
Democracy's Development: Second Elections in Iraq and Afghanistan

A Roundtable Discussion with:

DR. LARRY DIAMOND

DR. ASHRAF GHANI

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Several years ago, millions of Iraqis and Afghans queued at schools, community centers, and polling stations to participate in their first truly democratic elections. The image of their fingers glistening with blue ink were broadcast around the world and became a poignant symbol of both the hope embodied in the democratic process and the promise of stability and prosperity in the wake of tyranny and chaos. Since that moment, the shifting political dynamics in both countries have shattered many illusions and diminished hopes for the transition to liberal democracy in the Middle East and South Asia. The dramatic return of the Taliban alongside the boom in the opium economy in Afghanistan and the dramatic episodes of sectarian violence in Iraq have set the stage for a very different democratic vision as both countries approach the next phase of post-conflict elections.

As recent state-building efforts in these countries have demonstrated, first elections receive a considerable amount of attention from policymakers and the media. With the convergence of Afghanistan's September 2009 presidential election and the Iraqi provincial elections in January 2009, *The Fletcher Forum* facilitated a discussion with prominent experts in the fields of state-building and democratization to explore what second elections can tell us about the health of these nascent democracies. The discussion touched on the fluctuations of power dynamics, the shift in electoral strategies, the longevity of political parties, and the impact of Islam on the electoral process. Eight years after the American military intervention in Afghanistan and six years after the invasion of Iraq, should we distinguish between "democracy," "Iraqi democracy," and "Afghan democracy"?

The Fletcher Forum was privileged to be joined by three distinguished experts: **Ambassador Rend al Rahim** of the Iraqi Forum for National Dialogue and former Iraqi Ambassador to the United States, **Dr. Ashraf Ghani** of the Institute for State Effectiveness and former Afghan Minister of Finance, and **Dr. Larry Diamond** of Stanford University and the editor of *The Journal of Democracy*. All three participants had a close-up view of the early steps and missteps of the state-building process and their continued scholarship has contributed to our collective understanding of the impact of U.S. policy in the Middle East and South Asia.

FLETCHER FORUM: *How do scholars of democratization view the significance of second elections?*

PROFESSOR LARRY DIAMOND: I think that second elections are a theoretically significant phenomenon. If the first elections were democratic, and the resulting system was initially democratic, second elections can give us some sense of how democracy is beginning to work. Second elections can also help to tell us if the country is moving toward democracy and better elections.

We do have public opinion polling evidence suggesting that when second elections are considered to be free and fair, particularly where the elections bring about electoral alternation, they tend to improve public assessment of, and identification with, democracy. I think that both in Liberia and Sierra Leone, to choose some post-conflict cases, second elections helped to produce greater stability with electoral alternation between

..... political parties. The most irreducible factor is the quality of the elections and whether people see them as reasonably fair and neutrally administered, reasonably free of intimidation, and open to political competition and participation. People judge the legitimacy of a

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nominally democratic system in part by whether they see it to be democratic. Also, people will look at whether there is the ability to change rulers that they do not like, whether those officials are legislators, or as happened in Iraq in January, provincial governments that voters felt to be corrupt or abusive. A positive response on this front tends to enhance the legitimacy of a political system that one hopes is moving in a democratic direction.

AMBASSADOR REND AL-RAHIM: I am not an expert on elections in general, but watching Iraq and a few other Muslim countries in the region, we probably have put a little too much emphasis on elections as a barometer

of democracy. However, we have not laid enough stress on other indicators. Larry mentioned a few of those and perhaps we can go into them. For example, financial corruption, intimidation, the presence of armed groups and militias, the education of the electorate, the transparency of the electoral law, and the ability of people to compete freely are all measures that should be taken into account when we look at elections and the context in which those elections are taking place. Freedom of speech is certainly important. The presence of elections is certainly useful, but can be misleading. I would actually add that focusing too heavily elections is rather dangerous in some cases.

