

THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN SHAPING OF PUBLIC POLICY A CASE STUDY OF AFGHANISTAN IN A YEAR BETWEEN 2014 AND 2021

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ABSTRACT

The paper examine the role of interest groups in shaping of public policies between the years 2014- 2021. It focuses to understand the structures involved in the process of public policy formulations in Afghanistan. The paper also explore the challenges these groups were facing between 2014 and 2021 while imposing on their interest in public policy making process. This research also explore the strategies taken be the interest groups while influencing the process of policy formulation.

Mixed research Method was used to collect the data. 20 interviews with politician, civil society member, Journalist, social activists and academia were conducted and 30 questionnaires in the shape google form were shared with these categories of people.

The findings of the research shows that between 2014 and 2021 various interest groups were involving in the process of policy formulation. These group were using different strategies to emphasize on their goals and objectives to be given attention while making policies. The groups were also faced by some challenges when they were trying to have an eye on the policy formulation process. Furthermore it reveal that people supports the interest group intervention in the public policies formulating process which can restrict the structures to the public interest. Finally the research has a light that these people were very aware of the role of the interest groups and see it as a positive initiative taken and implemented in this specific era of time.

INTRODUCTION

This study is proposed to understand the role of interest groups in shaping of public policy in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2021. Understand various factor involved in the process of policy making in the country. The research also focuses to understand the process of public policy making in Afghanistan and the structures which have more impact on this process. It also determine the involving factors on the process of public policy making and the want to explore the people will about this important process.

Public policy is usually regarded as a set of governmental activities which effect citizen's life either directly or through an agent (Peters, 2020). This article aims to investigate the role of interest groups in shaping/changing of public policies. The article also focuses on selected policies in three main categories (higher education, law and.....) as a case studies. In the last few years the attention towards governmental movement has brought significant attention of scholars around the word. The incitement on what government do and why is always existed in the mind of people

living around the world (Simeon, 1976). In fact public policy is often shaped by people gathered with each other to follow their mutual interests. A group of people which acting together to conquer their goals or depend common interest is called an interest group. It becomes a political interest group when they start to challenge the government and shape public policy. The success of this group in effecting the process of public policy making is linked with the ability of the group in identification of the desirable policy and the common support that they gained from the citizens (Gable, 2016).

The status of the interest group and the social and political environment in which they act; effect the role of the group and the power of the government to shape and implement public policy. The influence of interest group on public policy making vary in different societies. It has always being effected by the cultural environment in which they operate. The structure of society according to ethnicity, religion, sect, level and system of education, the media communication and the governmental system are also considered as the prime element in selecting the efficiency of interest groups in shaping of public policy (Gable, 2016).

According to the 2004 constitution of Afghanistan; it is mentioned in article 4 that the supreme power is vested in the hands of people and they can use it directly or through their formal representatives. Based on this article people have the right to accept or ignore government policies in each part of their life. In fact this article can be traced as the source of the recognition of interest's groups' power in Afghanistan. Although, the constitution clearly mentioned the authority of people in shaping of public policies, it is officially the responsibility of a government to take care of citizen's interests. The constitution of Afghanistan openly mentioned and defined the responsibilities and authorities of each government part.

In the new world the basic role of a state is to shape public policies. States with having legislative and executive branches as their parts work to investigate the problems and the interests of people and shape plans to achieve theses interests; and then examine the execution of their policies to ensure the citizens interest, otherwise

the existence of the state is unnecessary. Basically public policy is considered as the process of selecting the general strategies which pave the way for the future activities of the state bodies and national and international NGOs to overcome on the public problems and public interests. (Momand, 2020)

Research objectives:

This research aim to investigate the role of interest groups in shaping of public policy in Afghanistan between the years 2014-2021. The research also focuses to understand the process of public policy making in Afghanistan and the structures which have more impact on this process. It also determine the involving factors on the process of public policy making and the want to explore the people will about this important process.

