

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



April 17, 2018

Fraud as a structural challenge to fair elections in Afghanistan

Fair elections are critical for Afghanistan, because they can provide an important means of improving responsiveness by making elected officials accountable to the people who have voted to them. However, election fraud has undermined its critical function in Afghanistan. This is a challenge that many other young democracies, most often at the hands of tightly network groups of corrupt political elites, face too.

Considering the wide spread corruption and corrupt officials, there are many ways to manipulate elections in Afghanistan, including voter intimidation, forced voting, ballot box stuffing, and changing voter totals after ballots cast; of among these, manipulation of vote totals is of particular importance because it is highly vulnerable to involve collusion between candidates and election officials. This challenge is one of the main concerns of the people and the international community in Afghanistan, an issue that has always created electoral chaos in the country.

As fraud affects many elections in developing countries, the Afghan government shall ensure it will take all the necessary measures to prevent it. Doing so, it requires the government not only study the affects of election monitoring for design of electoral policies and for understanding the causes and consequences of election fraud; but the government shall also support research organizations to conduct independent research on the causes and consequences of election fraud to inform its policies.

Empirical research shows that corruption limits the ability of government to correct externalities. The purpose of electoral law is to ensure that election outcomes reflect the will of the electorate. However, research findings show that this function is undermined by a faulty aggregation process in previous elections of Afghanistan. Further, the effects of announcing photo quick count depend on preexisting connections between candidates and election officials. It is a clear cut fact that fragile democracies most often provide many examples of elected officials sharing rents with their networks; this approach contributes to weakening the electoral bodies and disappoints people from the election process and critically undermines the credibility of elections and electoral bodies.

On the other hand, Patronage networks has various incentives to coordinate when capturing elections. As research findings show there is possibility of multiple equilibria in corruption. In addition to this, patronage networks lead to systematic corruption and even organized crimes that can undermine efforts to build Afghanistan's institutions, consolidate security gains, achieve political progress, encourage economic growth and create conditions for enduring stability. Currently, patronage networks is part of the government in Afghanistan, as a form of organized illicit power structure, and have access to national and international financial resources. However, such challenges are not unique to our country. In fact, the experience of the countries emerging from insurgencies and civil wars show that, all these countries have been vulnerable to such challenges to some degrees.

To overcome these challenges, Afghanistan and its allies, need to strategically focus on not only integration of civilian and military efforts to establish security, enable law enforcement, and promote rule of law, but they also shall take specific measures to ensure transparency and accountability within the critical institutions, especially the electoral institution of Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan the root causes of patronage networks and wide spread corruption goes back to conflicts started by assassination of Sardar Dawood Khan, and continuous conflicts that started since 1978. As a result, these conflicts destroyed Afghanistan's state and civil institutions. Afghanistan has taken many initiatives to improve IEC including development of its institutional and staff capacity, taking initiatives in terms of long term voter registration, improving IEC's operational management, conducting of pooling, counting and results management and legal reforms. However, patronage networks has remained a major concern for all Afghanistan's electoral stakeholders. If the government does not take concrete steps to address it properly it will create a national chaos in the country again. Therefore, Afghanistan and the international community shall develop specific tools to ensure preventing electoral fraud in the country. Some measures to ensure electoral fraud include; an election management environment with key role players who have a track of high integrity that the candidates have confidence on them, an organized civil society that acts independently, and international partners on all levels to support the electoral process, can play a significant role to ensure the electoral transparency and credibility in Afghanistan.



Fifty Shades of Trump

By Elizabeth Drew

Last week was a most unusual one for President Donald Trump's administration. There was no high-level firing: the only dismissal of any note was that of the White House aide in charge of homeland security, who was forced out at the behest of John Bolton, who had just taken over as Trump's third national security adviser in 15 months. Nonetheless, it may well have been the most turbulent week yet of Trump's presidency.

Bolton's appointment was enough to set much of Washington trembling with fear that he would reinforce Trump's most pugnacious views, for example, that the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement should be scrapped. Still, it has been widely speculated that Bolton, reportedly a bureaucratic whiz, was outmaneuvered by Defense Secretary James Mattis on the question of how far to take the military attack on Syria in retaliation for the latest use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's government against its own people. In the end, the attacks by the US, the United Kingdom, and France were restricted to targets believed to be chemical weapons and storage facilities.

Questions are being raised in the Senate about the suitability of Mike Pompeo, a hardliner on Muslims and Russia, to succeed Rex Tillerson as Secretary of State. And with Bolton now ensconced in the West Wing, the consensus is that only Mattis stands between Trump and military overreach. (Mattis supports the Iran deal.) Trump's most peculiar recent personnel move – part of an ever-growing list of dismissals – was to fire David Shulkin as head of the Veterans Administration, a Leviathan of an agency, and nominate his personal physician for the job. The number of pending nominations for high-level positions ahead of November's midterm congressional elections is believed to be one reason for Trump's reluctance to fire his most controversial appointee, Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency. Pruitt's determination to reverse the EPA's achievements in reducing air and water pollution, especially regulations adopted during Barack Obama's presidency, bespeaks Trump's own resentment of Obama. In addition, major polluting industries are enthusiastic about Pruitt.

The problem is that in an administration filled with grifters and experts at indulging in first-class air travel and other comforts at taxpayers' expense, Pruitt is probably the champ. Trump blows hot and cold on Pruitt, and observers have learned not to predict what he might do with regard to any aspect of policy and personnel.

That is also true of the question creating the most tension: whether Trump will try to end the investigation into whether he or his campaign conspired with Russians to try to swing the 2016 election in his favor. The evidence of such collusion is mounting. Trump, according to many observers, has absorbed the idea that firing Special Counsel Robert Mueller, who is leading the probe, wouldn't go down well at all. The supine con-

gressional Republicans, terrified of Trump and his base of devoted supporters, are actually beginning to show some spine and are moving toward backing a resolution that would protect Mueller, who is supported by a large majority of the public.