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Elections are only as good as the political environment in which they are taking place. Just to look at a couple of examples—and I only know about the Muslim world—if you look at the Algerian elections, there were a number of contenders for the presidency but there was absolutely no change. There had been a change in the constitution in order to allow the incumbent president to run for a third time and the results were widely expected. Now these were not even second elections, these were the umpteenth elections in Algeria and it would be useful to look at that and say, "What do we mean by repeat elections being a good indicator of democracy; what exactly do we need to see; what does the political environment as a whole look like; and what other measures should we have in order to judge the degree of democratization as well?"

DR. ASHRAF GHANI: I have a couple of points. First is the need to keep in mind the level of government at which second elections take place. There is excellent work on Mexico's elections by Merilee Grindle at Harvard that shows that after 20 years, elections have not really changed the nature of governance at the sub-national level. So, the theory that the second election automatically leads to the third and fourth is questionable on the basis of data.

The second issue is the accountability of the state: the kind of state structure that has been consolidated, what core functions are being performed, and the extent to which the performance of those core functions relates back to the electoral system. Professor Diamond has pointed out repeatedly that not every regime that calls itself democratic is practicing democracy, and points to the importance, not of the theory of democracy,

but of the theory of the type of state that is being created or not being created. If every five years, as was the custom in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, there was just a mandate for a new group of people to use the state to enrich themselves, then that is not democratization, but rather an abuse of the process which leads to disenchantment.

FORUM: *Does it take an actual change in government rather than merely the occurrence of a second election in order for the population to have more faith in the system of democracy, rather than just the particular leaders who have, at least in name, tried to establish a democratic type of government?*

DIAMOND: Not necessarily, if voters judge that the first elected government did well, then the ability to reelect that government in a free and competitive environment can also serve the purpose. But since post-conflict governments so rarely do well in the initial years, there is a strong impulse to want political change—if not at the national level then certainly

..... at the sub-national level. Some ability for voters to change their leaders and representatives is very important.

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..... I would really underscore the point that both of my colleagues have made that, first of all, there is much more to having good elections than simply having free voting on election day. Free and fair organization of political parties, open debate in the society, minimization of violence and intimidation to enable people to speak out at all times and not just during elections, and neutral and effective electoral administration—all these things are crucial to having free and fair elections. One could go farther, as both Ambassador Rahim and Dr. Ghani have done, in insisting that for a system to become legitimate it is not enough to even have good elections. In the broader sense, you need effective government, good governance, and the rule of law, and that will not be ensured simply by having democratic elections, though I think it will be helped.

FORUM: *To move in the direction of more specifics with Iraq and Afghanistan—in the Iraqi case, how has the power dynamic shifted between the first election and the second election? In the Afghan case, how does the power dynamic appear to be shifting as we come toward the next parliamentary and presidential elections?*

RAHIM: In Iraq we have had not one election, we have so far had three sets of elections. We had elections in January of 2005, which were for a proto-parliament and for provincial councils. We had elections in December of 2005 for the Iraqi Parliament, now called the Council of Representatives. And then we had elections in January 2009 for the provincial councils. So we have had two sets of elections each for the national parliament and the provincial councils. And I think this is where I would be somewhat hopeful for Iraq. As you look at the progression of these elections, you see that they are getting better rather than worse. I would single out two major ways in which they have improved, although one could count others. One very obvious way is the expansion of the franchise and the inclusion of more people in the electoral process. Virtually no Sunnis participated in the elections of January 2005, which elected a transitional parliament and provincial councils. We are not talking just about Sunni parties, but there were very few Sunnis in parliament as such. When the time came to write the constitution in the summer of 2005, we had a very skewed picture of what the country looked like and the competing interest groups in the country were not represented. That was a major imbalance in the make-up of the parliament, and consequently, in the construction of the constitution.

Later that year, in December 2005, you had another set of elections for the national parliament. At that point, many Sunni groups came into the fold. They had, of course, excluded themselves by choice in January's election, but in December 2005, many Sunni groups, including political parties as well as loosely formed groups that cannot be called political parties, actually came in both as candidates and as voters. So between January and December 2005, there was an expansion of the electoral process to include more people.