Research methodology

Mixed research method is used in this study. The primary data is collected through semi structured interviews with politicians, journalists, academia, civil society member and activist and questionnaires shared with the mentioned categories of people. 20 interviews was scheduled and 30 questionnaires were shared to collect the primary data. Nevertheless, for understanding of the basic of the topic, literature review and theoretical underpinnings, the research also used secondary data including books, articles, newspaper, academic journals and etc.

Data collection and sampling technique

In order to collect the data we focused in both primary and secondary data. In primary Data we categories the research universe in to two groups (governmental official and those haven't worked with the government). And for the secondary data we outlined some of the important literatures about the topic and then used properly for our research work.

Convenience sampling technique is used in this research. This technique enable a researcher to interview and send questionnaires to the targeting people when meet certain criteria like easy accessibility, willing to answer your questions and can properly add a positive to your research.

Determinants of Policy Formulation

For decision making in national side; there are several organs which has the authority of making a choice in the favor of publics. One of them can be called the executive part of the state which is formulated from a group of professional and experts people which participate in almost all policy making processes. The second one of these organs is called the legislative body which select the short, mid and long term policies. In fact the legislative organ can be traced as the foundation for the internal and external decision making body. The third branch of these determinants is the private sector which help and support the state in policy making process through their advices and collaborations. (Momand, 2020)

Political and governmental system of a country effect these determinants and their authority. For instance in Parliamentary system of government the executive part of the government has the ultimate authority for shaping public policy. But in presidential system it differs from the last. The foundation for public policy shapes from the legislative but the executive has also their effect on this process. These determinants can be divided in to official (legislative, executive, judiciary and Bureaucrats) and unofficial determinants (political parties, interests groups and Mass media and international organizations). (Sayed Mehdi and Fatah Sharifzada, 2013)

In Afghanistan; according to the 2004 constitution, Parliament (MILI SHORA) is the highest decision making body which is consist of two houses (Upper house of the parliament (Mishrano Jirga) and the Lower House of the parliament (Wallis Jirga). Based on article 90 of the constitution the parliament has the Following authorities:

- Approving, amending and revoking ordinance and legislative decrees
- Approval of social, cultural, economic, technological and development programs
- Approval of state budget
- Creation, modification and abolition of administrative units.
- Ratification of inter-state agreements and international treaties or the separation of Afghanistan from them.

Based on the above informations, it can be said that the parliament gives legitimacy to the

government decisions and proposals, gives credibility to the expenses and revenues presented by the government and as a Jirga parliament debates about the issues of the people. The Jirga members have the wide power to influence the government's decision positively and negatively.

The second highest body which shape public policy is the executive part of the state. According to some political scientist the executive part of the state can be called as the government. Based on the constitution of Afghanistan government is consist of ministers which work under the supervision of the president. (Sadhan, 1986) Public policy making is the most important duty of the government because they are responsible for organizing every aspect of people's life. The final power of policy-making is in the hands of the person who give legitimacy to the policy, which may be the king, prime minister, president or a group of people like political parties and army or the will of people may be involved. According to the constitution of Afghanistan, the president has the authority to control all the decisions as the head of the council of the ministers. The president is interested in foreign affairs, defense and economic affairs but may not involve in internal affairs because the decisions of the council of ministers is sent to the president for corrections and every responsible minister take the assist of the president in their activities. The president is assisted in his work by a number of hired officials. The secretariat is the most important and the advisers of the president are also one of the most valuable part of the decision making. (Robert, 1980)

The council of ministers has the following powers in term of policy making:

- It sets guidelines for policy making.
- Making proposals.
- Conforming the drafts of other ministers or independent departments, institutions and the private sector.
- Decide on the financial resources of the government.

The judiciary has also its effect on the public policy making process. In most countries the judicial body looks at the legitimacy and legality of the laws of the government and legislative. It does not interfere in the authorities of the two

other branches of the state. In Afghanistan the Judicial part of the state has the following authorities in case of effecting public policy:

- **Judicial Review:** based on this authority the judiciary examines the conformity of laws and the government actions with the constitution. In case of inconsistency, it will be invalidated.
- **Interpretation:** the judiciary has the authority to interpret and clarify the laws and provisions that have ambiguity or the issues which cause the controversy.

