



Afghanistan's 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?

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The Independent Election Commission has published the preliminary list of the 2019 presidential candidates. The list includes 18 candidates. It should now go through a vetting process and a challenge and appeal period before it is finalised and published on 26 March, according to the electoral calendar. AAN's researcher, Ali Yawar Adili, looks at the list and provides a brief background on the 18 presidential tickets. He also points out that there are still doubts about whether the election date, 20 July 2019, can be adhered to, not least because new rifts between the president and the other candidates about some necessary electoral reform steps have appeared (with input from Thomas Ruttig).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has published the preliminary list of the candidates for the presidential elections scheduled for 20 July 2019. The list was published on 5 February 2019, as per the electoral calendar. The IEC has approved all 18 candidates who had submitted complete documents and paid the deposit money of one million afghanis (around USD 13,300). (This amount is returned to the candidate if they win or receive at least ten percent of the valid votes polled in the first round of the elections.). Two applicants were rejected because they had failed to meet the legal requirements. (1)



The candidates include: incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive, Abdullah Abdullah, and former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar. They are widely seen as the favourites.

Almost half of these 18 candidates had run in at least one previous presidential election. Apart from the incumbent (who had run unsuccessfully in 2009) and the 2009 and 2014 runner-up Chief Executive Abdullah, there are: Zalmay Rassul (2014), Latif Pedram (2005), Hakim Tursan and Dr Faruq Nejrabi (2004).

In contrast to the 2004 and 2009 elections, there are no women candidates. In 2004, the only female candidate, Massuda Jalal, finished at rank six from amongst a total of 18 candidates (see the results [here](#)). In 2009, two female candidates stood. In 2014, there was one female candidate who was disqualified before the poll. (2) This time, only three candidates have proposed one woman each for one of their two vice-presidential posts (see the list of the tickets in the table below).

The initial nomination period was from 22 December 2018 to 2 January 2019 when the elections were still planned for 20 April 2019. It was extended until 20 January after the election date was moved to 20 July 2019 (see [AAN's previous reporting here](#)).

Who are the presidential tickets?

The IEC has published the following preliminary list of the candidates (see the statement and list [here](#): and the list with photos [here](#)). It is unclear how the IEC has chosen the order. In response to AAN's enquiry, a deputy spokesman for the IEC, Abdul Aziz Ibrahim, first said that it was based on alphabetic order, but when he was shown that this was definitely not the case, he said that it was not important, as it is still a preliminary list. Earlier, the IEC had published the names in a different order, based on the order of the dates they had registered (see [here](#)):

No	Presidential candidate	First running-mate	Second running-mate
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No	Presidential candidate	First running-mate	Second running-mate
1	Abdul Latif Pedram	Muhammad Ehsan Haidari	Muhammad Sadeq Wardak
2	Haji Muhmmad Ibrahim Alekozai	Khadija Ghaznawi	Dr Sayyed Sami Kayani
3	Dr Zalmai Rassul	Abdul Jabbar Taqwa	Ghulam Wali Wahdat
4	Pohand Professor Dr Ghulam Faruq Nejrabi	Sharifullah	Muhammad Sharif Babakarkhel
5	Dr Faramarz Tamana	Pohanmal (Prof.) Sayyed Qiyas Saidi	Dr Muhammad Amin Reshadat
6	Shaida Muhammad Abdali	Abdul Basir Salangi	Zulfiqar Omid
7	Nur Rahman Liwal	Dr Abdul Hadi Zul Hekmat	Muhammad Yahya Wayar
8	Enayatullah Hafiz	Jannat Khan Fahim Chakari	Abdul Jamil Shirani
9	Muhammad Shahab Hakimi	Abdul Ali Sarabi	Dr Nurul Habib Hasir
10	Ahmad Wali Massud	Pohand Dr Farida Momand	Dr Abdul Latif Nazari
11	Muhammad Hakim Tursan	Muhammad Nader Shah Ahmadzai	Diplom Engineer Shafiullah Qaisari
12	Rahmatullah Nabil	Murad Ali Murad	Dr Massuda Jalal
13	Gulbuddin Hekmatyar	Pohandoy Dr Fazl ul-Hadi Wazin	Mufti Hafiz ul-Rahman Naqi
14	Sayyed Nurullah Jalili	Abdul Khalil Ruman	Cheragh Ali Cheragh
15	Dr Abdullah Abdullah	Dr Enayatullah Babur Farahmand	Asadullah Sadati
16	Muhammad Ashraf Ghani	Amrullah Saleh	Ghulam Sarwar Danesh
17	Muhammad Hanif Atmar	Muhammad Yunus Qanuni	Haji Muhammad Mohaqeq
18	Nur ul-Haq Ulumi	Bashir Ahmad Bezhan	Muhammad Naem Ghayur

The two tickets not registered were: Ahmad Elyas Elyasi, with Abdul Maqsud Hasanzada and Amruddin Fahim as running-mates; and, Ustad Zia ul-Haq Hafizi, with Muhammad Zalmai Afghanyar Popal and Omid Langari as his first and second running-mates (see also media report [here](#)).

