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Exaggerated Registration Counts: Election Scandal

The downfall of the Pakistan-installed regime of Taliban on October 7th, 2001 resulted in the installation of Mr. Hamid Karzai as Chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) at a conference in Bonn, Germany on 22 December 2001. Subsequently, he became the President of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA) at Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) held in June 2002. The current situation gives the impression that he will be put in the presidential office after October “election” with the financial and military power of the US for an unknown period. However, Mr. Karzai rarely ventures from his heavily guarded presidential compound because of continual threats to his life. He has narrowly escaped three assassination attempts till now. During the current year, US ambassador for Afghanistan, Mr. Khalilzad and a designated Karzai’s team have been very busy in the election campaign bribing electorates and tribal heads to vote for Karzai in order to fix him in the office.

“United Nations Development Program (UNDP) implemented voter registration at a cost of US\$100 million mainly funded by US and Britain.” (1) Karzai is blamed for using government facilities in the election campaign and the foreign aid donated for the so-called “reconstruction of Afghanistan”.

Karzai’s rivals have expressed their dissatisfaction on several occasions against irregularities and manipulations in the election process. Despite being seen rigging his domination by replacing certain senior government officials, Karzai’s orders are not executed within the

corrupt government departments. Bribery and nepotism are common daily practice imported from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Recently, news agencies reported that *“despite the violence, voter registration wrapped up with some 10.53 million Afghans signed up to vote in the landmark elections -- more than 90 percent of those eligible, and more than 41 percent of them women.”* (2)

This article is mainly focused on the assessment of these figures and on how it would be possible that the voter registration counted for over 10 million and women’s participation to 41% under the current turmoil situation. To evaluate the authenticity of these figures, it is deemed necessary to highlight Afghanistan’s population demographics structure and characteristics (composition) in brief.

Population Demographic Profile of Afghanistan (3)

■ Size and Urban- Rural Distribution of Population:

Table 1. Population by sex in urban and rural areas in Afghanistan, 1979

(In million)

<i>Area</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Urban</i>	1.05	0.96	2.01	15.4
<i>Rural</i>	5.66	5.38	11.04	84.6
<i>Total</i>	6.71	6.34	13.05	100.0

Source: Computed from the Final Result of Population Census of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Office (CSO), Afghanistan, 1981.

On the basis of the first census, the size of the settled population in Afghanistan was 13.05 million, of which 6.71 million were males and 6.34 million females. The three sources indicated under table No. 2 are the result of the Census 1979, published by CSO (then changed to the Ministry of Statistics) and the UN reports of different years. According to the Ministry the population counts for 15.81 million in 1989. In an interval of 10 years the population has gone up by 2.76 million. (4)

The mean (average) annual rates of growth♠ for Afghanistan in the years 1979-89 were estimated at approximately 2 percent, which depicts a high mark in the growth rate under the war condition. It was overestimated growth rate for political reasons. The decennial population growth rate for the years 1979-89 was estimated at approximately 21.15 percent. (See table 3, footnote.). Due to deterioration of the general situation, the annual population growth rate, ranging between (1.77- 1.92), was estimated at an average of 1.86 for the years 1990-2000. Consequently the population counts for 19.81 million in 2000, indicating an increase of 3.7 million in a period of ten years.

Likewise, the population count for 2001-2004 is 22.29 million, demonstrating an increase of 2.13 million or 10.57% between the intervening periods of 2001-2004

♠when population increases over period of more than calendar years studied, the mean annual rate of growth may be computed. (5)

The study of population structure and characteristics (composition) aims at finding and measuring changes if any, in these characteristics over a period of time.

Table 2. Population and Growth rate in Afghanistan (in million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>
<i>1978</i>	10.83	1.89	12.72	-

1979	11.07	1.98	13.05	2.56
1981	11.58	2.17	13.75	2.61
1983	11.78	2.30	14.08	1.94
1985	12.17	2.48	14.65	1.93
1986	12.37	2.56	14.93	1.89
1987	12.57	2.65	15.22	1.94
1088	12.78	2.75	15.51	1.90
1989	12.97	2.84	15.81	1.93
1990	13.61	2.99	16.11	1.92

- Source:**
1. Economic and Social indicators, March 1979-84. Central Statistics Office, Republic of Afghanistan, 1984.
 2. Demographic Year Book, United Nations, 1981.
 3. Statistical Year Book, March 1984-1083, Central Statistics Office, Republic of Afghanistan.
 4. For 1979: Final Result of Population Census of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Office CSO), and Afghanistan, 1981.
 5. United Nations 1989, Projection Methods for Integrating Population Variables into Developing Planning, Volume 1, New York.