The role of bureaucrats can be explained in the following sections:

1. **Informative role:** In order to identify the issues and shape the policy, it is necessary to investigate these issues in a systematic way, so the bureaucrats collect information related to the issues, what kind of information is this? The government is responsible to have evidence related to the policies in order to gain public support. For example, when making a policy in the field of agriculture, they should have information about the country's land and collect enough evidence, which is one of the important tasks of bureaucrats. (Malik, 2011)
2. **Suggestive role:** The bureaucracy is constantly engaged in making proposals and gathering information about the issues, therefore they are intimately familiar with the issues and are considered as a repository of information for the government. Identifying economic, political, social and other issues, proposing the nature of the issues, and inventing good ideas to consider the issues.
3. **Analytical role:** Bureaucrats have an analytical role in policy and decision making. They analyze the positive and negative aspects of each decision or alternative. In the policy proposals, they consider the continuity of solutions, future hopes, conflicts with laws, social culture and other aspects, for this reason bureaucracy can be useful. And make effective policies.

Bureaucrats perform the following activities to make effective decisions:

1. Reforms and changes in decisions.
2. Monitors and supervises.
3. Make observations and reports.
4. Facilitation and organization of resources
5. Creating public relations.

Finally, it is said that the role of bureaucrats is very important in making decisions and public policies.

Unofficial contributing structures of public policy

In addition to the formal actors, there are also informal actors who are effective in decision-making.

Political parties: Political parties are groups of people who work on the basis of ideological consensus. They want to win elections, govern and define policies. Party members work together for the development of national interests, but they are committed to the principles of their party and ultimately seek to gain power in the government. (Chakrabarty, 1986) After their ideology, they put their thoughts into the process of policies and decisions and reach their spiritual and materialistic goals.

1. There may be a thirst for power in the government to control economic resources.
 2. It creates a place in people's minds for ideological purposes based on policies.
- Political parties sometimes make decisions through coalitions, but the process of gathering national interests may not be done properly

2. Interest groups: Interest groups are a group of people who regularly reflect public interest and follow their programs to influence government decisions and institutions and get their own benefits. They are not interested to gain political power like political parties instead the influence the strategies of the government in order to carry out their own interests.

3. Media: Media such as newspaper, magazine, television, radio, movies and others help in

spreading understanding and information. The effectiveness of the media is significant in the change of society, therefore their presence is effective in decision-making. The impact of the media can be summed up by mentioning their informative, analytical and suggestive role in policy making.

International organizations: Whenever governments decide on a series of issues, their proposals are influenced by international and regional organizations. For example, when a country needs a budget in order to implement a policy in one area, then this budget can be provided by an international organization. Providing budget will give them a chance to influence the foundation of policy. For example, the formulation of policies in the field of health requires the coordination of WHO or the formulation of policies in the field of security requires the coordination of some important organizations. Based on this, it can be said that the role of international organizations is very important in policy making because these organizations have a direct and indirect impact on the affairs of countries in every field. (sapr, 2016)

Interest groups as the drivers of public policy

Interest groups can be considered as the key drivers of public policy. To understand its effectiveness and its impact on shaping of public policy the following reasons is written here:

1. Interest groups are considered an excellent source of information for policy makers and their influence on policy making can't be ignored.
2. Interest groups have a very important role in shaping the mindset towards policies. For example, at the time of making and implementing a policy in health sector the interest groups can bring to many people to accept or decline the implementation of the policy. In the next section we will bring too many examples where the interest groups has an ultimate effect on policy making processes.
3. Interest groups always consider the goals of their supporters when making policy, for this reason they have more public

support, which gives them the ability to change or approve policy.

4. Political parties need the support of interest groups to gain political power and win the elections, so they cannot ignore the value of having good relation with all the groups which can directly or indirectly effect the process of transforming political power. (Amjad, 2015)
5. Interest groups can be traced as the information and financial resources for the politicians. These groups always have investigations about the present issues in the society and can easily find the subjects and problems which are very essential for the people of the society. They always attract the media attention about the broad issues. In the 21 century the interests groups use social media and too many other tools to inform people what is going on in the society. They have webpages, use emails, have WhatsApp groups and too many of mass media. (Hays, 2017) All these problems can be traced as an information source for the policy makers to work on and contribute toward its solutions. And the other hand they always use financial resources to achieve their group's interests which can be beneficial for the politicians financially.