What will happen now?



Now that the preliminary list has been published and according to the electoral calendar (see it annexed to AAN's previous report [here](#)), the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) will conduct a 48-day vetting process from 5 February to 22 March.

For up to two weeks following the publication of the list, objections to the preliminary list can be submitted to the ECC in accordance with article 74 of the electoral law. Paragraph one of article 91 of the same law says that “individuals, political parties and other organisations” may file objections with regard to the ineligibility of a particular candidate or candidates *within two working days*.

It is not clear why two deadlines are given for the objections. It seems that the ECC also is not fully clear about this. Spokesman Rohani told AAN that one interpretation could be that article 79 refers to the general objections to the preliminary list, while article 91 is specifically about ineligibility. It is also unclear why the time for objections is so limited (particularly the two-days deadline that, practically, makes objections impossible), while the commission has been given almost seven weeks to work on their decisions on them.

The criteria under which candidates on the preliminary list can be disqualified are given in two articles of the electoral law:

Article 44 bans members or commanders of illegal armed groups from standing. The responsibility to investigate their possible links to illegal armed groups rests with a Vetting Commission that forms part of the ECC. It is headed by the ECC chair, currently Abdul Aziz Ariayi, and includes representatives from the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Ministries of Interior and Defence and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). These institutions are charged with providing the ECC with the needed intelligence about candidates. After its deliberations, the vetting commission then recommends a list of those candidates found to be linked to illegal armed groups to the ECC for disqualification, which then takes the final decisions ([see AAN's previous reporting here](#)).

Article 38 of the electoral law prescribes further requirements for the presidential candidates, as follows: they must be 1) an Afghan citizen, a Muslim and born to Afghan parents and not have



the citizenship of another country; 2) not be less than 40 years of age on the day of candidacy; 3) not have been convicted of crimes against humanity and felony or deprived of civil rights by the country; 4) not have been elected as a president or vice-president for more than two terms. Their running-mates are also required to meet the same requirements. (3)

Any candidate the ECC disqualifies will have the opportunity to appeal. The ECC will then address this, and then the decision will be final. (4)

It is not clear whether or not all 18 candidates will survive the vetting and challenge process. In 2014, 27 candidates had registered, but the IEC brought the list down to 10 (see this list [here](#)). The then head of the commission, Yusef Nuristani, told journalists they had excluded candidates who had a second citizenship or had failed to submit 100,000 voter cards of supporters from at least 20 provinces or had other problems with their registration. This time, the IEC sent a query to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the issue of a possible dual citizenship of candidates or their running-mates, as a deputy spokesman for the IEC, Ibrahimi, [told media](#) on 6 February. However, it seems that the IEC has not yet received any response. Ibrahimi said that, as this would possibly be time-consuming, the issue could be clarified later and before the publication of the final list.

Candidates on the preliminary list can still withdraw their names by 23 March. In this case, they should inform the ECC in writing. There have been such cases during previous elections when some candidates decided to withdraw to favour another candidate in return for them securing a government position should the favoured candidate win or to enter into another form of a political deal. If they withdraw after that date, they remain on the ballot, but any votes cast for them are not counted and their deposits are not returned with the money going into the state revenue. (5)

When this procedure is finished, the IEC will conduct the ballot lottery on 25 March to determine the order of candidates' names on the ballot and publish the final candidates list on 26 March. The election campaign will start on 19 May and continue for 60 days until 17 July. This will be followed by a silence period of 48 hours before the polling day on 20 July.

