

***An Analytical Study Administrative Reforms in the Post-Taliban Afghanistan***  
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Abstract: Reform means making a change in the structure, procedures, strategy, and culture of the organizations, and it is also a crucial issue for the public policymakers in developing nations and Afghanistan in particular. Administrative reform is perceived to improve the design, operation, attitudinal actions, and quality of bureaucracy in the government machinery to articulate the people's needs and aspirations. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghan government has introduced various reform packages, including legal, economic, education, health, military, and, more importantly, civil service, which is the topic of the current study. Indeed, the post-Taliban government came in with the philosophy of market principles and democratic society that every Afghan individual sees themselves free and liberated. Additionally, Afghanistan's government pledged to the International Community that the government intends to reform its institutions, systems, and bureaucrats' attitude to improve good governance. Woefully, in contrast, the government has failed to deliver its promise. The present study has two objectives: first, to assess administrative reform initiated by the post-Taliban government and, secondly, to identify and analyse the significant obstacles facing the country's administrative reform process over the past two decades. This work depends on the interpretation and analysis of data gathered through 10 semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentary, including public and classified reports from donors, government repositories, and published scholarly articles. The author preferred to use a qualitative approach for the data analysis. The paper's finding indicates administrative reform encounters multiple challenges, including lack of political will, criminalization of politics, weak leadership, low quality of bureaucracy, and administrative corruption.

Keywords: Administrative Reform, Accountability, Effectiveness, Good Governance, and Transparency.

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\*Note: The data for the current study was gathered before August 15, 2021. therefore, it means that the Afghan government has collapsed, and the Taliban has returned to power.

## 1. Introduction

Administrative reform in both developed and developing has passed through many ups and downs. Nevertheless, every nation has been undertaking various administrative reform initiatives to promote good governance and ensure public goods and services for ordinary citizens. Markos (2013) points out administrative thinkers, scholars, and economists have numerous perspectives about reforms. However, social scientists have a consensus on reform that governments attempt to change doing things while providing public service. That is why Boyne et al. (2003) argue that administrative reform is the most effective instrument to promote good governance. Likewise, Fatile et al. (2010) stress that civil service reform can be used interchangeably with administrative reform to strengthen how public administration institutions are managed effectively and efficiently. The reasons for administrative reform are that government ministries and agencies at national and local levels are entangled with poor decision-making processes, feckless leadership, inappropriate organizational structures, overstaffing, systematic corruption, weak accountability, and poorly designed public programs (Scott, 2011).

The idea of administrative reform in developing nations has been explained and interpreted from different perspectives (Painter, 2003). One interpretation is that significant administrative reform is the requirement of transition from socialist society to market economy. For instance, Burn (1993) states that China has launched administrative reform initiatives to move from the centrally planned economy towards a market economy, with a growing collective and private sector. The second interpretation of administrative reform means promoting good government practices. For example, in the long run, administrative reform establishes a state of the people, by the people, and for the people, and in the short run, it builds up a state of law and a clean, healthy, and efficient government (Minh Chau, 1997a). The third interpretation of administrative reform is reinventing and re-engineering public sectors. It means applying new public management makes the public sector more effective, efficient, responsive, and accountable (Straussman & Zhang, 2001). The fourth interpretation is that administrative reform means the modernization of administration. Namely, administrative reform means to make deliberate and systematic changes in institutions, management, and attitudes and behavior of policymakers and policy implementers to improve organizational performance (Lan, 1999). Generally speaking, administrative reform is an extensive term that defies a single interpretation or definition (Minh Chau, 1997b). In the current paper, the researcher believes that developing nations should strive to reform their administrative systems in response to the problems posed by socio-economic, political, and technological environments. Finally, administrative reform became a critical requirement over the past several decades and flourished worldwide (Caiden, 1988). The United Nations Program in public finance and public administration has prioritized administrative reform efforts to improve the quality of governance apparatus (United Nations, 1983).

Pathways to reform are different from nation to nation. For instance, After the collapse of the communist regime, Romania underwent various reforms in different levels: organizational culture, political-administration relationship, the structure of the public administration, understanding of the change, and more precisely, the relations with citizens. The overall objective of Romania's reforms was how to move from the pre-democratic communist regime directly to a post-bureaucratic democratic administration (Hintea, 2020). Furthermore, Hintea points out that four elements, such as trust issues, motivation, stability and predictability of reforms, and building up a functional management system, are the central pillar of successful administrative reforms. These countries have realized that development in all walks of life would not be achieved without speeding up administrative reform efforts. Public administration reform has been launched in various countries to promote service delivery, improve productivity, meet economic development requirements, bring the government closer to the people's needs and aspirations, and strengthen overall good governance (Dzimbiri, 2009). Dzimbiri further states in his paper that administrative reform strategies include re-engineering, popular participation, human development issues, accountability, and the public-private sector. Moreover, administrative reforms are fundamental for realizing developmental goals and a pivot for developing nations' economic growth and good governance. The reform content can be ideological, socio-psychological, technical, and institutional (Hanekom et al. 2001).

