The Powerless Majority

Young Afghans Struggle for Political Power

and Participation since 2001

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Abstract

Afghan society is characterized by a patriarchal hierarchy, meaning that it is primarily elderly men who bear the authority to make decisions. Youths and women are either marginalized or excluded from all levels of the decision-making processes; whether it is in the family or in society. It is a rough environment for political engagement.

Young Afghans despite their increased individual resources and political orientation are still in the margins and struggle to gain access to decision-making organs. However, despite many opportunities, marginalized group have not managed to succeed in their goal of political inclusion. By studying the youth perception of the current political issues and their field and method of engagement, I argue that there are two main obstacles that have held the youth back. The first is that youths are not as conscious of their social and political status as they perceived to be. Therefore, they lack the required motivation to identify themselves as a group. Therefor they cannot mobilize effective collective actions to improve their social statues. The second obstacle is that youth movements today despite fundamental differences apply the same organizational structure and ideological base as youth movements in 1960s and 70s. I argue that without introducing new ideas and formula they will face the same destiny as youth movements in 1960s and 70s.

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To complete this Master Thesis, my own efforts were not enough obviously. I have been lucky enough to have good people around who guided me, supported me and encouraged me in the processes. In this regard:

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1. Introduction

The new Afghan generation has either been born into or grown up in a war zone. For many, their chances for education and self-fulfilment have been very limited, or non-existent. Very few have had access to education. Schools and universities have been primarily used as arena for political activities rather than educating young people in science and technology. Whenever there was a regime change, the dominant parties would change the curriculum to reflect their social and political ideologies (Ewans 2002:191). Due to unemployment and a lack of educational opportunities, young Afghans were in a vulnerable situation and many of them were attracted by hostile political parties and movements.

During the Taliban regime, young Afghans faced many other challenges and they were deprived of education, self-fulfilment and a normal live as youth. Those who were able, left the country, and those who lacked the means or connections, remained and kept a low profile.

After the fall of the brutal Taliban regime in late 2001, a new chapter was opened in their lives. Afghans tasted freedom once against; youth stormed barbershops to shave their beards and style their hairs[1], turned on their tape recorders and listened to their favourite music with great joy. They dressed as nicely as they could and walked around in the streets and bazaars, and they embraced the freedom of being young. The youth not only missed out on these seemly simple pleasures during the Taliban period, they were also denied peace, stability and prosperity in their country. Hope for a better, brighter and prosperous Afghanistan was evident in every Afghan's eye. This hope was even greater among youth and women. After the fall the Taliban, they saw for themselves better opportunities to engage in, and participate effectively in rebuilding the country based on democratic values and human rights.

To the youth disappointment, elderly influential men and those accused for war crimes and violation of human rights during the decades of civil war, dominated all decision making and executive branches in the new government. After 12 years of democracy experiment,

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[1] During the Taliban regime shaving beard was considered as moral crime that was punished by prison or

Afghanistan is currently in a very critical historical situation. The international military forces will leave the country in 2014, presidential election will be also held at the same year. The security situation is deteriorating, economy is stalled and corruption among government organs is unprecedented[2]. Post 2014, the situation is very uncertain and many fear that the country will roll back into civil war.

Despite the emphasis on the crucial role of women and youth in conflict resolution and post-war peace building in the country, these two groups have been kept in the margins. Women have at least attracted politicians, scholars and human rights activists' attention, but the important role of young Afghans have been almost completely ignored.

There are activities among youth that indicates their dissatisfaction with the system. They are not satisfied with their current political and social status as subordinate group. They demand equal and effective participation in decision making processes. For example, At the International Youth Day in 2011, Ghulam Daud Shayiq the head of National Youth Union accused the government of ignoring the youth in the decision-making processes and asked the government to include the youth in the second Bonn conference and in traditional Loya Jirga[3], which in session to discuss a proposed strategic partnership with the USA (Outlook Afghanistan 2011).

In July 2012, around 1700 young people gathered at 'National Youth Peace Jirga' (YPJ) to discuss the youth role in decision making processes and express youth opinions on important and critical issues in the country. According to the organizers, the aim of this Jirga was to include youth in the decision making processes regarding peace talk with Taliban, social justice, United States military bases in Afghanistan and challenges regarding higher education (Kazemi 2012). However, the YPJ was criticized for many irregularities and influence of dominant political parties, in a telephone interview that I had with one of the board members, he rejected all the critics and claimed that the YPJ was completely an Afghan initiative, and driven by young and dutiful Afghans who were concerned about the future of the country and its reconstruction.

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[2] According to the organization Transparency International, Afghanistan was one of the three most corrupt nations in 2012 survey. Retrieved 20. 12. 2012, rom URL: http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/

[3] Loya Jirga is a Grand assembly in which influential people from across Afghanistan is gathered into a mass meeting to discuss decisions that need national consensus.

On December 6, 2012 a new youth's organization announced its existence under the name "Afghanistan 1400" and with the motto "our country, our responsibility". The founders of this organization are relatively young and highly educated Afghans with broad experience from academia, civil society and as political actors. Afghanistan 1400 founders focus specifically on a new generation's (youth) role in the present and future of the country[4]. On their website the write that " We aim to build confidence, instill enthusiasm and promote acceptance of responsibility for Afghanistan's present and future through creating a political space to mobilize the new generation, so that they take an active part in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the country".

In this thesis, I explore why young Afghans despite their large population, increased knowledge, competence, and activities are still kept in margins. To do so I will first have an historical retrospect, and discuss youth political engagement pre-2001. Then I will explore youth perception of the current political situation in the country and their possibilities for engaging and participation since 2001. I will also discuss the channels they use to demand their rightful position in the society and make an impact. At the end I will discuss the challenges that have hampered youth effective participation in decision making organs.

1.1.   Who are youth?

There is no consensus on the definition of "youth" among scholars or policy makers. Due to difference across nations and cultures it is difficult to agree on a qualitative definition of youth. For statistical reasons, the United Nations has defined *youth* as age group between 15 and 24. And youth as age category may vary from country to country. Furthermore, it is this age group that policy makers and scholars usually refer to as youth. According to UNISCO ""Youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community" (UNISCO). In order to understand this definition one must have an understanding of childhood and adulthood. There must be also some criteria for when each period ends and the other begins. UNISCO basis its definition on education and employment, arguing that, persons who have finished their compulsory school up until their first employment are "youth"., therefore UNISCO usually choses local definitions, while they implement their projects in member nations.

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[4]Afghanistan 1400, visions, mission and values. Retrived 15.01.2013 from URL:
http://1400.af/eng/about/vision-mission-values/

Bayat, Asef (2010) differentiates between being young and being a youth. For him, being young is associated with age (age category) which would be similar to UN's standard definition of youth as everybody from age 15 to 24. Similar to UNISCO he associates being youth with a process of cognitive and mental transformation (social category). As he puts it, "… young persons" turn into "youth," by experiencing and developing a particular consciousness about being young, about youthfulness" (ibid:119). He defines youthfulness as a "distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngsters exist in a relative autonomy and is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent"(ibid) . In his view, youths are free of being responsible for others (ibid). For Bayat, it is in this period that young people develop "particular habitus of behavioral and cognitive dispositions that are associated with the fact of being "young"" (ibid).

But this definition of youthfulness is problematic regarding countries like Afghanistan. In the first place, in such countries young people traditionally take responsibilities at an early age by getting married, having children or supporting the family. Conversely, most of them stay with their parents all their lives, meaning that they are not independent. So while most young people are taking responsibility for their families, they are neither fully dependent nor independent of elders in the family.

In the Dari and Pashtu[5] languages there is only one word "Jawan/Zawan" meaning young and there is no word or concept describing youth. Thus, there is no clear definition of what it means to be young either. Contrary to UNISCO and Bayat definitions, people usually relate youngness to physical strength and appearance in Afghanistan. In this regard, even those around 40 with good physic and appearance are considered to be young, and those as young as twenties with weaker physic are considered old. When taking the cognitive aspects of being young into account, it is usually associated with negative adjectives, such as ignorant, irresponsible and immature. Youths usually define themselves as adults in order to distinguish themselves from such negative characteristics. Due to the ambiguous quantitative definition of youth; in my thesis, I refer to youth as an age category, referring to persons between age 18 and 30. The word young and youth might be used interchangeably, but it refers to the same group.

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[5] Dari and Pashtu or to two main official languages in Afghanistan. Dari is spoken by Tajiks and Hazara and Pashtu is spoken by Pashtuns. Most Afghans are bilingual and speak both languages.

1.2. *Importance of the topic*

Despite the emphasis on young Afghans role in politics and decision making process, they have been an under studied group. There is little known about young Afghans and their abilities, perspectives, perceptions, attitudes, aspirations, goals, and role in politics and society. Therefore, various studies are needed to explore these aspects of young Afghans and shed light on what role they play in forming and shaping the country's current situation and in the future. Such studies will provide the government and policy makers with necessary information to address youth issues more effectively. It can also raise awareness among youth themselves. The most important it can make it possible to predict what Afghanistan will be like in the future (Giustozzi 2010). The study may also contribute to clarifying misperceptions that elders may have about youth and redefine how youths see themselves.

Similar studies have been conducted in other countries. In a report published in March 2012 Saferworld[6] in cooperation with young researchers from Central Asia tried to find out the young people's perspective on identity, exclusion and the prospects for a peaceful future in Central Asia. They focused mainly on Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In order to identify common themes and differences across the region they have also conducted some research in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan (SaferWorld, 2012a:i). By doing so, researchers intended to understand what kind of role the young people play in the current situation, and the role they could play in the future development of Central Asia (ibid).

The report concludes that "many young people in the areas surveyed feel largely excluded from politics, the economy, the legal system, protection by law enforcement, quality public services and decision making processes at the local, family and even personal level (ibid :29). As a consequence, many young people find it difficult to have an impact on the society through legal and non-violent means. Thus, they resort to undesirable measures such as, criminality, affiliation with extremist movements, and participation in ethnic violence, emigration or regular migration. The research warns that "in [the] long term, such tendencies towards disenfranchisement, and anger towards the state and its representatives, constitute [the] potential for destabilisation and conflict that should not be under-estimated" (ibid). However, researchers in this report do not focus mainly on Afghanistan, but the view of

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[6] Saferworld is an independent international organization working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. URL: http://www.saferworld.org.uk/

young Afghan participants in this research, reflects the same problems as in other central Asian countries.

In another report published in March 2012, Saferworld with cooperation of Nansen Dialogue Center Sarajevo studied the role of young people in relation to peace and conflict dynamic in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The report uncovered many aspects of the role of the youth which were previously unknown. Given the fact that there is a clear distinction between Afghanistan and BiH, young people in both countries have experienced war, violence, exclusion, emigration and ethnic, religious and gender based discriminations. Both groups are a generation of war and conflict, and are dealing with post war challenges and may face the same obstacles.

The studies shows that young people in BiH tend to have a more negative view of the security situation and are more critical of security providers than older generations" (SaferWorld 2012b:i). They have also found that young people are more prone to violence and conflict (ibid).

As mentioned above, Saferworld report warns that if youth feel excluded from the decision-making process, this might constitute a potential for destabilisation and conflict. This warning coincides with the UN general secretary Kofi Annan's statement, cited at United Nations World Youth Report 2003 that:

> No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death" (United Nations 2004:271).

The same UN report emphasises that "youth participation is an essential strategy for ensuring young people's optimal development- and for achieving wider development goals for society" (ibid :287).

A different study on youth in decision-making, conducted by University of Wisconsin-Madison concludes that "involving young people in organizational governance represents one of the most innovative strategies for promoting youth and community development" (Zeldin et.al, 2000:10).

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The war in Afghanistan is one of the most studied topics in recent years and has dominated the national and international media since 2001. Many scholars have paid extra attention to the conflict dynamic in the country and have tried to find the forces driving this long lasting violent war. Despite the emphasis on youth role in peace building, conflict transformation and development, young Afghans and their challenges, problems and struggles have received very little attentions from researchers and scholars of the social sciences. Therefore, this study will be of substantial importance for many reasons.

Firstly, there is huge lack of information about this big majority. The scholarly literature available on this topic is quite minimal in the field. In a study by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi (2010), has explored student politics in Afghanistan. He argued that student politics moves between two poles- patronage and rebellion. Additionally, Eikås Elizabet (2007) has written her master thesis in social anthropology about the possibilities and constraints Kabuli youth experience in terms of social and political participation. While both are fine contributions to the field, more scholarly studies are needed to understand young Afghans political engagement in recent years. My thesis aims to contribute to increasing the horizon of knowledge in the field and generate possible hypothesis for further scholarly research.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the majority of Afghans constitute the youth category. Unfortunately this big majority has had very little or no possibilities for active participation in important decision making efforts at any level. Due to increased education and awareness among the youth over last decade regarding their rights and duties and inspired by Arab Spring[7], the youth demand for active and effective participation in decision making channels has also increased significantly. This trend has challenged and threatened the elderly men who have traditionally monopolized decision making processes. For example, once during a gathering the former President and leader of the High Peace Council, Burhanudin Rabani warned Mullahs and clerics, that if you do not take responsibility, "Facebook Youth" will come to the streets and create chaos. He asked the mullahs and clerics to take the lead in important issues in the country and avoid "Facebook Youth" taking the over the helm (8am 2010).

The results of this study will draw knowledge from different part of the country on how, why, and in which cases youth have been successful in finding their way into decision making processes without challenging the elders, and in other cases, why they have not been so

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[7] Arab spring was only mentioned by Respondent from Nengarhar University.

successful? Additionally, what they can learn from each other. This information can contribute to making youth activities more effective and productive.

Thirdly, most scholarly studies related to Afghanistan have been done by non-Afghan scholars. Researching young Afghans political engagement, while I am a young Afghan myself, may lead to some interesting or controversial conclusion that would be of interest for further discussions and studies. This, in itself will be an important contribution to the horizon of knowledge and for those who are eager to know young Afghans' opinions and perspectives on the dominant social and political issues in the country.

The second chapter of this study will focus on the theoretical aspect of political participation. Different theories on why and how people (in this case youth) want to participate and engage in politics will be discussed. The methodical aspect of the thesis will be explained and discussed in chapter three. In chapter four I will look at young Afghans political activities pre and post-1960 and its impact on young Afghans' political activities today. Chapter five and six will be based on the interviews that I have conducted. While in chapter five, I will focus on the youth perceptions of dominant social and political issues in the Afghanistan. Chapter six will focus on 'youths as actors'. Chapter seven is dedicated to analysis of the data and presentation of my findings. Finally, concluding remarks will be dealt with in chapter eight.

2. Why political participation? A theoretical framework:

United Nations has recognized the importance of young people's role in the continuing development of the societies in which they live has been recognized by the United Nation since 1965. In order to magnify the important role youths play in the world, the United Nation marked 1985 as the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace. Ten years later, the United Nations strengthened its commitment to young people by adopting an international strategy called the *World Program of Action for Youth (WPAY) the year 2000 and Beyond* (United Nations 2010:i).

The WPAY provides member states with the policy framework and practical guidelines necessary to promote and improve well-being and the livelihoods of youths, increase the quality and quantity of opportunities available to them for effective and constructive

participation in society (ibid:ii). In 1995, the WPAY identified 10 priority areas, and then added five more in 2007.

Full and effective participation of youth in society and in decision-making has been recognized as one of the most important priority areas of 1995 WPAY[8]. The reason being that "any effort and proposed actions in the other priority areas considered in this program are conditioned by enabling the economic, social and political participation of youth, as a matter of critical importance" (ibid:42).

The importance of youth participation in decision making processes is clearly addressed by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-general of the United Nations. According to Annan (United Nations 2004:271) "No one is born a good citizen; no nations is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline; it is condemned to bleed to death".

Participation is also one of the key factors of democracy. Russell J. Dalton (2000:927) claims that, "Democracy expects an active citizenry because it is through discussion, popular interest, and involvement in politics that societal goals should be defined and carried out in a democracy. Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force". This implies that, in democracies, citizens should be active and involved in the processes of policy making. On the other hand, Robert Dahl (1998:37) emphasizes the opportunities for participation. He claims that "before a policy is adopted by the association, all the members must have equal and effective opportunities for making their views known to the other members as to what the policy should be. These two claims imply that the legitimacy and success of democracies depend on the citizen's willingness to involve themselves in the decision making processes, and the opportunities they are given by the government.

The United Nations' top-down approach in WPAY is supposed to promote youth political participation by encouraging states to open up and facilitate youth participation in decision-making organs (WPAY 2010:43). As we see in many western countries, for example in Norway, youth are represented in almost every organ, from municipality's council to the

[8]WPAY other priorities areas are: These priorities are: Education, Employment, Hunger and poverty, Health, Environment, Drug abuse, Juvenile delinquency, Leisure-time activities, Girls and young women, Globalization, Information and communications, technology, HIV/AIDS, N. Armed conflict, Intergenerational issues

parliament and the government. They are represented in political parties, civil society organizations and media. Youth are given great opportunities for participation in formal political processes and to make an impact, on the condition that they have the desire and willingness to do so.

Studies show that youth political engagement through formal democratic means, such as voting in election elections and party membership is declining in consolidated democracies[9]. Yet, in newly emerging democracies and war-torn countries, like Afghanistan, where the opportunities for engaging in politics through democratic means are limited, the demand for participation is increasing.

There are many theories that discuss the causes of political participation in general, but few theories discuss why youth want to participate in politics and how they go about it.

Scholars who have studied the causes of political participation have mostly focused on conventional political participation such as elections and voting behavior in western and industrialized democracies, especially in the United State. Conversely, here are few studies about youth political participation in new-democracies and war-torn countries such as Afghanistan. This naturally limits the applicability of the conclusions drawn from these studies to be extrapolated to societies such as Afghanistan, yet the underlying assumptions of the principal approaches may help us in the search for how to explain political activism among young Afghans. Moreover, the extent to which the models are relevant to Afghanistan is a test of their validity and generalizability. Further into this chapter, I will discuss some of the theatrical models on political participation and their implication for young Afghans.