But Trump and his closest congressional allies are still trying to undermine the investigation by smearing the FBI, which is implementing it, and Justice Department officials who are overseeing the FBI's work. Trump has hinted that he may fire Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who presides over the investigation. The president remains furious that Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who was Trump's sole Senate backer from early in the 2016 campaign, has recused himself from the investigation.

When Trump gets particularly angry, he remains so, exhibiting his rage in unexpected ways. It seems that nothing has made him angrier than the FBI's extraordinary April 9 raid on the office, home, and hotel room of Michael Cohen, his principal personal attorney and fixer. Ostensibly, the FBI acted because Cohen had been involved in the most lurid aspects of Trump's public career. But Cohen might also have been involved in a 2016 conspiracy with Russia, and his own business affairs are under investigation.

Since early this year, it has seemed possible that Trump might be brought down not by his and his campaign's possible dealings with Russia, but by a pulchritudinous adult film star whose professional name is Stormy Daniels (her real name is Stephanie Clifford). Daniels and her aggressive attorney are fearless toward Trump, on whose behalf Cohen arranged to pay her \$130,000 shortly before the election to keep quiet about her one-time liaison with Trump, which occurred early in his marriage to Melania Trump and four months after the birth of his son, Barron. One question raised by the deal is whether the \$130,000, which Cohen says he paid out of his own pocket without Trump's knowledge, amounted to an illegal campaign contribution. Another mystery is why Trump, who has been less bothered by revelations of a longer affair at around the same time with a former Playboy model, seems particularly terrified of Daniels. Unusually for him, he has refused to comment or tweet about her.

At week's end, a memoir by former FBI director James Comey, whose firing by Trump led to Mueller's appointment, began to leak, also arousing Trump's ire. He called Comey a "weak and untruthful slime ball," and, as has happened before, his attack on the author of an unflattering book helped propel it to the top of the bestseller list before it was officially released. The attack on Syria seems to have distracted public attention from Trump's scandals only temporarily, given Comey's coming high-profile book tour. But there is a growing sense that what Mueller is in the process of getting on Cohen may present the greatest danger of all to the president.

Elizabeth Drew is a contributing editor to The New Republic and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon's Downfall.

Why Markets Can't Cool the Planet

By Ivan Ascher

With global temperatures rising at an alarming rate, the race is on to lower the world's consumption of fossil fuels and accelerate the adoption of greener forms of energy. Among the most discussed remedies are those that would use market forces to make traditional fuels more expensive; ideas include putting a price on carbon and protecting natural resources that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

At first glance, market-based strategies might seem appealing. After all, as Adam Smith noted in The Wealth of Nations, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest." In other words, the best way to convince emitters like Chevron or General Motors to help save the planet must be to appeal to their profit motive, right?

Not necessarily. While free markets may have steered much of the world toward a wealthier, healthier future, placing our faith in Smith's "invisible hand" to win the fight against climate change would be a tragic mistake.

In a capitalist economy, our relationship with the future is guided by economic forces that are notoriously fickle. Commodities like sugar, soybeans, oil, and gas are relatively standardized products, meaning that they can be traded instantly and globally through the use of derivative contracts. But because these contracts price in assumptions about the future, commodity prices can fluctuate wildly. And that variability complicates environmental planning in three important ways.

For starters, price unpredictability makes it virtually impossible to detect the depletion of natural resources merely by looking at short-term changes in value. On the contrary, the more uncertainty there is about the scarcity of a resource, the greater the price swing, which only compounds the planning difficulty. As the French mathematician Nicolas Bouleau observed in a 2013 paper, "markets cannot spell out trends; it is absolutely impossible on an ontological level." If resource-related

trends were discernible from outcomes in financial markets, those who could see them would trade accordingly and the trends would disappear.

Second, uncertainty about the future price of any commodity makes it exceedingly risky for producers to invest in whatever new technologies might help reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. For most producers and consumers, it usually makes more economic sense to maintain the status quo than to change their habits, even if they know that the status quo will be disastrous for the environment.

Finally, although it's possible to put a price tag on precious but non-marketable natural resources – like the capacity of a boreal forest to absorb atmospheric CO₂ – the price fluctuations for resources that can be traded make most conservation strategies untenable in the long run. That's because at some point, the volatile price of the tradable resource will exceed the fixed cost of destroying it.

The pressure to plunder can be especially strong when a combustible resource is found. As Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau conceded at a March 2017 energy conference in Houston, Texas, "no country would find 173 billion barrels of oil in the ground and just leave them there." Financial volatility is like a superstorm on an already-warming planet. Not only does it make it impossible to see what lies ahead; it is itself also a force of environmental devastation, leaving irreparable damage in its wake. "Market volatility is ill suited to environmental cycles," as MIT's Janelle Knox-Hayes puts it. "Economic systems recover from market turmoil in time. Environmental systems do not have the same luxury; their cycles of reproduction are inflexible."

Ecological devastation should be expensive, and the world no doubt needs workable strategies to move people away from dirty sources of energy toward greener, more sustainable alternatives. But to defer to markets to overcome the environmental woes of capitalism is a blueprint for disappointment – and a recipe for planetary suicide.

Ivan Ascher is an associate professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He is the author of Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction.

Chairman / Editor-in-Chief: Moh. Reza Huwaida

Editor: Moh. Sakhi Rezaie

Email: outlookafghanistan@gmail.com

Phone: 0093 (799) 005019/777-005019

www.outlookafghanistan.net



The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Daily Outlook Afghanistan.