet the IEC and UNDP agreed to postpone establishing a monitoring and evaluation plan until after the election.³⁵ Furthermore, even with improved HQ–field office communications, the IEC was still unable to secure timely voter registration statistics throughout the registration process. The commission, for example, could not provide an accurate list of voters registered in each district until long after the registration period had ended in July 2018, three months before voting was to begin.

Going into the 2018 elections, the IEC might still have been able to adjust to the operational challenges it faced had its leadership encouraged a culture of resilience. An indication of its lack of attention to this was its inability to retain a sufficient level of expertise from the 2014 electoral cycle. The failure of the commission to empower the secretariat and field-based staff to react based on clearly articulated principles meant that real-time adjustments to foreseeable problems could not be made. The months-long vacancy in the chief electoral officer (CEO) position negatively affected the overall management of the IEC. Instead of a CEO leading the planning of the IEC's activities to be guided by the secretariat's various directors, the commissioners themselves took on active operational responsibilities. This was an unfortunate interpretation of a provision in the election law that the secretariat “report” to the commission. This new provision—which was not a SERC recommendation—encouraged the commissioners to take on executive functions. The acting CEO repeatedly found that the commissioners micromanaged the secretariat and ignored the expertise that did remain within the IEC—in effect interfering in the substantive work of the secretariat and impeding the development of the commission as an apolitical institution driven by professionalism rather than political considerations or the pursuit of personal gain.³⁶ Moreover, one of the reforms intended to improve the professionalism of the secretariat had just the opposite effect. A 2016 law specifying that only individuals with a degree in law, sharia, political science, management, sociology, economics, or related fields could qualify as a senior IEC official led to the dismissal of some of the body's most experienced electoral technicians, who had backgrounds in other fields.³⁷ A more thoughtful law would have

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grandfathered in these experienced staff. Even so, it is not obvious how the law would have actually improved candidates for these positions by further reducing an already limited pool of literate and educated applicants.

Rather than working toward a common goal guided by principled leadership and a

clear plan, the commission's agenda was determined by the most recent crisis sprung upon it by members of parliament or the political parties. The arrival of a new CEO and his two deputies in July 2018 did initially instill a sense of purpose and leadership for the secretariat, but by then it was too late. Communication between headquarters and provincial officers also improved, enabling the IEC to begin establishing a capability to operate through a disruptive event. However, interactions between the commissioners and the CEO remained fraught. For example, the CEO's effort to relocate provincial officers from their current duty stations before the elections—another SERC reform, one aimed at breaking potential political or financial links to local strongmen running for office—was blocked by the commissioners, causing a stalemate that lasted weeks. Eventually a compromise was reached, but the lack of a coherent decision-making process among the IEC's leadership led to costly delays and ran counter to the operational flexibility necessary to operate through a threat with minimal loss of capability.

A few days before the elections, IEC chairman Abdul Badie Sayyad stated with confidence that “the IEC is ready to conduct *transparent* and *credible* elections on 20 October.”³⁸ The intention behind such a statement might have been to signal to voters and political stakeholders that the commission should not be blamed for any delays. But by unequivocally stating that the elections would be transparent and credible, the commission raised expectations to a level that was, in fact, unattainable. These statements ultimately undermined the credibility of the commissioners more than it reassured voters and political actors, and in the end it turned out that the gap between the IEC's promise and what it managed to deliver was too wide. In a decision that was a clear sign of the total loss of confidence in the institution, in February 2019 President Ghani fired all IEC commissioners, the chief electoral officer, and several critical directors of key units in the secretariat.

Not long before their dismissal, the IEC's leadership had organized an internal lessons-learned exercise. Had this effort been based on a frank, open, and honest assessment of the 2018 electoral cycle, it might have provided the incoming IEC leadership with a solid foundation to begin planning for the 2019 presidential election. Instead, the report was devoid of honest analysis and failed to detail past shortcomings or outline well-crafted solutions to the many problems that plagued the 2018 elections. The report's overarching message was that the IEC could have organized credible elections if only there had been more funds, more time, better logistical resources and office infrastructure, and better employment conditions. The report documented no instances of the commission's own failings.

