

Review Article

The Karzai Administration: Challenges, Achievements, and Controversies

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ABSTRACT

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In October 2004, Karzai assumed the presidency through a constitutional mandate, raising hopes for political stability, ethnic reconciliation, and effective governance. However, his tenure was marred by entrenched political rivalries, ethnic tensions, governance challenges, military escalations, and rampant corruption, which overshadowed his ability to fulfill the promises of his presidency. This article aims to analyze the political legacy of Hamid Karzai's thirteen-year rule, shedding light on his governance approach and unmet commitments. Despite initial expectations of strong leadership, Karzai's tenure was marked by persistent political discord, ethnic fragmentation, and governance deficiencies. While his presidency achieved significant milestones, such as constitutional reforms and electoral processes, it fell short in addressing systemic issues, including corruption and security concerns. Through an examination of Karzai's political trajectory, this article seeks to illuminate the complexities of governing Afghanistan amidst formidable challenges, ultimately evaluating the effectiveness of his leadership during a tumultuous era of transition and turmoil.

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Introduction

The aftermath of the September 11 attacks ushered in a seismic shift in Afghanistan's political landscape. This pivotal event triggered a global war on terrorism, leading to the United States and its allies launching military operations in Afghanistan (Busaeidi, 2007). Consequently, the Bonn Conference was convened, culminating in the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and laying the groundwork for a transitional government. (Sharan, 2016). The Bonn Agreement set forth a legal framework for political transition and governance reforms in post-Taliban Afghanistan. This agreement outlined the structure for an interim authority and established a roadmap for the formation of a representative government, emphasizing principles of inclusivity, democracy, and respect for human rights (UN Security Council, 2001).

The formation of the interim and transitional government, along with the approval of the constitution, represented significant milestones following the Bonn Agreement, laying the groundwork for Afghanistan's transition to stability and democracy. These initiatives fostered inclusivity and provided a legal framework for governance, enshrining principles of equality, human rights, and the rule of law. The presidential election on May 18, 2004, which saw Hamid Karzai elected as the first democratically chosen president, marked a pivotal moment in Afghanistan's democratic journey, symbolizing the Afghan people's commitment to representative leadership and democratic principles. Together, these developments signaled Afghanistan's progress towards overcoming past challenges and working towards a future defined by peace, prosperity, and effective governance.

After Hamid Karzai came to power, many hopes were created that Afghanistan would truly become a home for all ethnic groups, good governance would be established, the law would be applied equally to everyone, power would be distributed fairly, justice would be ensured at all levels, and serious fight against corruption would be the top priority of the government. However, despite internal and external assistance and sufficient financial and time opportunities, these hopes turned into despair and disappointment. The gap between the people and the government widened, the struggle and reconciliation with opponents did not yield results, national unity was not secured, ethnic conflicts intensified, corruption reached its peak, and Mr. Karzai handed over a sick and corrupt government to his corrupt successor, which resulted in nothing but the collapse of the government of small-mindedness.

The purpose of writing this article is to identify the political functions of Hamid Karzai during his 13-year rule, which this research has been written based on first-hand documents and sources that have been viewed in a library-like manner with a psychological approach.

Hamid Karzai's Political Legacy: Navigating Afghanistan's Turbulent Transition

The September 11, 2001 attacks on US commercial towers and the Taliban's failure to hand over Bin Laden led to US air and missile attacks on Afghanistan, which brought down the Taliban regime within two months. The first American military group to investigate and organize operations through the land border of Tajikistan entered Khawaja Baha Uddin district, then went to

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DashtQala district adjacent to Khawaja Ghar district, which is the front line of the northern front in Takhar Province. This operation started on 6/8/1380 from the air, which was very terrible. The most intense air bombing took place on 13/8/1380. Following this operation, Mazar-e-Sharif fell into the hands of the United Front on 18/8/1380 and Kabul was also evacuated on 22/8/1380. With Kabul falling into the hands of the United Front, the Bonn meeting by the governments of the United States, England, the European Union and the United Nations in Germany paved the way for reaching a political agreement on November 27, 2001 according to 9/16/1380 and on December 5 of the same year finished. The results of that are the formation of an international coalition in the fight against terrorism and extremism, ensuring the peace and security of Afghanistan, drafting the constitution, presidential elections, parliamentary elections and provincial and district council elections, the structure of the Afghan National Police and Army, and the voluntary return of refugees. Under the supervision of international authorities, it was the provision of suitable alternative services for farmers due to poppy cultivation and drug trafficking, the balanced reconstruction of the country and the formation of a temporary administration (Moradi, 2019).