Table.3 Projected Population of Afghanistan Based on the First Census

Average Annual Growth Rate= 2.0

<i>Year</i>	<i>Settled Population (Million)</i>	<i>Absolute increase (million)</i>	<i>Percent Over1979</i>	<i>Nomadic population (Million)</i>
1979	13.05	-		0.80*
1989	15.81	2.76	21.15▶	-
1990	16.11	-		
2000	19.81	3.70	23.00	1.20 ♣
2004	22.29	2.48	10.57	
Total (Settled + Nomad) 23.49				

Source: Computed from the Final Result of Population Census of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Office (CSO), Afghanistan, 1981

♣ Nomadic population was estimated at an average growth annual rate of 1.70. It counts for 1.20 million in 2004, indicating an increase of 408,000 populations in 30 years.

- The highest government's manipulated nomadic figure of 800,000 estimated in 1973.

■Rural- urban population:

Afghanistan is predominantly rural and is **poorly urbanized country**. According to 1979 census, out of 2.6 million urban populations in 1986, over half of them were concentrated in one major city. Kabul accounts for 51% of the total urban population of the country. **The**

urban population has gone up by 0.96 million in the intervening period of twelve years but the population growth rate has declined from 2.56 in 1979 to 1.93 in 1989 due to war conditions. On the basis of the 1979 Census of Afghanistan, the urban population was 1.98 million, while the rural population was 11.07 million. Thus, the ratio of urban-rural population accounted for 0.179, i.e. for each rural resident there was 0.179 urban resident.

Table 3: Population by Sex, Urban and Rural Areas in 1979

<i>Area</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Urban</i>	1.05	0.96	2.01	15.4
<i>Rural</i>	5.66	5.38	11.04	84.6
<i>Total</i>	6.71	6.34	13.05	100.0

Source: Computed from the Final Result of Population Census of Afghanistan, Central Statistics Office (CSO), Afghanistan, 1981

■ Nomadic Population:

Various estimates and projections made by USAID- sponsored Afghan Demographic Studies (1973), the Central Statistics Office (1979) and Mr. Thomas Eighmy indicated the nomadic population differently. Mr. Eighmy estimated the nomadic population to be 80,000 and the then Government of Afghanistan indicated 800,000 (unpublished). While the Demographic Survey of Afghanistan published in 1975 designated the nomadic population to be 107,400.

In this article, I prefer to take the highest government's manipulated nomadic figure of 800,000 estimated in 1973. This figure at an annual growth rate of 1.7% in a period of 30 years counts for 408,000 and totaling 1.2 million in 2004, (800000 +4080,000= 1.2 million). The official annual average growth rate for nomads is lower than the settled population due to their hard living condition. Nomad's annual growth rate even during peacetime could not be more than 1.7%, which is even much higher than most developing countries. While the nomads annual population growth rate in Afghanistan is much lower than the settled population due to: their tough living condition, lack of education, high infant mortality rate combined with inaccessibility and unavailability to medical facilities and poor sanitation. Because of their constant movement and change of place, nomadic population is prone to additional risk of death, lowering their annual growth rate considerably.

It has to be noted that nomadic figure (0.8 million) was highly exaggerated by the then government for obvious political reasons. Most of the nomad's population was settled during the governments of Prime Minister Hashem and after. Under the illusion of majority and minority, certain elements of the governments in Afghanistan atrociously have used the poor nomadic population as a political tool and to retain an artificially political score for their domination in power. By beating the drum of a fictitious majority, they have not done anything for the interest of the majority of Afghanistan's population. For years a few notorious elite ruling circle of our society, who were the minority themselves, suppressed the rest of the population to living in a miserable condition. For more than two decades, almost all Afghanistan population has been exercising a nomadic-life in their country. The population has constantly been displaced for their safety, experiencing devastation, starvation and other war related consequences. There is no need to further elaborate on this issue for being not the scope of this article.

In conclusion, the total population of Afghanistan, settled and nomadic counts for 23.49 million in 2004. According to the Afghan governments 2 million of population were killed during the past 25 years of war, devastation and on –going unrest. Still more than 3.5 million of our population is wandering in the neighboring countries of Iran and Afghanistan and 0.5 million in other parts of the world including America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Therefore, if we subtract the wartime dead population and emigrants (out migrants), the total population in Afghanistan, settled and nomadic, is not more than 17.49 million in 2004. It is absolutely ludicrous that the mass media report that the population figures are 25 million and even sometimes 28 million. For God’s sake! Has the Afghanistan population increased by an absolute number of one million per year?