2.1. Socioeconomic Status model (SES)

The first of these theoretical models is the 'socioeconomic status model', which is claimed to be broadly accepted as the basis for nearly all empirical studies of political participation, developed by Verba and Nie (1972) (Leighley 1995:183). In addition to individual resources such as time, money and skills, civic orientations are also an important driving factor of

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[9] For more information on the subject refer to: Forbrig, J. (2005). Introduction: democratic politics, legitimacy and youth participation. In Forbrig, J., Ed (2005). Revisiting youth political participation: Challenges for research and democratic practice in Europe. Strasbourg Cedex, Council of Europe Publishing. Retrived 13.03.2013 from URL: http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/EKCYP/Youth_Policy/docs/Citizenship/Research/Revisiting_youth_politica.pdf

political participation in this model (ibid). Civic orientation is defined as "attitudes which individual holds toward themselves or the political system which predispose them toward political action" (ibid). Therefore, according to this model, high status individuals, due to their favorable position in the society and the opportunities they have for developing positive attitudinal and participatory norms are more likely to participate in politics than are low status individuals (ibid). As she claims, studies of income and education effects on participation show that, individuals with higher education participate more than individuals with less education. Likewise, individuals with higher income participate more than those with lower income. Interestingly, the effect of income on participation is less than the effect of education (ibid:183).

According to Leighley, even though the SES model has been broadly accepted by scholars, it has also been criticized for some misspecifications. Firstly, she criticizes the assumption that the model makes regarding the causal mechanism between political attitude and political participation. According to the SES model "positive civic orientations are causally prior to acts of participation" (Leighley 1995:186). While other studies show in some cases, (demonstrators' attitudes before and after demonstration) that participation can affect attitudes as well (ibid) Leighley claims that this position may lead to overestimation of the effects of individuals' attitudes on participation and underestimation of the participation effect on individuals' attitude. The other critic regarding this assumption is related to the interaction between political attitude and political mobilization as causes of participation. She argues that "conclusions regarding the relative importance of individuals' political attitudes and political mobilization as causes of participation are impossible to draw" (ibid:187).

The other misspecification that she refers to is related to assumptions regarding the act of participation (ibid:187). The SES model assumes first, "that participation is an atomistic activity: when an individual is motivated to participate, that is necessary and sufficient for participation to occur" (ibid). She argues that critics accept the necessity of motivations for participation to occur, but they question it as a sufficient factor. They believe that, in addition to motivation for participation, there should also be opportunities for participation such as: a political meeting to attend, a petition to sign, a group to join or an election to vote etc (ibid). She argues that the problem arises especially when researchers try to interpret the survey data when the response to the question (related to participation) is negative. For example, if

somebody says that she has not signed a petition, is it because there was a petition and she refused to sign? Or there were no petition to sign (ibid).

The third problematic assumption is that the model assumes evenly distributed participation opportunities across the population. According to Leighley, "if this is accurate, then the observation that high-status individuals participate at higher rate than the low-statues individuals is rightly interpreted as confirmation of the SES model" (ibid:187). But she argues that different studies indicate the existences of differential opportunity structure across socioeconomic classes. For example, According to Hansen and Rosenstone (1983:7) individual political participation varies "over-time, probably in response to shifts in life circumstances and in the political environment" (cited in Leighley 1995:188).

This assumption is very problematic in studies of countries which are in conflict and new democracies. For example, during the presidential election in Afghanistan, there were areas in which people could not participate in election, either because of the lack of opportunity (electoral points, voting cards etc.) or due to security issue. Additionally, unevenness in participation opportunities is very evident between elders and youths, and between rural and urban areas across the country.

2.2. The mobilization model:

The other model of participation that Leighley has reviewed is the mobilization model. Contrary to socioeconomic models, this model focuses mostly on contextual factors and political opportunities. It states that "participation is a response to contextual cues and political opportunities structured by the individual's environment" (1995:188). This does not mean that the model ignores the importance of individuals' personal characteristics (personal resources and psychological motivations). In the mobilization model, "socioeconomic status (i.e. personal resources) structures individuals' civic orientations as well as the level and nature of their political mobilization" (ibid:189). Assuming that, individuals with higher socioeconomic status have better opportunities (formal and informal) to use their resources to engage in political activities.

Secondly, contrary to SES model, the mobilization model considers participation and mobilization as causes of individuals' civic orientations (ibid). Referring to studies of relation between political participation and political attitude, Leighley claims that, participation improves individuals' political attitudes in a more positive way, especially when they feel that their participation is demanded (ibid). She argues further that "with mobilization and participation postulated to enhance individuals' attitudinal motivations, both the nature and conceptual priority of attitudes as stimuli of participation is modified: they are not only "internally driven", but externally determined as well, and their correlation with participation reflects a reciprocal relationship" (ibid:189).

Scholars who have studied group mobilization in great detail found that voluntary organizations play an important and critical role in mobilizing individuals' political activities and their overall participations level (Verba and Nye (1972); Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), Cited in Leighley 1995:190). According to Verba and Nye, voluntary organizations provide their members a lower threshold to participation. The knowledge and experience participant achieved through engaging in voluntary organizations can be transferred to political realm (Verba and Nye 1972:184, cited in Leighley 1995:190).

Verba et.al. (1978) also argues that group mobilization processes can also explain cross-national differences in the relationship between socioeconomic status and participation, something that SES model had assumed to be evenly distributed (cite in Leighley 1995:191). They found that "where group mobilization processes directed toward the lower class are weak, the relationship between socioeconomic status and participation remains strong: where group mobilization processes are strong, the relationship between socioeconomic status and participation is typically insignificant" (cited in Leighley, 1995:191). In other words, when group mobilization is strong, it may compensate for the lack of personal resources and stimulate participation also among those with low-statues.

2.3. The Rationality of participation:

Political participations is broadly accepted as a rational act, in which individuals consciously engage in political activities to pursue particular goals, and engage only, when the benefits of political participation outweigh the costs (Leighley 1995:192). As rational models always deal

with collective action problems (free-rider), the nonparticipants cannot be excluded from collective benefits (ibid).

Many scholars have studied voter turnout to understand the collective action problem. However, Leighley argues that studying only voter turnout is not an appropriate measure to understand the relation between rational choice and collective action problem (ibid:193). He suggests that, studying protest as a form of collective action can provide a better explanation of the relation between rational choice and collective action (ibid), and argues further that a "valid test of rational choice models require more appropriate research design and improved measures of central concepts: incentives, benefits, costs" (ibid:194).

2.5. Group consciousness and Participation:

Miller et al (1981) introduces "group consciousness" as a driving factor for political participation in the form of electoral and non-electoral participation. For Miller et al, group consciousness is distinct from group identification and they are critical to Olsen (1970) and Verba Nie (1972) works who have conceptualized group consciousness as group identification in their study of black communities (Miller et.al. 1981:595).

According to miller et al., group consciousness is a multidimensional concept in which, group identification happens to be a single component. They argue that political participation is caused mostly by how people perceive and evaluate their position in a certain social situation (ibid:503). The social conditions that they experienced cannot alone encourage political participation (ibid). They argue that social conditions can only encourage political participation when people's perception and evaluation of these conditions are politicized through group consciousness (ibid). Therefore, they reject the idea that group identification can simply encourage participation (ibid:495).

Based on the Marxist term in literature, Miller et al argues that for a group to be considered as conscious, the group members must be aware of the fundamental differences that exist between their group and the other groups (ibid:503). If differences between groups are perceived as unjust, intergroup relations will be hostile and antagonistic (ibid:495). This will encourage group members to resort to individual and collective actions to change the social order (ibid).

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Group consciousness can be understood as process in which group members become aware of their rights and interests as compared to other groups. The fact that people belong to different social groups does not mean that everybody in the groups is politically active. Therefore, it can be deduced from Miller's et al arguments that group membership only leads to political participation when the group members carry a political message: changing or preserving the status-quo.

As mentioned earlier, Miller et.al. (1989:496) argues that group consciousness is a multidimensional concept consisting of four components: group identification, polar affect, polar power and individual vs. system blame.

They distinguish between objective and subjective group identification, describing both as psychological feelings of belonging to a particular group. While objective group identification is based on socioeconomic circumstances, subjective group identification is based on collective identification and conscious loyalty to the group (ibid). They describe "polar affect" as a situation in which members prefer their own group (ingroup) and are hostile against those outside the group (outgroup) (ibid). Such attitudes among the groups seem to be inherent and have been found to develop even in the absence of any functional conflict of interests (ibid). Polar power on other hand, describes a situation in which one group member compares their current status, power, or material resources with other groups', and thereby expresses their satisfaction or dissatisfaction (ibid:496). Group consciousness is promoted when subordinate groups feel discriminated against by a dominant group, or when a dominant group feels threatened by the subordinate group (ibid:496). Individual vs system blame possesses an individualistic vs collectivists view point on the issue. It deals with the question of whether individuals themselves are responsible for their social status, or if it is the system that has allocated the status within society (ibid:497).

The second and third components of group consciousness mostly depend on the first component, namely group identification. Given the objectivity and subjectivity of group identification, it might be challenging for the members to identify themselves with a particular group. For example, somebody at age of 25 who is married may believe that he belongs to youth group. Objectively however, he might be placed in an adult group. This can make it challenging for him/her to take position regarding, for example youth-adults conflict.

The other challenge is that people might be members of different social groups. For example, those who identify themselves as youth can be divided into male and female. Even though they belong to the same category based on their age, they belong to different categories based on gender. They may belong to the same age and gender, but to different groups based on their religion. Multi-group membership may on the other hand hamper political participation. I will elaborate more on this issue regarding young Afghans political engagement in chapter 7.

When there is coherence between the four components of group consciousness, they form a political ideology which encourages subordinated group to use the electoral process in an attempt to improve their social conditions (ibid: 497). This claim implicitly requires that there is an effective electoral process that the subordinated groups can use to impose reforms and changes on in their favor. However, in countries where electoral processes are a new phenomenon and lack the necessary legitimacy and efficacy, political participation through electoral processes can be less attractive.

Miller et.al. (1981:504)claims that group consciousness can encourage non-electoral political engagement as well. For example, activities such as: writing to a newspaper editor to express one's political views, working with others to solve a national problem, contacting one's congressman or some other national leader, and signing a petition either for or against action taken by national government can be encouraged through group consciousness (ibid). They argue further that, due to the collective nature of non-electoral activities, these activities are dominated by organizational efforts indicating that non-electoral participation is caused mostly by group orientation and attitudes rather than group consciousness (ibid:506).

According to Miller et al. the effect of group consciousness on participation is not dependent on the size of the group, but on the number of members who identify themselves as part of the group and are politicized (ibid:508). As studies show, small number of people with intense attitudes can prove effective in promoting action (Schuman and Presser (1981), cited in Miller et.al. 1981:508). Similarly, there is a proverb in Afghanistan that says "two competent and brave solders are better than a lazy army". This issue is to some degree evident in the youth vs elder conflict in Afghanistan. For example, elders, despite the small size of their group, have adheared to the proverb very well. They have intense negative attitudes toward youth and resort to any possible means to keep their dominance. The youth, on the other hand, despite of

being a larger group, due to cultural, religious and family norms have moderate attitudes toward elders, therefore are less effective and action oriented.

In countries in which formal political process do not answer to peoples demands or are ineffective, politicized group awareness can lead to feelings of political disaffection. This can either lead to apathy or non-conventional collective action that threatens the stability of the political system (ibid:508).

As mentioned earlier, theories on participation are general and primarily based on studies from consolidated and developed democracies with defined arena for political activities and participation. A different explanation of political participation that seeks to capture the dynamic of political engagement in authoritarian and semi-democratic countries is presented by sociologist and scholar of social movements, Asef Bayat. In his works which will be discussed below, he argues for a broader definition of political participation. He is open to other forms of political engagement beyond elections and voter behavior that can capture the dynamics of citizen's political behavior in non-democratic or semi-democratic countries.

2.6. Street Politics: Free-form activism

In his article, Un-civil society: the politics of the 'informal people' (1997), Bayat argues that in the case of a lack of institutional power , lack of trust in governmental organs and malfunctioning formal institutions, in order to promote social changes in their favor, citizens engage in what he calls " free-form activism" (ibid:55). Bayat describes "free-form activism" as: mostly self-generating, individually motivated, spontaneous collective actions (ibid:57) with mundane, ordinary and daily nature which engender common interests and the need to defend them (ibid: 54-55). He argues further that "these practices represent natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives" (ibid:55).

Contrary to the theories described above, this type of activism is driven and justified by the force of grievances and necessity rather than being a conscious political act (ibid: 58). Bayat perceives this everyday activism as a 'movement in itself' rather than a 'social movement', meaning that the actors in free-form activism are not conscious of their doings, and they lack articulated aims, methods and justifications (ibid:57).

He characterizes this type of activism as 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary'. It happens when ordinary people in a long term quiet and non-confrontational struggle, initiate gradual small changes to improve their live quality and survive hardship at the cost of the powerful (ibid). Quiet encroachment is a leaderless activity and lacks ideology and structure in its organization. This makes the whole group as a counterpoint vis-à-vis the state (ibid).

Actors in these types of activism deliberately avoid acquiring social movement's features such as, collective, large scale, organized operations, and by doing so, they avoid the authorities' attention. They try to keep their quiet encroachment characteristic (ibid:158).

In order to understand how actors organize themselves in 'quiet encroachment', one could draw similarities between 'quiet encroachment' described by Bayat and 'motivation theory' developed by Adam Smith. In his book 'The Theory of Moral Sentiment' first published in (1759), by developing a motivation theory, Adam Smith tried to reconcile human self-interestedness with an unregulated social order (Heywood 2002:180). Even though Adam Smith's theory is related to economy, the role of its key feature, what he calls 'invisible hand' is evident in Bayat's 'quiet encroachment' activism. For Adam Smith, if each individual tries to maximize his own gains in a free market, it will benefit the whole society (ibid:180). Similarly, in Bayat's 'quiet encroachment' "while advances are made quietly, individually and gradually, the defense of these gains is always collective and audible" (Bayat 1997:58). Therefore, mobilization to collective action in Bayat's quiet encroachment is not encouraged by group consciousness as described by Miller et.al. (1981), but it is driven by individual interests as described by Adam Smith (1759).

The other question is why do people resort to quiet encroachment rather than formal political activities? Bayat argues that in undemocratic political system where authoritarian regime dominates and where family and kinship are essential for individual survival, such as in Middle Eastern countries, the disadvantaged my use this strategy to impose social changes (ibid: 68). However, in Latin American countries, where traditional institutions serve as an alternative to civic activities, mobilization is more organized and operates as associations and unions (ibid).

In contrast to Middle Eastern and Latin American countries, Afghanistan, despite all its challenges regarding freedom of speech, the regime is not authoritarian as such. Additionally, there is plenty of space for political activism and engagement through formal democratic

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institutions and civic and political organizations. The case of quiet encroachment in the context of Afghanistan is therefore, very limited. It is also impossible for poor people to occupy the properties of the powerful in Afghanistan. There are several government areas around which seems to be occupied by poor people and those who have moved back to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran. However there are reports which states that the land has been grabbed by the powerful people in the government and then sold to the poor people (Outlook Afghanistan 2013).

Bayat pays specific attention to youth political behavior in his new book 'Life as Politics' (2010). His focus is on the youth in Middle East, especially in Egypt and Iran, but his theory can also capture the dynamic of youth political engagement in some parts of Afghanistan

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Bayat associates being youth with a process of cognitive and mental transformation, which leads to developing a particular sense of consciousness about being young and youthfulness (ibid:119). This group consciousness and collective motivation to defend and extend its goals and interest will lead to the formation of youth movements (ibid). Bayat distinguishes between being young and being a youth, which is coherent with Millers et.al. (1981) study of group consciousness and political participation. Being young is more related to identification and may not encourage political participation on its own. Yet, being a youth on the other hand requires a combination of group identification and other components of group consciousness, described by Miller et.al. As Bayat puts it, ""young people" turn into "youth" by experiencing and developing a particular consciousness about being young, about youthfulness" (ibid:119). He defines youthfulness as a "distinct social location between childhood and adulthood, where the youngsters in a relative autonomy is neither totally dependent (on adults) nor independent, and is free from being responsible for others" (ibid). For Bayat, it is in this period that young people develop "particular habitus of behavioral and cognitive dispositions that are associated with the act of being "young"" (ibid).

If we rely on Bayat's definition of youthfulness, then most Afghans never experience youthfulness, or they experience it all their lives depending on how you look at it. It also makes it challenging for young people to identify with a particular social group and mobilize collective actions. This problem of identification can be solved by the way Bayat defines social movements. He argues that, a movement is defined by the nature and claims of its actors, not primarily by the identity of the actors (ibid:117). Applying this definition can make

identification with a social group easier. By comparing the claims and grievances of a particular group with one's own, it is easy to find a group you want to be identified with. For example, even though my female respondent from Bamyan was 36 years old, she identified herself as part of the youth group. Perhaps she shared the same beliefs, interests and problems as the youth in a lower age class, and was advocating youth right and well-being in Bamyan. Given Bayat's arguments that "youth movements are ultimately about claiming youthfulness" (ibid: 116), my respondent, despite of her age, could be considered as an agent of youth movement.

The other method that most youth apply to promote social changes is what Bayat calls "Street Politics" (Bayat 1997:63). Youth use the street as an arena for political expression, when they do not trust authorities or perceive participation in formal political space as inefficient in responding to their needs (ibid). Bayat argues that the perception of *space as power* and the possibility to build *passive networks* among the people who use the space are the two main factors that transform 'street' into an arena for political activities (ibid: 63-64).

It is possible to draw parallels between Bayat "street politics" and McClurg (2003) study of social networks on political participation. According to McClurg (2003:450) "interpersonal social interaction, such as having friends who participate, being married, patterns of family interaction, playing cards or attending dinner parties can influence participation". The street is also a place where people interact personally, exchange ideas, and build networks that can promote political action.

Afghanistan is a country in transitions to democracy with an ongoing war and foreign military presence. Both its political and social structure is quite different from the other countries', something which has been under the focus of political participation scholars. It is neither fully democratic nor an authoritarian state. What distinguish Afghanistan from other countries which have been subject to scholarly studies, is the fact that the government lacks control over its territory. Therefore Most of the restrictions on youth political engagements and participation come from non-state actors and insurgents groups.

The question is, can we apply these theories to understand young Afghans' motivation towards political engagement, their political behavior, and the methods they apply to achieve their goal?

3. Research methodology:

Given the characteristics of case studies as a study of a small number of instances of a phenomenon (George & Bennett 2005: 17), or as an"in-depth empirical investigation of a particular 'case', in a particular timeframe, and within a particular context" (Zwozdiak.M, 2007: 140), the case of my research – Young Afghans political engagement in post 2001Afghanistan- will apply such an approach.