Mathur (2017) states that reform is in the air, and no country is left out of this global discourse. In the era of change, administrative thinkers, economists, and political scholars suggest that reform is the most crucial and pressing issue. Effective administrative setup is the cornerstone of socio-economic and political development, and it makes the government accountable to articulate the core needs of the people. However, recent research on good administration suggests that inadequate administrative systems result in corruption, red tape, nepotism, poor service delivery, economic stagnation, and social unrest in the developing world. Quah (1976) highlights that the concept of administrative reform is imperative for both theoretical and practical justifications. Sangita (2000) states that different nations in human history have undergone various administrative reform packages to ensure good governance and boost economic growth. Besides, Sangita says that administrative reform initiatives are not the most crucial factor for increasing public administration productivity and can be considered the cornerstone of socio-economic progress in sophisticated and developing societies. Administrative reform has increasingly become a substantial effort to provide a comprehensive solution to organizational pathologies. Its primary purpose is to increase adaptiveness, productivity and, more precisely, deliver good governance (Brunsson,1989).

International Organizations attached conditionality to their development aid packages based on administrative reform initiatives (Zafarullah,2002). World Bank imposed reasonable governance requirements such as administrative reform, transparent administration, and, more precisely, protection of human rights in the context of developing societies. Tummala (2002) rightly argued that roadmap and strategy are the main foundation for launching various reforms, and every nation has to understand where they move. The path and vehicle they want to take to obtain those goals and objectives. Farazmand (1999) considered administrative reform as means of modernization in developing nations. El Ghaziri (2005) states that administrative reform means systematic advancement of government performance.

Furthermore, Administrative reform enhances accountability, transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness in government agencies so that public sector organizations' excellent performance merely responds to citizens' needs and expectations. Indeed, an administrative reform initiative is considered a possible solution and appropriate instrument for the vexing problems that Afghanistan's public administration encounters. It attempts to change the government's old performing patterns by implementing an efficient, effective, and modernizing approach to improve the quality of government. The majority of prior studies show that administrative reform is meant to re-engineer the public sector agencies to deliver public services such as safe water, health care, education, defense, shelter, electricity and law, and order. Moreover, administrative reform is aimed to enhance sound public administration. Like many other countries, the government of Afghanistan has been undergoing various reforms since 2001 and, more significantly, administrative reforms with international community assistance to create sound administration. The first reform initiative was the establishment of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) to robust administration, recruiting civil servants based on merit and skill, establishing the core civil services, and organizing the issues related to civil servants was the main goals behind the commission's establishment<sup>1</sup>. The events of 9/11 can be considered a turning point for modern Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Taliban regime at the hands of the U.S. military campaign supported by the Northern Alliance warlords, Afghanistan's social, political, and cultural landscape has changed drastically(Braithwaite & Wardak, 2013). After post 9/11, The government has received a considerable amount of foreign aid for almost two decades to improve population well-being and facilitate economic and institutional development (Qian, 2015). In addition, the government pledged to bring reforms in all walks of life and, more importantly, in the public sector to deliver effective, efficient, and timely services to its citizens. Woefully, the result is not more significant. Many political rulers naturally use government to benefit themselves and their supporters at the expense of citizens in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The government in Afghanistan was unable to protect its citizens' property rights but remained strong enough to prey on society. Despite the significance of administrative reform, the governments in Afghanistan and, more precisely, Karzai administration and the international community did not pay sufficient attention to administrative reform initiatives in post-Afghanistan, and they almost ignored reforming public sector institutions in the country. Karzai and Ghani politicized and ethnicized the public sectors in Afghanistan, and as a result, they both have failed at almost every step. Moreover, several articles, research papers, and studies have been done regarding

Afghanistan's political, social, security, economic, cultural, media issues, and so forth. In contrast, we will not find sufficient literature about administrative reform in Afghanistan. The shortage of academic materials and government carelessness fascinated the author of the present study to work on administrative reform initiatives in Afghanistan's context. The government of Afghanistan has to reform every facet of society by insisting on health, education, police, finance, and public sectors delivering public services. Administrative reform is a fundamental need of Afghanistan, and socio-economic and political development relies on administrative reform initiatives. However, we need to ask in this study: What type of reform does Afghanistan need? How to carry out administrative reforms, and what are the significant challenges facing Afghanistan's administrative reform process? Therefore, knowing public administration fascinated the researcher to avail himself the opportunity to analytically assess the status of administrative reforms in the Post-Taliban Period and then figure out the problems that bedebbled the administrative reforms since 2001.