The universe of the study

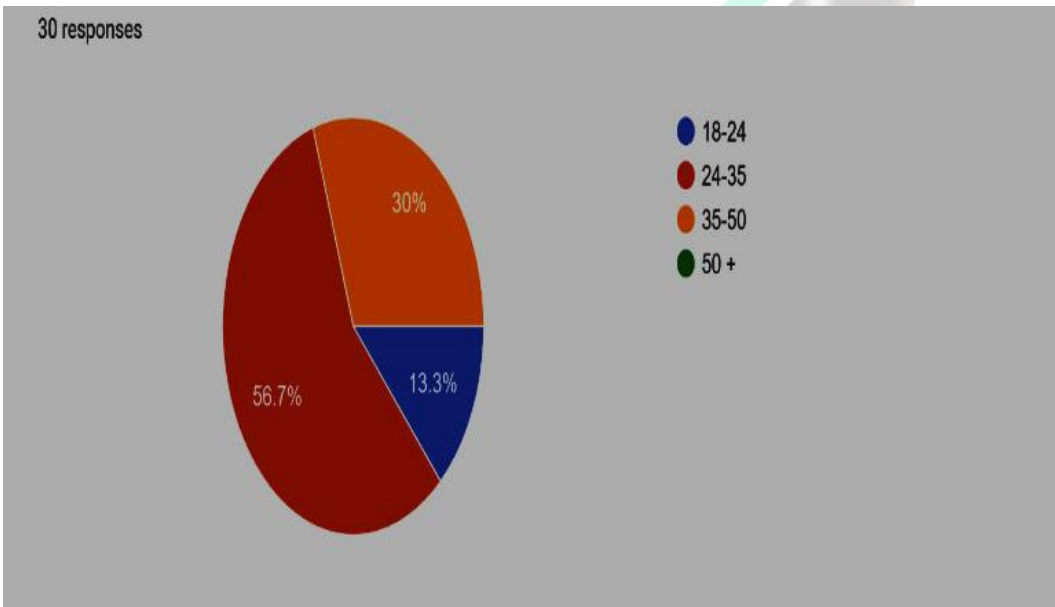
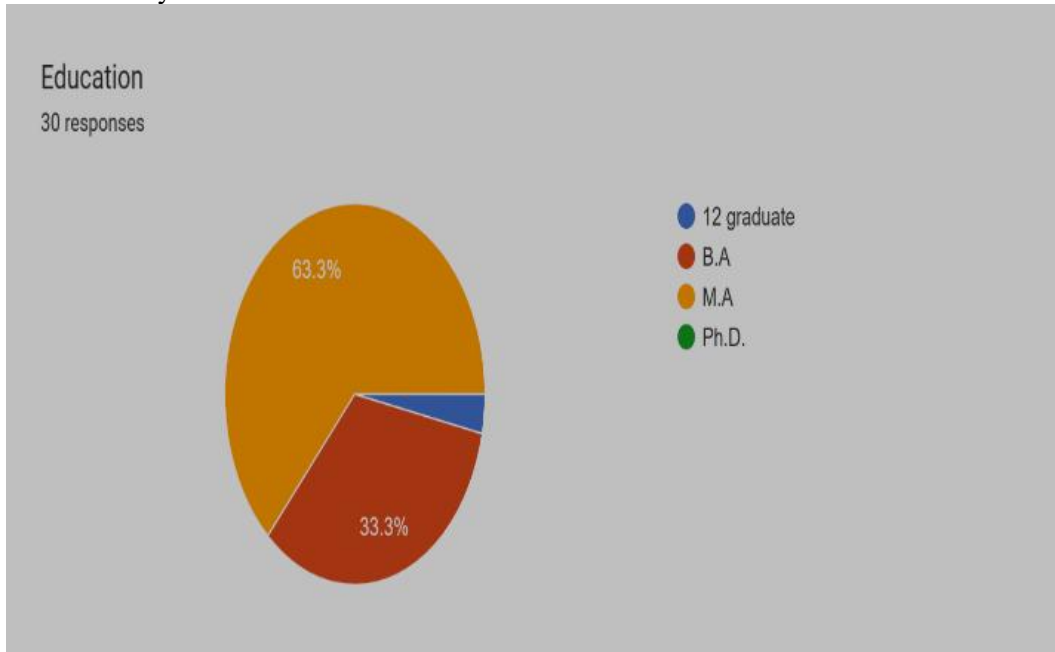
This study mainly focused on Khost province of Afghanistan. This province is located in eastern Afghanistan bordered by Pakistan. And it also internally a neighbor to Paktia and Ghazni. The majority of its population is Pashtun with combination of different tribes like Zadran, Mangal and etc.