■ **Age- Structure of the population:**

Population of Afghanistan like many other developing countries, are young and over half of them are in the working age group.

“As a whole the developing countries have high percentages of children below 15 (ranging from 35.3 per cent to 51.4 per cent). The population in the working age ranges from 46.5% to 67.7 percent for the developing countries.” (6)

Afghanistan like most developing countries has “young” population, while the developed countries has “old” population. Therefore if we illustrate the age-sex pyramid of Afghanistan it indicates a broad-based with steeply sloping sides, indicating a large proportion of children and young persons and a small proportion of old people.

Two important points emerges out of the above discussion on the age structure and the age distribution of Afghanistan population being eligible to vote. In view of this matter, the total population who may fall within the eligible voter registration in the upcoming election is less than 10 million due to young age structure of our population.

Sex and age are the basic characteristics, or the biological attributes, of any demographic group, which affect not only its demographic but also social, economic and political structure. For they influence birth and death rate, internal and international migration, marital status composition, manpower, the growth national product (GNP), planning regarding educational and medical services and housing etc. From the sex-age distribution of any population, estimates of school-age population may be made and, on that basis, one may arrive at an estimate of the number of educational institutions and their necessities that may be needed. Similarly, estimate of the number of voters, entrants in the labor force, etc. may also be made. Sex and age are very important demographic characteristics of population because they are the *“invisible, indisputable and conventional indicators of social status . ” (7)*

■ **Fertility and Mortality:**

On the basis of the 1979 Census, the crude birth rate (CBR) was 49.09, the crude death rate (CDR) 22.3 per 1000 population, the infant mortality rate was 181.6 per 1,000 live birth, the total fertility rate was 7.1 per woman and the growth reproductive rate 3.5. These rates are

among the highest in the world. The annual rate of natural increase 2.5% and the expectation of life at birth is 41 years. All these rates are to be the highest in the rural areas.

The birth rate is indicative of the fact that the level of fertility in Afghanistan is higher than the death rate, which is moderately high. The reason for high birth rate can be due to high proportion of married women, currently in the reproductive age group, a high percentage of illiterate population specifically women, a low level of contraception, universality of marriage and a low mean age at marriage. The high death rate could be because of the lack of medical and hospital facilities. Maternal mortality could be high as most of the births take place at home rather than in hospital. Added to this low level of living standards could be a contributory factor.

When there is a positive difference between the number of births and the number of deaths, population grows, and this increase of birth over death is known as the natural increase of population.

In Afghanistan an almost equally high level of mortality checked the excessive fertility. During the past 25 five years, Afghanistan population path of growth was slowed down because of the violent and high death rate associated with such catastrophes as famines, chronic food shortages, widespread epidemics, droughts, floods and above all devastating war, sporadic conflicts and mine victims. In normal times, too, death rates were quite high as a consequence of poor diet, primitive conditions of sanitation and absence of effective preventive and curative medical practices.

Afghanistan's education system have been disturbed during the war period and totally shunned under the domination of Taliban. During the last two and half decades no changes have occurred, what so ever, in public life.

Changes may be of material and easily discernible such as a rise in the income level and greater availability of food. Or changes may occur in the ways of thinking, in one's attitude to women's education or changes in the social and political thinking and respect of women's rights and freedom. By and large, no change has been visible yet in Afghanistan. It has got worse.

The general experience is that a deficiency in any of the factors may seriously retard the over all growth of a system. The purpose of this debate, which will be elaborated later, is mainly focused to determine the cause of change in the attitude of Afghanistan's women to make 41% of the voter registration in the presidential election of October.

Summary of Population Profile

Population size: On the basis of the first population census (1979) the size of the settled population in Afghanistan was 13.05 million. The average annual rates of growth for Afghanistan population in the years 1979-89 were 2 per cent, which depicts a high mark in the growth rate under the war condition.

According to the Ministry of Statistics the population counted for around 15.81 million in 1989. As it may be observed in an interval of ten years (1980-1989) the population has gone up by 2.76 million. Considering the progressive annual estimated growth rate the population counts for 19.81 million in 2000 while in 2004 the total population counts for 22.29 million.

As you may have heard the Afghan governments and international organizations, times and again, claim that up to 2 million of population were killed during the past 25 years of war, devastation and on-going unrest. Likewise, there are still more than 3.5 million Afghan refugees wandering in the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan. Migrants in other parts of the world including America, Europe, Asia and Africa are estimated at 0.5 million.

Therefore, if we deduct the wartime dead population and emigrants (out migrants) ($3.5 + 2.0 + 0.5 = 6$ million) from the *total population of 2004, settled and nomadic, still remaining in Afghanistan does not count to more than 17.49 million.*

It is absolutely ludicrous that the mass media report the population figures 25 million and even sometimes 28 million.