## 2. The Dilemma of Administrative Reform in Afghanistan

Before grasping the circumstances of administrative reforms in Afghanistan, initially, it seems right to address the governance situation in Afghanistan by introducing the dilemma of the allegory of bad and good governance of Ambrogio Lorenzetti. In the mid-fourteenth century, an Italian artist named Lorenzetti painted his famous frescos illustrating the stark contrasts between good and bad government. One part of the frescos pictures a beautiful city where justice reigns, where young women are dancing, children playing, and men working. Some are ploughing, others cultivating vine. In contrast, the frescos part illustrating bad governance shows a satanic tyrant on a throne and justice lying tied up on the ground. They do not cultivate fields, no one is working, and the only activity is the killing of men and rapping of women” (Kjar,2004). The first part of Lorenzetti is in contrast to the situation of governance in Afghanistan. However, the second part of the assertion is a commonplace of the current phenomena in Afghanistan. The question that matters here is, why is Afghanistan in the second part of frescos of bad governance? Several indicators were contributing to placing Afghanistan in the second part of Lorenzetti's frescos. As a result, some essential factors are mentioned because it does not explore the reasons in detail.

National Factors	Reginal Factors	International Factors
<p>Table 1</p> <p>Civil war; Ethnic Conflict; lack of Political Will; Ineffective Pollical Parties; Xenophobic Beliefs; Harshes Interpretation of Islamic Platforms; lack of Bureaucratic Administration; Lack of Educational Infrastructures; Highest Number of Illiteracy; Economically Dependent on Overseas; Dysfunctional government and; Corrupted Political and Administrative Setup.</p>	<p>Proxy War by regional actors to articulate their interests in Afghanistan; Regional interference in the socio-economic and political affairs of Afghanistan;</p>	<p>The socio-economic, political, and cultural context of international players in the context of Afghanistan; The geopolitical location of Afghanistan attracts international actors to contest in Afghanistan.</p>

Sources: Developed by the author

As mentioned above, finding comprehensive solutions to Afghanistan's problem is a very complicated and challenging task. Still, the researcher believes that launching successful administrative reforms and promoting good governance will help Afghanistan manage overall national challenges. Several studies indicate that Afghanistan's government attempted to achieve good government by launching effective administrative reform initiatives. In 2003, the international community (IC) and Afghanistan's government executed administrative reform through priority

reform and restructuring (PRR). The main objective behind introducing the priority reform and restructuring platform was to standardize the administration and create new agencies where vacuums existed. The post-Taliban government came in with the philosophy of market principles and democratic society that every Afghan individual sees themselves free and liberate. The government pledged to International Community that the government intends to reform its institutions, systems, and bureaucrats' attitudes to improve good governance. Unfortunately, public service has become a fruitful business in most public sectors rather than an excellent service to people. People have to pay a bribe to get their work done in the government apparatus; otherwise, their work will not get done. However, several people believe that the current administrative setup will not work without giving public officeholders additional money.

Consequently, the people disagree with public sectors, and donor countries conditioned their aid to significant reform packages. Therefore, the government is responsible for delivering essential services reasonable, timely, appropriate, and suited to the people needing them. Afghanistan needs to learn lessons from various nations with effective administrative reform implementation, like India, South Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia. For instance, there was a demand for reform from both government and the Korean citizens. Besides, South Korea experienced economic and political turmoil between 1950-1953, and Dae Jung Kim introduced the four significant reform platforms in business, finance, labor relations, and government administration (Kim,2000). This work will initially start the journey by assessing what administrative reforms are implemented in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Then the researcher comes up with a possible solution to smoothen the administrative reform process in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

Some major administrative reforms have been undergone in post-Taliban Afghanistan, which is illustrated precisely as given below:

Table 2

Specific administration reforms which have been launched?	What effects do the reforms have in practice?	what went well or did not go well
<p>Establishment of permanent government institution- Boon Agreement, was signed on December 5, 2001;</p> <p>There was no particular agency responsible for handling administrative reform issues in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime;</p> <p>As per Afghanistan's need, the interim government established an Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission on June 10, 2003, to promote public administration quality in Afghanistan;</p> <p>Afghanistan's constitution was officially ratified and signed by Karzai in January 2004, which the most outstanding achievement of Afghanistan in the last two decades;</p> <p>The Afghan Constitution also touches on several topics, including</p>	<p>Afghanistan had begun a new journey after the collapse of the Taliban regime. Afghanistan's faces entirely changed, and Post 9/11 events compelled Afghanistan to develop political, cultural, and economic relations with regional and international countries. However, the nation was left in a vacuum in all aspects of life during the Taliban Regime. Afghanistan did not have any diplomatic, economic, political ties with the world. Taliban imposed strict rules and regulations on every walk of life. Women were not allowed to go to school and work in public sectors. Today, a significant number of women are returning to schools and their jobs and participating in macro and micro levels of government. As a result of administrative reform, the quality and quantity of government institutions have, to some extent, improved. To sum up, despite several challenges, the government made good progress in contrast to the Taliban Regime. The researcher merely wishes to point out that Afghanistan must pass a long way to</p>	<p>For almost two decades, Afghanistan has received a considerable amount of aid from the international community to build up a strong government and avert economic collapse. In contrast, acute poverty, poor governance, insecurity, weak leadership, social violence, political instability, ineffective public service delivery, and rampant corruption is evident. However, certain things went dreadfully wrong and could be marked as follows:</p> <p>Afghanistan's government had not placed the right people in the right positions in the</p>