The ability of the IEC (or any EMB) to recover quickly from an election of such substandard quality as the 2018 Wolesi Jirga elections is directly linked to its capacity to adjust to adverse developments. Unfortunately, several months after the elections, the IEC continues to lack the

requisite electoral and operational expertise to properly prepare for and professionally implement the forthcoming presidential poll. Together with the poor quality of the lessons-learned exercise, the new, inexperienced IEC leadership will be prone to repeating mistakes made in previous elections—a likelihood made greater by the short amount of time it will have to prepare. Compounding the commission’s lack of capacity to rebound from previous failures is the worrying indecisiveness of the new commissioners regarding the use of biometric solutions for voter registration and the verification of voters on Election Day. During the last electoral cycle the commission was informed in technical detail that introducing a complete biometric voter registration solution would put the Wolesi Jirga elections in grave jeopardy, yet they decided to move ahead with the solution even though registration was to commence in a matter of months. The commissioners partially reversed their decision in mid-May, five months before the elections, stating that the BVV machines would only be used on Election Day. However, this unnecessary dithering wasted precious time for proper voter registration planning and thereby further risked compromising the quality of the electoral processes.

It is critically important that the new IEC break from previous commissions’ modus operandi of delays, broken promises, and lack of consistent, realistic planning. Critical first steps would be to reclaim its independence vis-a-vis the government and be forthright to its external stakeholders about what can actually be achieved. Continuing to claim that the IEC can successfully introduce new voting technologies on a national scale without prior testing, sufficient training of users, and complete lack of information for voters, candidates, and observer groups in a matter of months is detrimental to the commission’s credibility.

Institutions and Incentives: Is There More Resilience at the Bottom?

The point of institutions—especially when they are seen as patterns of behavior—is to shape human interaction by constructing incentives that constrain behavior.³⁹ In many areas, however, the incentives created by Afghanistan’s post-2001 institutions were badly suited to existing behaviors and led to perverse or counterproductive results. Under the SNTV system, for example, there is only a tangential connection between representatives and voters—voters do not know who their representatives are and representatives do not need to be accountable to voters. As a result, seats in parliament are seen as rent-seeking opportunities, with the added benefit of providing legal immunity. Given the lucrative nature of parliamentary positions and the general climate of impunity, the mediation of elections by a central authority headed by a small but powerful group of decision makers has created massive incentives for corruption.⁴⁰ Furthermore, in many areas there are no locally elected officials who have access to authorities at the central level where resources are allocated.⁴¹ Noah Coburn and Anna Larson have questioned “the presumption that simply holding elections on a regular basis allows the development of institutions and processes that in turn generate interests and incentives promoting the establishment of democratic society.” They correctly point out that “these international efforts

have not sought or analyze or incorporate the political interests and incentives generated by the technical administration of elections.”⁴²

Yet while the latest round of parliamentary elections were a costly embarrassment, hardly noticed but successful elections recently did take place across Afghanistan—the nearly five thousand locally organized Community Development Council elections held between June 2017 and March 2018. These elections featured a turnout of over 70 percent, witnessed few complaints, had no problems with voter registration or access to ballot boxes, and attracted an impressive level of participation by women. They present an instructive juxtaposition to the institutional failures that beset the parliamentary elections.

CDC elections have likely functioned better than Afghanistan’s centrally organized elections because the incentives are far better aligned with the realities of behavioral patterns and expectations. As Ghani and Lockhart have written, “Trust in a system . . . is dependent on the degree of fit between these formal and informal rules.”⁴³ The elections are run locally by people who are accountable to the voters because they live among them. For the same reason, those who are elected have an incentive to deliver results to the community. The responsibilities of power and the means of attaining it are in a more salubrious alignment, such that the exercise of elections strengthens the institution that is elected rather than delegitimizing it. As a 2009 paper on the National Solidarity Program (NSP), which launched the CDC, noted,

In contrast to Western-led initiatives, the NSP is distinguished by the degree to which Afghans are personally invested in its projects. The high degree of Afghan participation stems from the way the program is structured: Afghan citizens are involved in every aspect of the decision-making process, from project selection to implementation, and the expenditure of funds is publicly tracked and monitored by villagers. Project results are tangible and of immediate use.⁴⁴