In the provincial council elections of January 2009, an even greater number of Sunni groups were included, both as candidates and as voters. Those are groups which, in December 2005, had been counted as part of the insurgency, or at least as people opposed to the political process as a whole. We saw greater participation in Sunni provinces such as Anbar, Mosul, and Fallahadin—many more candidates, many more voters. Significantly, a very large number of Sunni pockets in greater Baghdad also participated in the elections, although they did not do very well. In terms of participation and inclusiveness, there has been a huge expansion over the last three or four years, which is a very important indicator. Another positive development is that improved electoral law allows greater interaction between the candidates and the voters, as well as greater transparency and, potentially, improved accountability.

In 2005, both in the provincial and the national elections, the laws stipulated that voting would be by lists, not individual candidates. Many lists did not disclose the full names of the candidates. Very often the candidates' names did not appear on the list, most likely they were blacked out because of security concerns. This was not a transparent process; the voters did not really know who they were voting for.

In the latest elections, the January 2009 provincial elections, the laws changed. To create a more transparent process in which voters could vote either for a list or a candidate. All the names of the candidates appeared on the lists. Therefore, what we saw in January 2009 was actual campaigning by candidates. It was possible for candidates to go knocking on doors, to hold town hall meetings, and to campaign for themselves, not only as part of a list but also as individuals. This is very important because it could translate into greater constituent accountability. That kind of accountability simply did not exist in the past and there was no relation between the parliamentarians in the national parliament and the representatives in the provincial councils toward those people who elected them. So, in these two areas, we moved toward strengthened accountability, improved transparency, and much greater inclusion.

DIAMOND: I would just add that the significant improvement in the security situation was also a very critical factor here. The fact that candidates could not only campaign but could actually show their faces and their photographs really created a much more genuine electoral environment.

RAHIM: When I arrived in Baghdad just after the elections, candidates' posters were still up and one said, "Vote for Mrs. So-and-So—I can't remember her name—" but the picture on the poster was a man's picture, and underneath her name it said, "wife of so-and-so, daughter of so-and-so." There are limits, even in the most improved environment. It is always women who are the last to be freed and liberated.

GHANI: Unfortunately, the situation in Afghanistan is the reverse story of Iraq. We began with the presidential elections in 2004 in an environment of great trust and hope for the future. The election in October 2004 was more like a national celebration than just an election. Eighteen-year-olds and women who had never left their homes actually showed up and voted. Women's participation was incredibly impressive. What was expected was a major state-building effort that would produce good governance, accountability, rule of law, and the removal from power of strong men that the U.S. and its allies had imposed on the country. With the parliamentary elections of 2005, the environment started shifting. The UN and the election

commission failed to disqualify people with severe human rights violations. That meant that the parliament became the location for people with severe deficiencies in reputation and accountability to the public. Essentially, they acquired immunity and they actually passed an immunity bill to safeguard themselves from their past misdeeds. The checks and balances that were required between the executive branch and the legislative branch became severely restrained. Accusations of persistent bribery of the legislators by the executive and presumably by other interested parties became an issue. As a result, instead of checks and balances, we often have deadlock in the government.

The net result has been a major rise in corruption. In 2005, Afghanistan was ranked 117th in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index; in 2008, it ranked 176th, the fifth-most corrupt country. Since 2006, almost every indicator of governance in Afghanistan has worsened. In addition, every effort has been made by the executive not to promote the formation of political parties. There are at least 110 small political parties—every faction has become a political party. The absence of a strategy by either the government or the international community to promote the formation of political parties has created an ideological vacuum that has been filled by ethnic politics. The risk here is that the rise of ethnic politics in Afghanistan could result in the creation of voter banks similar to those in Pakistan and India that revolve around national identity issues.

Another key concern is the abuse of state power for electoral gains and the denial of a level democratic playing field for opponents of those in power. With the first election, there was not an entrenched negative influence—there was optimism. People thought they could vote for an agenda of change. The current situation is marked more by the electorate's dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the democratic process. They do not think that the process has produced democracy because the security situation has deteriorated and economic conditions have not improved for the vast majority of people. Also, because of the breakdown of rule of law, there is a lack of trust that the government will enforce laws. More significantly, there is the fear that the government, instead of embodying the rule of law, is violating it. Another issue is complying with the constitution. The constitution specifies that the parliament can override a presidential veto of a bill with a two-thirds majority. We have two bills that have been passed by parliament, but they have not been implemented. Thus, simple procedures are being used to deny a level playing field. There are also important questions concerning the freedom of the media and institution building. The freedom and capacity to organize is an important medium-term issue, one

that is taken for granted in most countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