<p>political structure, administrative system, economic setup, electoral system, human rights, freedom of speech, and, more precisely, good governance.</p> <p>The government has adopted the Priority Reform and Restructuring (PRR) framework in moving from traditional perspectives to public administration reform;</p> <p>The government has put in practice civil service law, implemented Public Administration Reform (PAR) framework and Post&amp; Grading (P&amp;G) deliver efficient and effective service;</p> <p>National Development Strategy (ANDS) has been drafted, emphasizing promoting good governance and development in post-Taliban Afghanistan;</p> <p>Establishing the Civil Service Appeal Board (CSAB) to review the complaints of individuals regarding recruitment of civil servants;</p> <p>Initiated to re-engineering public sector organization inducing, government ministries and agencies,</p> <p>Applied e-governance, including e-recruitment, biometric registration, mass examination, and online application in some ministries to deliver public service and make the recruitment processes fair and transparent;</p> <p>Unfortunately, in contrast to other developing countries, Afghanistan lags far behind in the utilization of e-governance.</p> <p>Human Resources Management Information System adapted to register all employees of the government ministries and agencies across Afghanistan. In addition to this, the government has recently purchased 80 biometric registration</p>	<p>meritocracy and sound public administration.</p>	<p>government machinery, and authority and power were given to ethnic leaders. Public administrators were only loyal to political elites.</p> <p>Despite support from the international community, Afghanistan's government has made adequate efforts to invest in capacity building in the public sector organization to promote administrative infrastructure. However, as a result, the country has weak human resource capacities.</p> <p>Afghanistan's government has had no strategical plan and roadmaps to handle administrative reform issues ever since, and a shortage of clear policy hindered the administrative reform process.</p> <p>There was no excellent coordination between government ministries to efficiently and effectively utilize foreign aid over the last two decades.</p> <p>A lack of vertical and horizontal coordination between government ministries and agencies caused corruption and waste resources. Simultaneously, sectoral ministries suffer from the shortage of mid-term and annual planning in administrative capacity building.</p>
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kits for recording civil servants' information.		
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Sources: Developed by author

### 3. Impeding variables to administrative reform implementation in Afghanistan

The administrative reform process in Afghanistan encounters multiple obstacles. First, Afghanistan cannot reach economic growth and good governance without reforming its public sector institutions. Indeed, the post-Taliban government launched some major reform platforms, but the government needs to strengthen the public sector reform. Some significant challenges to administrative reform are as follows:

**Corruption:** Any attempt to analyze the concept of corruption must contend that the word corruption has a history of vastly different meanings and connotations in English and other languages (Friedrich,2017). Social scientists have defined corruption in their own ways. For example, World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain(Polzer, 2001) This is a concise definition and gets to the heart of the problem. Misuse of power by some authority and that authority can be inside and outside of the government apparatus. Corruption can be found in many different parts of society. It is commonly seen as conduct driven by explicit or implicit economic incentives. A further complication is that corruption is most commonly referred to as a public sector phenomenon. Still, it is also an essential fact of life in the private sectors of both developed and developing countries (Goudie, et al., 1997 ). Let me flesh out the concept of corruption in a simple way- corruption is behavior by a public office holder, whether appointed or elected, which involves a deviation from her or his formal occupation because of personal benefits to herself or himself or other parties with whom the public servant is associated (LaPalombara,1994). I agree with researchers that corruption acts as a significant deterrent to state-building, political development, economic growth, and public capacity building in Afghanistan. Jain (2001) argues that corruption is inimical for economic development and affects the reform process highly in developing nations in general and Afghanistan in particular. Woefully, systematic abuse of power and authority for private, political, and collective gain has become a legal business in Afghanistan. Corruption seems to affect the level of investment, quality of public service, entrepreneurial incentives, and the design or implementation of rules or regulations regarding access to resources and assets in Afghanistan. Singh (2016) points out that Afghanistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Corruption is the first vexing problem that adversely affected economic development, security issues, and the bedeviled administrative reform implementation in the post-Taliban government and, more significantly, the Ghani administration. To speak honestly, Afghanistan is a victim of corruption; public office holders such as civil servants, police officers, nurses and doctors, and law enforcement actors demand bribes to get your jobs done or speed up the bureaucratic procedures. For instance, Ahmad Shah Katawazai, a former Afghan diplomat, states that in Afghanistan, "from your birth certificate to your death certificate and whatever comes in between, somehow you have to bribe," otherwise your problem will remain unsolved<sup>1</sup>. "When the former president Hamid Karzai delivered a speech in one private media, he acknowledged that his government was the most corrupt. Still, he demands his cabinets and public office holders not to transfer the looted public money (stolen money) abroad and invest inside the country<sup>2</sup>." But unfortunately, it means that he has given the green light on his cabinet ministers and those who are responsible for the administration of the government at different levels to make

<sup>1</sup> Please refer for further detail at: <https://www.economist.com/asia/2021/08/28/the-afghan-government-was-undone-by-its-own-corruption>

<sup>2</sup> It has been translated from Persian version into English and it is available at:

(Haya Dolat Afghanistan dar mobarza ba fasad saysi, ejtamaye mofaq buda ast))

corruption and spend their black money an apartment in a high-rise building. For this reason, every former government official now owns several high-rise commercial or office buildings in Afghanistan. I firmly believe that Karzai is one of the most corrupt president in the history of Afghanistan because there were high expectations that he would curb corruption and boost the economy, but he has struggled with entrenched interests and demands of patronage.