The contrast between the relative success of these locally held (but not centrally supervised) elections and the failure of the IEC-organized elections is striking. Part of the problem is that the selection of IEC commissioners has become intensely politicized, with selection decisions based almost entirely on political loyalties and divorced from technical expertise or individual integrity. This is fatal to the development of a supposedly independent organization. The failure to institutionalize the organization of elections has severed the presumed links between elections, representation, legitimacy, and stability. As David von Reybrouck wrote provocatively,

When Western donor countries hope that countries ravaged by conflict, like Congo, Iraq, Afghanistan or East Timor, will become democracies, what they really mean is this: they must hold elections, preferably on the Western model, with voting booths, ballot papers and ballot boxes, with parties, campaigns and coalitions, with lists of candidates, polling stations and sealing wax, just like we do, only over there, and then they will receive money from us. Local democratic and proto-democratic institutions (village meetings, traditional conflict mediation or ancient jurisprudence) stand no chance.⁴⁵

It is clearly not feasible to have national elections conducted by local institutions as are the CDCs, but it is equally undesirable to continue holding national elections that lack minimal credibility. The failure of institutionalization has had two effects: it has, because of serious fraud and

CDC elections have likely functioned better than Afghanistan's centrally organized elections because the incentives are far better aligned with the realities of behavioral patterns and expectations.

mismanagement, diminished the credibility of elections when they are held; and it has diminished the credibility of elected institutions when the elections have not been held. The imminent September 2019 presidential election will be another test and another data point. The new IEC has been criticized by

observer organizations for its lack of transparency and professionalism. If the election produces another extended political crisis because of mismanagement, donors will need to confront the question of what their hundreds of millions of dollars in electoral support has bought them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While the international community pays great attention to every election and uses them as a gauge of political progress and fitness for funding the Afghan state, Afghan political actors see them as opportunities for rent- and power-seeking. Elections, it seems, are too important to be left to electoral administrators. As electoral institutions have become “Afghanized,” they have become more and more susceptible to Afghan political pressures. The result has been the depressing progression of electoral cycles that over time has undermined the idea of democracy and created repeated, and draining, political crises.

As the preceding resilience analysis demonstrates, the IEC failed in all of its basic tasks in preparing the 2018 parliamentary elections. Not captured in the analysis, however, but relevant to the failure of institutionalization, are the rumors and indications of corruption within the commission.⁴⁶ Put simply, the commissioners responsible for delivering the elections have not placed the higher public interest over their own narrower, private interests. They had been reminded by the international community that the elections were not only important for the goal of a legitimate parliament, but also because the international community would base its future commitment to Afghanistan in part on the quality of the elections. The importance to the international community of holding good elections was communicated to both the IEC and the ECC during a visit of a UN Security Council mission in January 2018—but that message was ignored.⁴⁷

Due to the IEC's limited resilience, it has struggled to recover from the highly problematic 2018 elections and to organize the September 2019 presidential election. Looking ahead, the international community must either recognize the need for a significantly more proactive approach to providing technical assistance or to revise its expectations for the credibility of future elections. Donors are currently bearing the political risks associated with supporting the largest and longest technical assistance program to any national election commission ever, but, due to their passive posture under the “Afghan-led, Afghan-owned” mantra, have limited leverage over how elections are actually conducted. This risks strengthening the Taliban's argument that a rights-based democracy that relies on competitive elections is a foreign concept not suitable for Afghanistan. Afghan citizens deserve an acceptable electoral process that contributes to both the democratization process and the ongoing peace process.



Election workers wait for vote tabulations from the October 2018 parliamentary elections at the Independent Election Commission's National Results Center in Kabul. (Photo by Omar Sobhani/Reuters)

The IEC must become more professional and independent at every level, making itself far more resilient in the face of Afghanistan's known electoral challenges. The situation is particularly acute when it comes to the IEC leadership, both at the level of the commission and the secretariat. Recent IEC leadership teams have become corrupt and politically compromised and have lacked sufficient technical know-how to fulfill their duties professionally and with integrity. Several actions are required to overcome these severe challenges.