According to George and Bennett (2005: 17) a case study is defined as "instances of a class of events". By class of events, they mean "a phenomenon of scientific interest, such as revolutions, types of governmental regimes, kind of economic systems, or personality types that the investigators choose to study with the aim of developing a theory (or "generic knowledge") regarding causes of similarities or differences among instances (cases) of that class of events (ibid: 17-18). In this thesis, I intend to study young Afghans struggle for power and participation in politics and what holds them back. By comparing youth political activities in different part of the countries, I want to find the similarities and differences between their activity and the reason behind these similarities and difference. My purpose is to generate information that can contribute to youth effective political engagement and generate possible hypotheses for further research.

The benefit of case studies is that it allows researchers to measure theoretical concepts such as; political engagement, democracy, security, power, etc. more precisely according to the research questions context. By doing so, the results will benefit a high level of conceptual validity (George and Bennett 2005: 19).

Case studies enable researchers to discover new variables and produce new hypothesis (ibid: 20).

Case studies also provide the researchers with the possibility to explore causal mechanisms in a case and identify what conditions present in that particular case activate the causal mechanisms (ibid: 21). For example, in a documentary film, Anders Somme Hammer (2012) a Norwegian journalist, investigated why a demonstration in Mazare-e-sharif - against Quran burning by an American pastor - lead to violent actions against UN and murder of UN employees. He found that the demonstrators had planned to go toward the American Consulate. Therefore, Afghan police and security forces had been deployed there to protect

the consulate against violent actions by the mob. He found that the demonstrators had planned to go toward the American Consulate. Therefor Afghan police and security forces have been deployed there to protect the consulate against violent actions by the mob. But American agents were placed among the crowd who diverted the demonstration toward UN office which was unprotected. The few policemen who were on sight could not control the mob which resulted in murder of many UN employees.

There are also disadvantages and shortcomings with case studies as any other research methodology. The shortcoming of case studies is that due to the specific criteria of the case, the results cannot be easily be generalized to other relevant situations. This weakens the external validity of the results. The result cannot be credibly generalized-to: generalizing to the same type of units which is being studied. For example, the findings from A.S. Hammer's investigation of demonstration cannot be used to say something about the role of USA agents in other violent demonstration in Afghanistan. We can neither generalize-over: if the finding from A.S.Hammer's report could be used to say something about Americans role in other violent action in Afghanistan.

Case study is worst off when it comes to external reliability and inter reliability. External reliability is achieved when different researchers can repeat the same research. Internal validity is achieved when different researchers can come to the same conclusion by studying the same subject and material. Therefore, case studies, due to the important role of the researcher, informant's perceptions, attitudes, and the context in which the data is gathered, have both weaker external reliability and weaker inter reliability (Bryman 2008: 264).

3.1. The principal questions

Given Afghanistan's current critical situation as mentioned in the introductory chapter and the importance of the year 2014 as a turning point, Afghans, especially the youth, are struggling with unprecedented fear and uncertainty. International security forces are leaving gradually and Afghan security forces are taking their place. At the same time the government is putting efforts into bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table to solve conflicts through dialogue and peaceful means. The Taliban and other insurgent groups have intensified their attacks on national and international forces across Afghanistan. Opposition political parties are busy with mobilization, alliance building and preparation for presidential election on April 5, 2014.

The security situation is deteriorating, economic and financial activities are put on hold and investors are taking their assets out of the country. Corruption within government organs is overwhelming and the unemployment rate is increasing. The post 2014 situation is very uncertain and many fear a very high unemployment rate, economic setbacks, and in worst case scenario the security situation may deteriorate and the country may fall back into a situation such as pre-2001[10].

Afghans in general and youth in particular are extremely worried about the situation and are trying to do something about it. Despite the emphasize on the important potential role that youth could play in this critical moment, most of my respondent believed that the youth are deliberately marginalized and almost excluded from decision making organs. Furthermore, the threshold to participation and engage in politics through formal governmental organs are too high for youth[11].

In my thesis, I seek to find out, why young Afghans despite their large population, increased knowledge, competence, and activities are still kept in margins. In order to do so I will conduct a semi-structural interview with following main questions. 1) How do you perceive current political situation in the country? 2) How you/youth organize their activities and which channels they use and why? 3) What are young Afghans opportunities and challenges as political actors?[12]

3.1.1. What is your/youth perception of the current political and social situation?

This is the first question respondents will be asked. It is a broad and open question. The aim of this question is to give the respondents a chance to talk freely about issues that engage them or that they perceive as important. I believe it will be a good ice-breaker for the interview and at the same time provide me with general information and insight about the respondent's beliefs, thoughts, aspirations, engagements and level of awareness. The information from this section can also be used in other sections of the interview, especially while discussing the youth role and political activities. The governance issues, peace

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[10] These concerns regarding 2014 transition is discussed thoroughly in a report published by United State Institute of Peace. The report can be retrieved from following address.
http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR326-Afghan%20Perceptions%20of%20Electoral%20Processes.pdf
[11] This issue will be discussed in detail at chapter 6.
[12] My choice of questions is inspired by the Saferworld studies on youth political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Saferworld 2012b) and Central Asian Countries (Saferworld 2012a).

processes, and youth attitudes towards politics and politicians will also be dealt with through follow up questions in this section. This question will be discussed in chapter 5.

3.1.2. How you/youth organize their activities and which channels they use and why?

Given the fact that Afghanistan is a conflict-ridden and multi-ethnic country, youth political activities might be very divers and affected by their socioeconomic status, opportunities for political engagement (Leighley 1995), group consciousness (Miller et.at.1989), social conditions and political freedom (Bayat 2010) or other factors such as, patronage, insurgency (Giustozzi 2010).

Through the above questions I expect to find the reason behind the youth's different methods of engagement in politics and the channels they use to make their voice heard. In addition I want to check if the above mentioned theories can catch the dynamic of political participation in Afghanistan. I will discuss this question in chapter in 7.

3.1.3. What are young Afghans opportunities and challenges as political actors?

Afghanistan is rough country to engage in politics. Youth despite their higher education, competence, ambitions, willingness to contribute and intense actives are still kept in margins and excluded from local and national decision making processes. Through this question I intend to explore the underlying causes for youth powerlessness and marginalization. This question will be answered in chapter 7 which is dedicated to the Analysis of my findings.

3.2. Data collection:

To collect necessary data for my research, I have used a data triangulation technique. That is, combining different research methods to explain the same phenomenon (Ashatu 2009:2). In this thesis, I have combined a semi-structured interview method with text analysis. The texts

that I have used includes manifestation of youth organizations[13], their formal statements, news articles and scholarly articles written about youth political engagement in general and young Afghans in particular.

The most proper way to collect my data would be to travel to Afghanistan and conduct a field work with face-to-face interviews. That would provide me data with higher internal validity - if I measure what I intend to measure, I would have a better understanding and ability to interpret the respondents' answers about the social, political and economic context they are living in. Due to the lack of security, scope of the research and other constraints related to time and budget, conducting such a field work was not actual possibility. However, due to my background, as a young Afghan and engagement in Afghanistan related issues, despite the fact that I have lived abroad for about 15 years, I still feel equipped with necessary contextual knowledge to collect data with fairly high contextual validity through telephone interviews.

Modern communication technology such as internet and mobile technology has made it easier to get access to potential respondents and to conduct affordable, high quality and in-depth long distance interviews.

I used semi-structured interview methodology with open-ended questions. Because it can provide researchers with details, depth, and insider's perspective with the opportunity to test hypothesis and quantitative analysis of interview responses (Leech 2002: 665). It is neither conversational like unstructured interview nor constraint as structural interviews (ibid)

I used an interview guide with main questions that I wanted to explore as topics. I wanted to provide respondents a copy of the question guide before the interview, but not all my respondents have access to internet, so I could not do that. The purpose of sending the question guide beforehand was to give respondents a chance to think on the question and make preparation for the interview and feel comfortable. Fortunately, almost all respondent that I managed to interview seemed to be quite knowledgeable about the topic and outspoken.

There were also some drawbacks with the semi-structured interviews. The first was that my follow-up questions were based on the respondent's answers to the main questions. I figured out that there was a high possibility that I ask each respondent a different follow-up question. The danger in that is that it t could make data interpretation and analysis challenging. To

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[13] Afghanistan 1400, Youth Peace Jirga, Afghan New Generation organization, Youth for Change Afghanistan Organization (YCAO), youth coalition of Afghanistan.

overcome this problem, I went through my two first interviews and revised the interview guide. When I asked the main question, I listened carefully if the respondent provides me with answers to the follow-up questions that I had intended to ask, or not. I managed to create a balance by jumping over the follow-up questions that respondents elaborated upon while answering the main question and asking about what he/she may not mention that could of importance for the thesis.

Conducting in-depth interviews via telephone and Skype was not as easy as I thought at first. Due to slow and poor quality internet connections, I did not manage to interview my respondents on Skype. Besides that, only three of them had access to internet. Therefore, I did all of my interviews via mobile phone. Each interview lasted on average 60 minutes. Sound quality was not always dependable from my respondents' side, but it was good enough to understand them and follow the conversation.

Given the sensitive nature of political discussion in Afghanistan, not everybody wants to express their opinion as they want to. Therefore, the other challenge one might face using telephone interview is building trust. Without an established trust, it is very difficult to get information out of Afghans, especially when it might about something critical or controversial. This issue was especially pervasive regarding finding female respondents. It is not common that a stranger calls an Afghan girl, and talks with her about sensitive topics, such as politics for one hour. It is neither common nor acceptable for families to allow their daughters to talk with strangers on the phone. Many female respondents were introduced to me, but when I called them, either their mobile was off, or they could not talk. Two of them said that they needed to ask their parents for permission, which was not granted. I ended up with only one female respondent. I tried to avoid such problems by providing my contact person with detailed information regarding my thesis objectives and the interview goals. I informed them about the process of my research, respondent's right to withdraw from interview any time they wanted to, and assured them about the confidential processing of the interview material and personal information. It worked for the majority of my potential male respondents, but not for the potential female respondents.

The other problems with long distance telephone interviews are related to recording and documentation of the interviews. Internet speed and telephone lines are not always as good as they need to be in Afghanistan. This might complicate the process and cause misunderstandings due to a bad connection, as well as increasing the duration and costs of

interviews. With the exception of the interview with my Qandahari respondent, other of interviews went very smoothly and voice quality were good enough for recording and transcription.

All the interviews were conducted in the Dari language and translated and transcribed into English.

3.2.1. The Sample:

My original plan was to interview 20 young Afghans between the ages 18 and 30, chosen from 5 different State Universities across Afghanistan: Kabul, Nengarhar, Balkh, Bamyan, and Herat. The underlying reason was to balance the sample based on gender, ethnicity and geographic domicile. Having a balanced sample could provide me with nuanced and more generalizable information on youth political activity given the social conditions they are living in (Leighely 1995; Bayat 2010).

Therefore, in order to reflect this diversity in my thesis, I wanted to conduct 8 in-depth interviews with young Afghans from six different regions of the country. It is noteworthy that these interviews reflect the respondents' perceptions of the social and political conditions they are living in; it is not a study of social and political conditions in Afghanistan as such.

I interviewed two youths from Kabul. One of them was ethnically Tajik and studied psychology at Kabul University. He was also working as journalist. The second respondent was ethnically Pashtun, had studied Pashto literature at Kabul University and now working as freelance journalist. Two of my respondents came from Bamyan. Bamyan is one of Afghanistan central provinces and hometown of Hazara ethnics. Despite the relatively peaceful situation compared to other regions of the country, this province has not received adequate attention on the developmental issues. Both of my respondents -a male and female- had lived most of their lives in Iran, and came to Afghanistan in 2004 and 2002 respectively. The male respondent studies pedagogy at Bamyan University and the female respondent is a part time student and studies English literature. The respondent from Nengarhar University originally came from Laghman province, but he had lived many years in Kabul and Nengarhar. Nengarhar University is located in Jalalabad, a small city near Pakistan border. Nengarhar and the surrounding provinces: Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman are together called

Mashreqi (eastern) region and are mostly populated by Pashtuns. This region is dominated by the Taliban movement, Hizb-e Islami of Gulbodin Hekmatyar and Haqani Network, therefore, upset by insecurity and periodic military operations. The respondent was ethnically Pashtun, and studied at engineering faculty.

I interviewed one respondent from Herat University. He was ethnically Tajik and grown up in Herat. Herat is one of the western cities which sits along the border with Iran. The province has been relatively peaceful, well developed and has highly educated citizens compared to other provinces in the country, with the exception of Kabul. The province has both ethnically and religiously divided populations, Tajiks live mostly in urban areas and Pashtuns in rural areas. This respondent was also student of engineering faculty.

One respondent was studying at Qandahar University. Qandahar is known as the stronghold of the Taliban and hometown to Taliban leader Mullah Omar. The province is mostly populated by Pashtuns and it borders with three other insecure and unstable provinces: Helmand in west, Urozgan in north and Zabul in east. Similar to Mashreqi region, this region is also dominated by the Taliban, and governmental organs are weak and ineffective. In the south Qandahar is bordered by Pakistan, which has benefited the Taliban and other drug criminals significantly. Due to personal protection issues, I am not allowed to share background information of this respondent.

I had planned to interview one respondent from Balkh University. Unfortunately, despite numerous attempts, I did not succeed. The University is located in Mazar-e Sharif, a holy city in northern Afghanistan. The province is populated mostly by Tajiks and Uzbeks. It was the stronghold of Abdul Rashid Dustom -the leader of Junbesh Meli Afghanistan party (Afghanistan National Movement party: an ethnically homogeneous Uzbek party). The city has been governed by Ustad Atta Mohammad Noor – a Tajik with affiliation to Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan party- since 2004.

The decision to compose the samples from University students was based on the assumptions that students, due to their social position, are more aware of the social, political and economic dynamics in the country than the youth outside the Universities (ref: SES model). They are also more aware of their attitudes and behaviors (ref: group consciousness) and possess the necessary information that might help to enlighten the research problem in a more generalizable manner. Given the fact that public universities are free in Afghanistan, the

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sample will not be biased regarding class. I am also aware of the fact that students who are studying in universities across Afghanistan are not necessarily from the same provinces; therefore, selection bias cannot be avoided easily. I would have had to take a further step by ensuring that my respondents were from the province where the university is located or one of the neighboring provinces.

To choose my sample, I applied the snowball selection method. In this selection method "the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these contacts to establish contact with others" (Bryman, 2008, p.184). Unfortunately, in my thesis there were some challenges to use this approach as described by Bryman. As I have not been in Afghanistan for many years, I didn't know anybody who could be relevant to the research topic. The second problem was related to a lack of contact between different universities students. For example, when I interviewed students in Bamyan they did not know anybody in other target universities. So the snowball method, as described by Bryman could not work. What I did was a modified snowball approach, thereby I contacted my friends in Afghanistan and Norwegians whom may have a connection to Afghanistan (who are not in the target group) and provided them with detailed information about the objectives of thesis and the goal of the interviews and asked them to introduce me to some potential respondents. After coming in contact with one student in a particular University, I asked if he/she could introduce me another potential respondent.

Due to the challenges I explained earlier, I could not acquire a gender balanced sample. I managed to interview only one female respondent who does not belong to my target group given her age. However, if we define youth as a social category (Bayat 2010) she could be definitely in the target group. Thus, having at least one female respondent is much better than not having any. Choosing male respondents was not without its challenges. As my original plan was to interview 4 students from each University, I end up with 2 students from Bamyan, 1 student from Nengarhar, 2 students from Kabul, 1 student from Qandahar, 1 student from Herat and 0 student from Balkh. Qandahar University was not in my original target group. However, due to the small size of my actual sample and the importance of collecting information from this region, it was useful to include it in the target group. Unfortunately despite numerous attempts I did not manage to interview youth from Balkh University. My actual sample is not as representative and as balanced as I had planned, but given the Snowball sampling approach that I have applied here, it is neither possible to have sample that

can be representative of the population (Bryman 2008: 184). Additionally there is a tendency that the researcher comes in contact with like-minded participants. Finally, within qualitative research, external validity and the ability to generalize are not as critical as in quantitative researches (ibid). Therefore, even if the sample is not representative of the population, researcher can still make valid contextual conclusions. The issue of like-minded participant was also avoided in my thesis as I used different first contact person to make my acquaintance with respondents at different universities.

In addition to these young students, I had also intended to interview some young government officials and parliamentarians. I succeed to interview one of National Youth Peace Jirga secretariat member.

Combining this data can contribute to the credibility of my results, and will potentially make it possible to draw reliable conclusions and generate potential hypothesis for further research on young Afghans political engagements.

Other background variables will be: Age, Civil status, Ethnicity, Education, Employment and Geographic belonging.

4. The legacy of the Past and its impact on young Afghans today

Young Afghans' political engagement has a long history dating back to the young king Amanullah. It became more intense during 60s and 70s with the establishment of the young leftist movements at the Kabul University and the Muslim Youth Organization. These movements were mostly motivated by autocratic and exclusionary policies of the royal family and ideological hostilities between students themselves. Kabul university was battlefield between secular students who were inspired by Marxist and Leninist ideology and students with strong Islamic beliefs and inspired of Ikhwanulmuslemin in Egypt. This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I will discuss youth political activities pre-1963 and in the second part, I will discuss youth post-1963 political activities with some overlap. The reason that I have chosen the year 1963 is that it was in this year that Afghanistan got a more democratic constitution and the royal family dared to encouraged broader participation from its subjects in politics. It also marks the beginning of a turbulent democratization period that lasted only for one decade, which has been called for decade of democracy.

4.1. Youth political engagement Pre-1963

As mentioned previously, young Afghans political activities go back to young King Amanullah who was the third of three brothers and claimed the crown at age 27. There are many controversies surrounding Amanullah's motives regarding claiming the crown.

According to some historians, King Habibullah's (Amanullah's father) took a cautious position toward the British Empire. Afghanistan remained neutral during the First World War. King Habibullah's strategy of gradual reform and was not tolerated by young Afghans who wanted faster modernization and independency. Among these young Afghans was Prince Amanullah, who was inspired by the Russian revolution. After the mysterious assassination of King Habibullah, and rapid ascension of his heir to the throne, many observers believed that Prince Amanullah was behind the assassination of his Father (Saikal 2012: 58; Ewans 2002: 119; McCauley 2002:8).

Whoever assassinated the king and what their motives were behind the assassination is a mystery, but regardless, the outcome was that the shift in power allowed the young visionary princes a chance to claim the crown and put all his efforts into realizing his visions of an independent and modern state.