My last point concerns the international community's involvement in Afghanistan's elections—the United Nations did a poor job of supporting

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elections in Afghanistan. In 2004, they could not even provide all the ink that was needed. After conducting two elections, each of them costing hundreds of millions of dollars, we still do not have a voter registration or electronic identification system. I think inter-

national support of these elections needs some serious review—it has become a business without accountability. The UN has still not issued a report on the election of 2004 or 2005 outlining what they did with their funds, what services they created, and what institutional mechanisms they provided. And if each of the elections in Afghanistan is going to cost \$250-400 million, how do we afford this?

DIAMOND: First of all, I thank Dr. Ghani for an amazingly trenchant and comprehensive assessment of what is a very worrisome and discouraging situation in Afghanistan. I think that there are some signs of improvement in Iraq—increasing institutional capacity, stabilization, and better democratic institutionalization or progress—and yet it is very hard to find any of these right now in Afghanistan, which is moving in the other direction. I would say that pervasive corruption remains an issue in both Iraq and Afghanistan and is a major threat to the medium and longer-term legitimacy of these governmental systems. Iraq ranks right near the bottom, along with Afghanistan, in the realm of transparency.

The other point I wanted to mention is that institutional choice is an important cause of the underlying chaos in the system, as well as the inability to breed political parties. I think this was partly President Karzai's choice, for just the reasons that Dr. Ghani implied. The electoral system in Afghanistan, based on the single, nontransferable vote, is really regrettable. Almost every country in the world that has used it has abandoned it. There is no electoral system better at suppressing the emergence of political parties than one in which multiple candidates compete in a district and residents can vote for only one individual.

RAHIM: There are some key issues I want to address. The first is the complete unaccountability of campaign funding. Where does campaign money come from? How is it spent? Are incumbent groups using state funds

in the electoral process, as seen in Iraq since 2005? These are critical questions. More money was spent in the last provincial elections than was spent in the previous elections, and we are anticipating that in the December 2009 elections and again in 2010, it is going to be even more. Now, unfortunately, the groups that participate in government and who have cabinet posts and so on, see participation in the executive branch as a means of acquiring money illicitly to finance their election campaigns. And the groups that are outside government are regarded as not having a chance of winning any elections because they simply cannot steal money from the government in order to fund their campaigns. So, corruption is a big issue, as is the origin, flow, and spending of money.

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One issue that is important when discussing Iraq is that the country does not really have parties. I am always careful about talking about parties, because although there are groups that call themselves parties, they really are not. We do not have a party law and we do not enforce any regulations on the internal or external conduct of political groups. Another issue, of course, is that so far in Iraq, with the possible exception of the provincial elections, we do not have issue-based elections. We have identity-based elections and we have demagogic elections. There are no platforms, there are no so-called party platforms, there are no white papers, there are no programs for winning office, nor agendas that give voters a sense of what to expect from candidates or from groups if voted into office. That simply does not exist yet in Iraq. Perhaps it will be resolved eventually, but so far we have not had that.

I'd like to make one final point about elections providing the opportunity for change. Look at the perception of the latest elections in Iraq, people keep saying that the elections changed the complexion of the politics. To a certain extent, they did, but I think a lot of analysts have gone overboard in saying that these were elections for change. In fact, if you look at the way the elections were facilitated in Iraq generally, not in individual provinces, there are two things that emerge. One of them is that in every province the incumbent was voted out, including in provinces where (Prime Minister Nouri Al) Maliki and his party were dominant in the provincial council. So it wasn't really a vote for Maliki, it was a vote that said they didn't want to keep any of the incumbents. Now, it so happens that in many of the provinces, the group that Maliki leads was not the governing group and therefore ousting the others automatically brought

Maliki in—he came in by default. They were not necessarily voting for him, but voting out the incumbents. The other very interesting factor is that because of the way the elections are set up, 75 percent of the votes in the provincial elections went to “none of the above.” In other words, they went to political groups or individuals who want no seats whatsoever in the

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provincial council. So 75 percent of the votes were lost votes. The message was, “we don’t particularly like any of the large groups, any of the well-known names, any of the incumbents who are now in the provincial councils or the national parliament. We want people

who are completely out of the system, completely new faces. We want new blood.” And yet none of those small groups or individuals wanted to be elected. A full third of the electorate simply does not have representation in Iraq. Now, one could say, too bad and things could improve. But I think this is a significant fact and it should tell us a little about what the mood of the country is and whether the next elections are going to take this into account or not. If they do not, then I think we will be regressing.