A systematic literature review states that public office holders in Afghanistan such as civil servants, police, judges, prosecutors, member of provincial councils, the lower house of representatives, and the upper house of senators regularly demand bribes for getting the rightful jobs done or speed up the bureaucratic procedures<sup>3</sup>. Generally speaking, political elites and public officials use corruption as a means of business activity. Thus, it became a legal business in some post-conflict countries and, more precisely, in Afghanistan. Furthermore, many people may engage in illegal activities, such as smuggling or illicit trade in arms, and may need the protection of public authorities to continue to operate (Rose–Ackerman, 2008). For example, the people are feeling furious and frustrated.... but to whom can they complain? Unfortunately, corruption has become part of the political culture; no one in the society will take care of his rightness and wrongness action. So that society is corrupted, and every community member wants to be as corrupt as the rest of humanity—corruption fuels crime and conflict in this type of human society. In addition, General Petraeus stressed that corruption is the part of Afghan culture and history (Peter, 2010). However, many people reacted with menace on social media against General Petraeus ....and I buttress his statement. Still, we have not had this much corruption in the course of history in Afghanistan. Over and above that, Afghanistan has not been as corrupt as today. Patronage and patron-client relations in Afghanistan have been identified as the primary root cause of administrative corruption<sup>4</sup>.

Government jobs at central and local levels are purchased and sold in lucrative poppy-rich areas in exchange for loyalty. Indeed, vacant posts in government are filled through corruption. For example, for somebody who wants to be a teacher, the 2000 dollars he or she has to pay to get the job<sup>5</sup>. A job seeker has to pay 3000 dollars to get government jobs in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the government. In some cases, a job seeker has to pay a lump sum or monthly stipend as a bribe to the recruiter or superior. In Afghanistan, the root cause of corruption is debatable. Still, it is difficult to challenge corruption and clientelism in a state-run by patronage appointments based on kinship and similar interests. Nwabuzor (2005) states that corruption is the most dangerous threat to the legitimacy of governments in developing nations, and it is the leading cause of the crisis in Afghanistan. These factors challenge the rule of law, security, anti-corruption, and, more broadly, state-building. Corruption can occur in various forms, in multiple types of entities, and at numerous levels within entities, such as grand, political, corporate, administrative, petty, and systematic, which is prevalent in the context of Afghanistan. There are currently six international organizations, including Transparency International (TI); Global Corruption Barometer (GCB); Bribe Payers Index (BPI); World Bank Control of Corruption Index (CCI), International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) Corruption Score; and the Opacity Index. Afghanistan has been ranked one of the most corrupt countries by all these international organizations. The following figure demonstrates that how corruption is in Afghanistan.

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher interviewed with the Advisor of the Afghan Civil society Forum (ACSFo), Kabul, June 1, 2020, 10:45; Program Director for Law, Human Rights and Women’s Empowerment of The Asia Foundation, Afghanistan, Kabul, May 26, 2020, 16:00; Project Coordinator of the Centre for Policy and Human Development (CPHD), Kabul, May 27, 2020, 12:00; Justice Sector Support Program Legal Consultant to the AGO, Kabul, May 29, 2020, 15:00.

<sup>4</sup> Researcher interviewed with the Director Human Resource Personnel, October 26, 2020, 15:00; Head of Access to Justice Program for The Asia Foundation, Kabul, October 28, 2020, 16:00;

<sup>5</sup> Author interview with the Resident Director for Elections of National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Kabul, November 27, 2020, 15:30.



Table 3: Transparency International Corruption Perception Index Rankings Afghanistan from 2005-2019

No	years	Number of countries in the classification	Afghanistan Sequence	Scores
1	2005	158	117	25/100
2	2006			
3	2007	179	172	18/100
4	2008	180	176	15/100
5	2009	180	179	13/100
6	2010	178	176	14/100
7	2011	183	180	15/100
8	2012	176	174	8/100
9	2013	177	175	8/100
10	2014	175	172	12/100
11	2015	168	166	11/100
12	2016	176	169	15/100
13	2017	180	177	15/100
14	2018	180	172	16/100
15	2019	180	173	16/100