At the same time the young King was preparing to assume his role as the new King, his uncle Nasruallah Khan, who was in Jalalabad province at the time of assassination, announced that he had already claimed the crown. His claim was also supported by Inayatullah Khan, Amanullah's eldest brother. Yes, Amanullah's favorable position in Kabul and his control over the treasury, gave him the possibility to attract support of the military, religious and tribal leaders. He was formally crowned king on February 27, 1919 while he was only 27 years old (Ewans 2002: 119; Saikal 2012: 57).

An interesting side note about Royal session is that given the seniority Principle: an internationally accepted way of allocating position and securing unity inside the ruling clan (Saikal 2012: 106) - Enayatullah Khan, who was the eldest son of King Habibullah, should have succeeded his father not Amanullah, who was the third son[14].

Amanullah's controversial claim to the crown can also be viewed as youth frustration against elder's dominance in the decision making process and the exclusion of youth from these

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[14] What happens here is of great importance for the topic of my thesis that I will discuss in chapter 7.

processes just because of their age and hierarchy of power in the royal family and society. By claiming the crown, Edward (2002:12) argues that King Amanullah changed this hierarchical tradition and showed that "identity could be fashioned, that man could become something other than what he had been born to". King Amanullah "chose to create a persona and role for himself that was fundamentally different from the one that he had inherited from his father and grandfather" (ibid).

Contrary to many previous kings, there is little evidence that Amanullah's motives were to claim the crown just because he believed that he is the rightful heir. He claimed the crown because; he had a vision and a plan to raise Afghanistan's stature into an independent and modern nation state as he was tired of his father's cautious politics which he felt were holding the country back.

After claiming the crown, the young King and his followers saw their vision becoming a reality, and took measure to declare Afghanistan as independent nation and implement it reforms (Saikal 2012: 63). Afghanistan's declaration of independence both in its domestic and foreign affairs was then acknowledged at the Paris Peace Conference, August 19, 1919 (Ewans 2002: 124; McCauley 2002: 8)). This achievement made the young King a hero and the father of the nation. He enjoyed great support among Afghans. Conversely, his rapid modernization efforts challenged the status quo that his father and grandfathers had set, alienated tribal and religious leaders and created dissatisfaction in the eyes of the young King (Saikal 2012: 83). It turned everything upside down and forced the King to abdicate the crown and leave the country in 1929 (Ewans 2002:132).

Even though the young King failed to accomplish his reformist visions and transforming Afghanistan into a modern, independent nation state, according to Saikal, he left behind a legacy, a model for the subsequent Afghan reformers (2012:93)

Young Afghans, who seemed to be inspired by the King Amanullah and supported his visions, continued their activism both individually and collectively against the new autocratic royals. The Musahiban family was led by General Mohammad Nadir as the King. During the reign of General Mohammad Nadir who claimed the crown from Amir Habibullah Kalakani, a young student assassinated Mohammad Aziz, Nadirs' brother who was ambassador in Berlin (Ewans 2002:141; Saikal 2012:106). The student claimed to be a supporter of King Amanullah, and protested against Nadir's acceptance of subsidies from Britain (Ewans

2002:141). Later, another young Afghan with the same motives tried to enter the British Legation to kill the minister, but ended up shooting three of the staff instead (ibid).

Nadir Shah himself, was assassinated by another young student named Abdul Khaliq in 1933 (ibid:142). Abdul Khaliq, who shoot Nadir, is claimed to be either the biological or the adopted son of Ghulam Nabi Charkhi. Charkhi was accused by Nadir of complicity in an uprising in the east of the country, and was later executed (Ewans 2002:142; Saikal 2012:106). Even though it has been suggested that Nadir's assassination was personally motivated (Ewans 2002:142), it had great political implications. The young Abdul Khaliq, who assassinated Nadir Shah, is still seen a hero and role model among young Afghans especially Hazaras[15], and has been remembered in recent years for his courage and sacrifice against oppression and injustice.

The assassination of Nadir Shah brought another young man - his nineteen year old son Zahir Shah - to the throne. Mohammad Zahir had lived and studied for 7 years in France, and came back to Kabul in 1930 (Saikal 2012:107). His lack of essential knowledge of the country, its people and expertise as a statesman served his 3 remaining uncles very well (ibid). Mohammad Zahir had a soft and introverted character and even though; he was formally in charge of the country, in reality his uncles: Hashim Khan, Shah Mahmud and Shah Wali were actually leading by exercising their regency rights[16] (Ewans 2002:143). His uncle Hashim Khan held the Prime Minister Position and made sure that Zahir never realized his potentials and remained merely a symbolic leader (Saikal 2002:08). According to Saikal, in some stages, Zahir had to ask his uncles for permission about where to hunt and what to eat, and he was excluded from the entire decision making process until the end of Hashim Khan's Premiership (ibid). Saikal argues further that it was this isolation and subordination that disabled the King ability to rule the country even when he assumed the rein in 1963 (ibid). The three brothers continued Nadir Shah's "do nothing" strategy. They avoided challenging the status-quo that Nadir had created by relaxing religious antagonism, inclusion of tribal and religious leaders in government through the National Council, and cautious and periodic democratic reforms (Ewans 2002:143). In other words, the brothers were mostly beholden to

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[15] Hazaras are the thiered largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.
[16] "the Regency" is the time when King George III became so incapacitated that his eldest son legally assumed his role (1811-1820). Blair Bancroft: WHAT IS REGENCY? http://www.blairbancroft.com/pdf/Regency.pdf

the power, rather than exercising that power, a trend which could explain pre-king Amanullah and post-king Amanullah politics in Afghanistan.

The youngsters of the royal family, including the king himself, were not satisfied with his uncles' way of ruling the country and cautious policies which had now turned to be more authoritarian. Shah Mahmud had to resign as prime minister in favor of his nephew Mohammad Daoud Khan in 1953, who was characterized as a dynamic, autocratic, and often harsh person (Ewans 2002:151-152,).

But Daoud's premiership was short-lived, he had to resign as prime minister early in 1960s as a consequence of the border dispute with Pakistan and an attempt from the royal family towards liberalization and democratization (ibid:162). The royal family feared that revolutionary forces might over through the monarch as they had done in some other Middle Eastern countries: Iraq and Yemen. They believed that moving toward a constitutional monarchy was necessary to secure the endurance of their rule. Daoud proposed a constitutional monarchy with a single party parliament. When his proposal was rejected by the king, Daoud offered his resignation (ibid:163). However, according to Saikal, Dauod's uncompromised relation with Pakistan was the reason for his resignation as prime minister (ibid:134).

4.3. Youth political engagement in post 1963 Afghanistan

The new constitution was drafted by a committee of seven members. It was then discussed and approved by a Loye Jirga. The King signed the new constitution into effect on October1, 1964 (Ewans, 2002, p.166). The new constitutions allowed for the formation of political parties and movements and opened the door for freedom of expression.

During the decade of democracy (1963-1973), young Afghans in urban areas especially Kabul University became highly politicized. They either formed new organization or engaged in already established ones. The political parties that were established in this period have made significant impact on Afghanistan's social and political situation today.

The most important impact was the formation of diverse anti-government revolutionary youth/student movements such as: the Marxist-Leninist movements inspired of Soviet Union;

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Maoist, inspired of China; and Muslim youth, inspired of Ikhwanul Muslemin in Egypt. Even though all these anti-government movements had the same goal of revolutionizing the political system and getting rid of the King and his despotic family, they had fundamental differences in their beliefs and ideology (Saikal 2012:161)

One of the influential parties that was established in this period was the People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The prominent figure in this party was Noor Mohammad Taraki, who had been inspired by leftist ideologies and movements during his study in India. He started his anti-monarchy activities when he came back to Afghanistan. In 1943 to 1948, while still a young man in mid-twenties he tried to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a political party to fight against monarchy, autocracy and despotism of the royal family. His struggle led to foundation of "Weeshe Zalmayan"; a leftist political movement founded in 1947. The movement briefly flourished when Shah Mahmud was appointed as prime minister and took some measures to liberalize politics (Ewans 2002:145; Edward 2002:.27, Saikal 2012:163).

Taraki participated in 1965 parliamentary election, but when he failed to gain a seat in the parliament, together with Babrak Karmal and a number of youths chosen from existing study groups, he established the People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (Saikal 2012:164). Karmal had begun his anti-government activities at an early age. As a consequence of his activities he was prevented entry to Kabul University at that time, and when Shah Mahmud backpedaled on his liberal reforms and suppressed liberal movements that had taken place, Karmal was imprisoned for four years at age of 24 (Ewans 2002:170). However, Karmal had built good relations with Dauod and he was released only after 3 years when Dauod became Prime Minister. Karmal then managed to continue his education and finish his degree at the faculty of law and political science. It is claimed that Karmal became a committed communist while he was in prison (ibid; Saikal 2012:162). Actually, it was Karmal who helped Dauod in his coup against the monarch that I will discuss later.

Similar to Taraki he also participated in 1965 parliamentary election, and he managed to gain a seat and became a dominant figure in the parliament. It is also said that it was Karmal who triggered the student demonstration that led to resignation of Dr. Yousuf as Prime Minister (Ewans 2002:170).

Taraki and Karmal, who were the founding members of PDPA, were ousted due in part to a personal rivalry and on the policy strategy of the party. Karmal who was the son of the major-general and provincial governor had good connections with people in upper-middle class and military officials. He was much in favor of working the system, but Taraki on the other hand, coming from a semi-nomadic Kuchi family, insisted that party should hold on to its revolutionary ideological purity and devote itself to promoting class struggle (Ewans, 2002, p.171-172; Saikal, 2012, p.165)

These personal rivalries led to factionalism and PDPA was divided into two parties along personal, ideological and most importantly ethnical divides. Karmal went out and establish his own party called Parcham Party (The Banner) attracting support from different ethnic groups mostly Tajiks. And Taraki formed Khalq (The People) party mostly dominated by Pashtuns (Ewans 2002:172; Saikal, 2012:165).

A long side PDPA many other leftist parties such as: Shula-i-Jawid (Eternal Flame), founded by the Mahmudi family, and Setem-i-Milli (Against National Oppression) founded by Tahir Badakhshi - a founding member of PDPA- were established during 1960s and 1970s with even more radical ideologies inspired by Maoism in China. Kabul University became the breeding ground for these movements (Ewans 2002:172; Saikal 2012:167).

At the same time, youth and students with strong religious beliefs had started to mobilize both against the government and leftist movements who were increasing their activities and gaining support from youth at the University campus and from the city streets.

The most influential of these movements was the Muslim Youth Organization (MYO) which was founded by students with a strong Islamic belief and a vision to reform Afghanistan according to Islamic law (Edward 2002:3 &128; Saikal 2012:167).

Establishment of MYO was a reaction to increasing Marxists influence and advocacy of secularism by leftist students and their leaders; Nur Mohammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal at the Kabul University (ibid:129). It was also a reaction to the ineffectiveness of established Muslim leaders who were more concerned about their position in government than responding to Marxists and seculars' provocations (Edward 2002:127). Kabul was the center of all political activities at the time and those living in rural areas were not as aware of the new social divisions and political activities which were taking place in the capital (ibid:26).

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During the decade of democracy, Kabul University with its remarkable expansion and increasing student population from various parts of Afghanistan became a central contributor to the formation of political parties and youth movements. It became also a central point for all types of political, social, ideological, and religious rivalries. The situation in Kabul University was upset by political clashes and conflicts among students and the period 1965 to 1972 is claimed to be one of the most politically tumultuous periods in the campus's history (Edward 2002:128; Roy 1986:71).

According to Qazi Amin Weqad – one of the early member of MYO - the Muslim youth movement was the result of deep feelings, thoughts and social awareness among the young Muslim students, who had studied and understood the goals of communist parties, and had a desire to struggle against the regime and western influences because they felt a responsibility for Islam (cited in Edward, 2002:129).

The founding members of MYO were mostly in their early to late 20s with different ethnic and sectarian backgrounds. The organization was built upon ideological principles inspired by a group of professors from the Islamic law faculty at Kabul University such as: Ghulam Mohammad Niazi and Burhanodin Rabani who had studied and spent some time in Egypt (Edward 2002:132; Roy 1986:73; Saikal 2012:167). While leftist movements were divided along ethnic and linguistic lines, the MYO abandoned all such cleavages in its initial phase. The members had to take an oath of loyalty to the organization and superior student members of the organization (Edward, 2002:142).

Starting as a very small group on campus, MYO managed to increase it is membership gradually and took two-thirds of the seats in the student elections of 1970. Thus making them well represented in parliament and to some extends the military (Roy 1986:71; Saikal 2012:168).

According to Edward, after the sudden death of Abdul Rahman Niazi the charismatic leader of MYO in 1970, the organization faced a leadership gap. It seemed nobody else in the movement –despite their activity and commitment- could not enjoy the same respect and authority as Niazi did in determining the groups movements and direction. (ibid:134)

Students then became divided into factions around particular leaders and within the different university faculties. They struggled to define their means and ends. Open hostility between

Muslim and Marxists students polarized the campus and also provoked those mildly religious students to take action (ibid). MYO made significant progress 1970s.

According to Edward, the most significant of leftist provocation occurred when Marxist Parcham newspaper published a poem called "The bugle of revolution" in which Lenin was praised using words which are exclusively used to praise Prophet Mohammad (Drood). This provocation brought different religious groups; clerics, Sufi Pirs, and members of saintly families together in a demonstration in front of Pol-i Kheshti mosque (ibid:135).

The demonstration was first supported by the government who wanted to take the opportunity and hamper leftist militant activities in the country. With the exception of Maulavi Habib-ur Rahman and Abdul Rahman Niazi who were educated at Madrasa, other members of MYO were excluded from participation in demonstration (ibid). After one month continuation and anti-government diversion, the demonstration was cracked down by the government and the demonstrators were sent back home and some were arrested (ibid).

According to Edward, the Pol-I Kheshti demonstration had many consequences. First, it articulated a line of division within the Muslim political community: between younger, secularly educated university and high school students and Madrasa-trained Mullahs and Maulavis. It marked a turning point in the tactics of Muslim political activities, as youth lost faith in traditional religious leader's willingness and ability to overcome modern challenges and answer to leftist parties' propaganda. The demonstration also put an end to the government cooptation of Muslim clerics (ibid:136).

Mohammad Daoud, who took power in the coup d'état of 1973 with support from the Parcham faction of PDPA, was totally against the Islamist movements and considered them to be hampering modernization in Afghanistan. In order to escape government oppression, most of the principle leaders of the movement, with the exception of Ghulam Mohammad Niazi, fled to Pakistan (Roy 1986:75; Saikal 2012:168).

MYO organized a violent uprising against Mohammad Daoud regime in 1975. However, they failed and most of the movement's leaders were arrested and executed. Those militants, who survived, fled to Pakistan. While in Pakistan, MYO was divided into two factions Hizbe Islami: led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar who attracted radical members of MYO, mostly Pashtuns, and Jamiate Islami: led by Burhanudin Rabbani who attracted moderate members of MYO mostly Tajiks (Roy 1986:77; Ewans 2002:213-214).

From the founding fathers and early members of MYO, Gulbudin Hekmatyar and Ahmad Shah Masood were the two most influential and prominent figures. While Hekmatyar founded Hizbe Islami, Ahmad Shah Masood, who was a Tajik from Panjshir, joined Rabbani at Jamiate Islami and became one of its most influential commanders and enjoyed more freedom from the party leadership than was usual among the resistance groups (Ewans 2002:214). Masood and Hekmatyar became two of the most famous figures of resistance against Soviet Union and an archenemy of each other (Ewans 2002:242).

Ppersonification of parties' politics and agendas is very wide spread in Afghanistan. In other word a single person's beliefs, ideology, visions and aspirations became the core principle of the party. Therefore, many of these people consider themselves as the ultimate leaders of their parties with unquestionable authority. It can be claimed that such uncompromised rivalry based on personal interests among the leading figures of PDPA and MYO led to their fractions.

Hekmatyar and Masood were two such leaders, whose unquestionable authority and the level of hostility between them, with their uncompromising ideas and visions regarding the methods of resistance against Soviet Union and post-Soviet government in Afghanistan threw the country into a devastating, destructive and bloody civil war. This conflict was exacerbated by unprecedented ethnic, linguistic, and geographic tensions in that laid the ground for civil war (Ewans 2002:213)[17].

The enmity between these two founders of MYO paved the ground for the raise of a new student movement called Taliban. Taliban are those students who study at religious schools and Madrasas. Even though the movement were called Taliban, but it leaders seemed to be elderly mullahs. The movement took power in 1996 and governed until September 2001.

Masood continued his resistance against Taliban till he was assassinated by a suicide bomber in September 9, 2001, two days before the attack on World Trade Center in New York. Hekmatyar went into exile in Iran and moved back to Pakistan after the USA invasion of Afghanistan and declared his support to Taliban in struggle against new Afghan government and its Western allies.

With international engagement in Afghanistan after 2001 and the implementation of democracy once again, the hope for greater and broader participation was unprecedented

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[17] For more information on the role of Masood and Hekmatyar check Ewans Martin 2002, p. 249-260

among Afghans, especially youth. Despite, the fact that youth have acquired higher education since 2001, their presence in decision making organs is considerably lower across Afghanistan, a fact that as made them a powerless majority in a relatively democratic country.

The next chapter will deal with youth perception of current dominant political issues, and chapter 6 deals with youth's possibilities and challenges as political actors.

5. Youth perception of the dominant political issues:

As we are going toward 2014, the year that all Afghans and most people in the international community are waiting with great uncertainty. "Afghanistan beyond 2014" is a much discussed topic among all sorts of people: men and women, old and young, scholars, politicians, officers, solders, insurgents, criminals, smugglers, friends, enemies, and the average person on the street. It is widely discussed on TV, Radio, in seminars, workshops and on social media outlets, such as Facebook, both nationally and internationally. Everybody who has some kind of relation to Afghanistan looks forward to 2014 with a mix of hope and fear, unfortunately, the scale is tilted towards fear for most people. The reason for this is two important events that will take place in Afghanistan in 2014. The first is that the withdrawal of foreign military forces which have already begun will be completed, and Afghan security forces will be fully in charge of securing the country. The second event is that President Karzai tenure in the office will end and there will be a Presidential election on April 5, 2014. The current political situation of the country is mostly affected by how the dominant political parties, influential movements, combatants and insurgents relate to these two issues and their consequences. 2014 could be a year in which Afghanistan goes toward peace and prosperity or towards more war and destruction. What bothers both scholars and everybody else especially in Afghanistan is the difficulty of predicting which course the country will take. In this chapter, based on the interviews that I have done, I will try to illicit the youth perception of the current political situation in the country and figure out what the important issues are for them.