The temporary administration was formed based on the Bonn Agreements for a period of six months, which was headed by Hamid Karzai with the support of America and the pressure of Zalmia Khalilzad and the consent of the United Front. According to Sepenta Karzai, undoubtedly, as a result of the support of the Americans in the Bonn Conference of 2001, he became the leader of the interim administration after the Taliban. In other words, he was the only person approved by the Americans for this position (Sapenta, 2016).

Quoting Sattar Siret's interview with BBC Radio, Mohammadi wrote: "The head of the American CIA told me; You go away! Mohammad Zahir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan, told me the same thing, the Americans are making Karzai the president, get out!" (Mohammadi, 2017, p. 144). This quote undoubtedly confirms what SepentaMehri said.

The interim government of Afghanistan was the first government established after the fall of the Taliban on November 12, 2001. One of the duties of the interim government was to hold an emergency Loya Jirga, so that they could choose the head of the two-year transitional government until the 2004 presidential election. Compilation of Loya Jirga is also one of the comedies and tragedies of Afghanistan's history.

In order to organize the Loya Jirga, a commission was created under the supervision of the Central Commission of Zonal Commissions, all financial and logistical facilities of which were provided through UNAMA. As an employee of the Sub-Election Commission in the Northeast Zone, I was conducting the process of selecting members of the Loya Jirga in sixteen provincial and central units of Takhar province and in the center of Badakhshan province. A decree was issued through the Election Commission and UNAMA that the elected people should be accused of Drug trafficking, smuggling of antiquities, and human rights violations were not honest and patriotic men, and in this case, we carried out extensive propaganda in election gatherings. Unfortunately, when the elections were held, the same people accused of corruption and related to powerful people and violators of human rights were elected. If independent people were also elected, their number was small, in the Loya Jirga tent to vote on issues such as the election of the head of the transitional government and the election of the government cabinet and councils, the voting would be postponed for hours due to lack of agreement.

Following the conclusion of the interim and transitional government periods, as outlined in the 2001 agreement,

Afghanistan held presidential elections on the 18th of Mizan 1383, corresponding to October 9, 2004, resulting in Hamid Karzai's election as the nation's first democratically elected president with 55.4% of the votes. Serving two consecutive five-year terms, totalling 13 years in office, Karzai spearheaded various initiatives, including the drafting of a new constitution. Under his leadership, the constitution drafting commission was established to prepare the draft constitution, a comprehensive legal document comprising 12 chapters and 162 articles. Following rigorous review and approval processes, the constitution was ratified during the Loya Jirga of the Constitution on 22 Qos to 14 Jadi 1382, receiving presidential endorsement on Fran No. 103 dated November 6, 2003. Karzai's dedication to democratic principles and institutional development left an indelible mark on Afghanistan's political landscape.

In this law, serious attention was paid to democracy, individual rights and elections (Busaeidi 2007). In the new constitution of Afghanistan, the country is united and independent, and its government is called the Islamic Republic. At the head of the system, the president along with his two vice-presidents are elected and run the country by direct vote of the people for five years. The president is also the head of the three forces and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces or the supreme commanders of the armed forces. The president appoints the president and members of the Supreme Court of the country and members of the government cabinet with the approval of the parliament. The president still appoints a third (one-third of the parliament) (Busaeidi 2007).

According to the constitution, the main lines of the country's foreign policy are determined by the parliament and the president determines the internal policy. Unfortunately, during the thirteen years of Hamid Karzai's rule, there was never a written foreign policy based on which the Afghan government's foreign policy was carried forward.

In the 40th article of the constitution, the formation of provincial councils and district councils was reserved, but the establishment of district councils and municipal councils was never realized. The constitution of Afghanistan is considered to have the content of the best and most valuable law at the regional level, according to Dabeniz, the second Loya Jirga was held in January 2004, the new constitution is considered one of the most progressive constitutions in the Islamic world (Dobbins, 2016). according to Khalilzad, one of the clearest constitutions in the Islamic world (Khalilzad, 2015) but despite being the most progressive and clear laws, Karzai never took the aspect of implementation because the Commission for Monitoring the Implementation of Laws has repeatedly warned of violations of these laws.