People involving in the process

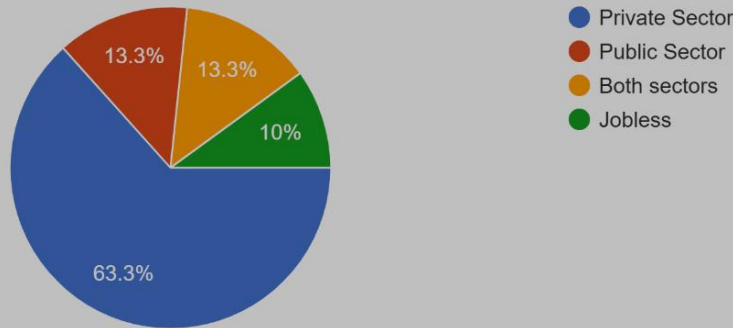
In this study we asked our respondent either they involved in the process of policy making in these specific era of time or not. As we mentioned in the methodology that we were focusing mainly on those people who were actively named as the interest groups members. The reason behind this selection is to understand exactly what the

research is proposed for. For answering this question we receive that; the majority of the respondent were actively participating in the process of policy making. We also received their personal information and statues as well. 13, 3% of them was between 18-24 years of age, 56, 7 were between 24-35 years and 30% were more

between 35-50 years. Furthermore 63, 3% of them hold Master degree in their filed, 33, 3 hold bachelor and the other has PhD in their field of study and jobless. Finally, 60, 7 % of them had a job in Private sector, 14,3 % in Public sector, 14,3% had two jobs and 10,7 % was Jobless.



Job
30 responses

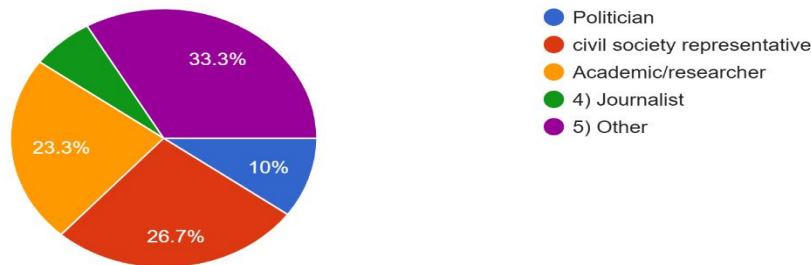


Role of people in policy making

We asked the respondent about their role in the process of policy making. Through interview we understand different roles that they have put down in this vital process. These roles were various. The impact that they have was as a politician,

social society representative, academic researcher, Journalist, members of international organizations. We also put all these categories in the questionnaires and we found the below percentages.

What was your role in the process of policy making?
30 responses



In the section five they mentioned their role in various positions like a Volunteers, investors, member of international organization, member of political parties. So this the given answers reflect that the role of all these groups can be seen in the process of policy making.