The diversity that I briefly described in chapter two was evident in my respondent's perception of the current political situation in the country. However, their view on what are

the important issues in the country and what the youth are concerns about overlapped. The most important issues mentioned by respondent were: uncertainties regarding 2014, peace processes and dialogue with Taliban and corruption in government organs, and the importance of the youth for the present and future for the country.

5.1. 2014 and beyond:

On June 22, 2011, claiming that that United States had largely achieved its goals in Afghanistan, President Barak Obama announced a timeline to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Following president Obama's announcement, France President Nicolai Sarkozy announced withdrawal of his troops by the end of the same year (DeYoung 2012). Other coalition forces submitted their own timelines. In the meantime, it was agreed that 350 000 Afghan National Army (ANA) should be trained up to gradually take over the security responsibility from the coalition forces by the end of 2014 (Gentile 2013).

The specification of a precise date for withdrawal got broad reflection and mixed reaction among military experts (Epatko 2011), politicians (Entous & Barnes 2013) and ordinary Afghans (Ayaz Gul 2013).

While the withdrawal announcement was rejected by Taliban, it was welcomed by President Hamid Karzai, claiming that the newly trained Afghan National Security Forces are now able to take over the responsibility and secure their country (Smith Bernard 2011).

All my respondents mentioned 2014 as a critical and important turning point for Afghanistan. They were all concern regarding the social problems caused by the uncertainty regarding pre - and post- 2014 political and social situations, such as increasing unemployment, the economic crisis, the lack of investment, hostilities among armed political parties and increased criminalities and corruption. While my respondents with Pashtun background expressed an optimistic viewpoint regarding the post-2014 situation, the other respondents seemed to be more pessimistic about the post-2014 situation and believed that the problems would worsen.

My Pashtun respondents believed that the 2014 announcement is a western psychological war aiming to scare Afghans and make them to believe that without foreign troops present in the country, the Taliban will take over power once again, or Afghanistan will fall back into civil war as in pre-2001. Westerners, particularly USA and Great Britain, are trying to legitimize

and guarantee their long-term presence in the region through Afghanistan according to the Pashtun respondents, which is how they explained their theory.

My Kabuli Pashtun[18] respondent believed that foreign military forces have failed in their mission and could not deliver what they promised at the Bonn Conference of 2001. Therefore, their withdrawal will have only positive consequences. He argued that when foreign forces leave the country in 2014, the Taliban will not have more reason to fight; they will either put their weapons down, join the government or get destroyed by Afghan forces. His optimism regarding the Taliban's desire to stop the fight after 2014 and his believe in the ability of the Afghan forces to destroy the Taliban was not supported by the My Kabuli Tajik respondent from Kabul.

My Kabuli Tajik respondent, conversely, agreed with my Pashtun respondent regarding the withdrawal of foreign forces, but he disagreed with him regarding the consequences of their withdrawal and expressed great concerns. Most of his concerns were related to the dependency of Afghan government on foreign aids and donations. He feared that after 2014 and the withdrawal of foreign forces, foreign aid and donation will be reduced dramatically, which will weaken the Afghan government, and many Afghans, including youth who are working with foreign forces and NGOs who will lose their jobs.

Both respondents from Bamyan shared the concerns of my Kabuli Tajik respondent. The male respondent from Bamyan claimed that people in Bamyan and other central provinces strongly support the presence of foreign forces in the country. They believe that the credit for peace and stability in Bamyan can be attributed to its people, but he emphasized the important contribution of the foreign troops in securing and stabilizing provinces neighboring Bamyan. He also believed that foreign forces protect minorities' rights in Afghanistan and feared that after 2014 the Taliban may come back and destabilize the region by implementing their discriminatory policies. Given the geographical location of Bamyan, in central highland Afghanistan, there is only two roads that connects the province to the capital Kabul. According to the respondent any destabilization in neighboring provinces will have therefore have a huge negative impact on Bamyan as well.

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[18] I interview two respondent from Kabul, one ethnically Tajik and the other ethnically Pashtun. To distinguish between them I will use Kabuli Pashtun to refer to my Pashtun respondent, and Kabuli Tajik referring to Tajik respondent.

My Bamyani female respondent agreed with my Bamyani male respondent, but added that in the last ten years, youths and women have had some good opportunities to educate themselves and engage in civil society and politics as well. She claimed that the decision that the foreign forces will withdraw in 2014 has created many concerns for women in Bamyan. As a consequence women have reduced their engagement in politics and civil society due to uncertainty regarding the post-2014 situation and the fear the Taliban's return.

The Herati Respondent[19] also referred to 2014 and the withdrawal of foreign forces as a critical turning point. He claimed that people, especially the youth are very scared and confused. They do not know what to expect and are fearful of their destiny. According to this respondent, the youth are going through a crisis situation because of uncertainties associated with post-2014 situation. Consistent with the Kabuli Tajik respondent, he also mentioned the Afghan government's dependence on foreign aid and donation. To his mind, opportunities related to employment, progress, development, peace building and stability in the country have been highly dependent on the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of foreign forces, many of these opportunities may vanish, and that is something that worries youth.

The Nengarhari respondent claimed that people here hate anything that is in some way related to the west. They even hate western appearances. Thus, they hate all foreigners, regardless of their affiliations. This respondent suggested that the presence of foreign forces has increased the level of insecurity in the region. People get panic when they observe foreign forces in the streets of the city, and fear t a suicide attack will happen at any time, or a gun fire will start.

The Qandahar respondent seemed to have a divided opinion on the issue of the presence of foreign forces and the consequences of their withdrawal. He seemed to be agreeing with my Herati respondent, believing that the developmental opportunities that Afghans, especially the youth had received during the presence of coalitions forces may vanish. This may lead to higher rate of unemployment among the youth. However, he was more optimistic in terms of the security issue. He believed that in the areas where Afghan National Security Forces have taken the responsibility for the security, the situation is much better. He also mentioned that incidents in which civilians are bombed or killed by foreign forces increases negative attitudes toward their presence in the country.

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[19] 21 years old, Male, Student, Herat University, Tajik, Herat, unemployed

5.2. Peace Processes and dialogue with the Taliban:

The second most important issue that bothered my respondents was the role of High Peace Council (HPC) in peace building and dialogue with the Taliban. There was a consensus among my respondents that the peace process lead by HPC is doomed to fail and dialogue with the Taliban is just waste of time. Yet, their opinions differed about what should be done with them.

The Taliban is a fundamentalist religious movement who ruled Afghanistan from September 1996 until December 2001. While in power, they established the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan and tried to impose a strict interpretation of Sharia law in the country. At the same time, they enforced discriminatory policies against women (Hanford 2001), and non-Pashtun ethnicities in the country (Winchester 2000; Gargan 2001).

In December 2001, following the terror attacks on World Trade Center, The Taliban was defeated by a coalition of an anti-Taliban groups called the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan (known-as the Northern Alliance) and United States.

The Taliban was considered defeated and destroyed, and it was believed that they would not be able to regroup and pose serious threat to the newly established Afghan government supported by United States and NATO (Shanker & Schmitt 2001).

There was no desire to initiate peace talks with the Taliban following their defeat. While all other involving groups were invited to the Bonn Conference in 2001 to negotiate a peace agreement and roadmap for the new Afghanistan, the Taliban was excluded from the process. The Bonn peace agreement was later criticized as a victor peace, and doomed to fail due to the Taliban's exclusion from the process (Aljazeera 2011).

The Taliban's ability to regroup and conduct military operation was underestimated by the Afghan government, The United States and its allies. When The United States and its allies focus turned to Iraq in 2003, supported by international terrorist networks and neighboring countries (Reuters 2006). The Taliban got a chance to regroup and since then, they have posed serious threat to the Afghan government and coalition forces (Bergen 2006).

After many years fighting to destroy The Taliban, both coalition forces and the Afghan government realized that the military is not the solution to the conflict (Staff blogger 2009).

Additionally, Astri Suhrke (2011) argued that the military coalition forces have been part of the problem itself.

Following the acknowledgement that the military is not the only solution, different strategies such as "winning the mind and hearts" and secret peace negotiations were initiated both by the Afghan government (Huff Post world 2012), UN (Borger 2010), The United States (Ryan et.al. 2011), and other countries like Qatar, Turkey, Norway, Germany and Saudi Arabia.

In order to take ownership of the negotiation process, the Afghan government called for a consultative Loya Jirga in 2010 (Lamb et.al 2010). Following the Jirga, President Karzai appointed a group of elders, clergies, influential people, former Mujahedin leaders and tribal leaders in a High Peace Council (HPC) to mediate peace talks between the Afghanistan's government and Taliban leadership.

Even though, all of my respondents were in agreement that a peaceful solution to the conflict with the Taliban was needed, they also unanimously believed that peace process and dialogue with the Taliban under the authority of HPC would be a failed project[20].

My respondents mentioned several crucial reasons why peace talks are doomed to fail. The Nengarhari respondent criticized the composition of HPC, saying, most of the members of the HPC are appointed based on political interactions and compromises rather than their qualification and legitimacy to lead such an important body. He argues that Burhanodin Rabbani's leadership of the HPC had puts its legitimacy in question. He said that both youth and elders in the eastern region have questioned Rabbani's leadership of this council and considered his appointment as the leader of HPC by President Karzai as an irrational act. The fact that Rabbani's appointment was a political compromise was strengthened when his son Salahudin Rabbani succeed him after his assassination in 2011. The respondent believed that this lack of legitimacy has undermined HPC efficacy and impact in the region. He claims further that HPC does not have any activities in the eastern region, and those who are involved in the process are not respected there.

My Kabuli Tajik respondent mentioned the importance of having a valid negotiation partner and genuine desire to end the conflict. According to this respondent, the Taliban do not

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[20] Checking the website of the High Peace council (www.hpc.org.af) you will find out that there is no information provided under the Achievement tab which gives good reason for why the respondents are skeptical to HPC.

consider the Afghan government a valid negotiation partner. They believe that Karzai government cannot make decisions independent of United States. Yet, the Taliban consider the United States a valid negotiation partner. However, the Afghan government emphasizes that there will be no negotiation or peace talks if the Afghans do not take the lead (Fox News 2013). Thus, it is very difficult to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table with the Afghan government at the helm.

The Kabuli Tajik Respondent attributes the issue of willingness to USA and its allies, claiming that they do not have genuine commitment to bring peace in Afghanistan. He argues that when peace is established, foreign forces cannot justify their presence in Afghanistan (and they have to leave the country).

The Kabuli Pashtun respondent from Kabul was positive about the efforts the government had made to make peace with the Taliban. However, he was critical that the Taliban is not a unified group and receives support from many neighboring countries especially Iran and Pakistan. The result is that the government in Afghanistan does not know whom they should talk to.

The Qandahari respondent questioned the process of peace talks and negotiation with the Taliban. He argued that the peace process and dialogue with Taliban is not organized in a systematic way and it is not transparent. We do not know what is going on behind the scenes as there are many foreign intelligence agents involved. He believed that this process benefits a few people in the government who want to stay in power or gain political influence during the coming election. However, the majority of people in Qandahar believe that peace is possible.

The Bamyani male respondent was very critical to the peace process and dialogue with Taliban. In his opinion, when the government invites the Taliban to peace negotiation, it means that all the efforts made so far to democratize the country and promote freedom of expression in the last 12 years, have been waste of time. It means that government and international society has surrendered to the Taliban. He claimed that more than 95 %, almost 100% of the people in central provinces do not support such a peace processes or dialogue with the Taliban. He believed that the southern provinces of Afghanistan support the Taliban, which makes it difficult to fight. But by creating an anti-Taliban attitude among the people and putting pressure on those countries that support the Taliban, such as Iran and Pakistan, it could be possible. Peace talks and dialogue with the Taliban will not lead to any results.

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The Bamyani female respondent was one of the participants at the Consultative Peace Jirga. She was critical to the process. In her words, everything is kind of superficial and as long as they (HPC) are not working systematically and transparently, they will not be able to achieve peace. Additionally, this process will create some other problems, as the government is giving incentives to the Taliban and releasing their prisoners. This will lead to more war and conflict rather than peace.

According Herati respondent; most of the Taliban are not Afghan nationals. He believed that the Taliban are enemies of Afghanistan who brutally kill innocent people. Any negotiation and peace with them is betrayal to the nation. Furthermore, those who are part of the process and want to include the Taliban in the government should be accountable to every single child of this country.

Similar to the Kabuli Tajik respondent, Herati respondent also mentioned that both the Afghan government and the international society are unwilling to fight the Taliban to get rid of them. If governments are willing to fight them, then these small groups of the Taliban would not be able to keep up the resistance against well-trained Afghans and foreign forces. As we have seen those Taliban members who are arrested because of terrorist or other criminal activities are released by president Karzai. This unwillingness is also evident in Mr. Karzai's contradictory and ambiguous positioning. Sometimes he calls the Taliban, Pakistan and USA, his brothers and friends, and other times he talks against them and a secrets they are responsible for the deterioration of security in the country. He is not mentally stable and nobody knows what he is doing with Afghans fate and destiny[21].

5.3. Youth and corruption:
The third issue that all respondent were concerned about was regarding youth engagement in patronage and corruption. Political parties, influential people in the government, local leaders and power holders, are the key actors who use youths as a means to achieving their own goals and strengthening their own share of power. Such actors generally prefer loyalty over knowledge as compared to other qualifications. Those who are not qualified for a position; get hired and those who are qualified are often left out due to corruption in the system.

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[21] For forthur reading on Karzai's mentality see Kai Eida 2010. høytspill om Afghansitan. Cappelen Damm. Oslo

Respondents were worried about the future of the country and the youth, claiming that and patronage and corruption will kill the spirit of hard work and justice in them.

Afghanistan has had a dramatic increase in the form of human capital since the collapse of the Taliban regime. The numbers of school-age students has increased from 1 million during the Taliban regime to 10.5 million in 2013 (Adina 2013). Each year over hundred thousand students take conquer exam to gain admission to universities. Unfortunately, due to low capacity, only a small number of applicants are enrolled into public universities. Most of the under-graduate students stagnate without any further education. Those who are rich go to private universities, others try to find a work and others join the military or insurgents or leave the country.

The lack of employment opportunities and government's capacity to absorb the new wave of educated youths in the system has put young Afghans in a vulnerable situation. Those students who graduate from universities also struggle to find a work. Most youths are subject to patronage and corruption from the very beginning.

The study made by Giustozzi (2010) shows that student politics in Afghanistan struggles between patronage and rebellion. According to Giustozzi (2010:9) political parties use their student members as their spokespersons at the universities and other political arenas, and provide them with accommodation and financial support in return. He argues that ideological linkage between political parties and their student members is very weak, in some cases non-existing (ibid:9). Giustozzi's claim was confirmed by my Bamyani male respondent, who mentioned that he knows some students who are member of 3 or 4 political parties. They are doing this just to get more financial support and build stronger networks, not because they believe in or support those parties' ideology and politics but because many believe that this is the only way students can guarantee their future after graduation. Therefore, most students, instead of focusing on their educations, focus on building networks and work as recruitment agents for the dominant political parties and movements.

The Qandahari respondent also mentioned that students affiliated with dominant political parties or influential people get employed in important positions even before graduation, but qualified students, without such affiliation, stay unemployed. The Bamyani female respondent talked about one of her friends who had applied for a job at Bamyan municipality. Despite her qualification and experiences, her application was rejected and another girl who lacked the

necessary qualification was appointed to the job. When my respondent friend complained regarding the rejection, the people in the municipality had told her that the other girl had a strong reference and we cannot do anything about it. The same trends were reported by my respondent in Nengarhar, and Kabul. Herati respondent, in contrast to my other respondents noted that the government institutions are improving and the employment processes is less flawed in Herat than it was reported in other provinces.

Respondents expressed a since of concern about extend of corruption and patronage. They believed such behavior undermines youth's ability to achieve self-fulfillment, and realize their visions. The youth will become a means to others ends. For example, the front figures (spokespersons) of many government institutions and political parties are relatively young people. All of President Karzai's spokespersons have been relatively young. When the government or other institutions and political parties are criticized for excluding youth, they refer to these young front figures to deflect the critics.

Respondents were also worried that engaging in patronage and corruption undermines young Afghans abilities to take the lead, to be an actor, to be an agenda setter and to be a decision maker. It will undermine their legitimacy as independent actors and will always be judged based on the party or the person he was representing once.

In next chapter, I will try to explain the possibilities and challenges that youth face as actors and how they utilize these possibilities and deal with challenges.

6. Youth as Actors: Opportunities and Obstacle

In reference to chapter two, understanding the impact of the social conditions that youths are living under, and youth perception of these social conditions is essential   to understanding why and how they engage as political actor (Miller et.al. 1981; Leighley 1995). Given the geographic, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity in Afghanistan, contrary to the SES model assumption (Leighley 1995:187), social conditions and opportunities for participation is not distributed evenly across Afghanistan, and this will have implications for youth political engagement across the country. Therefore, in order to reflect this diversity in my thesis I conducted 8 in-depth interviews with young Afghans from different regions of the country, as explained in chapter 3.

Afghan society is characterized by a patriarchal hierarchy, meaning that it is mostly the elderly men who bear the authority to make decisions. Youths and women are either marginalized or excluded from all levels of the decision making processes; whether it is in the family or in society. Based on my data, it is possible to argue that, youth are treated as subordinates to the elders regardless of their knowledge and wisdom. In cases where youths are included in the decision making process, their ideas and opinions are not valued or considered equal to the elders. Most young Afghans that I have talked with have expressed dissatisfaction with the system and complain over lack of powerlessness and influence. They are educated, ambitious, visionary, talented and patriotic. The lack of opportunities to utilizes their abilities and realizes their visions have pushed them toward a vulnerable situation in which their energy and knowledge are misused by dominant political elites. Most youths are frustrated which can manifest itself when confronted with linguistic, religious or ethnic issues and sometimes result in violent clashes, protests and demonstration.

In light of recent activities, as mentioned in the introductory chapter and the frustrations and uncertainties mentioned in chapter 5, we see these factors persuading the youth to demand the right for effective participation in the decision making processes and to make a positive impact.