Brief background to the tickets



Most registered tickets have adopted a name to indicate the focus of their respective election campaign or programme. (6) 'Justice' and 'peace' are the two most used words. We follow IEC's order of the tickets on the preliminary list:

Azadi wa Adalat (Freedom and Justice) team led by Abdul Latif Pedram, a Tajik from Badakhshan, who leads his own party, the Tajik-ethno-nationalist and pro-federalism National Congress Party. Pedram was an unsuccessful 2004 presidential candidate, a two-term (2005-10 and 2010-19) former MP, and an unsuccessful 2018 parliamentary candidate from his home province of Badakhshan. His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Ehsanullah Haidari, a Hazara from a prominent family in Ashterlai district of Daikundi province. He has a degree in sociology and archaeology from Kabul University. Haidari worked with several NGOs, including Oxfam and French Action contre la Faim.
- Muhammad Sadeq Wardak, a Pashtun from Maidan Wardak province. He attended school up to secondary education and is a former Jihadi figure. (The info about both comes from diplomatic community sources)

Mubareza bar zed Zulm wa Be-adalati (Fight against Oppression and Injustice) team led by Muhammad Ibrahim Alekozai, a Pashtun from Kandahar, who is the head of the National Consensus of the People of Afghanistan, a political coalition that came together in 2017 ([media report](#)). Since then, the group has been taking positions on political issues in a bid to establish political relevance. Alekozai is an elder of the eponymous tribe and chief of its council (according to diplomatic sources). He has graduated from political sciences from Kabul University and ran in the 2018 parliamentary elections in Kandahar, but was not elected ([media report](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Khadija Ghaznawi, a Hazara born in Badakhshan (see [here](#)), but the family with origins from Ghazni (diplomatic sources), who tried to run with her own ticket in the 2014 presidential elections, but was disqualified (AAN's reports [here](#) and [here](#)). Ghaznawi owns a logistic company, and is the president of the [Ibrahim Asia Group of Companies](#).
- Sayyed Same Kayani from Ismaili-inhabited Kayan valley, Dushi district of Baghlan.

Wahdat, Shafafiat wa Etedal (Unity, Transparency and Moderation) team led by Dr Zalmai



Rasul, a Pashtun born in Kabul, but originally from Kandahar, who is a medical doctor, and served as minister of transport and civil aviation, minister of foreign affairs, and national security adviser to former President Karzai. Before 2001, he was the chief of staff of former King Zahir Shah in his exile in Rome. Rassul, with Ahmad Zia Massud and Habiba Sarabi as running-mates, also ran in the 2014 presidential elections (see [here](#)), and ranked third in the first round. His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Abdul Jabbar Taqwa, a Tajik from Farkhar district of Takhar, who was a member of Jamiat-e Islami during mujahedin (diplomatic sources) and has served as a governor of Parwan, Takhar and Kabul (see his biography [here](#))
- Ghulam Ali Wahdat, a Hazara from Bamyān, who has served as a governor of Bamyān as well as in several positions within the ministry of interior, including provincial police chief in Bamyān, police chief of the 404th Maiwand zone in southern Afghanistan, deputy minister of interior (see [here](#)). He is the brother of MP Safura Elkhani. He competed for 2018 Wolesi Jirga elections and was sentenced to three years in prison for misusing his authority and, as of October 2018, was said to be imprisoned, but still had the right to appeal (diplomatic sources).

A *yet-unnamed ticket* led by Ghulam Faruq Nejrabi, a Tajik from Kapisa province, who is the leader of Hezb-e Esteqlal Afghanistan, holds PhD in surgery from Indira Gandhi University, India. It is the third time he is running for presidency (see also [media report](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Sharifullah (no information available so far)
- Muhammad Sharif Babakarkhel

Tadbir wa Tawse'a (Prudence and Development) team led by Dr Faramarz Tamana, a Tajik born in Herat, who holds two PhD degrees in the field of international relations and studies from Tehran University, Iran, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. He has worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in various capacities since 2002. Before registering to run for the presidential elections, he was head of the Centre for Strategic Studies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has been teaching as lecturer in different universities for the last ten years and is the chancellor of a private Afghanistan University. His first and second running-mates are respectively:



- Pohanmal (Prof.) Sayyed Qias Saidi, born in Chaparhar district of Nangarhar province. Sa'idi has completed his higher education in the field of economics from the University of Nangarhar and Ruhr University Bochum, Germany. He has worked with UNICEF as the head of public outreach and information in Nangarhar, in charge of regional office of the United Nations Refugees Agency in eastern provinces, and head of Nangarhar provincial department of economy.
- Dr Muhammad Amin Reshadat, a Hazara born in Ghazni, holds a PhD in sociology (development and social change) from Shiraz University in Iran. Reshadat is currently deputy chancellor and a member of founding board of private Gharjestan University in Kabul. (The biographical information is extracted from their biographies published in [Dari on Tamana's Facebook account](#) on 17 January 2019.)