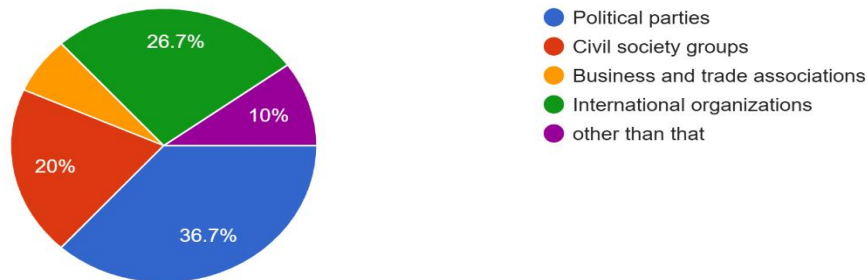
Most influential interest groups

In this section we asked the respondent to tell us about the most influential interest group which

has lots of impact on the process of policy making. Political Parties were the most influential groups said by the respondent, which always effect the implementation of public policies. We have been said that when these parties reject a policy no one could re implement it in Afghanistan. We put some of the interest groups in the google form to understand the more significant and important interest group which can be trace influential group in making of public policy.

Which interest groups do you believe had the most influence on public policy in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2021?

30 responses



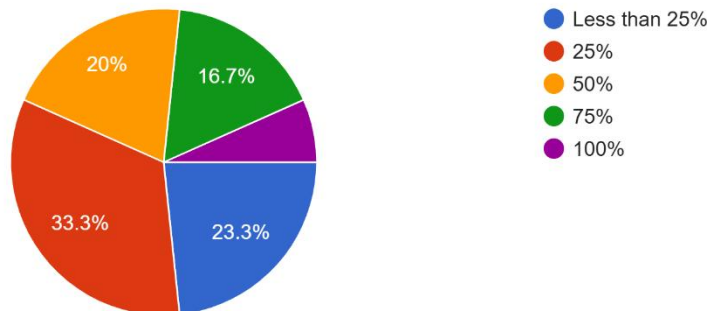
As seen in the above data political parties has a very huge impact on policy making in Afghanistan. Civil society groups, business and trade associations, international organization had also has their impact on the process of policy making in Afghanistan.

Contribution of interest groups in the process

In a question we asked the respondent that to what extent interest groups contributed towards shaping of policies in Afghanistan. 23, 3% were agreed that the contribution of these groups were less than 25%. But almost all of them agreed that these groups had an impact in shaping of public policy.

To what extent do you believe interest groups contributed to the shaping of policies in Afghanistan during between 2014 and 2021?

30 responses



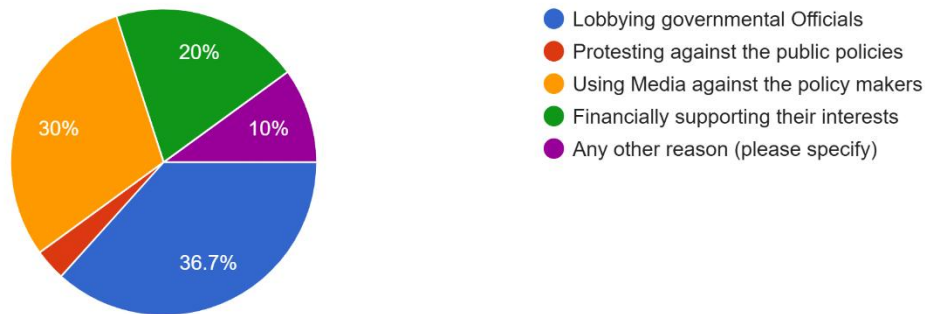
Strategies interest groups taken to influence the process of policy making

The strategies taken by the interest groups in the process of influencing public policies were various. As we told by some of the respondent that we cannot say and focus just on one method of influence. Some political parties using their own media accounts, not only social media but using TV channels against the policies governmental authorities were selecting.

Pressurizing the government by using public power was also another strategy used to influence the policy making process. The power of international organizations and political power of them was also another strategy used in this process. Lobbying governmental officials, financially supporting their interests, protesting against the policies and using media against the policy makers were also considered as the strategies taken by the interest groups.

What procedures did interest groups use to influence public policy in Afghanistan between 2014 and 2021?