Reduce the risk of financial corruption. The IEC, at all levels, is highly prone to financial corruption. This is particularly acute at the top echelon. Proactive measures must be taken to drastically reduce the risks of financial corruption. For instance, leaders should not only sign a detailed and relevant code of conduct that is actually enforced, but asset disclosure must also form an integral part of official protocol. Asset disclosure forms should be filed annually, not just at the beginning and end of an official's tenure. The process must be monitored by credible agencies, with international support if necessary.

Maintain independence and promote transparency. Much of the IEC's leadership has not only struggled with financial improprieties, but also in maintaining their independence from the president's office as well as the president himself. This was already a problem in the lead-up to the country's first post-Taliban elections in 2004 and 2005, but it has worsened in subsequent electoral cycles. During the 2018 Wolesi Jirga elections, President Ghani frequently summoned the IEC commissioners and was criticized for allegedly influencing their policymaking. Ghani's interventions were sometimes motivated by the IEC making poor decisions that threatened the

integrity of the elections, but at other times they had the appearance of partisanship. All policy decisions made by the IEC during a presidential election must be made in a transparent manner. Meetings between an incumbent president running for reelection should be publicly reported, just like all other meetings a member of the IEC leadership has with any other presidential candidate, thereby avoiding undue influence or the perception of partiality.

Select commissions based on their ability to do the job. The process for selecting future IEC commissioners needs to be reformed so that expertise and personal integrity are more highly valued than ethnicity, political loyalty, or other partisan and politicized concerns.

Finally, a number of practical measures should be undertaken to reduce the likelihood that a poorly conducted presidential election, whether it occurs in 2019 or later, results in a crisis that further undermines the legitimacy of the state and reduces Afghans' confidence in democracy as a means for determining who leads the country. This includes paying greater attention to the training of polling station workers, especially when new technologies are being implemented; implementing an effective public information campaign so that voters know what to expect at the polling station; creating a staff evaluation system and providing incentives to retain good staff (and remove ineffective or corrupt staff); establishing clear organizational boundaries with other institutions (for example, ACCRA, the interior and finance ministries, the Presidential Palace) that prevent undue influence while promoting effective cooperation between them; ensuring consistent, adequate, and transparent funding; and increasing the capacity of other stakeholders in the process, especially political parties. The IEC should have facilities to ensure that parties are fully informed of electoral procedures and are able to monitor the process according to the law. The IEC should hold regular, public consultations with political parties.

Ultimately, the success of Afghanistan's electoral institutions will depend not just on their resilience but on a variable that is both difficult and uncomfortable to measure: the integrity and competence of individuals in charge of them. It is not easy under any circumstance for members of independent authorities to exercise the "fearless independence" required for their institutions to effectively implement their mandates. It is especially difficult in postconflict societies where the rule of law is tenuous, violence is prevalent and cheap, and pressure from family or social networks is intense. Perhaps these people do not exist, or perhaps the risk/reward ratio that is offered to them is unpersuasive. There is no remedy for the former possibility, but the latter suggests that the international community has not been paying sufficient attention. It is difficult to be optimistic about the next round of Afghan elections, but there will surely be other postconflict elections in other places. Afghanistan's unfortunate and expensive experience might still be of value somewhere. One hopes that it can still be to Afghanistan.