Musharekat wa Taghir (Participation and Change) team led by Shaida Abdali, a Pashtun from Kandahar, who holds a master's degree from the US and a PhD from India, and served as former deputy head of the National Security Council under former President, Hamed Karzai. Abdali has also been ambassador to India (2012-18). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Abdul Basir Salangi, a Tajik from Parwan, is a member of Jamiat-e Islami party, has served as chief of police in Kabul, Maidan Wardak and Nangarhar between 2002 and 2009, as well as governor of Parwan and Farah in 2009-18 (see also [this](#)).
- Zulfiqar Omid, a Hazara from Daikundi, is the leader of Labour and Development party and is one of the leaders of the Enlightening Movement, a predominantly Hazara protest movement that emerged in protest to the rerouting of TUTAP power line from Bamyan to Salang ([see AAN background here](#) and [here](#)). Omid served as the director of international relations at the administrative office of the president during Karzai's second term, and was an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate 2018 from Kabul and 2004 from Daikundi.

Masuliat wa Adalat (Responsibility and Justice) team, led by Nur Rahman Liwal. He was born in Logar province and is a computer and software engineer and the founder and owner of Pashto language software company in Kabul (media report [here](#)). He was also a candidate in the 2014 presidential election. His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Abdul Hadi Zul-Hekmat, a Pashtun from Logar province
- Muhammad Yahya Wyar, a Pashtun from Khak-e-Jabar district of Kabul province, and a



medical doctor with Jihadi background. He was a candidate for both 2014 and 2018 WJ elections, but failed to be elected. He worked as a public outreach officer for the Joint Election Management Body (JEMB) in 2005.

Khademin-e Mellat (Servants of the Nation) team led by Enayatullah Hafiz, a Hazara from Behsud district of Maidan Wardak. He has graduated from language and literature from Shahid Rabbani Education University, Kabul. He has been an unsuccessful two-times candidate for provincial councils, as well as an unsuccessful one-time candidate for the Wolesi Jirga (media report [here](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Jannat Khan Fahim Chakari, a Pashtun from the Chakari area, Bagrami district of Kabul province. Chakari holds a bachelor degree in military affairs and is a former military officer (diplomatic sources).
- Abdul Jamil Shirani, also a Pashtun, from Kabul. He holds a bachelor degree and is a former employee of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (diplomatic sources).

Solh, Qanuniat wa Refah (Peace, Lawfulness and Welfare) team led by Shahab Hakimi, a Pashtun from Maidan Wardak province, who holds a degree in agriculture from Kabul University and a master's degree in administration from Preston University, Islamabad. He has worked as a lecturer at Kabul and, recently, as the director of the Mine Detection Centre. He was an unsuccessful candidate in the 2005 Wolesi Jirga elections. His first and second running-mates are respectively (media reports [here](#) and [here](#)):

- Nur ul-Habib Hasir (no information available so far)
- Abdul Ali Sarabi (no information available so far)

Wafaq-e Melli (National Accord) team led by Ahmad Wali Massud, a Tajik from Panjshir, who is another leading Jamiat member and brother of assassinated mujahedin leader Ahmad Shah Massud. He served as Afghan ambassador to London for many years, starting under the ISA government of Prof Borhanuddin Rabbani (1992-96). Today, he heads the Ahmad Shah Massud foundation in Kabul. Massud's first and second running-mates are respectively:



- Pohand Dr Farida Momand, a Pashtun from Nangarhar, who has served as professor at Kabul Medical University and dean of the paediatric department, and minister of higher education from President Ghani's camp from April 2015 to 14 November 2016, when she lost a vote of confidence in the Wolesi Jirga (see AAN's background [here](#) and [here](#)); She was an unsuccessful candidate for the 2009 provincial elections, the 2010 and 2018 parliamentary elections.
- Dr Latif Nazari, a Hazara from Ghazni, holds a PhD in international relations from Tehran University, Iran, and is the founder of Eslahat Newspaper and the head of board of founders of private Gharjestan University. Nazari was a 2018 parliamentary candidate from Kabul, but did not win (his bio on his supporters' Facebook page [here](#)). Nazari was previously a member of Hezb-e Wahdat-e Mardom led by Muhammad Mohaqeq.