During Karzai's rule, the law enforcers turned into violators of the law because the aspect of implementing this law was for the poorest and most immediate people, not for the powerful, the powerful and the rich. He has demoted the government to its lowest level.

In the contemporary history of Afghanistan, it is not possible to find a government leader who considers himself responsible and obliged to respect citizenship rights and national identity. The administration of the rulers of this era, including Mr. Karzai, was above the law and the interests of the people and used the law as a tool to beat heads. Due to the lack of sufficient literacy, tyranny and lack of understanding of the rights and duties of citizenship, the citizens of the country considered the government unquestionably entitled to rule and they deserved allegiance and obedience (Moradi, 2019).

A typical example of Mr. Karzai's lawlessness is quoted from Akbarzadeh's book *BaziBakhte*: "I have in my hand a decorated letter with Karzai's signature, which says: Hotel Serena (formerly Kabul Hotel) is in the possession of the Aga Khan This act is a clear violation of the law (Mammon, 2019).

Governance: Insights from Karzai's Leadership

A good government is a government that, with an open view of the people of the society, without any traditional, ethnic and tribal prejudices, works for the high national and human values and for ensuring national unity and social, economic and cultural justice of its people.

The government of Afghanistan, which was headed by Hamid Karzai and Ben Tsharvi as president based on the agreement, one of its commitments to the international community was to eradicate administrative corruption and bribery in this country. However, according to the report of the World Bank, Afghanistan is also ranked at the lowest level, i.e., in the 8th rank of countries that are facing governance problems. Especially the problems related to the rule of law and regulatory quality, abuse of military and political power, misuse of public funds, anger of land, corruption in the context of the non-transparent privatization process and the share of public companies, extensive embezzlement and corruption related to criminal issues, concern It shows the majority of Afghans during Karzai's rule. Also, the exorbitant expenses imposed by government offices, ministers and high-ranking officials and the payment of dollar salaries under the name of superskill and NTA to the relatives of high-ranking government members, while the average salary of low-ranking government officials was about 2000 thousand Afghans and teachers' salaries were paid in the same range (rural).

If Karzai's government is compared with the past decades, according to Moradi's writings, it had favorable conditions for building services and governance:

- 1- According to all previous governments, Karzai's administration enjoyed the broad political support of the international community and has rarely faced coups;
- 2- The Karzai government rewarded from the extraordinary military support of the international community in the context of the NATO agreement, which it could not use against neighboring conflicts;
- 3- In the direction of reconstruction and investment, the international community came forward to spend significant resources on development programs and the use of internal economic resources and reserves in Afghanistan (Moradi, 2019).

According to Dobbins, Afghanistan has never been a self-reliant country and may never achieve this virtue. This country is simply far more barren, far away and isolated than it can provide security and provide good and efficient governance for its large and scattered population (Dobbins 2016). To cultivate a thriving and robust office environment, three essential pillars must be upheld:

Determination and Resolve: It begins with a steadfast commitment and unwavering determination to foster peace, stability, and progress both domestically and internationally. Without this foundational will, achieving meaningful outcomes becomes an uphill battle.

Effective Planning and Skillful Management: Proper planning and astute management are vital components in steering the office towards its goals. Without a strategic roadmap and competent oversight, efforts risk being adrift and outcomes remain elusive.

Competent and Professional Personnel: Central to success are individuals who bring expertise, professionalism, and dedication to their roles. A cadre of capable professionals ensures that tasks are executed efficiently and with excellence, driving the organization forward.

During Mr. Karzai's tenure, these critical elements were notably lacking. The government lacked the resolve necessary to pursue peace and stability, both at home and abroad, and failed to define clear national interests. The constitutional framework lacked practicality, hindering effective governance. Economic growth and infrastructure development were approached superficially, with little regard for comprehensive planning and execution. Compounding these issues was the pervasive influence of ethnic and factional divisions within government offices. Appointment to key positions often hinged on personal connections and affiliations rather than merit, resembling more a coalition of interests than a unified administration. This nepotistic approach, particularly evident in the security and civil sectors, eroded loyalty to the state and paved the way for corruption and abuse of power. Addressing these shortcomings demands a fundamental shift towards meritocracy, strategic planning, and a unified vision for progress. Only through the cultivation of a committed, competent, and inclusive workforce can the office truly thrive and serve the interests of the nation.