Population distribution: *Afghanistan is predominantly rural and is poorly urbanized country.* According to 1979 census, out of 2.6 million urban populations in 1986 half of them were concentrated in one major city. Kabul accounts for 51% of the total urban population of the country.

Population of Afghanistan like many other developing countries, are young and over half of them are in the working age group. **As a whole the developing countries have high percentages of children below 15 “(ranging from 35.3 per cent to 51.4 per cent).”**

Two important points emerges out of the above discussion on the age structure and the age distribution of Afghanistan population being eligible to vote. Large proportion of populations in Afghanistan falls below the age group of 18, not being eligible to vote.

Population Growth: During the past 25 five years, Afghanistan population path of growth was slowed down because of the violent and high death rate associated with such catastrophes as famines, chronic food shortages, widespread epidemics, droughts, floods and above all devastating war and sporadic conflicts, mine victims. In normal times, too, death rates were quite high as a consequence of poor diet, primitive conditions of sanitation and absence of effective preventive and curative medical practices.

Education and Social Changes: Changes may be of material and easily discernible such as a rise in the income level and greater availability of food. Or changes may occur in the ways of thinking, in one’s attitude to women’s education or changes in the social and political thinking and respect of women’s rights and freedom. By and large, no change has been visible yet in Afghanistan. It has got worse.

The general experience is that a deficiency in any of the factors may seriously retard the over all growth of a system. This debate is mainly focused to determine the cause of change in the attitude of Afghanistan’s women to make 41% of the voter registration in the presidential election of October.

Comments and Conclusions

Currently the estimated population of Afghanistan accounts for 17.49 million. It is notable to mention that the developing countries, by and large, have high percentages of children below 15 “(ranging from 35.3 per cent to 51.4 per cent).” We assume that 45 % of Afghanistan

population is below 18, estimating at 7.9 million. While out of the total population 55 % or 9.6 million fall within the category above the age of 18, being eligible to vote. Even if all eligible voters had registered, the voter registration would not have counted for 10.53 million because of being more by around one million than the overall eligible voters in the country.

Therefore the current election registration counts is totally misleading. It is a figure generated behind closed doors by Karzai's clique to demonstrate to the world public that Afghanistan has a so-called "free and democratic election". It gives a propaganda tool that the defeat of "terror network" brought a new model of democracy to Afghanistan. A model of democracy and presidential system copied from the most developing country, USA, to the least developed country, Afghanistan. This would be a model of "democracy" to install a dictatorial regime that the people of Afghanistan fight against it for 25 years and suffered for 100 years. This so-called democratic model in view of certain narrow-minded and arrogant interest-seekers would be applicable later in Iraq. How funny it sounds!

As the situation shows this up-coming elections are just a formality and an embellishment of the old tactic of colonial power to install their stooges and to have much of a grip on a nation with the color of democracy. Unleashing high voter registration propaganda is orchestrated in an attempt to pull the wool over the eyes of Afghans and the world. Afghanistan's election is shaping as part of US presidential election campaign. *"With his own bid for re-election approaching in November, President George W. Bush would like a foreign policy success story. In June, he cited Afghanistan as a role model for Iraq."*(8)

According to (AREU), *"Election marred by widespread intimidation and irregularities will be regarded as illegitimate by both Afghans and the international community."*(9) As **Mr. Hamidullah Tarzi**, a former minister and an academic and writer said, *"This will not be a fair election in the way that America wants us to have one,"*

Mr. Karzai was apparently given the task of reuniting and rebuilding ethnically and regionally fractured, poverty-stricken and war ravaged Afghanistan. The question that whether he has made any attempt to reunite and rebuild the nation remains up in the air. The promises of reconstruction by western nations have gone with the wind. This government has neither taken any practical step towards rebuilding nor reuniting the nation yet. His opponents that he has consistently been seeking to retain his position contrary to the decision of Bonn conference have constantly accused Karzai. He has cunningly been playing various cards to consolidate his power base and to galvanize his political legitimacy through spreading the seed of discord and disunity among ethnic groups in Afghanistan who badly needs to be united for peace and stability of Afghanistan and the region. People of Afghanistan have been united in the course of history and hostile against foreign domination and invaders.

Observers and reporters point out many examples of disunity and discord, which were deliberately orchestrated by Karzai's clique such as: conflict in Herat province, manipulation in modifying some main items of the constitution at Loya Jirga, attraction of criminal Taliban high ranking elements to the government departments and conspiracy against presidential challengers.