Amal mekonem, sho'ar na medehem (We act, we do not chant slogans) team led by Hakim Tursan, an Uzbek born in Kabul. He graduated in Persian literature from Kabul University, and served in various intelligence capacities under former President Dr Najibullah. He ran in 2009 (but withdrew before the campaign) and 2014 (according to [his bio](#), his supporters published). His running-mates are respectively:

- Nader Shah Ahmadzai, a Pashtun from Kabul, who is head of Civil Rights and Research Organisation of Afghanistan. He was one of the 17 presidential candidates disqualified in the 2014 presidential election
- Muhammad Shafi Qaisari, an Uzbek from Qaisar district of Faryab (see also [here](#)). He graduated from the Polytechnic Engineering Faculty at the University of Kabul and is a former head of Governmental Housing Company (Tassadi-ye Microrayonha) in Kabul. Qaisari is a leftist and former member of the Jombesh party (according to diplomatic sources).

Amniyat wa Adalat (Security and Justice) team led by Rahmatullah Nabil, a Pashtun from Maidan Wardak ([see AAN bio here](#)). He served as the head of President's Protection Service (PPS) in the presidential palace under President Karzai and then as chief of National Directorate of Security (NDS) from July 2010 to late 2015 (see AAN's previous reporting [here](#)). He is a founding member of Mehwar-e Mardom-e Afghanistan coalition ([AAN reporting here](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Murad Ali Murad, a Hazara from Ghor province, who has served as commander of the Kabul Garrison until early 2019 (a position he resigned from in order to be able to run)



and before as senior deputy minister of interior for security, first deputy of chief of army staff, and general commander of ground forces (see also his short bio on a Facebook page of his supporters [here](#)).

- Dr Massuda Jalal, a Tajik from Badakhshan, who was a presidential candidate in the first, 2004 presidential election, and then served as the minister of women's affairs from October 2004 to July 2006 (see also AAN's previous reporting [here](#)). She was a candidate in the October 2018 parliamentary elections from Kabul, but was not elected.

Solh wa Adalat-e Islami (Peace and Islamic Justice) team led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun from Kunduz, the leader of Hezb-e Islami during the war against the Soviet occupation and now of one of its factions ([AAN background here](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Dr Fazl ul-Hadi Wazin, a Tajik from Parwan, who has a PhD degree in Islamic studies from Imam Muhammad Ben Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and served as lecturer in International Islamic University in Islamabad, and a visiting professor in Fatema Jinah University, Pakistan.
- Mufti Hafiz ul-Rahman Naqi, a Tajik from Badakhshan, who has served as a judge, as well as in other capacities in the judiciary, and was an unsuccessful candidate in the 2010 and 2018 parliamentary elections.

The information about the two running-mates is extracted from their bios AAN received from a deputy spokesman for the party, Fazl Ghani Haqmal. He claimed in a conversation with AAN on 7 February that Hezb-e Islami had picked the running-mates based on merits, and not on any division of ethnic groups. Haqmal said that both running-mates were members of Hezb-e Islami. Media had earlier wrongly reported that Wazin was an Uzbek (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

A *yet-unnamed ticket* led by Nurullah Jalili. Ali Madad Rezayi, the person in charge of his public relations, told AAN on 7 February that the name and slogan of Jalili's ticket had not yet been finalised. Jalili is a Sayyed from Nangarhar province and graduated from Kabul medical university. He previously worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Taleban. He is the director of the Kabul-based road-construction company America. Both he and his company worked as contractors with the US military (according to diplomatic sources). His first and second running-mates are respectively:



- Khalil Roman, a Tajik born in Kabul, who has graduated in journalism, was a member of the Parcham branch of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, has served as chief of staff of former President Dr Najibullah, and deputy chief of staff of former President Karzai. He was an unsuccessful candidate in 2010 parliamentary elections from Kabul province.
- Cheragh Ali Cheragh, has served as director of Kunduz public health department, head of Jamhuriyat hospital, Kabul Medial Institute, acting head of Shahid Rabbani Education University, and head of Balkh University (media report [here](#)). Cheragh was the second running-mate of Dr Abdullah in the 2009 presidential elections.