According to Rahimi, the 13-year rule of Mr. Karzai has not been very positive and proud in terms of effectiveness, initiative and administration, and it is a pity for him personally that this golden period and all these economic aids, which are unprecedented in the history of the world, were not used wisely. and it was not effective (Rahiab, 2013).

According to the Guardian newspaper, after pointing out many examples of administrative corruption in the Qaisi system, the police and other departments of Afghanistan, Mammon says that healthy governance and the rule of law are the best defenses for President Karzai's government (Mammon 2019).

Corruption is one of the social and administrative difficulties that has been formed since the beginning of the establishment of the government, it has been institutionalized over the years and now it has seriously affected the society.

Administrative corruption weakens the government's accountability, robs public trust from the government and reduces the legitimacy of the government institution. Administrative corruption was a tool for illegal armed groups to maintain their power structure at the provincial and district levels, preventing the consolidation of government power and the rule of law. (Human Development Policy Center, Kabul University, 2007).

Evidence in all countries of the world shows that administrative corruption delays economic growth, reduces social services, and diverts investment in infrastructure, institutions, and social services. It is the people and the government that increases poverty (Busaeidi 2007 p. 60) and weakens security. The countries that spend the post-war period are vulnerable to corruption because the government institution is weak and they are not able to guarantee the rule of law.

The emergence and spread of corruption at the beginning of Hamid Karzai's administration was based on the fact that his entire governing body was made up of known corrupt people, and until the end of his administration, Hamid Karzai was promoted not to the position of a responsible governor, but to the position of an observer. And he sat idly and watched.

A survey conducted by Transparency International in 2004 indicates that the fight against corruption compared to security is considered to be the biggest significant challenge facing the

government in the near future. According to Transparency International's Corruption Index, Afghanistan ranks among 159 countries are ranked 117 in terms of corruption (Busaeidi, 2007).

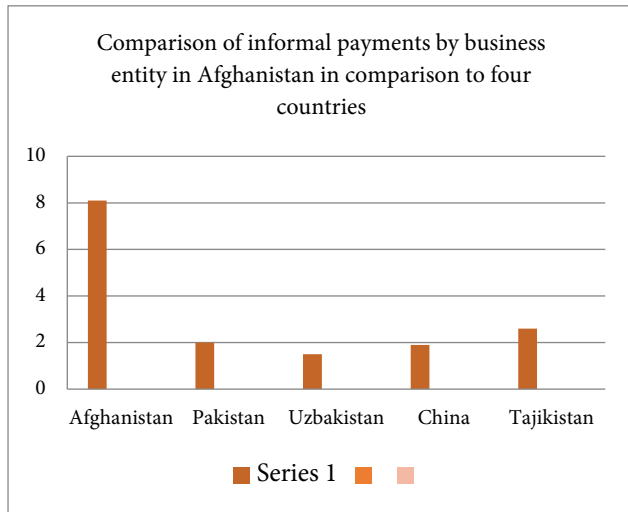


Chart 1

World Bank: Investment Situation Survey 2005

Despite the significant influx of international aid into Afghanistan, a distressing reality emerged: more than 30% of this aid was siphoned away through bribery and embezzlement, with the bulk of it disappearing within the labyrinthine corridors of government bureaucracy. Administrative corruption in Afghanistan soared to unprecedented levels, particularly during the tumultuous years of 2012 and 2013, prompting Transparency International to rank the country among the world's most corrupt nations (Busaeidi, 2007). Shockingly, despite mounting evidence of systemic corruption, the response from the highest levels of government was characterized by apathy and a glaring lack of accountability, perpetuating a culture of impunity that further entrenched corruption.

The infamous Kabul Bank scandal serves as a glaring testament to the endemic corruption that plagued Afghanistan's financial landscape. In 2011, revelations surfaced regarding the bank's brazen diversion of over \$160 million into dubious real estate investments in Dubai (Busaeidi, 2007). Notably, the beneficiaries of this illicit scheme included individuals closely aligned with the Karzai regime and Marshal Fahim, illustrating the extent to which corruption had infiltrated the highest echelons of power. Mahatma Gandhi's timeless adage, "Cleaning up corruption is like cleaning stairs; it should start from the top," takes on a poignant relevance in this context, as Afghanistan's descent into corruption unfolded from the pinnacle of authority down to the lowest tiers of governance, tarnishing the government's reputation and exacerbating the nation's challenges.