Notes

1. The term “cycle” here refers to a year in which one or more elections have been held. For example, presidential and provincial council elections were held in 2009 and parliamentary elections were held in 2010. Given that planning for 2010 was a separate process from 2009, they are not considered to be part of the same cycle.
2. Scott Seward Smith, *Afghanistan’s Troubled Transition: Peacekeeping, Politics, and the 2004 Presidential Election* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2011), 286.
3. “Rules become the resources that create stakeholders and determine their relations with each other.” Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 199.
4. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 9.
5. Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.
6. “Individual interests are necessarily short-term interests. Institutional interests, however, exist through time; the proponent of the institution has to look to its welfare through an indefinite future” (Huntington, *Political Order*, 25).
7. “Those societies deficient in stable and effective government are also deficient in mutual trust among their citizens, in national and public loyalties, and in organizational skills and capacity” (Huntington, *Political Order*, 28).
8. The term is from Lant Pritchett and Franke de Weijer, “Fragile States: Stuck in a Capability Trap?” World Development Report 2011 Background Paper, World Bank, November 5, 2010, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/681031468337197655/Fragile-states-stuck-in-a-capability-trap>. They write that “the danger in fragile conditions is that it is much easier to rapidly build the ‘form’ of a capable state—e.g. pass civil service legislation, create ‘new’ police forces, pass budgets showing the ‘right’ priorities, articulate ‘development plans’—than it is to create the conditions for assessing functional performance and allow an organic process in which the forms adapted emerge organically from functional success.”
9. Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 190.
10. Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November 1997, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1997-11-01/rise-illiberal-democracy; and Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).
11. William A. Byrd, “Understanding Afghanistan’s 2014 Presidential Election: The Limits to Democracy in a Limited Access Order,” Special Report no. 370, United States Institute of Peace, April 2015, www.usip.org/publications/2015/04/understanding-afghanistans-2014-presidential-election.
12. Noah Coburn and Anna Larson, *Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan: Elections in an Unstable Political Landscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 144–45.
13. International Organization for Standardization, “ISO 22316:2017: Security and Resilience—Organizational resilience—Principles and attributes,” March 2017, www.iso.org/standard/50053.html.
14. For example, institutions responsible for critical infrastructure have a zero tolerance level for accidents, whereas others that are focused on the resilience of a community to adapt to an evolving threat are more willing to take on a higher level of failure risk.
15. For a discussion of Ghana’s past election results, see Atindow Musah, “The Journey of Presidential Elections in Ghana from 1992 to 2016,” *Modern Ghana*, July 13, 2017, www.modernghana.com/news/787795/the-journey-of-presidential-elections-in-ghana-from-1992-to.html. Ruben Ruiz-Rufino cites Ghana as an example of how repeatedly accepted elections in the past increase the resilience of electoral institutions (“When do electoral institutions trigger electoral misconduct?” *Democratization* 25, no. 2 (2018): 331–50).
16. See International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), “Elections in Iraq: 2018 Council of Representatives Elections: Frequently Asked Questions,” May 7, 2018, www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_ifes_iraq_council_of_representatives_elections_faqs_final.pdf.
17. *Al Jazeera*, “Iraq Orders Recount of All 11 million Votes from May 12 Election,” June 6, 2018, www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/iraq-orders-recount-11-million-votes-12-election-180606163950024.html.
18. For details, see page viii in Krista S. Langeland et al., “*How Civil Institutions Build Resilience: Organizational Practices Derived from Academic Literature and Case Studies*,” Research Report no. 1246, RAND Corporation, 2016.
19. Risk, here, is understood as the potential effect from a threat materializing, such as fallout from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) being unable to organize a transparent and credible results tabulation process at its National Tally Center in Kabul.