Subat wa Hamgerayi (Stability and Integration) team led by Dr Abdullah Abdullah, the current chief executive of the National Unity Government and a prominent member of Jamiat-e Islami. After 2009 and 2014, this is the third time Abdullah has run for the presidency. Some leaders of his party, such as Ismail Khan, had requested him not to run again, criticising him for his – in his view – too quiet role in what he [called](#) the “kindergarten” National Unity Government. Abdullah's first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Dr Enayatullah Babur Farahmand, an Uzbek born in Jawzjan, who holds a medical degree from Balkh University and has served as correspondent, producer and reporter with the BBC Uzbek service. He was an MP from 2010 to 2015, and chief of staff of first Vice-President General Abdul Rashid Dostum from 2015 until January 2019 when he resigned to be Dostum's man in Abdullah's ticket (see his bio on his Facebook page in English [here](#)).
- Asadullah Sadati, a Hazara MP from Daikundi, who holds a degree in literature from Kabul University and a master's degree in international relations from the private Ibn-e Sina University, also Kabul. He was an MP from 2010 to 2019 and is affiliated with the leader of one faction of Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami and head of High Peace Council, Muhammad Karim Khalili.

Dawlat-sazan (State-builders) team led by Muhammad Ashraf Ghani, a Pashtun from Logar province, who is the incumbent president of the National Unity Government since 2014. He has served as adviser to former President Karzai during his interim administration, chancellor of Kabul University, and minister of finance. He was a candidate in the 2009 presidential elections and ranked fourth. He was appointed by Karzai as the head of the Transition Coordination Commission. The team's title possibly refers to Ghani's book *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World* (2009, with Clare Lockhart). His first and second running-mates are respectively:



- Amrullah Saleh, a Tajik from Panjshir, and a former Jamiati who has distanced himself from his old party. He now runs his own Green Trend of Afghanistan, which he established after his resignation as NDS director in 2010 and had its first public appearance on 5 May 2011. Saleh supported Dr Abdullah in the 2014 presidential election. During the NUG, he co-headed the fact-finding commission investigating the 2015 fall of Kunduz. He was appointed as state minister for security reform in March 2017, but resigned after three months and as minister of interior in December 2018. After less than a month, he resigned again to be able to run on Ghani's ticket ([see AAN background here](#) and [here](#)).
- Second Vice-President Sarwar Danesh, a Hazara from Daikundi province, served as the first governor of Daikundi (after it was established in 2004), minister of justice and higher education under former President Karzai. Danesh was a member of the constitutional drafting commission in 2003. He is a member of Khalili's Wahdat-e Islami Party, which supported Ghani in the 2014 presidential election. However, this time, Khalili's party has announced its support for Abdullah.
- It is important to note Ghani has also picked a third, informal running-mate: Muhammad Yusef Ghazanfar, an Uzbek and former MP from Balkh, and brother of former minister of women's affairs, Husn Banu Ghazanfar (diplomatic source). Ghazanfar was present at Ghani's registration and might serve as an adviser or special representative to him, until any possible amendment to the constitution to create a third vice-presidential post.

An idea had been floated to amend the constitution to create a third vice-presidential post, but in more practical terms, this step is a bid to garner the votes of the Uzbek community, the fourth-largest ethnic group of the country. (On Ghani's 2014 ticket, Dostum was the vice-president 'for the Uzbeks'; there was no Tajik on the ticket then.)

Solh wa Etedal (Peace and Moderation) team led by Muhammad Hanif Atmar, a Pashtun from Laghman, who has served as national security adviser to President Ghani until 2018, and before as minister of rural rehabilitation and development, education and interior under President Karzai (who fired him – [AAN background here](#) and [here](#)). Atmar is also a founding member of the Right and Justice party established in 2011 ([AAN background here](#)). His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Former vice-president Muhammad Yunus Qanuni, a Tajik from Panjshir, is senior Jamiat member. In 2001, Qanuni served as chief negotiator for the 'Northern Alliance' delegation at the Bonn conference. He was a candidate in the 2004 presidential election, ranking second. He also served as speaker of Wolesi Jirga from 2005 to 2010,



MP from Kabul from 2010, and as first vice-president following the death of Marshal Muhammad Qasim Fahim in March 2014 ([AAN background here](#)) till October of the same year.

- Muhammad Mohaqeq, the second deputy to Chief Executive Abdullah, and the leader of Hazara-dominated Hezb-e Wahdat-e Mardom-e Afghanistan. Mohaqeq served as a vice-president and the minister of planning in Karzai's interim government, and was a candidate in the 2004 presidential elections, ranking third. He was a two-term MP from Kabul (2005-10 and 2010-14 when he resigned to join Abdullah's ticket as second running-mate). On 24 January, President Ghani issued a [decree](#) dismissing Mohaqeq from his position as the deputy chief executive, which he rejected as "illegal." Chief Executive Abdullah, who had nominated him, [called](#) the dismissal as "totally in contradiction with the spirit of the political agreement founding the National Unity Government," saying that the government would continue to serve till the next presidential elections are held and "the next legitimate government is formed."
- Like Ghani, Atmar has also picked a third, informal running-mate, Alem Sa'i, an Uzbek and a former governor of Jawzjan. He is a member of the anti-Dostum New Jombesh party, which declared its existence in June 2017 ([AAN background here](#)).