Sources: Transparency International- Corruption Perception Index

The Report of Transparency International between 2005-2019 reveals that corruption has become a deeper bypassing of each year. Until 2014, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranked Afghanistan as the first, second, and sometimes the third most corrupt government globally. Citizens have to pay a bribe to switch on their electricity or issue their ID cards. "Afghan former PM Ramazan Bashardost states that in the Afghan parliament, in Afghan justice, and Afghan court we have corruption and it has become practically legal in the country<sup>6</sup>." Major governance indicators show that Afghanistan has not achieved significant progress over the last two decades in terms of government effectiveness, regulatory framework transparency, and corruption control. Woefully, corruption remains a substantial problem in the country. In 2010, The UN office for drug control came out with a survey. "He stated that 60% of afghan people believe that the number one problem was corruption". It was not the Taliban, terrorists, and economy. The ordinary afghan people were tensed up and dissatisfied with the government's performance. The reality is that everyone in the government seems to be on the date, from the lowest and the highest public authority<sup>7</sup>. Corruption in Afghanistan is endemic and has penetrated all parts of the Afghan state, adversely affecting the ability of Afghanistan to maintain security for its citizens and deliver essential public services. Corruption is also increasingly embedded in social practices, with patronage politics and bribery becoming an acceptable part of daily life (McDevitt, 2016). The cabinet of Hamid Karzai has constantly been perceived to be the most corrupt government globally and incessantly frustrated the realization of noble national goals, despite the enormous natural and human resources and international foreign aid in Afghanistan. In a similar vein, President Ghani describes Afghanistan as, by any measure, "one of the most corrupt

<sup>6</sup> CBS News. (2009, Jun 29). *Corruption In Afghanistan* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taNvWFA4m4>

<sup>7</sup> NATO. (Apr 18, 2011). *NATO Review - Enduring Partnerships: is corruption now Afghanistan's main battlefield?* (Video). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZQKp8kM5-E>

countries on earth." Similarly, when the National Unity Government in 2014 formed under the leadership of Mr. Ghani, his government immediately put in place different anti-corruption institutions and made cosmetic efforts to curb the problem, and he raised the hope of Afghan people with the expectation that most of the elected and appointive public office holders and top bureaucrats who use their position of authority to engage in corrupt practice will actively go to jail. But fortunately, these efforts did not result in any significant changes, and the only thing he did was improve the situation in Afghanistan in a few steps. Today, the fight against corruption in Afghanistan has wholly become a lost battle. The government of President Ghani is yet to convict one corrupt political official; not one politically exposed person has been convicted of corruption under Ghani's administration. Corruption is flourishing in Afghanistan because there is a complete lack of political will to combat the monster by successive governments, especially President Ghani's administration. Ghani was unable to root out the government corruption he vowed to fight during his campaign, and during his presidency corruption woefully, has become of a way of life in Afghanistan.

**Centralization of power:** When the USA toppled the Taliban regime in 2001, Everyone expected politicians and the international community to form an inclusive, pro-development, stable, and democratic government in Afghanistan. Instead, a centralized pattern of administration was favored by the Afghan technocratic and international community. As a result, these elite stakeholders have together weathered civil war, insurgency, and multiple protests — despite deep conflicts with one another. As you know well that a growing number of countries are moving to adopt decentralized systems that devolve significant governing authority down from the center to lower levels, or at least for decentralizing some essential elements of government responsibility down to the local government. Unfortunately, Ghani has been quietly creating an even more dominant presidency, according to a range of current and former Afghan officials. Ghani has monopolized and centralized power, and in the name of fighting corruption, Mr. Ghani is bringing billions of dollars in procurement deals under his direct purview, denying ministries the opportunity to contract their own goods and services<sup>8</sup>. Despite the importance of administrative decentralization, unfortunately, Afghanistan lags behind administrative decentralization rather than other nations. There are two opposing arguments concerning administrative decentralization in Afghanistan. Firstly, centralization proponents argue that a highly centralized system is required for nation-building and essential to mold Afghanistan into a unified country. Besides, they argue that the government apparatus is fragile; rebels and their armed groups manage several parts of the country. So, they need a strong, centralized government. The proponents of administrative decentralization justify adopting a model of devolution or shifting power, authority, and responsibilities from central government machinery to local autonomous bodies according to the cultural and ethnic structure, and the geographical territory would encourage citizens' participation in governance and public policy implementation. More importantly, it can bring the administration to the people.

Furthermore, criticism of centralism states that Afghanistan is a multiethnic and cross-cultural society, and centralized administration is not appropriate for the Afghan community. It also spreads ethnic violence among people. Notwithstanding the crucial significance of administrative decentralization, Afghanistan is one of the world's highly centralized countries, and decentralization has lagged behind it. The constitution adopted in January 2004 a highly centralized administration with little instruction on how and when political or administrative authority must be extended into the provinces. Article 147, Chapter 8, Article 2 reflects that Afghanistan's government, while preserving the principle of centralism, shall delegate certain authorities to local administration units to expedite and promote economic, social, and cultural affairs(Sadri, February 27, 2019).

Furthermore, according to article 137 constitution, the government, in preserving the principles of centralism, shall transfer necessary powers, under the law, to local administrations to accelerate and improve economic, social, and cultural matters and foster peoples' participation in developing national life. However, Afghanistan's former and present president are not more enthusiastic about transferring politico-administrative power and authority to sub-national government agencies. People are dissatisfied with the highly centralized public sector, losing trust and confidence in the government institutions. Pervasive corruption is a symptom that

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<sup>8</sup> Further detail is available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/21/world/asia/ghani-afghanistan-unity-government-plan.html>

government machinery in the country is functioning poorly, and it widens a gap between government institutions and citizens in Afghanistan. In contrast, evidence from developing nations reflects that administrative decentralization brings the government to the people. For example, administrative decentralization removes the distance between the people and bureaucracy and creates a climate of trust and close cooperation between citizens and administrative institutions. In a special meeting with a U.N. Security Council Delegation, Abdullah Abdullah, the national unity government's chief executive officer, emphasized the need for decentralizing the administrative system. Furthermore, he said too much focus on administrative centralization resulted in multiple problems. As a result, Afghanistan is politically, administratively, and fiscally the most centralized state on the earth<sup>9</sup>.