Mr. Latif Pedram, a presidential candidate and outspoken critic of the government, was accused of expressing anti-Islamic views on women's rights. Certain high-ranking judiciary body for expressing his notion criticized him. Comically an Afghan woman said, "How can they dare to stigmatize people of expressing Islamic or un-Islamic views, while they

themselves are retaining government position and ruling the country with the help of foreign forces? They should think twice before they touch on such matter. They use Islam to justify their inhumane and treacherous behaviors.”

Afghanistan’s education system have been disturbed during the war period and totally shunned under the domination of Taliban. In the last two and half decades no changes have occurred in public life. Changes may occur in the ways of thinking, in one’s attitude to women’s education or changes in the social and political thinking and respect of women’s rights and freedom.

In Afghanistan nothing is visible yet. The general experience is that a deficiency in any of the factors may seriously retard the over all growth of a system. No reason can be perceived to point out the sudden swing of women in Afghanistan to boost up the voter registration through their participation. Have the Afghan women’s socio-economic, freedom of speech, literacy rate, living condition, political awareness etc. changed to be pointed out as a reason to make 41% of the voter registration? The response is absolutely not.

Cultural barrier dominantly influential in rural areas associated with lack of information, low women status, low level of education, hostile opposition of fundamentalists to women’s participation in social and political affairs of the nation prevent women from registering. *“Even if the current UN estimate that 41% of registrations are from women is (supposedly) correct, there needs to be substantial progress in reversing women’s restricted mobility and participation in public life.”*(9). It is hard to believe the exaggerated publicized registration. Women are invisible in government offices, except a few in Kabul, and as a whole in rural areas where over 85% of population is concentrated.

According to Jenny Frances from Kabul, “ the Afghan women willing to talk to me openly about the issue told me they would not register, nor vote, because, “ It’s too risky.” They live in Kabul, where voter security will supposedly be “ guaranteed” by NATO’s omnipresent International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).”

According to Human Right Rights Watchdog, even in Kabul where thousands of foreign troops are present, Afghan women do not feel safe and many continue to wear burqa for protection. In some areas where girls’ education does exist, parents are afraid to allow their daughters to take advantage of it, following the burning down of several girls’ schools. Girls have been abducted on the way to school and sexual assaults on children of both sexes are now very common. (10). Under the prevailing circumstances how the women registration makes 41% that *“it is proving difficult for 12000 US Special Forces to protect a road from Kabul to Kandahar.”* (11)

Obviously as after tight political control of the process, the new constitution upholds the presidential system that Washington pushed for, defeating the demand for a parliamentary system. Election for president is a formality in order to give Hamid Karzai, who was appointed by the US, the mantle of being elected some sort of legitimacy (11) to keep up ruling the country. Regardless of the continual deteriorating security situation, and assault on voters and the possibility of a boycott by the presidential candidates Karzai will be put in office in line with the “US agenda”. As from Kabul Jenny Frances quoted from (AREU): *“ There is a wide held perception that this enthusiasm for 2004 elections is a result of the Bush administration’s need for foreign policy and ‘war- on- terror’ success ahead of the November 2004 presidential elections in the US, particularly as Iraq appears to be coming less of a*

success by the day.” Consequently “ US President George Bush will claim credit for bringing democracy to the country just in time for the US presidential election”. (12)

The overall outlook in Afghanistan is gloomy. It is impossible for international community to “fix” Afghanistan through pushing their own agenda. The country is currently run by US ambassador, Khalilzad, who was a liaison between the US energy company Unocal and the taliban government and had worked under national security advisor Codoleezza Rice when she worked as a director of Chevron oil. (11) Karzai has been a supporter of Taliban and a former consultant to Unocal gas consortium that is planning to build a trans- Afghanistan pipeline to carry oil and natural gas from central Asia’s Caspian Sea to open water ports in the Indian Ocean. (9)

It is seen a new dictatorship is looming over the people of Afghanistan who have been suffering for years from atrocity and injustice of the dictatorial regimes and their absence of law and order. At present, the people who speak of bringing democracy to Afghanistan unfortunately have not any idea of democracy. There will not come any peace in ravaged Afghanistan if their leader is imposed, as it has been in the last 100 years, from abroad. On the contrary, the policy of “king making” will neither bring about peace of mind for the people of Afghanistan nor for the world community. The educated and intellectuals will be sidelined, frustrated and resented. The diverse effect of hatred and frustration create more under ground terror networks and produces too many groups both inside and outside Afghanistan, causing a prolonging anarchy and instability. Foreign forces cannot protect a ‘ king’ forever.

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