GHANI: The single non-transferable vote policy was the worst possible choice for Afghanistan. President Karzai was not interested in the emergence of political parties; a single non-transferable vote system promotes individual bargaining and prevents the formation of legitimate interest groups and, hence, political parties. Under a single non-transferable vote system, elected officials don’t have constituencies. It’s extremely difficult in a large province to hold an individual accountable to an electorate. Also, the system contributes to corruption in the legislature. The system produces an independent politician without party affiliation who can use bribery in order to smooth a path through the bureaucracy. This severely contributes to undermining the rule of law. If rule of law is the key criteria by which we judge the nature of democratization, then these processes, instruments, and mechanisms need careful scrutiny, analysis, comparison, and then revision.

FORUM: *Dr. Ghani, you mentioned the importance of issue-based politics and we would like to move the conversation in the direction of the role of Islam in the electoral politics of Iraq and Afghanistan. Professor Diamond, could you start off by addressing whether there has been a trend in other countries in the Middle East or South Asia that emphasizes or de-emphasizes religious symbols as new democracies develop. What seems to be the trend?*

DIAMOND: I would say the dominant trend is not just religion, but more broadly, identity. In some contexts, identity can take the form of religious identification—Islam in general, Shi'a Islam, Sunni Islam, whatever it might be. Or it can take the form of Bosnian versus Croat, Serbian versus Kosovar, or one ethnic group in Liberia versus another. It is very hard to transcend identity politics. While it is important to try to do so, it is a gradual process. The politics of Islam is on the rise in many places and you see some gains for Islamist forces. But I want to stress that you also see losses or failures of performance. Islamists did not do well in the Moroccan elections recently. They are not doing well in the Indonesian elections—they figure to lose significant ground by all the polls that are coming out. The Islamists ruling in Turkey received a modest setback in recent municipal elections. So you have quite a lot of variation. In Iraq, the hardest core of the Islamist party in the Shiite south is the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, formerly the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which has close ties to Iran and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. They suffered a lot of setbacks in the provincial elections. Now, you can say, well, that was because they were ruling in many of the Shiite provinces, and as the Ambassador said, the ruling parties got kicked out almost everywhere, but I think there was also a reaction in the Shiite South against creeping Iranian influence and against the over-mobilization of religion in politics. So I think there is some ground for hope in Iraq that more moderate, restrained, and in some cases, secular groups are making a comeback.

RAHIM: I would agree with that. I think you are absolutely right. It is not just that they kicked the incumbents out. It is also that they were sending a message about excessive religiousness, excessive constraint on personal freedoms, and also the issue of Iran
 and the larger Shiite region. However, we have had a breakup in Iraq of the monolithic sectarian block—Shiite and Sunni. And yet, what is very obvious is that the resultant Shiite groups that have emerged from the United Iraqi alliance still only address themselves to Shiite voters and what you see in the Shiite scene is competition among the
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 Shiite groups for the Shiite vote. The same goes for Sunnis—the breakup has produced a number of groups competing for the Sunni vote only.

What we have not developed yet is any prospect of a cross-sectarian national agenda or national platform. I think the reason for this is not

because the religious parties are so appealing but because of another conundrum we have not discussed today: why is it that the more moderate mainstream, middle ground, quasi-sectarian groups have failed to organize, mobilize, unite, and compete? I think there is room for them, but we are still in a rut of sectarian politics where every group is only capable of addressing and attracting people with similar sectarian identities.

DIAMOND: Unfortunately, that is a very common pattern in post-conflict politics.