The government of Afghanistan after 2001

The September 11 attacks orchestrated by Al-Qaeda prompted a swift and decisive international response, leading to interventions aimed at fostering peace in Afghanistan. In the aftermath of these tragic events, urgent measures were initiated, ultimately culminating in the convening of the Bonn Conference under international oversight on December 5. During this pivotal gathering, representatives from the international community, alongside four Afghan political factions, engaged in negotiations that resulted in the Bonn Agreement. This landmark accord outlined the establishment of temporary governance structures to bridge the gap until permanent government institutions could be

formed. Serving as a crucial political framework, the Bonn Agreement facilitated the consolidation of various factions, delineated the roadmap for future government formation, and paved the way for the transition to post-2001 AD governance.

Conversely, some critics contend that the September 11 attacks served as a pretext for advancing geopolitical agendas and consolidating power, particularly through the erosion of civil liberties and the expansion of surveillance programs (Greenwald, 2013; Hersh, 2004). Skeptics argue that the U.S. government exploited the tragedy to justify interventions in the Middle East, exacerbating instability and fueling anti-American sentiment worldwide (Chomsky, 2002; Bacevich, 2005). Moreover, questions persist regarding the adequacy of intelligence gathering and the extent of government complicity or negligence leading up to the attacks, prompting calls for greater transparency and accountability (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004). Ultimately, the diverse interpretations of September 11 underscore the ongoing complexities surrounding counterterrorism efforts and the balance between security imperatives and individual freedoms in the modern era.

There has not been a single and coherent point of view about state building after 2001 in Afghanistan. Many researchers have incompletely discussed the international interventions after 2001 and the government's peace efforts, or have mentioned it marginally. Therefore, the constitution and the electoral system were two factors that strengthened the ethnic conflict during the Hamid Karzai era. As it was said above, the constitution of Afghanistan and the electoral system of this country have been two driving factors of ethnic division in Afghanistan for the past twenty years. As after every election, there were many ethnic conflicts, which reduced the participation of Afghan citizens in the next elections. In a note, Afghan researcher Mitra Qutb explains how Afghanistan's constitution promoted ethnic divisions in the country by creating a highly centralized form of government and adopting an electoral system that did not reflect the true political reflection of Afghanistan's ethnic diversity. Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, due to several decades of war, there is no accurate census of its population, especially considering the size of each nation; But one thing is clear, one nation is not big enough to form the majority, but the country is made up of several different ethnic groups.

The new constitution of Afghanistan, which was approved in 2004, adhered to the tradition of the unity of the country and the presidential system of government (Article 1) and granted extensive powers to the president, who was generally from a particular ethnic group. This presidential system of the country drew the conditions in such a way that only one person was allowed to enter the power based on the majority of votes. This person was born from ethnic votes with the majority of the population compared to other ethnic groups. As a result, the negative consequences of this highly centralized government structure can be seen in the electoral system of this country. As the presidential electoral system is based on the majority voting system, which could lead to the encouragement of ethnic and national divisions among the voters, so that the crisis of ethnic conflicts quickly arises after every election.

However, the type of political system formed along with the form of the electoral system led to the concentration of power in the hands of a particular group and created ethnic and sectional dissatisfactions, such that no Uzbeks supported the government in the 2005 parliament. In addition, the Afghan constitution did not consider any balancing option for the fair distribution of power among the ethnic groups. For example, the constitution banned the formation of parties based on ethnicity and religion, a decision

that seemed to be a logical option to prevent discrimination between the people of Afghanistan. But many experts doubted this law. Because such a ban limits the ability of ethnic groups to redress any injustice or discrimination through the electoral process (Qutb, 2002)

Rival political networks stimulated by Karzai

After the Bonn Conference in 2001, there were changes in the composition and positions of the dominant Jihadi political network, ethnic arrangements and elites of these networks. Also, a new political network of Western-educated technocrats with close ties to international state-building had emerged. Of course, this change was less important than the composition of the elites of the settings and the nature of their power. In addition, the division was carried out in a hasty manner and according to the immediate concerns of the western countries. Negotiations related to the structure of the new government were strongly influenced by the changes in the military situation (not the realities of the battlefield). According to the plan of the Bonn Conference, the four main political groups of Afghanistan agreed on a political balance based on the principles of the multi-ethnicity of the Afghan society and the free choice of government representatives; But the fact of the matter is that the Northern Alliance, especially the military criminal Jamiat-e-Islami, which was mainly from Panjshir Tajiks, had a lot of power. This division of power was consistent with the logic of "winner takes all." As a result, Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Hazaras were unhappy with their small share.