30 responses



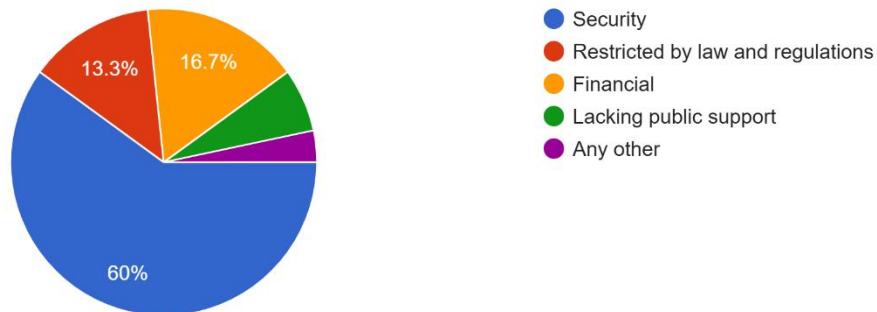
Challenges interests groups faced in influencing the process

The process of influencing the public policy was not without any challenge. As we asked the respondent we understand that some time taking against the public policies were equal to the life of

the person. Restricted laws and regulations, lacking financial support, Lacking public support was the main challenges they faced while focusing of the process of policy making.

What was the major Challenges they faced?

30 responses

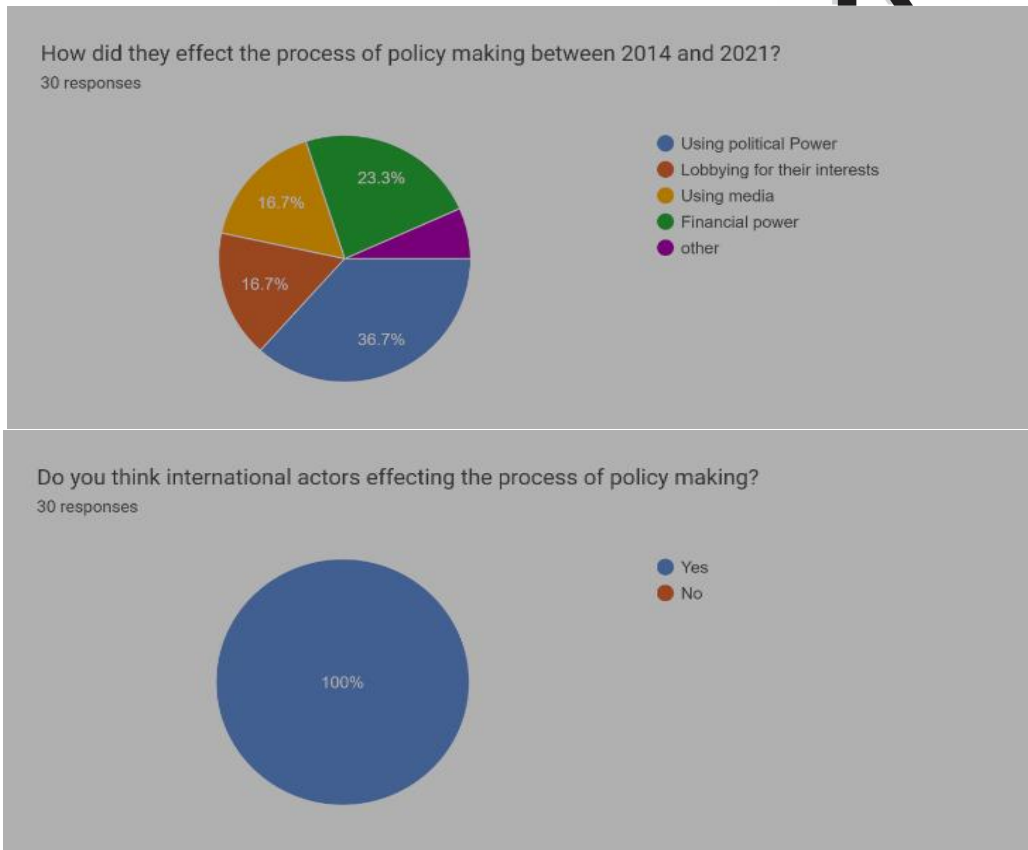


Role of international groups (organizations) in this process

We also asked our respondent about the role of international organization in this process. They told us that these organizations effect the public policy by different ways. As more of these

policies has international donors and were supporting by these organizations financially so they have their own effect.