Mardomsalari, Enkeshaf wa Tawazun (Democracy [People's Power], Development and Balance) team led by Nur ul-Haq Ulumi, a Pashtun from Kandahar, who leads his own political party called Hezb-e Mutahed-e Melli (National United Party) and served as minister of interior from January 2015 to February 2016 ([see AAN reports here](#) and [here](#)). He was an MP from Kandahar from 2005 to 2010. Under the government of President Najbullah (1986-92), he was a general and head of the southwestern zone, ie 'Greater Kandahar'. His first and second running-mates are respectively:

- Bashir Bezhan, a Tajik from Badakhshan, who has served as editor of Ariana Airlines magazine Parwaz, editor of Khabar Negar and the founder and editor of the weekly cultural magazine Cina magazine. He was and unsuccessful candidate in 2009 presidential elections and 2018 parliamentary elections from Kabul.
- Muhammad Naim Ghayur, born in Guzara district of Herat, according to [his Facebook profile](#), is from a mixed Tajik/Pashtun family. His father is originally from Ghor province and his mother hails from the Katawaz area of Paktika province. He holds a bachelor in law and political science degree, as well as attended several military and intelligence courses in Afghanistan and abroad. He started his official governmental career as Enjil district direct of NDS and served in the ministry of defence in different capacities, including director of intelligence for 606 Ansar police zone in Herat province (2014-18). Ghayur is said to be a leftist, formerly with the PDPA's Parcham faction (diplomatic sources), and is currently a member of Ulumi's party.



Conclusion: Caveats

All proceedings for the planned July 2019 presidential election continue to be overshadowed by the on-going peace efforts ([AAN analysis here](#)) and the election reform process. On the former, US special envoy for reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, [said](#) at an event at the US Institute of Peace in Washington DC on 8 February that he hoped to achieve a peace agreement with the Taliban before the 20 July 2019 election date. An agreement, whenever reached at, would require to then merge the (old or new) Afghan government with the Taliban who – as a partner of such an agreement – however so far do not consider the government in Kabul as an actor in its own right.

On election reform, President Ghani held a consultative meeting with a number of presidential candidates or their representatives, as well as with representatives of some political parties in the presidential palace on 8 February (report by the presidential office [here](#)). There, the president said that there was a consensus to amend the electoral law and that the government had prepared draft amendments. On 9 February, another consultative meeting with representatives of candidates, parties and observer organisations was chaired by Vice-President Sarwar Danesh to discuss various articles of the proposed amendments to the law (see [here](#) on his Facebook page). No outcome was officially reported. Mobinullah Aimaq, the head of Free Watch Afghanistan, an observer organisation, who had participated in the meeting, told AAN on 9 February that there was no agreement reached and it was decided to meet again.

On 9 February, a joint committee of the presidential candidates, which includes all presidential tickets except President Ghani's, issued a [statement](#). This said that the council had rejected the amendments proposed by the Palace on 8 February. These candidates submitted their own draft amendments including: retaining the selection committee for shortlisting applicants for the position of electoral commissioners, but changing its members (while the government's draft amendment, of which AAN has seen a copy, calls for abolishing the selection committee and asks registered political parties and election-related civil society organisations to introduce 15 candidates each and the president – then in consultation with the chief justice, speakers of the two houses of the parliament, attorney general, heads of the commission for overseeing the implementation of the constitution and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, as well as heads of political parties and civil society organisations – appoints seven of them as IEC members); calling for the appointment of new electoral commissioners and heads of the IEC and ECC secretariats in consultation with the candidates; cancelling the existing voter list and preparing a new one using biometric technology only; and using



technology in the presidential elections (without specifying whether it means they want electronic voting).

On 11 February, the IEC issued a statement saying that it had been informed through the media that the government seeks to amend the electoral law and endorse it through a legislative decree. It said that given that the president and the chief executive of the national unity government are among the candidates, amendments to the electoral law by the national unity government at this critical time “will not pursue any other goals other than manipulating the upcoming election process, which is very dangerous for the country’s future and the post-elections that will result from this will move the country to crisis.”