FORUM: *Ambassador Rahim, could expand on your observations about women and elections and, specifically, what effect the lack of a strong guarantee for women's council seats have had on the Iraqi elections? Is the absence of a quota a sign of confidence in Iraq's democratic institutions, or do you think it's an obstacle?*

RAHIM: First of all, I do not think we can do without a quota right now. There was an effort in 2005 to remove the quota and not include it in the election law for the Parliament. We simply do not live in a society where people, even women, will freely vote for other women. It's completely unrealistic to say that we have matured sufficiently and we have sufficient regard for the abilities of women in politics to remove the quota system. I can tell you that even in parliament, where women are 25 percent of the population, there is resistance to their participating actively in decision-making and debate. There are certain committees—for example, the Committee on Security—that do not have a single woman on it. They obviously do not think that women and security are in any way related or that women have anything useful to say on security issues. So no, we are a long way from being able to rely on the electorate's judgment and their trust and confidence in the capacity of women to be able to contribute to and be effective within the current system.

Overall, in the provincial councils, we have somewhat less than 25 percent female representation. To be fair, in some provinces, it is as high as 30 percent, but that is only because on the list, they were scattered in with other men and that's why they were chosen. But because of the mixed system that we have—list or candidate—when people voted for lists, then women came into office as part of that list. In the fewer cases where people voted for single candidates, women were not chosen.

The issue of women in politics is very serious because in the cabinet women only have three real ministries, only two of which are of substantive weight. There has been a lot of resistance to placing women in office in Iraq—that situation hasn't improved.

In terms of U.S. interests, and this also reminds me of Afghanistan and the recent law concerning Shiite women.¹ The international community can have an enormous bearing on the situation of women. When the constitution was being written in Iraq in the summer of 2005, the combined leverage and pressure of the international community—not just the U.S.—was essential for keeping the quota in parliament at 25 percent because a lot of people wanted to eliminate it. There was not similar pressure in the writing of the provincial elections law. The international voice, which can

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 speak forcefully to governments on the issue of women, should not be discounted. All these governments—certainly the Iraqi government—are still young enough, fragile enough, uncertain enough of their own status to care about international opinion and the way they are perceived by the international community. Therefore, this is an issue that should not be dropped by the international community and certainly not by the United States. We would be far worse off today if the United States or the European Union, for example, decided to back off.

DIAMOND: I agree and I would also like to emphasize that there are technical ways, which we explored when I was in Iraq, of having an open list system, as has emerged now in the recent provincial elections. There are ways to adjust so that you maintain a 25 percent quota or some kind of quota for women's representation.

GHANI: First, in Afghanistan, the issue of a quota has been positive. In Parliament we now have quite a significant presence of women. But, contrary to what some believed, having women has not reduced corruption. Women politicians practice patronage-based politics just as men do. In terms of the cabinet, lack of attention to women has been disastrous. We have a single organ—the Ministry of Women's Development—and some of my female colleagues would like to see it abolished, because whenever they go to another ministry with any complaint regarding gender issues they are referred to this ministry that cannot do anything on gender issues. It is in its sixth year and still preparing its so-called strategic plan.

I think the creation of a women's ministry could actually undermine rather than promote women's empowerment. Where we have really not paid attention is in the creation of equality of opportunity in terms of education. Roughly 30 percent of the students in Kabul University are

girls. We should have had targets very early on for a 50-50 representation of men and women because in a post-conflict environment, if there is a very strong gender bias in one direction versus another, the consequences of this can take two or three generations to clean up. And here, the lack of attention by the international community to higher education and to gender as part of a human development is important.

The most significant positive development in Afghanistan has been the emergence of some very strong women leaders at the sub-national level. The emergence of these women, and the group of votes that they represent, makes every politician, regardless of their own opinion, understand their importance. The opening of the democratic process has brought about an interest group that is beginning to identify and articulate its interests and give them organizational form and expression, which if supported, could be very positive.