The percentage of the responses that has been received trough google form is shown the below chart.



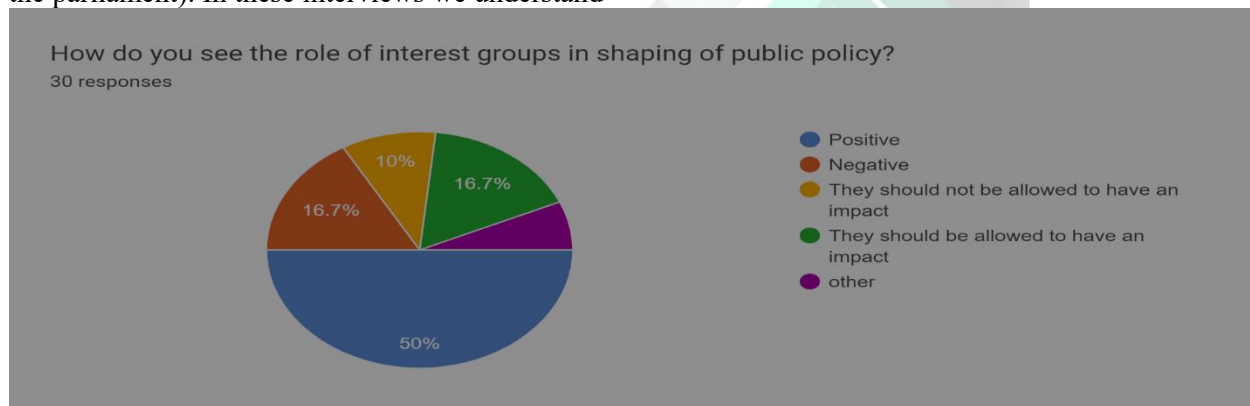
Role of these groups on the public policies:

We also asked our respondent both in interviews and google form that how they see the role of interest groups in the process of policy formulation. The majority of the interviewees told us that in a democratic state and government it is the right of people to have access and should have access to intervene in the process of policy making. They told us that in indirect democracies people will is expressed through their formal representatives (in Afghanistan called members of the parliament). In these interviews we understand

that people believe that the role of interest group is a positive action which should be accepted and welcomed in every policy making process.

These respondent believed that the interest group can easily restrict the policy making structures which is very beneficial and is important for direction the people will and goals.

The respondent in the google form also believe in the positive role of interest group and added in the comment sector that these groups should be welcomed.



A very low percent of the respondent told that these groups had a negative role in the process of policy formulation. The reason behind this idea was that some of the interest groups were involving in the fraud around the country in was systematically effecting government to accept what they were thinking about.

Conclusion

The first objective of this paper was to understand the role of interest groups in shaping of public policy. In this part we realize that these groups has an upper hand in the process of shaping public policies. The role of these groups were categorise in various aspects. Interest groups involved as political parties, civil society members, Journalist, academia's groups, governmental association, Social activist, and etc. They used various strategies to implement their interest while the policy shaping process. Some of them were using political power to convince the policy making structures. They gained this power from the governmental positions they were working in. or the background they have as a political party. Soft power was also used while convincing the authorities to be aware of the group's interests. As we were told about the usage of media, lobbying governmental authorities, protesting for their will and so on.

In the second goal of this paper we recognise that the role of these group were positive. Because they could easily restrict the governmental authorities to be aware of the public interests. People emphasize that these groups should be most welcomed in shaping and implementing the public policies. Most of the people believe that free hand of the government in shaping of public policies results in dictatorship which is not a good sign for a society. So there should be people to always have an eyes on the policies taken by the formal structures.

The paper also understand some of the most used strategies used by these groups to follow on their interest. For instance we could say the strategies of using media, protesting against public policies, role of international organizations, using the people who are not in the favour of government, lobbying governmental officials and some other strategies.

The paper also gained that these groups were facing some problems in shaping of public policies while emphasizing their interests in shaping of public policies. Restricted laws, security issues, lacking financial support, lacking of public awareness about the role of interests group and about public policies and to some extent lacking awareness of these groups about the policies taken by the government were the *struggles* these group were facing.

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