In fact, the political elites of the Northern Alliance surrounded Karzai and weakened and limited his power. This also started the ethnic crisis in the last two decades, in this connection, Ali Ahmad Jalali, a western educated and former interior minister, argues that the monopoly of power (by the Northern Alliance) fueled the concerns of ethnic balance in the post-Taliban government.

As a result, by limiting the Karzai government to Kabul and strengthening power networks in provinces such as Kandahar and Balkh, they began to consolidate their power bases. As at the end of 2002, Karzai started to eliminate the key elites of Mojahedin networks. He also tried to turn the powerful governors of the provinces against each other. In fact, he used the policy of repression and compromise. The result of which was evident in the comparison of the post-Ban cabinet and the cabinet after the 2004 presidential election due to conflicts between local commanders. However, after the 2004 elections, Karzai changed the ethnic balance in favor of the Pashtuns, and again the commanders (warlords) changed the ethnic balance again with their wide power base (Sharan, 2016).

Karzai and management crisis

Regarding how to manage the ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, according to Thomas Barfield, the new government has a powerful executive branch modeled after the constitution written by Mohammad Zahir Shah's regime in 1964, which Afghans believe is necessary to prevent ethnic and regional division. They rejected alternative plans and labeled those who favored more regional autonomy and less presidential power as tools (warlords) or ethnic blocs. The international community also supported those Afghans in favor of concentration; But in the new constitution of Afghanistan, there was no mention of the political role of political parties in the power structure. Karzai refused to allow any party to participate in elections and to allow parliament to organize itself along party lines, to allow candidates of any party affiliation, or to allow parliament to organize itself along party lines. Because

according to Karzai, parties lead to ethnic differences; But his decision only strengthened non-political relations based on family, regional or ethnic affiliations. Due to the lack of other options, the Afghan parliament was soon divided into Pashtun and non-Pashtun factions. Government ministries became ethnic monopolies, the spoils that Karzai offered to ethnic leaders in exchange for their political support. However, for regions that were used to autonomy over the years, the arrival of Karzai's appointees who took advantage of their positions or favored one faction over another created enmity with the central government (Barfield, 2011).

Conclusion

After the Bonn Agreement, Afghanistan embarked on a path of reconstruction after enduring 23 years of devastating conflict. The country, once in disarray, has made significant strides in restructuring both its government and private sectors, fostering social cohesion, and revitalizing its economy. Through the amendment of two Loya Jirgas and the adoption of a new constitution, Afghanistan laid the groundwork for an Islamic and democratic governance framework. Presidential elections were held, alongside Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections, demonstrating the Afghan people's commitment to the democratic process. Prioritizing good governance, anti-corruption efforts, and combating drug cultivation and production garnered widespread support from both the Afghan populace and the international community, evident in the robust public participation witnessed during the initial presidential elections.

However, challenges persisted, including non-compliance with laws, infringement upon citizens' rights, ethnic biases, and the proliferation of drug trafficking and potential poppy cultivation. Pervasive corruption, controversial elections, and weak governance threatened to undermine the government's relative legitimacy and international assistance. Misuse of political and military power, improper allocation of public and private resources, and opaque privatization efforts further eroded public trust in the Hamid Karzai administration. This erosion of trust culminated in Afghanistan ranking poorly in terms of the rule of law and corruption control, highlighting the need for enhanced government accountability and transparency. As insecurity and mistrust continued to escalate, the government risked sliding towards authoritarianism, exacerbating the growing divide between the government and its citizens.

The future purpose of research in this domain is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the successes and failures of governance in post-conflict Afghanistan, providing valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners alike. Secondly, by identifying the root causes of governance challenges, future research can inform targeted interventions aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, promoting transparency, and fostering public trust. Lastly, understanding the evolving dynamics of governance in Afghanistan is essential for ensuring sustainable peace, stability, and development in the country and the broader region. Therefore, continued research in this area is imperative for shaping effective governance strategies and advancing the long-term interests of Afghanistan and its people.

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