The IEC [said](#) that it had referred the issue of how to amend the electoral law to the legal institutions, including the Supreme Court and the Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution so they can share their legal opinions with the IEC and other bodies that seek to amend the electoral law at this juncture.

This shows that the palace and a unified front of all other candidates are currently at loggerheads over large parts of the electoral reforms, including the mechanism of changing the commissioners, and they both face backlash from the IEC. If the disagreement lingers, it will continue to hamper the preparations and, perhaps, lead to another delay in the elections, as the IEC might not be able to start certain important activities, such as the top-up voter registration exercise planned for 1 to 20 March and the registration of candidates for the provincial and district council elections, as well as Wolesi Jirga elections in Ghazni planned for 1 to 15 March.

Edited by Thomas Ruttig

(1) According to article 73 of the electoral law, the application for presidential candidacy should include the following:

- Name and specific address



- A copy of the document that proves his/her identity
- Verified copy of educational documents as mentioned in this law.
- Information on non-conviction, age, health status, movable and immovable properties, permanent and current residence addresses, latest place of employment and other instances stated in this law.
- List of names, number of the voter registration cards and the fingerprints of one hundred thousand voters, from a minimum of twenty provinces, at least two percent from each province
- Provision of official document of resignation from the government positions pursuant to the provisions of the law.
- Provide the names of two eligible vice-presidents, who fulfill the conditions set forth in this law.

(2) In 2009, Foruzan Fana and Shahla Attaran. The former, widow of minister Dr Abdul Rahman, who had been assassinated in 2002, scored best, ending on seventh place with 0.47 per cent of the total valid vote ([see AAN analysis here](#)). The IEC did not provide any reasons for the disqualification of the only female candidate in 2014, Khadija Ghaznawi, but generally (there were other disqualifications) cited failure to meet registration requirements and having dual citizenship ([see AAN's report here](#)).

(3) Article 38 of the electoral law reads:

- *A person may nominate himself/herself for the presidency, who meets the following requirements:*
 - *Shall be an Afghan citizen, a Muslim and born to Afghan parents and shall not have the citizenship of another country.*
 - *Shall not be less than 40 years of age on the day of candidacy.*
 - *Shall not have been convicted of crimes against humanity and felony or deprived of civil rights by the court.*
 - *Shall not have been elected as a president or vice-president for more than two terms.*
- *The vice-presidents shall also meet the requirements mentioned in clause (1) of this article.*

(4) Article 74 of the electoral law says:



- *The Commission is obliged to publish the preliminary list of candidates soon after the completion of the candidacy period.*
 - *The persons, who may have objections to the preliminary list of the candidates, may submit their objections to the Central Complaints Commission within a maximum of two weeks following the publication of the list. These objections shall be addressed in compliance with the relevant procedure and this decision shall be final.*
 - *Once all the objections are addressed by the Central Complaints Commission, the final list of candidates shall be published by the Commission. This list shall be unchangeable.*
 - *The Commission is obliged to display the final list of candidates at the polling centres on the Election Day.*

(5) Article 75 of the electoral law reads:

- *In case a candidate withdraws from his/her candidacy, he/she is obliged to inform the Commission in writing prior to the date determined in the electoral calendar.*
- *In case a candidate withdraws from his/her candidacy or dies after the date determined in the electoral calendar or if he/she is disqualified by the Complaints Commission, the votes related to him/her shall not be counted during counting of the votes.*
- *Only the deposit money of those candidates would be returned, who have withdrawn or died within the period of time determined in the electoral calendar.*

(6) Source: Terms of reference of the joint committee of 2019 presidential candidates, which includes 17 presidential tickets, except President Ghani's (AAN has seen a copy). The committee, which they also call the Council for Collaboration of the 2019 Presidential elections, has been formed after candidate nomination ended. The term of reference sets the following objectives for the committee or council: a) to facilitate consultation and taking joint stance regarding the instances pertaining to the integrity of the election process; b) to prevent illegal interference and influence by the government and other institutions in the election affairs; c) to forge coordination among candidates and different electoral teams about the necessary electoral reform, as well as in working with the relevant commissions; and d) to observe the election process. It issued a [statement](#) on 2 February saying that the council had approved a proposed procedure on preventing the abuse of government resources, authorities and facilities for election and political campaigning, which sets out "binding moral limits." The statement said that majority of candidates had approved the procedure and officially sent it to the presidential office. The statement also said that the council had discussed a second document, which is a



draft proposal on electoral reforms (AAN has seen both documents).