Administratively, provincial and local governments have only a modest formal role in decisions concerning their structure, senior staff recruitment, establishment size, workforce composition, etc. Such decisions are made by each ministry in Kabul, in conjunction with the Office of Administrative Affairs (OAA), and signed off by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC). The ministry in Kabul or the President makes staff appointments at the middle to senior grades, while the provincial governor appoints junior staff down to the district level.

Fiscally, Afghanistan is also highly centralized. At provincial and district levels, expenditure is made through national programs carried out by central ministries' local arms. No fiscal transfers as such go to sub-national levels. With 44 percent of the civil service workforce in Kabul, funds are concentrated at the center. Budgets of provincial governments are set in Kabul, and Kabul's approval is required for even minor changes. On the revenue side, Afghan districts and provinces have no independent authority to impose taxes. The only expenditure autonomy is at the municipal level. Although all tax and fee rates are set in Kabul, municipalities' revenues and fees remain there, and municipal fund spending.

Politically, Afghanistan is a unitary state, with all formal institutions vested in the government in Kabul. Provincial governors, for example, are appointed by the center, which also determines their powers and responsibilities. Municipal mayors are also approved by the center - but based on candidates proposed by local elders and the governor.

As mentioned in the above, Afghanistan's administrative system is highly centralized and based on ministerial and departmental structures. This system made it impossible to pursue a rational social and economic policy at national, regional, and local levels. It also made it impossible to prioritize, choose and achieve shared goals. Experiences of different countries around the world reflect that these countries moved forwards to decentralization. For example, Korea had moved from centralized administration into decentralized government to articulated the economic, political, social, and international challenges, since it was also commonly believed that decentralization would promote socio-economic development, efficiency, transparency, and democracy. Provincial governors, police officials, and even schoolteachers would still be appointed exclusively by the central government in Kabul without consultation(Barfield, 2010). According to the BBC (2018) report, to carry out a routine administrative process, the applicant had to go through 58 administrative steps to get the job done. This trend applies to both central and local administrations in Afghanistan; and some citizens even call the situation of the local government more catastrophic than the central government<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>Please refer for more information at:

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/86B8DDF10C41984CC1257464004A8CBF-Full\\_Report.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/86B8DDF10C41984CC1257464004A8CBF-Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Translated from the original title in Farsi as: haya nazam edari farsoda Afghanistan rahi hal digitali Dard? (Does the inefficient administrative system of Afghanistan need a digital solution?)  
<https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-42576240>

**Lack of administrative expertise:** Shortage of adequate skills and training programs crippled Afghanistan's administrative setup. The government can build organizational capacity through educating and training public employees. Ensuring peace and stability is related to solving endless and present conflicts. As a result of four decades of war, Afghanistan has not experienced stabilized public administration, and civil war adversely affected Afghanistan's administrative reform trends. Today insecurity is the biggest threat to Afghanistan, and it hindered developmental strategies.

**The politicization of administration:** Today, political parties interfere with administrative activities of public sector organizations in Afghanistan directly and indirectly. Public employees become stodes the political office holders so that political leaders are appointing them. There is no clear line between administration and political activities in the public sector organization of Afghanistan. Political elites adversely affected the administrative officeholders in the government's machinery across Afghanistan, and bureaucratic are royal to politicians rather than to laws. Bureaucracy grew in numbers and consumed every large slice of the national budget in Afghanistan: Contracting out, marketization, downsizing, rightsizing of staff in the government entities, and, more precisely, privatizing producing goods delivering public service would reduce the financial burden of the government.

**Budget constraints:** The economy of Afghanistan highly dependents on foreign aid. The country had received support from the 19th century, when the British Empire provided regular subsidies to Afghan Emirs to seek their cooperation in the region, to the cold war period when aid was given to limit the former USSR's influence troops Afghanistan. The flow of donations and support started again after the Taliban's ouster by the US-led western military operations in December 2001. Therefore, the shortage of a sufficient budget for capacity building is a significant problem (Fayez, 2012).