The point remains that marginalization will continue unless serious attention is provided to the economic empowerment of women. The Shiite law was a disaster and shows that legislation written in violation of human rights treaties that Afghanistan has signed and enshrined in the constitution can take place. There is not enough scrutiny or monitoring of the writing of legislation, nor enough understanding of the impact. The law was passed in parliament without significant debate. It was then signed by the President. The only thing that prevented implementation was international pressure and the significant dissatisfaction of women in general, and Shiite women in particular, with the provisions of this law. People who were very secure in their Islamic identity, like these female politicians and activists, could call into question provisions of a law that they see as a fundamental violation of their rights.

FORUM: *To what degree should we expect democracy to look different based on its cultural, regional, and historical contexts?*

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DIAMOND: First, I think in terms of the basic, minimum definition of democracy, it is the same everywhere. You cannot have a democracy unless there are reasonably free and fair elections in which the people can choose and replace their leaders in a reasonably well and neutrally administered environment, and in which there is relative freedom from intimidation and relative freedom for people to speak their minds. You cannot lower the bar and say this is just a “different form of

democracy” where candidates are being murdered and opposition is being silenced or bought off.

Now that being said, of course there are 120 different democracies in the world today and each one has its own distinctive properties. To say that there is purely a Western form of democracy or that there is a predominant form of democracy which will look different in Iraq or Afghanistan is to misunderstand the fact that democracy looks different in every country where it exists. It has some peculiar properties shaped by the culture, the ethnic structure, the specific institutions that are chosen, the historical circumstances, and so on.

The challenge in each of these countries is to create a system of governance, an administrative and an economic environment in which democracy can actually function. I think Iraq has made some modest—but partial and highly reversible—progress in recent months in that direction, and I am worried that if we become complacent and think the job is done, it will all roll backwards. In Afghanistan I think that the situation is moving backwards and we need to listen very carefully to Dr. Ghani and other intelligent, informed, and democratic Afghans regarding the radical changes we need to make to the way we engage that country.

RAHIM: I agree completely that there are certain basic norms and rights that cannot vary without actually compromising democracy, human rights, and civil rights. The workings, however, can change. For example, in the United States you have two parties, in

other countries you have more than two parties. In Iraq, a great deal of the work is achieved by consensus, as opposed to straight up-and-down votes. Now this is because of our culture—it’s a culture which regards consensus as more authentic and more expressive of the will of the people than an up-and-down vote. But these are the details.

“... there are certain basic norms and rights that cannot vary without actually compromising democracy, human rights, and civil rights.”

The bedrock of certain norms and principles really cannot change. This is why I am really not a great advocate of Muslim democracy, Christian democracy, or Iraqi democracy. There are different complexions but the basic, fundamental issues cannot vary without undermining democracy and rights.

GHANI: First, we need to focus on democracy without adjectives. That is the set of minimum conditions that relate to governance—governance in a

democratic manner where a change of leadership can take place and there are a set of guarantees. That is the minimum core.

My second observation is that a democratic process is not going to start or be consolidated without public debate. John Dewey's work, *The Public and Its Problem*, still remains the dominant text, in my view, of why a public debate and democratic discussion is an essential ingredient of building good and effective governance. Let me repeat what Dr. Diamond said—democratic processes in their first phases are highly reversible. If we were making a comparison in 2005, we would have said that conditions in Afghanistan were very positive and conditions in Iraq were very gloomy. Now the contrast is equally significant. This relates to human agency. Declines can be reversed but improvements can also decline. This means that the symbolic work of investing in the institutional structure or democratic process is never over. We need to continue to engage in renewal. And here again, the extent to which the international community is a catalyst or obstacle for democratic processes needs to be investigated. Thomas Carothers' work on democracy promotion is very sobering in this regard because when democracy promotion itself becomes a profit-making industry without accountability, the consequences must be fully understood.

FORUM: *Thank you for taking the time for this interesting conversation.*■

ENDNOTES

- 1 The law, which applied to Shiite women only, was passed by both houses of the Parliament and signed by President Karzai in March 2009. Among its provisions, the law made it illegal for Shiite women to resist their husband's sexual demands and required women to gain their husband's permission to work outside the home or to go to school. After international outcry and widespread protests, including public demonstrations by women within Afghanistan, President Karzai pledged to review the law and work with parliament to amend any provisions in conflict with the Afghan Constitution, which enshrines equal rights for men and women.