6.1. Youth in formal decision making organs:

Young Afghans are very concerned by the unstable political situation described in chapter 5. They have been directly affected by this situation, some in a positive way but mostly negatively. Despite the government and international society's formal statements regarding the important role youths play in political structures of the country, young Afghans are still marginalized or excluded from the formal decision making process and struggle to make their voice heard.

By formal decision making organs, I refer to National Assembly (Shooray Meli) which consist of two houses: Wolese Jirga (The House of People) and Meshrano Jirga (The House of elders), and Provincial Councils.

Wolese Jirga has 249 seats in which members are voted in by citizens in an election every five years. In addition to other criteria, a candidate must be at least 25 years old at the time of candidacy.

Meshrano Jirga is consisting of 102 selected and elected members. Sixty-eight of these members are elected by the 34 Provincial councils. 34 other members are selected by the President. To be elected or selected in Meshrano Jirga, one must be at least 35 years of age and citizen of Afghanistan.[22]

Provincial Councils are legislative decision making organs on the sub-national level. Members are elected every five years. The election is held simultaneously with presidential election. The number of representatives in each provincial council is determined by the population of each province. Candidates must be at least18 years old at the time of candidacy. Provincial councils are supposed to represent the public in each of the 34 provinces. Their responsibility is to hold the Provincial Governors accountable, contribute to the provincial policy and budget plan outlines, help resolving local and ethnic conflicts, and assign a delegate to the Meshrano Jirga in Kabul (ref: Independent Election Commission).

Even though youths are very interested in participating in formal decision making processes, and make efforts to enter these organs, decision making organs in national, and at the sub-national level are still mostly dominated by elderly influential men, warlords, national and local power brokers, and former Mujahidin.

If we define youth as people between age 15 and 24 according to United Nation measures, the Constitution of Afghanistan excludes youth automatically from participation in the National Assembly, which is the highest decision making organ in the country. However, if we adjust the definition of youth according to realities in Afghanistan and to my target group, youth between 18 and 30 years old do have still a chance to find their way to Wolese Jirga and Provincial Councils.

Youth are aware of this formal opportunity and according to the my Kabuli respondents, most of the candidates in 2009's provincial council's election were youths, but only few of them achieved entry into these organs.

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[22] For more information on National Assembly and its duties refer to Constitution of Afghanistan, chapter 5, article 90. Url: http://supremecourt.gov.af/content/media/documents/constitution2004_english24120129495832555332532 5.pdf_Retrieved 07.10.2013.

With the exception of Herat, all of the other places that my respondents came from claimed that youths are not included in the decision making organs. They reported that Provincial Councils have been dominated by influential elders and white-bearded men in their region, and youths have almost no chance of gaining entry to these organs independently.

Herat has been one the most peaceful and progressive provinces in Afghanistan. According to Herati respondent, youths in Herat have managed to take the advantages of opportunities they were provided during the last decade to educate themselves, expand their capacities and gain trust. For example, the head of Provincial Council is a relatively young person (25 to 35 years old), some members of the council are youths who are recent graduates from the university, and there are several district governors who are young people.

Nahid, Farid, the youngest member of the lower house of Parliament (29 years old) also comes from Herat. In a portrait blog for Afghanistan 101, she writes that, "The people who really campaigned for me were the young and children. Some I had met and others I had not. They persuaded their parents to vote for me. I was receiving so many phone calls from parents saying they had heard about me from their children and that they would support me"(Farid 2012).

The Herati respondent believed that the education that youths have acquired lately is one of the main reasons that they have managed to find their way in decision-making organs and be successful. Youths are more educated now than before. They stand out in clear contrast to elderly representatives, who are less educated, and some cases totally illiterate.

Education alone cannot be the reason for the success of youth in the Herat province. A great number of the young Afghans in other provinces are also educated but have not managed to enter the decision making organs yet. The other reason that the Herati respondent mentioned had to do with the unity and confidence among Herati youth themselves and the strong belief that youth should be a part in decision making processes. Due to this unity and confidence, the Herati youth first choose a few among themselves and helped them to enter these organs through democratic means (election). In return, those youths who entered the provincial council stayed committed to the youth and put all their efforts into delivering on the same promise that aided their rise to power. Even if they could not deliver on everything they promised, people could see that they were struggling and trying their best added the respondent. He made mention of Wahed Ghatari, who is the head of provincial council in

Herat, by using him as an example of a successful young leader. Those who are district governors have also been very successful.

The media in Herat is also dominated by the youth and they try to influence public opinion and the mindset to supports youth engagement. These activities have proved that the youth are capable of taking on responsibilities. They add to people's trust and confidence in youth, said the Herati respondent.

The Kabuli Pashtun respondent believed that the main problem that Kabuli youths have not managed to succeed is due to lack of financial and material resources. They cannot run an effective election campaign. The other problem is that the elders do not trust in youth abilities, therefore, they do not support youth engagement. He expressed a feeling of apathy and claimed that those youths who have managed to enter these organs cannot play a very effective role either. This is because youths are a small minorities in decision making processes and they are not be able to fight for youth causes as well as they should. They have to follow the mainstream/elders position to be accepted in society. For example, some youths who managed to enter the parliament in 2010, soon after they entered the parliament they were influenced and dominated by the influential political parties and had forgotten what they have promised to youth. He named Baktash Siawash, who is young Member of Parliament from Kabul. The respondent believed that Siawash promised to work on youth causes and to fight for their rights. After a few months in the Parliament he engaged in mains stream political issues and forgot youth issues. The Kabuli Tajik respondent accused him for populism, claiming that he shows up on cases that serve himself and his popularity, otherwise he is not accessible for youth.

In other provinces, despite the fact that a remarkable number of youth are educated, they lack unity and confidence. This problem was very evident in many of respondent's statements. The Nengarhari respondent mentioned that youth do not trust their own generation. Youth also believe in the misperception that they are inexperienced, ignorant, immature, and therefore, most of them do not bother to engage in politics and prefer an elderly man well versed in religious studies over a young man with master degree from a university.

According to the from Bamyani male respondent, there are influential elders who undermine youths efforts and make it difficult for them to gain trust and confidence from people. He believed that elderly parliamentarian and counselors, who have youth advisers, claim all

credit for the ideas that youth provide them. The reason is that elders feel threatened by youths and are trying to protect their traditional positions and authority in the community. They do not say that I am old now and I should open the path for the young generation.

6.2. Youth in political parties:

As mentioned previously, the majority of both elected and selected government organs are controlled by dominant political parties, war lords, and other influential people. In order to get a good position and enter any of the government institutions, one must be affiliated with the mentioned stakeholders. Studies done by Dr. Antoni Giustozzi (2010) shows that, students (youth) engagement in party politics is mostly driven by patronage and careerism. He argues that the reason most students join political parties is not because they support their political ideology and agenda, but due to some incentives and opportunities for which might aid their future career. Similar to Giustozzi findings, the Bamyani male respondent mentioned that he knows some youth who possess membership in several parties. Youths who are not affiliated with dominant political parties, despite of higher education and qualifications will fall away from governmental decision making organs.

According to the Bamyani female respondent, influential political parties in the region have dominated the recruitment process, and hire mostly those youths who are affiliated and loyal to them. These youth are mostly unqualified for the positions and easy to manipulate. Despite a government decree on the prevention of political activities at the universities across Afghanistan, dominant political parties are still active in universities across Afghanistan and try to recruit students to their parties (Giustozzi 2010). Supporting Giustozzi's claim, the respondent mentioned that there are three political parties: Wahdate meli, Harakat meli, Ensejame meli that are the most active at Bamyan University. She believed that the youth today do not believe in party politics and it is not like before when people wanted to die for the causes of these parties. Youth in Bamyan do not join these parties because of ideological beliefs and commitment, but due to gaining some economic and material incentives added the respondent.

My Bamyani female respondent also mentioned that Hizbe Ensejame Meli had a seminar at the University and they tried to recruit students by promising them good positions in government after graduation. The respondent said that when she heard about the episode, she

took up the subject with the university director and asked for restriction of such activities on campus. She believed that such political activities at university divert students focus from education onto other issues and create negative competition. For example, in order to get a good position in government students will join these parties instead of putting effort and studying hard. This situation has worried hard-working students, who do not want to be affiliated with political parties or contribute to corruption.

While in relatively peaceful provinces, youths join political parties due to patronage and careerism, in insecure provinces in the east and south, youths join political parties for other reasons. According to my Nengarhari respondent, the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami have dominated Nengarhar University. Youth in this region are mostly religious and traditionalists. Some of them join the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami believing that Afghanistan is occupied by infidels and they have to fight against them until they leave Afghanistan. Other youths join them, because they live in areas controlled by these parties. Membership in these parties can give them and their family's safety.

Kandahari respondent mentioned that there is no political activity on Kandahar University campus as far as he knows, and students are mostly concerned with their studies. Political activities in all forms are very limited in the southeastern provinces and youth were not very interested in politics.

He mentioned that the youth attitude toward politics and politicians is very negative in Kandahar. They believe that politics and politicians are guilty in the destruction of their country and all the difficulties and strife z Afghans are suffering. Therefore, youths are more focused on education and their future carriers seeing this as the preferred channel towards solving the problems that Afghanistan is facing.

Most educated and qualified youths who do not manage to enter government the decision making organs due to corruption in the system or because they do not want to engage in party politics. They join civil society or make individual efforts through the media react with apathy.

6.3. Youth in civil society:

The difficult and impenetrable political environment in Afghanistan has pushed many young Afghans to seek alternative channels to promote positive changes in the country. One of these channels that have been very popular among youth since 2001 is *Civil Society[23]* organizations.

Despite the ambiguity around the concept of Civil Society in the country (Winter 2010:19), and the lack of consensus on the role they should play (Brookland 2013), many young Afghans have found them a better alternative to make their voices heard and promote positive changes in some parts of the country.

Answers provided by my respondents indicated different level of Civil Society organizations and youth engagement in these organizations across the country. For example, youth in provinces with better security and opportunities for freedom of expression such as Kabul, Herat, Bamyan and Mazare-sharif have greater opportunities to engage in civil society, but in less secured and less open provinces like Nengarhar and Kandahar, civil society organizations were reported almost non-existant and youth engagement in these organizations are very limited.

According to the respondents from Bamyan, civil society organizations in this province are very active compared to the rest of the country. Youths use civil society as a channel for political influence when they arrange demonstrations, write to the media and arrange educational seminars to raise awareness about issues and problem in the province. According to the Bamyani male respondent, the reason that civil society in Bamyan is active is that activist feel safe to do so and despite bad governance, youths have an opportunity to express their opinions and criticize government authorities and other decision making organs without fear. The respondent complained that despite relative peace and security, Bamyan is one the most under-developed provinces. Lately, the citizens have been complaining about lack of standard roads and electricity. In order to add the issue into the national agenda, the civil

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[23] Even though there is no concensus on the nature of civil society, it refers to organizations that act to promote the common good without being a part of government or market (Winter 2010:7).

society activist arranged a demonstration and laid mud on the road instead of Asphalt to criticize the national government for not paying attention to transport problems in Bamyan. Likewise, in a different protest, which was arranged to highlight the lack of electricity in Bamyan, the civil society hung an old oil-lamp in the city square. To protest against the perceived laziness of authorities, the civil society organizations arranged a demonstration in which they give an *honorary medal of hard work* to a donkey.

Even though the protests were not as effective as expected and they did not serve their main goals, they were successful at raising awareness regarding the problems that people are struggling in Bamyan. It also sent a message of non-violent civic approach to demonstrate and criticizing authorities, added the Bamyani male respondent.

Similarly, youth in Kabul are mostly engaged in civil society organizations. Such organizations have been increasing recently and are established and driven by the youths themselves. Some of them are less political and focus mostly on youth empowerment and development through education and training. Some are highly political and are struggling to include the youth into power structure and the decision making organs.

One of the youth organizations that is worth mentioning, which is less political and focuses more on youth empowerment through education is Afghanistan's New Generation Organization (ANGO). According to information provided in their website, this organization was founded in 2011 by a group of young activist aiming to empower and bring together the new generation of Afghans to lead their country toward a peaceful, progressive and democratic future. In order to achieve its goal, the organization claims to use a four dimensional approach: building skills, critical awareness, creating networks of young activist and engaging in networks of youth in civic and volunteer activities.

Afghanistan's New Generation (ANG) is also administering and functions as umbrella organization for three other organizations that work with youth empowerment. One them is the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC)[24]. The organization claims to be a "nonpolitical and nonpartisan network of Afghan journalists and civil society activists dedicated to ensuring the safety and protection of Afghan media workers and international reporters working in Afghanistan". Another important organization that is working under the umbrella of Afghanistan's New Generation is Afghan Voice. Afghan Voice believe that

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[24] To access Afghan Journalists Safety Committee refer to: http://ajsc.af/

"media is the best tool for the youth of Afghanistan to express themselves, define the public discourse and contribute to the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan". Therefore the organization trains and empowers young Afghans to develop media products. They claim that some of the Afghan Voice products have won national and international awards. Many youths who have taken part in Afghan Voice programs have expressed their satisfaction and gratitude on its website, which shows the effectiveness of their efforts.

The third organization that is functioning under the umbrella of Afghanistan's New Generation is Sarak-e-awal. Unfortunately, there was no information provided about this organization in the website.

There are also many other youth organizations that works more politically. One of them that is newly established and has caught the media's attention is Afghanistan 1400. The organization was established under the slogan "Our country, our responsibility" in 2012. What distinguishes this organization from other youth organizations established so far, is the combination of its educated and high profile founders who came from a different part of the country and from a different sector of the society? According to their statutes, they aim is to mobilize and create a platform for the new generation of Afghans to participate in Afghanistan's political, social and economic development. This organization is still very young and their activities have not been significant enough to attract national media attention yet.

There are numerous civil society organizations either funded or organized by youth who works independently on the same goals and agendas, namely empowering youth and bringing peace and prosperity to the country. Many of these organizations have very short lifespans and they dissolves due to negative competition with each other. Another possibility could be due to internal disagreements, lack of financial supports or that they came under the control of established political parties.

Sometimes youth civil society organizations manage to come together and address issues of common interest. One such unprecedented initiative was the Afghanistan National Youth Peace Jirga (YPJ) which took place in July 2012. According to the Kabuli Tajik respondent, - who was one of the organizers of YPJ- the idea behind this initiative was that, if youths stay silent and do not raise their voices and express their opinions about what is going on, they will face a harsh judgments in the future.

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Around 1 700 youths gathered from across the country in this Jirga. They discussed critical issues such as; the strategic agreement between Afghanistan and United States, withdrawal of foreign forces, the peace process, including dialogue with the Taliban, corruption, youth problems and unemployment. After four days of discussion the participants agreed upon a resolution which was delivered to the President.

Kabuli Tajik respondent mentioned that even in this Jirga, which was arranged in the name of youth issues, youths were not given a chance to talk. The resolution that was delivered to the President was not taken under further consideration. Despite the efforts that youths put in arranging the Peace Jirga, many following protests through seminars, media coverage, demonstrations and other campaigns, authorities have not yet listened to the youth themselves. The resolution that youth agreed upon in YPJ is almost history, added the respondent[25]. There were also accusations regarding the composition, independency, and the formation of YPJ's resolution (Kazemi 2012)

In a telephone interview that I had with the general secretary of the YPJ, while confirming some irregularities, he refuted all accusations regarding the composition of the Jirga and its independency. He claimed that the 1 700 participants were invited from all provinces which includes, Individual youth, members of civil society organizations, members of political parties, members of government, members of insurgents groups (the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami). He also denied the accusation regarding the distribution of a CD containing the leader of Hizb-e Islami Gulbodin Hekmatyar's message to the Jirga participants. While confirming that the CD was sent due to Jirga's leadership request, the leadership of the Jirga refused to publish it due to its harsh contents, and he stated that the CD was neither distributed among the participants by others.

Despite the ups and downs, the Member of secretariat of YPJ believed the Jirga had some important achievements. For starters, he argued that, the effort to bring 1 700 youths from across Afghanistan together and give them a chance to discuss politics was a great achievement in itself. The second achievement was that 1 200 of these participants got 3 hours to discuss politics directly with President Karzai, and ask him critical questions. The most important achievement of YPJ, according to this respondent was that they broke the monopoly of Jirga by elders. They showed that Jirgas are not exclusively for elders, but it can

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[25] The Resolution which was issued at the end of the Jirga has not been published yet.

also be used as a means for youth to raise their voice and take part in the decision making process.[26]

Another coalition of youth organizations which is operating under the name National Coalition of Afghanistan's Youth had arranged a conference with over thousand participants from across Afghanistan in September 2013. The agenda for this conference was to evaluate the youth role in upcoming election, challenges regarding elections, poverty reduction, economic development, peace processes, and youth participation in government institutions (Tajlil 2013).

In interviews made by the Etilaatroz newspaper journalist Jalil Tajlil, one of the board members of this youth coalition argues that upcoming election belongs to the youth. Youth who are aware and makes conscious decisions. Other board member of this organization have also emphasized the important role youth can play in raising awareness about the candidates and their programs for the public and help them to make conscious decisions as well (Tajlil 2013

There are also youth organizations that cooperate sometimes on an ad hoc basis and arrange seminars, workshops or political campaigns. For example: Many youth organizations cooperated to arrange a five kilometer running race against corruption last year. The campaign was organized by Afghanistan anti-corruption network, which is a network of civil society organization that fights against corruption. Four-hundred young students and athletes participated in this campaign from across Afghanistan[27]. And the campaign method and its message were discussed by several media outlets across Afghanistan and abroad.

Civil society organizations, especially those who are engaged in political activities have not proven so effective. Most of them get hijacked by the dominant political parties, or get cut in internal disagreement and are short-lived. This trend has weakened youths' trust in such organizations and they seek alternative ways of engagements.

In addition, organized civic and political activities are only possible in relatively peaceful provinces that also enjoy some level of freedom of expression and respect for democratic values. However, in the eastern and southern provinces, youths' chances for civic and

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[26] Interview with NYPJ secretariat
[27] For detailed info on the race see : http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGtXvP25xt4

political engagement through such organizations are very limited and they use other methods to make their voice heard or affect government policies.