20. Maria Jesus Saenz and Elena Revilla, "Creating More Resilient Supply Chains," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, June 17, 2014, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/creating-more-resilient-supply-chains>.
21. Staffan Darnolf et al., "Afghanistan Electoral Integrity Assessment," International Foundation for Electoral Systems, June 2018.
22. Timor Sharan, "Afghanistan's Electoral Reform: A Distant Reality," Asia Foundation, April 6, 2016, www.asiafoundation.org/2016/04/06/afghanistans-electoral-reform-distant-reality.
23. For details, Ali Yawar Adili et al., "Another Hurdle for Elections in 2016: MPs Reject Presidential Decree on Electoral Commissions," Afghanistan Analysts Network, June 17, 2016, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/another-hurdle-for-elections-in-2016-mps-reject-presidential-decree-on-electoral-commissions.
24. Ali Yawar Adili and Martine van Biljert, "Afghanistan's Incomplete New Electoral Law: Changes and Controversies," Afghanistan Analysts Network, January 22, 2017, www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistans-incomplete-new-electoral-law-changes-and-controversies.
25. Adili and Biljert, "Afghanistan's Incomplete New Electoral Law." Adili and Biljert note, "The list of electoral crimes in the new law reads as a catalogue of the ways that candidates, supporters, electoral staff and others have, in the past, tried to influence the outcome of elections."
26. For example, see Andrew Reynolds and John Carey, "Fixing Afghanistan's Electoral System: Arguments and Options for Reform," Briefing Paper Series, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, July 2012, <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/sites.dartmouth.edu/dist/2/109/files/2013/02/RC-Fixing-Afghanistans-Electoral-System-AREU-2012-FINAL.pdf>. Furthermore, according to an analysis of Afghan election results by Colin Cookman of the United States Institute of Peace, winning candidates collectively won only 35 percent of the vote in 2018 and 37 percent in 2010 (https://github.com/colincookman/afghanistan_election_results_2018).
27. For details, see pages 42–46 of the IEC's "Polling and Counting Procedure: Wolesi Jirga Elections of Afghanistan," October 20, 2018.
28. The IEC printed some of the polling center lists and made those available at the provincial level for inspection, but without informing the electorate beyond a press conference in Kabul. In addition, no regulations or procedures were produced by the IEC outlining how voters could correct mistakes, request to be added if missing from the lists, or challenge names if they thought these individuals are ineligible.
29. For a detailed discussion of strategic planning, see Antonio Spinelli, *Strategic Planning for Effective Electoral Management: A Practical Guide for Electoral Management Bodies to Conduct a Strategic Planning Exercise*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, October 2011).
30. For analysis of the Special Electoral Reform Commission, see Alex Thier and Scott Worden, "Political Stability in Afghanistan: A 2020 Vision and Roadmap," Special Report no. 408, United States Institute of Peace, July 2017, www.usip.org/publications/2017/07/political-stability-afghanistan-2020-vision-and-roadmap.
31. United Nations Electoral Support Program, "Quarterly Progress Report, January–March 2018." However, strategic planning is never to be undertaken during a calendar year when an electoral management board is charged with organizing the election in the first place.
32. See International Organization for Standardization, "ISO 22316:2017."
33. See page 36 of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Final Evaluation of the Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) Phase II: January 2012–July 2015," <https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/documents/download/10724>. UNDP support did not materialize for the IEC to conduct an evaluation of its anti-fraud measures after the presidential election (see page 67).
34. For details regarding the third-party risk assessment, see Darnolf et al., "Afghanistan Electoral Integrity Assessment." IEC's operational plan makes no reference to IFES' risk assessment, nor does its primary service provider when discussing fraud risks and strategies to mitigate fraud, malpractices, and systemic manipulation in recent documents. See "IEC Operational Plan for the 2018 Wolesi Jirga and District Council Elections, 12 June 2018"; UNDP, "Quarterly Progress Report, January–March 2018"; and page 36 of United Nations Electoral Support Project, "2018 2nd Quarterly Progress Report."
35. See page 9 of United Nations Electoral Support Project, "2018 2nd Quarterly Progress Report."
36. Findings based on interviews with several senior IEC secretariat officials and provincial election officers in February 2018.
37. The acting CEO had a degree in medicine but had been working on elections since 2003. Fifteen provincial electoral officers were also dismissed on the same grounds.

38. Opening remarks by IEC chairman Abdul Badie Sayyad at the Sixth National Election Forum, September 19, 2018, in Kabul; emphasis added.
39. “Institutions include any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction.” North, *Institutions*, 4.
40. This description of perverse incentives applies only to the system as it is designed. It does not take into account the additional effect of local-level powerholders who have their own reasons to support parliamentary candidates and the power and resources to do so, often beyond the law.
41. The constitution provides for these elected officials in the form of district councils, but they have never been elected.
42. Coburn and Larson, *Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan*, 139.
43. Ghani and Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States*, 180.
44. Ahmed A. Humayun, Andrew M. Exum, and John A. Nagl, “A Pathway to Success in Afghanistan: The National Solidarity Program,” Center for a New American Security, March 16, 2009, www.cnas.org/publications/reports/a-pathway-to-success-in-afghanistan-the-national-solidarity-program.
45. David Van Reybrouck, *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy*, trans. Liz Waters (London: Bodley Head, 2016), 39.
46. Afghan media reported on May 19, 2019, that all twelve commissioners for the IEC and the Electoral Complaints Commission were indicted for committing fraud.
47. United Nation Security Council, “Report of the Security Council mission to Afghanistan, 12–15 January 2018,” S/2018/419, May 3, 2018. “The President of the Council underlined that credible election results were important for stability. . . . In their meeting with the electoral commissioners, Council members stressed the importance of safeguarding the independence of their institutions.”

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