#### **4. What administrative reform initiatives could work for Afghanistan?**

Over the last two decades, Afghanistan's government received tremendous support from regional and international institutions to generate economic growth, launch reforms, ensure political stability, and promote wellness. In contrast, acute poverty, poor governance, insecurity, weak leadership, social violence, political instability, ineffective public service delivery, and rampant corruption remained unresolved in Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghanistan's government needs to adjust to the transformation at the national, regional, and international levels. A paradigm shift within government institutions is required. Afghanistan needs to apply a new administrative reform package because the traditional conception of management can no longer cope with good governance and economic growth obstacles. The Post-Taliban government has come into power on the promises of implementing administrative reform to deliver good governance. Still, it seems that the political setup has failed to launch organizational reform initiatives in the government's machinery. However, the questions are raised here: how to undertake administrative reform and what administrative reform pattern will yield more fruits in Afghanistan's context? Even though Afghanistan has been highly ravaged by civil war and conflicts over the four decades, the country has not experienced stable public administration so far? In other words, bringing administrative reform is a complicated and challenging task because it requires changing the thinking and actions of administrator officeholders and political elites. As far as the researcher is concerned, there are different views regarding initiating reforms in government entities. Still, the present package will help the current government towards executing and implementing a sound administrative reform, which is sufficed in this form:

Table 4

## Areas need to be reformed

No	Reform type	What modules could help to reforms?
1	Reform Strategies	<p>Today most of the government ministries and agencies suffer from a shortage of strategies. Or we can simply say that existing processes at the governmental institutions cannot adequately meet people's needs. The government of Afghanistan does not have any particular strategical framework for public sector institutions. The present study believes that formulating strategies based on Afghanistan's values, norms, and conditions is essential. Naturally, reforming strategy determines the visions, missions, objectives, and roadmap of public sector institutions and averts corruption and inefficiency. Formulating a bottom-up approach to reform strategy fits Afghanistan's public sector institutions because needs and necessities could be identified better and generate a sense of belongingness among organizations.</p>
2	Personnel Management	<p>Fair recruitment is the cornerstone of public administration, and it contributes to enhancing the quality of public services for citizens and business entities and improves the quality of policy development. Therefore, the recruitment process had to be depoliticized, and placement and promotion procedures in the public sector institutions must entirely be based on the merit system. Building administrative capacity is the fundamental requirement of Afghanistan's public sector institutions, and it generates a professional administration free from corruption and the political influence of politicians. My observation suggests that investing in employees' competence, skills, and knowledge can improve public service delivery quality in government institutions. Also, consistent application of meritocracy principles, equal opportunities, equitable representation, and professionalization of senior management positions positively impact Afghanistan's public sector institution's depoliticization.</p>
3	Performance Management	<p>Public sector institutions have to rethink employee performance management. Generally, employee performance management practices entail performance agreements, rewards, training and development, and appraisal to affect organizational performance changes. Evaluation and compensation: Pay scale and job structure need reform in Afghanistan's public sector organization because most public employees do not content with Afghanistan's wage or salary hierarchy. Wages and productivity are the two sides of the same coin and. In contrast, several studies indicate that highly-compensated public employees result in ineffective performance, better output, and high citizens' satisfaction.</p>
4	Anti-Corruption Transparency	<p>Transparency and simplification of business process; Ethics of employees and; Internal audit and monitoring</p>

5	Fiscal Reform	Simplification of financial activity; Openness in a financial transaction and; Application ICTs in economic activities
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Table 6

Actions to be taken for administrative reform in the context of Afghanistan

No	Purposes	Directions	Means
1	Cost-effective;	Downsizing and rightsizing staff; Less budget	Privatization; Competition and; Strategic planning
2	Effective performance;	Effective policy and regulation; Better service;	Competition; Evaluation; Empowerment;
3	Improved procedure;	Transparency in the governmental system More democratic process	E-governance; Empowerment; Evaluation; Cultural Change;

## 5. Conclusion

This international assistance has helped the country in many ways, from establishing democratic institutions to health and education, freedom of the press; however, the expected equitable growth has still not been achieved. Despite these signs of progress, significant challenges have remained in Afghanistan. Political leaders have no intentions to reform and change the government because it's for their interests. Afghan people demand the government to protect and let them go to the daily routine in peace, as long as they will not break the laws and regulations. Therefore, we need administrative reform to ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in Afghanistan's public sector institutions for all these to happen. Narendra Modi, the prime minister of India, once said that mere good governance is not enough; it has to be pro-people and pro-active. Good government is putting people at the centre of development trends. It is significantly crucial at the onset that Afghanistan's administrative challenges are complex and have a multilayer; therefore, launching administrative reform is not an easy task, and this does not mean that the circumstance is hopeless. The author of this paper believes that reforms do not come from the government, and reforms come from the people. It means that citizens have to pressure the government to make significant changes in the institutions, process, and call for attitudinal change towards work. Also, Afghanistan's government has to restore public confidence in reforms and, more importantly, administrative reform practices so that citizens, investors, and the international community are confident that the blueprint, strategy, and process will be carried out with adequate checks balances. Finally, Years of International engagements and billions of dollars were wasted because the International Community and the Afghan governments failed to restore security, peace, and more significantly, establish a stable, effective, and democratic governance to deliver public service. Additionally, the hundreds of lives lost, the myriad opportunities that have arisen, the Taliban and Al Qaeda are thriving and pose a radical threat to the entire Afghanistan.

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<sup>i</sup> Further details refer at: <https://iarcsc.gov.af/en/about-iarcsc/>