6.4. Youth as insurgents:

The youths in Nengarhar and the eastern provinces organize and their political activities in a totally different way. Given the strength and influence of insurgent groups such as the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami of Hekmatyar in this region and a heavy USA and Afghan government military presence, youth are caught in crossfire. The Nengarhari respondent believed that youth in this region are neither included in the governmental decision making organs nor in insurgent groups' decision making organs. If they engage in pro-government activities, they will be punished and in most cases killed by the Taliban or other insurgent groups in the region. If they engage in pro-insurgents activities they will be punished and imprisoned by government authorities.

In contrast to the central and western provinces; the Nengarhari respondent claimed that freedom of expression is very limited and civil society organizations almost non-existant in the eastern provinces. Most people do not even know what a civil society is or what it does. They consider it as western phenomena and reject it outright.

The Nengarhari respondent believed that the youth in this region are primarily affected and influenced by religious and traditional beliefs; therefore they sympathize with the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami. He mentioned that when some of the students go back to their villages during summer and winter vacations, they join the Taliban and fight against the government and its allies. When they get killed or imprisoned, other sympathizers who are at the university, by arranging demonstrations and blocking roads, push the government to release them. The respondent's claim could be supported by a BBC TV reporter Haroon Najafizade (2013). In a TV reportage, Najafizade shows how students in Nengarhar University engage in pro-Taliban and Hizb-e Islami activities. The report clearly shows the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami's dominance over the University. Their declarations, commands, and other messages were hung all over the university and nobody dared to remove them. Some of the students openly expressed their disaffection with the government and their support for the Taliban.

The youth in this region resort mostly to what Bayat (2010) has referred to as "free-form activism" mostly in the form of violent street demonstrations to affect government policies.

They burn shops, block roads and destroy private and public properties in order to push governments to act on their demands, influence politics and to draw attention to their problems in the region (Schrade 2013).

Similar to Nengarhar, freedom of expression is very limited in Kandahar as well. The Kandahari respondent claimed that nobody would criticize government authorities or insurgents groups individually and only occasionally would people take collective actions and arrange demonstration. Only those who have strong backup can criticize and demonstrate against decisions made by government organs or others, but it is for the sake of their personal interests, not for the sake of people. Youth do not dare to protest and criticize authorities. Any form of organized protest can put their life in danger and cause them many problems.

The respondent believed that all political and decision-making organs are monopolized by elders and influential people. As far as Kandahari respondent is aware, civil society does not have any political activity in Kandahar, nor there has there been any investment in this field. He believed that the youth generally do not show interest in political activities due to security issues and negative attitude toward politics and politicians. Their automatic reaction to politics is apathy. Most youths try to keep low profile. If they get some opportunities they will be grateful, if not, they just keep silent and remain patient, added the respondent. He also mentioned that some try to get a job in government organs, some through open competition, but most through bribery and patronage. Students focus on their studies, some are running small businesses and some are doing agriculture. However, in villages some youths are also recruited to insurgents groups.

The youths not only resort to violent actions in eastern and southern provinces, but there have been incidents of violent youth actions in other area, even in much more peaceful provinces like Kabul and Mazar-e-sharif. The difference is that the youths in the eastern and southern provinces usually demonstrate against Afghan government policies, but violent demonstrations in Kabul and Mazar-e-sharif have been triggered by foreign military forces irresponsible actions or mistakes in Afghanistan, or Islam critics' actions in other places (Graham-Harrison, Emma). Such demonstrations usually start peacefully and are well organized, but sometimes they suddenly turn violent. Official and organizers usually blame insurgents for hijacking the demonstrations and turning it violent (Shamal 2011). Others argue that such violent demonstrations are result of an accumulated of anger, frustration, disappointment and hopelessness among the youth in these regions (Guisstozi 2012). One of

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such demonstrations took place in 2011 in Mazar-e-sharif where 7 UN employees were brutally murdered by the mob[28].

6.5. Youth as independent actors: Media

There was been a huge increases in number of TV channels, radio programs, newspapers and access to the internet and media which has become a very important factor in influencing government politics. . The Afghan media enjoys relatively broad freedom today as compared to the pre-2001 period.

The Press Freedom Index (PFI) shows a turbulent development for freedom of expression in Afghanistan. Scored 102nd in 2002 among 139 countries, it had improved by 2004 when Afghanistan scored 97th among 167 countries. PFI has registered a gradual worsening of situation and in 2012 Afghanistan scored 150th among 179 countries. Despite increased harassment against journalist and sanctions against the media (Reporters without Borders 2013), there has been no journalist imprisoned. Therefor in PFI has scored Afghanistan 128th among 179 countries in 2013. This indicates an improvement of situation of the media and journalists' safety, but due to the withdrawal of foreign forces in 2014 as explained in chapter 5, it is difficult to predict if the media will enjoy the same freedom in future.

Youths, given their access to new technology and internet, are using the media very actively to make their voices heard. My Herati respondent claimed that the media in Herat is dominated mostly by youths. They write for newspapers, produce TV and radio programs, and are active in social media. He believed that the youth took advantages of this chance and tried to promote youth involvement in politics and their participation in decision making process. The Bamyani male respondents mentioned as well that there are websites that publish article about youth activities and efforts in the central provinces to outside world[29].

Famous TV channels like Tolo TV and Channel 1 are also dominated by the youths. They host many political and critical TV programs. One of these programs that worth mentioning is

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[28] Anders Somme Hammer, a Norwegian journalist has found in a documentary film that USA agents bear some of the responsibility for turning this demonstration violent. NRK1, Brennpunkt, URL: http://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/mdup11000612/04-09-2012#t=40m12s. Access 11.10.2013.
[29] Respondent mentioned especially Jamhuri Sokut (The republic of Silence), a net based news agency that frequently publishes article about youth demonstrations and campaigns. url: http://urozgan.org/fa-AF/default/.

Kankash. It is a popular political round table discussion program that is broadcasted every week and draws attention to hot topics in the country. Even the guests are usually influential elders, so called political experts, politicians, university professors and civil society activist and journalists, the program is always hosted by youths. It gives them a chance to set the agenda and ask the debaters questions that reflects youth concerns and perspectives

There are many other youths who try to make their voices heard independently through media or other channels. My Kabuli Pashtun respondent who is a young journalist and the Nengarhari respondent are two of such youths. The Kabuli Pashtun respondent administer a Facebook group with over 3 000 members and actively publishes critical and informative articles about the different issues in the country. He has also authored three books, one which is not published yet, deals with youth issues and problems in Afghanistan. He claims that his struggle is based on the belief that we are all human beings. This earth has enough room for all people in his view. However, we can also have our ideological disputes. We should fight for our ideas and beliefs using argumentation and reason rather than weapons. He expressed a sense of skepticism toward the dominant media - TV, radio and newspapers - and claimed that these media outlets are also affiliated either with political parties or foreign countries: Iran, Pakistan, USA and/or the West. Therefore, he has chosen to work independently and focus on the issues that he believed are for the nation's good.

The Nengarhari respondent mentioned that during the presidential election in 2009, he went and interviewed most of the candidates. He referred to a saying by the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) that "if there are 40 people among my Umma who are claiming honesty, there is at least one "friend of Allah" (honest person) among them". He believed that among the presidential candidates, there should be one such person who is qualified to become president. He made some criterion and then started his quest to find the right president. The criteria were that the candidate could perform as a national figurehead and receive respect and trust from all ethnic groups in the country. He should have a specific school of thought. He should have his own disciples; people he trained (to be appointed to critical positions), and should have good physical and mental health.

The reason that the Nengarhari respondent did these interviews was to use the information to make an informed and conscious decision and at the same time raise awareness about the candidates and their programs. Through seminars and in informal discussion with friends and classmates he intended to reach out to the youth and gain their involvement.

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As explained above young Afghans use all available channels to make their voices heard and find their legitimate position in the country's politics and decision making processes. Yet, despite all these efforts and opportunities, youth complain over powerlessness and exclusion from decision making process. In next chapter based on the theories I explained in chapter two and the Data from other chapters I will explore the reasons that might have hampered youth effective participation in decision making processes.

7. Analysis

Afghanistan's political climate is characterized by traditionalism, chaos, instability, contradictions, self-interest, greed, grievances, patronage, careerism, and strategic alliance building[30]. To engage in politics in such a rough environment is not only difficult for the youth, but also difficult for women, scholars, students and ordinary citizens. For example, in the 2009 Presidential election, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, -who is a highly profiled scholar and was ranked second among the 100 best thinkers in the world by Prospect Magazine in 2013- got only 2.94 percent of the votes. In other words, the youth should be prepared for even tougher challenges and higher barriers in order to assure their effective participation in politics and the decision making processes.

7.1. Why do young Afghans engage in politics?

Being a generation at war, young Afghans are tired of the conflict and violence. They are tired of corruption, dependency, and powerlessness. They are also ambitious, visionary, dutiful, educated and most important; willing to contribute to bringing peace, progress and prosperity to their country.

In line with SES model assumptions, increased individual resources, in addition to dissatisfaction with current political system and the feeling of responsibility to do something, has persuaded youth to engage in politics and demand an effective role in decision-making processes. Young Afghans' engagement in politics recently and their struggle for power and participation is a clear indication that they have understood their rights and duties.

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[30] Such characterization is common among Afghans and it was also mentioned by my respondents.

In addition to increased individual resources and civic orientation, since 2001, many Afghans including women and youth have gained many opportunities to engage in politics and have their say. It has been a long road from being a country with the most authoritarian regimes to the induction of the most democratic constitution in the region. Thus, allowing Afghans to engage in politics by any peaceful means. It allows for the establishment of political parties and civic and political organizations. The media enjoys a high level of freedom of expression as compared to neighboring countries. Afghans got the opportunity to choose their leaders for the first time in history. They voted in members of the National Parliament and provincial councils.

Additionally, these developments have given them the opportunity to connect to the outside world and learn about the role youths play in politics and society. My Nengarhari respondent mentioned that he and many other youth are inspired of Arabic spring and youth role in Egypt's revolution[31]. He argued that, young Afghans are aware that they are not only the future of the country, but they are also the present. In order to improve their situation in future, they have to take action now. Otherwise it will be too late.

Most young Afghans especially in urban areas have the motivation, resources, beliefs and opportunities that are required to engage in politics and make a positive impact.

In this section I will argue that, there two main reasons that youth are still kept in the margins of politics and decision making processes in Afghanistan. The first reason is regarding youth perceived consciousness of their social and political status as a group, and their actual consciousness. I argue that the youth are not as conscious of their social and political status as they perceived to be. Therefor they cannot mobilize and act as unified actor. The second obstacle is that youth movements today do not learn from history, despite fundamental differences, copy the organizational structure, and ideological base of youth movements in 1960s and 70s. I argue that without introducing new ideas and formula, they will face the same destiny as youth movements in 1960s and 70s.

7.2.   Youth consciousness?

Almost all my respondents mentioned that they were aware of the important role youth should play in the current situation in the country and in the future. This awareness is also expressed

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[31] I have also witnessed debates and discussions on the issue in many Facebook groups.

in young Afghans organizations manifestations. They are also aware of the fact that young Afghans are marginalized and excluded from the important decision making organs in the government, and their opinions are not appreciated by elders. Most youth organizations consider effective participation in the decision making processes as their top priority. At the same time, my respondents and young Afghans who participate in discussions on social media, complain that young Afghans are confused, divided, lack confidence and do not trust each other. Such contradictions raise questions regarding the consciousness of youth as political actors.

As explained in chapter 2, Miller et.al. (1981) defines group consciousness as a multidimensional concept consisting of four components: group identification, polar affect, polar power and individual vs system blame (ibid:496).

Group identification is as subjective and objective psychological feelings of belonging to a particular group. While objective group identification is based on socioeconomic circumstances, subjective group identification is based on collective identification and conscious loyalty to the group (ibid).

The ambiguities and inconsistency around being a youth, has made it challenging for young Afghans to create a group identity. While all politicians, civil servants, activist, journalist and ordinary people talk about the youth and their important role in political the decision making processes, none of them makes it clear what they mean by youth.

Defining youth based on UNISCO and Bayat (2010) makes it even more difficult to create a unified youth group identity. Given the objectivity and subjectivity of group identification, it might be challenging for the members to identify themselves with a particular group. For example, somebody at age of 23, who is married and employed, may subjectively identify with youth and be committed to youth interests. Yet, objectively he might be considered as adult and categorized in adult group. This is usually the case in Afghanistan where society demands that those who are married should behave like adults, and therefore, do not engage in activities that is associated with the youth.

In addition to definitional complexities, the four decades of war and conflict have divided the country along ethnic, linguistic, geographic, religious and ideological cleavages. The challenge is therefore even greater for young Afghans to form a unified group identity, because, they bear many conflicting and overlapping identities. For example: On May 27th

this year, a group of Hazara students resorted to a hunger strike and demanded reforms in the Faculty of Social Science at Kabul University and the resignation of a professor. Instead of focusing on student's interests and supporting of their fellow students, another group of students who belonged to a different ethnic group, went to a counter-demonstration and tried to delegitimize Hazara students' demands. In other word, the counter demonstrators identified themselves with their ethnic kin, rather than their fellow student/youth. Such confrontations among the youth themselves undermine their efforts and damage their reputations as effective and valued decision-makers. On the other hand, it strengthens elders' position and justifies their hostile behavior.

The next two component of group consciousness mostly depend on the group identification. Polar affect is a situation in which members prefer their own group and are hostile against those outside the group (Miller et.al. 1981:496). It implies that there is already a group which youth identify them with. It is difficult to measure the level of the "Polar affect" among young Afghans. Even if they identify themselves with youth groups, due to insecurity, traditions and religious beliefs they do not express their hostility with elders openly. Youths prefer to criticize elders through the media (social media) or in informal conversations. Those youth who are members of the dominant political parties, employed in government institutions, are a Member of Parliament or apart of other decision making organs, are usually very cautious in their criticisms. In some cases when young Afghans are employed in top jobs in the government, they engage in other issues rather than fighting for youth interest, in most cases became inaccessible for youth voters[32]. This is either because they no longer identify themselves with youth, or the incentive to be identified with government/elders is more desirable.

Relationships between youths who are engaged with the dominant political parties are also very hostile. Instead of advocating for youth interest, they advocate for their parties' politics which is mixed with ethnic issues and usually ends in violent physical clashes or verbal harassment. Such clashes among youth are very evident on social media, where there is no discussion without ethnic, linguistic and religious fights. Due to such conflicting and overlapping identities, youth usually justify the position of the elders within their own ethnic group and are hostile against outsiders. When the youth from one ethnic group raises their

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[32] Several of my respondents mentioned the issue. And many youth came with such claims in social media.

voices and ask for justice, the youth from other groups do not support them; in most cases they try to counter them.

Polar power is quite evident in Afghanistan. It is a situation in which one group members compares their current status, power, or material resources with other groups, and thereby expresses their satisfaction or dissatisfaction on that basis (ibid).

Compared to elders, youth perceive themselves as a subordinated and powerless group. They lack any kind of real power and material resources. What they do possess is higher education and good knowledge of modern technology which their elders lack. They perceive elders who have dominated all decision making processes incapable of dealing with the challenges and problems that Afghanistan is facing currently. Furthermore, they argue that presence of the youth is essential in the decision making processes to secure peace, progress and stability in the country. They demand that elders should recognize the youth as a resource and value them as equal and effective partners. Their recent engagements and plea is a clear indication that they want to elevate their social status.

Polar power, can lay the ground for the fourth component of groups consciousness, namely "Individual vs System blame". This component of groups consciousness deals with the questions of whether individuals are responsible for their social status, or if it is the system that has allocated them their status in the society (ibid, 497).

In the case of young Afghans, based on the three first components of group consciousness, I claim that both the "system" and "youth" are to blame. Despite, international efforts and aid, in addition to young Afghans' increased competence, the Afghan government has not yet lowered the threshold for youth participation in the decision making processes. For example, age, status, and material resources are among the requirements to qualify for candidacy for all elected institutions: Presidency, National Assembly and provincial councils (the Constitution of Afghanistan, § Chapter 3, Art 62; Chapter 5, Art 85; and IEC factsheet on the provincial councils). There is no constitutional requirement mandating education as a prerequisite of candidacy in these institutions. Most youths are not satisfied with such a system. My respondents from Kabul and Nengarhar argued that education should be the first requirement for candidacy in all elected and selected institutions. Most youths who are educated and

highly qualified to be part of these institutions, but are either young or lack the material resources to compete with elders[33] do not stand a chance at being elected.

The presence of the youth has been marginal at best in traditional the decision making processes (Loya Jirga). They have not been included in five traditional Loya Jirgas since 2001[34]. Even the name itself indicates that, the members of Loya Jirga are usually influential people from the community mostly elders. In protest to such exclusions, in 2012, youth arranged their own Loya Jirga (as mentioned previously) to discuss current political issues in the country and express their opinions. The lack of the government's attention to youths' needs and demands is an obvious indication of youths' marginalization by the system. Therefore, they all have reason to blame the system for their failure.

With the exception of youths in Herat, young Afghans themselves are also to blame. Their lack of ability to cooperate and support with each other, identification with other groups rather than youth, engaging in ethnic, religious, linguistic and geographic conflicts, and engaging in patronage and corruption have raised concerns regarding youth's competency. Youths have not managed to build a unified group identity across ethnicity and other divides with specifically defined interest and demands. With the exception of some gatherings, demonstrations, campaigns and seminars, they have not yet done anything substantial to attract peoples' trust and confidence in youth movements. They have not been able to prove to the people that they are different, they are competent and they are action oriented than elders. All youth organizations that I have read about listed all the good things, such as youth empowerment, poverty reduction, unemployment reduction, reducing drug addiction, inclusion in the decision making processes, human rights etc. as their goals. The result is they are spreading their interest too thin and across too many fields. With limited resources and too many goals they end up accomplishing nothing. Most youth organizations dissolve after a very short time. Then they blame the system, the elders or lack of financial supports for their failure.

The confusion and ineffectiveness of young Afghans thus far, could be traced to the degree of their consciousness as a group. Given the four components of group consciousness young Afghans score very low on group identification and polar affect. And score high on polar

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[33] Respondent from Bamyan and Kabul.
[34] Emergency Loya Jirga, Kabul 2002; Loya Jirga on Constitution, Kabul 2003; Afghan/Pak Joint Peace Jirga, Kabul 2007; National Consultative Peace Jirga, Kabul 2010; Traditional Loya Jirga, Kabul 2011

power and individual vs system blame. Therefore there are not able to act as unified group to improve their social conditions.

Miller et.al. (1981:497) argues further that, when the four component of group consciousness go together, it encourages subordinate groups (in my case the youth) to use the electoral process in an attempt to improve their social conditions (ibid:497).

In other words, if youths identify themselves as a subordinated group, are hostile towards elders -who have dominated all decision making processes-, express dissatisfaction with current social status due to higher education and competence, and blame the system for their disadvantages and exclusion from decision making organs, they will form an ideology and become politicized. Miller et al. argues that, it is the intensity of such group politicization that leads to effective action rather than the number of people in a group (ibid:508).

Youths in the Herat Province have to some degree managed to overcome the challenges regarding group consciousness and form a more unified youth group identity than youth in other provinces. According to my respondent from Herat, this unity was the reason that the youth managed to improve their situation and take their share of power in provincial councils and Parliament. My respondent's claim can be supported by Nahid Farid's activities, who is a visionary, talented and action oriented young MP from Herat. She administers a website and Facebook group with 13 000 followers, writes article on different issues and participate in TV debates[35]. She write in her website that

> "When I decided to run for office, I have never asked people to vote for me but voting for the green idea (be a united nation and live in a united land by the name of Afghanistan, respecting human rights free of gender and tribal discrimination). This was a new initiative invented by myself just to bring youth together for a positive purpose- political participation. This trend is identified Green Movement as a self-motivated party of young generation. In couple of weeks my campaign office became the most crowded campaign center. My team-work was inspired more when the groups of people was craved to visit and talk to me nearly; whom followed up my last night TV debate program".

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[35] For more information on her activities see: http://www.naheedfarid.com/

Nahid's case demonstrates a good example of successful group conciseness. By forming a new ideology she managed to attract many youth and form an effective movement and succeeded to find her way to National Parliament.

There have also been coalitions building among the youth in Kabul recently that indicates some degree of coherence between the components of group consciousness as in Herat. For example, the secretariat of the YPJ that I interviewed, mentioned that they have persuaded youths who took part in YPJ in 2012 to run for seats in Provincial Counsels election. He mentioned that 50 of them have so far offered themselves up as candidates and many other are considering doing so. The YPJ secretariat said that we are committed to putting all our efforts into campaigning for them and helping them to succeed.

On the other hand both Miller et.al. (1981:508) and Bayat (1997:55) argue that cases in which formal political processes are ineffective and do not respond to peoples demands, the politicized group consciousness can lead to feelings of political disaffection, which can either lead to apathy or non-conventional collective action that threatens the stability of the political system. Such behavior was reported by the Qandahari and Nengerhari respondents. However, due to insecurity in these regions where insurgents are dominant and traditions strong, youth do not enjoy the same access to educational opportunities and freedom of expression as in other large cities. The cost of political engagement is high. Therefore, it is very difficult to measure the level of youth consciousness based on Millers et al. definition in these regions of the country.

Measuring group consciousness based on the Miller et al. definition, shows that even though young Afghans are aware of their social status and duties as youth, and complain over powerlessness and marginalization, due strength of other identities such as ethnicity and language they are not able to cooperate and take collective actions to improve their social and political situation. Without a group identity, well defined goals and collective actions, young Afghans consciousness is very doubtful. And the possibility to reach out seems blurred.

7.3.   *Will the future repeat the past?*

As explained in chapter four, Afghanistan's history can be called a history-of-struggle and a fight for political power and participation mostly through violent means. The inexplicable issue in this regard is the fact that when the subordinate groups and those who fought for broader political participation, development and modernization seized the power, they turned to even more autocratic rulers, than the previous regime(s). They believed that their way of thinking and strategy was absolutely the best for Afghanistan, with no tolerance for competing ideas presented by others. The limited and almost impenetrable political arena for broader engagement and participation, offered no other alternatives -to those who had a different view on politics and society- than resorting to violent means. This could be the reason that Afghanistan has gone through four revolutions[36] in last four decades and had never experienced a single peaceful transformation of power before 2001.

The autocracy was an inherent part of all those political parties that originated from political movements in 1960s and 70s. The leaders use to act as the core of the party, and they could not accept any competitors neither from within party nor from outside the party. In other word, the leadership in parties was a lifetime duty. Studying the history of political parties in Afghanistan one will realize that dominance and monopoly over the agenda and policy of the party by the leadership in addition to ethnic was the underlying reason for rapid fractions in the parties (Rutting, Thomas 2006). For example, seven hostile parties emerged from MYO alone.

Young Afghans in 1960s and 70s started their political engagement during an autocratic rule in Afghanistan, so their freedom of expression was limited. The dominant cleavages were, urban-rural, modernist-traditionalist, secular-religious and youth-elders (Ewans2002:168-174). All political movements both the communist and Islamist had wider goals and new visions (Saikal 2012:161). Their boards and member base represented all ethnic groups in the country ((Edward 2002:142). They had not inherited any enmity and conflict from their elders. There were no influential political parties or movements to sabotage their activities. To make thing even more cohesive, they had a common enemy: the Royal family.

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[36] Here I refer to 1973 when Afghanistan became a republic for the first time. Communist revolution, April 1978 known as Saur Revolution, Mujahedin (Islamic) Revolution April 1992, and Democratic revolution 2001. Even all these power changes inherit characteristics of revolutions, many might still disagree if we can call them revolution or not.

Unfortunately, most of political movements, both Islamist (Roy 1986:77; Ewans 2002:213-214) and communists (Ewans, 2002:172; Saikal 2012:165) split along ethnic and linguistic lines over time, a division which changed the climate of activism in Afghanistan. What was once a struggle for power on ideological based, became shaded by ethnic and linguistic differences. Those who fought in 1960s and early 70s on the same front started fighting each other. The result was a devastating never-ending civil war.

Compared to the 1960s and 70s, Afghanistan is much more democratic and its citizens enjoy more freedom of expression, thus and political activity has never been as high. Yet, on the other hand, youths have inherited a deeply divided, conflict-ridden war-torn country. Youths of 1960s and 70s have left a vicious legacy for the youths of today. In order to succeed in realizing their dreams and visions, the young generation of Afghans must first unite the country and remove the ethnic, linguistic and geographic divides and introduce new ideas that include and benefits all its citizens.

Despite the fundamental differences between the political environments of the 1960s vs post-2001, today, young Afghans apply almost the same organizational structure to organize their activities as they did in the 1960s. One of their common characteristic is that they tend to focus on the ethnic proportionality of the organization. For example, most youth organizations try to represent all ethnic groups by include them as board members. By referring to the composition of the board, they assume that the issue of ethnicity is solved in the organization and it is not a concern anymore. One of these organizations is Afghanistan 1400. One of the founding members of the organization stated in an interview with The Guardian journalist Emma Graham-Harrison (2012) that "There are so many ethno-centric people in this society. They are very active on TVs and radios and social networks, and call each other a lot of names. But for some reason they are confused about what to call us, because when they see the diversity in Afghanistan 1400, they are like 'what should we do with these guys, they have everybody around the table".

While youth movements and political parties took shape in 1960s and 70s, ethnicity was not considered as an important factor. Therefore, there was not as much focus on it and all ethnic groups were subsequently included. They were not aware of hidden ethnic challenges when they shaped their ideology. For example, referring to MYO, all the members were agreed upon the goal of the organization: an Islamic state. But the disagreement surfaced when they started to take action and choose their method of engagement (Roy 1986, p.77; Ewans 2002,

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p.213-214).It was then that Ethnicity became an issue, those who wanted radical actions against the government gathered around Gulbudin Hekmatyar (ethnic Pashtun), and those who were moderate gathered around Burhanudin Rabbani (ethnic Tajik).

While the new youth movements and organization are aware of the danger of trying to fill an ethnicity quota, they continue to just focus on the proportionality of their boards and do not take further measures to address the ethnic issues and assure the durability and effectiveness of their organizations. They believe that having everybody around the table is enough to address the ethnic issues in Afghanistan.

The discussions usually start when people talk about national interest and national unity. Such debates and discussions unity are numerable among young Afghans on social media. It seems all posts on Facebook groups turn to ethnic and linguistic discussion by the end; even if the thread originally had nothing to do with ethnicity. There are some people who consider the interests of the dominant group as a national interest, and argue that only by serving these interests can we achieve national unity. When the positions and beliefs of such people are criticized on social media, huge discussions regarding national interest and national unity raise among the youth.

There have been clashes regarding national interests outside the social media as well. For example, there have been huge clashes and conflict among youth on the usage of the Persian word "daneshgah" and the Pashtu word "pohanton", both meaning university. The Dari/Persian speaking ethnicities (Tajiks and Hazaras) argue that we want to purify our language and therefore prefer to use word Daneshgah which is Dari/Persian than words that have come from other languages. Conversely, the Pashtu speaking ethnics consider it as an influence from Iran and against National interests. They emphasis, that the word Pohantun should be used by everybody in the country. The issue was so intense that when the law of higher education was send to parliament for approval, it was delayed for long time, just because the word Daneshgah was mentioned in the Dari version of Law. It caused a verbal and physical confrontation among the MPs (ToloNews, Frakhabar 2013). In 2012 government issued a media decree in order to control the quality and impose standards (linguistic) on state-owned and private owned media (ToloNews 2012). While most journalists criticized government for imposing restriction on freedom of expression, many Dari/Persian speaking journalist and intellectual expressed concern that by standardizing the languages, the

dominant ethnic group may impose its own interests on other ethnic groups and hamper their progress[37].

The organizational structure that political movements acquired in the past divided the country and fortified the ethnic and linguistic divisions in the country. It is very surprising that the youth today apply the same structures to unify the country and build a united nation.

Youth ideological and structure bound to the former political parties and movements have created a sense of skepticism among the ordinary people. They doubt if the youth are capable of bringing peace, stability and unity to the country or not. Such similarities have also made them attractive and vulnerable to dominant political parties influence and sabotage.

In order to succeed, I argue that the new generation of Afghans needs to distinguish itself from the former generations, both ideologically and structurally. They have to take the issue of ethnicity serious and address it by effective measures.

In order to do so, the youth should accept the harsh social and political realities of the country and make realistic policies based on those realities. One of these realities is that Afghanistan is a deeply divided society along ethnic and linguistic lines, a division which is characterized by atrocities and war crimes. The bitter truth is that those parties and people who divided the country and committed crimes are still public figures who receive support from their ethnic kin. The other reality that youths need to accept is a quote by John Lennon that "Trying to please everybody is impossible - if you did that, you'd end up in the middle with nobody liking you. You've just got to make the decision about what you think is your best, and do it" (John Lennon, The Beatles Anthology).

There are many ways to shape national interest and achieve national unity. Although young Afghans have inherited a sense of ethnic divisiveness from their elders, they are not hostile against each other. Perhaps this is because they were not involved in atrocities and crimes committed during the civil war, but they have equally affected and deeply traumatized by these events.

In order to succeed, new youth movements and organizations should stop trying to satisfy all ethnic groups and focus their efforts on the ethnic group that they belong to. Afghanistan history has shown that all multi-ethnic political movements and parties have diverged shortly

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[37] Such discussions are very common in social media. Due to sensitivity of the topic people are cautious to express their opinion in more formal media.

after establishment and failed to achieve their goals. Accepting that Afghanistan is a deeply divided society and nobody can satisfy all ethnic groups, young Afghans should establish organizations and engage in activities that serves their own ethnic group. For example, young Pashtuns should establish organizations that serve Pashtuns' interests, whether it is political, cultural, social, or linguistic. Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks and other minorities should do the same. My argument is based on the assumption that young Afghans have been equally affected and traumatized by war therefore they are a peace seeking generation who want live in harmony with each other. In order to address the ethnic issues youth have to start from within their own kin. Such an organizational structure makes it possible for youth to bring positive changes to their own group social statues and mindset thereby reducing inter-ethnic tensions. They can later cooperate on equal basis to achieve goals of common interest and lay the ground for formation of national interest and a unified country.

Here I am seeking to a more market economic model developed by Adam Smith (1759). Given the fact that Afghanistan is a divided society and no ethnic group is philanthropic enough to overlook its own interest for the interest of others, it can be argued that if each ethnic group serves its own interest in a peaceful, respectful and tolerance manner towards other ethnicities, the sum of their efforts will be for the common good. Their focus will change from superficially attempting to satisfy other ethnicities (against their own will and interests) in keeping the ethnic balance in the organization; to actually making a substantial effort to improve their groups' social conditions. If this competition is fair, and based on respect and tolerance, the sum of their efforts and engagement will be for the benefit of the whole nation and form something which can be rightfully referred to as national interest. Each group, by serving its own interests, will indirectly serve the national interests of the country. Hopefully, in the end, we will have a stable, progressive and peaceful country in which our diversity will became our unifying factor. Without accepting the realities in the country and acting upon them, the repetition of the past will be inevitable

8. Conclusion:

After the fall of the Taliban's brutal regime in 2001 during the invasion of the country by the United States and its allies, a page was turned in Afghanistan's history. From being one the most autocratic and oppressive regimes, Afghanistan became the most democratic regime in the region. Hope for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan was evident among Afghans, especially the youth. They gained many new opportunities to educate themselves and develop their capacity in order to contribute in the rebuilding and reconstruction of the country.

Much to the youths' disappointment, elderly influential men, some of which who were accused of war crimes and violation of human rights, continued to dominate all decision-making organs. Despite increased education, knowledge and experiences; youths have been kept in the margins of politics and formal decision-making processes in the country.

After a 12 year long democracy experiment, Afghanistan is in a very critical historical period that has raised deep concerns among Afghans. Insurgents' activities are increasing, security is deteriorating, and economy is stalled. International security forces will leave the country in 2014 and there will also be a presidential election the same year.

Due to young Afghans' knowledge and social resources that they have acquired during the last decade, they refuse to be in the margins of decision-making processes anymore. Their demands for effective participation in politics and decision- making processes have been increasing.

In my thesis, I explored why young Afghans, despite their large population, increased knowledge, competence, and activities are still kept in margins.

I conducted 8 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 youths from 5 different universities in the country: Kabul, Bamyan, Nengerhar, Qandahar and Herat. I explored their perception of current political issues in the country, how they organize their activities and what channels they used to make an impact and why.

Youth perception of the dominant political issues was primarily influenced by where they came from and their social situations. The most important issues mentioned by the respondents were: uncertainties regarding 2014, peace processes and dialogue with the

Taliban, corruption in government organs, unemployment, and youth engagement in patronage and corruption, and the importance of the youth role in decision-making processes.

All my respondents mentioned 2014 as a critical and important turning point for Afghanistan. They were all concerned regarding the social problems caused by the uncertainty regarding pre -and post- 2014 political and social situations. Some such problems were; increasing unemployment, the economic crisis, the lack of investment, hostilities among armed political parties and increased criminalities and corruption. While my respondents with a Pashtun background expressed an optimistic viewpoint regarding the post-2014 situation, the other respondents seemed to be more pessimistic about the post-2014 situation and believed that the situation would worsen.

Regarding the peace processes and dialogue with the Taliban, even though, all of my respondents were in agreement that a peaceful solution to the conflict with the Taliban is needed, they also unanimously believed that peace process and dialogue with the Taliban under the authority of HPC is doomed to fail.

They also expressed great concern regarding youth involvement in patronage activities and corruption. They believed that such behavior undermines youth's ability to achieve self-fulfillment, realize their visions and kill the spirit of hard work and justice in them.

Young Afghans' political activities and engagement can be divided into three categories dependent on the level security and freedom of expression in their region.

In the region where there is high level of freedom of expression, youths are generally engaged in peaceful activities. They organize their activities through civil society organizations and use the media to spread their message. In some cases they try to make an impact through formal decision making organs (Herat). In provinces where there is a high level of insecurity and insurgents activities, with limited freedom of expression, youth mostly in engage in violent methods of protest and demonstration. In these areas youths are mostly engaged in collective actions rather than individual activities. Some youth engages in party politics mostly due to the economic incentives rather than ideological convictions and beliefs.

At the end I argued that there are two challenges that has hampered youth participation in decision making processes, despite their individual resources and civic orientation.

The first reason I argued that there are two reasons that have hampered youth participation in decision-making processes, despite their individual resources and civic orientation. The first reason is a contradiction regarding youth perceived consciousness of their social and political status as a group, and their actual consciousness. By referring to the theory of "group conscious" and political participation (Miller et.al (1989) I argued that the youth are not as conscious of their social and political status as they are perceived to be. Therefore, they lack the required motivation to identify themselves as a group and resort to strong and effective collective actions. In addition they possess many strong conflicting and overlapping group identities such as ethnicity, language, and religion which make it impossible for them to take collective actions in order to improve their situation. The second obstacle is that youth movements today despite fundamental differences, they copy the organizational structure, and ideological base of youth movements in 1960s and 70s. I argue that without introducing new ideas and formula, they will face the same destiny as youth movements in 1960s and 70s. and repetition of past will be inevitable.

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Interview guide:

1. Youth general perception of current political and social situation in the country:

   ▪ How do you evaluate the current political situation in the country?

   ▪ Do you thing the government is accountable to the people?

   ▪ Does the Afghan government respect citizens' rights such as: gender equality, freedom of speech, transparency, freedom of movement?

   ▪ What do you/youth associate with politics?

   ▪ What do you/youth associate with politicians?

   ▪ What do you think about the role of established Political Parties (Mujahedin) in Afghanistan

   2014 and withdrawal of foreign forces:

   ▪ What do you think about the role of NATO and ISAF regarding peace and security in Afghanistan?

   ▪ Do you think they contribute to peace and stability in your region?

   ▪ What do you think will the consequence of foreign forces withdrawal from Afghanistan?

   ▪ How will it affect youth?

   Reconciliation with insurgents and peace talks

   ▪ What do you think about the dialog and reconciliation program with Taliban?

      ▪ Do you think reconciliation with Taliban will lead to sustainable peace?

         ▪ Probe: If No, why? If yes, how?

   ▪ What do you think about the role of former mujahedin regarding peace process and dialog with Taliban?

2. How you/youth organize their activities and which channels they use and why?

   ▪ What motivates you/young people to engage in political activities?

      ▪ What issues do you engage in?

         • Why?

      ▪ What issues are you most engaged in.?

   ▪ How do you make your voice heard?

      ▪ How effective is it?

3. What are young Afghans opportunities and challenges as political actors?[38]

- Do you/youth have any chance to make their voice heard?

- What are youth main problems at the moment in Afghanistan?

   - What do you think is the solution?

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[38] My choice of questions is inspired by the Saferworld studies on youth political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Saferworld 2012b) and Central Asian Countries (Saferworld 2012a).