This dissertation is a qualitative study of presidentialism in the ethno-religiously divided society of Afghanistan with a main focus on the case of President Hamid Karzai’s first presidency 2004 – 2009. The study is based primarily on the analysis of executive-legislative relation during this first government. It examines how President Hamid Karzai’s first government survived without facing problems, which have been said to be associated with presidentialism, such as executive-legislative conflict, institutional paralysis, and the breakdown of government. Although, there was great potential for the emergence of these problems, on one hand, President Hamid Karzai was lacking a partisan power that he could rely on within the assembly, and on the other hand, the national assembly’s Lower house (Wolesi Jirga) was in control of his opposition group called National Front, led by Mohammad Yonus Qanoni.

However, President Hamid Karzai was still successful in generating majority’s support in parliament, necessary to back his legislative initiatives within a house controlled by the opposition. As the records of President Hamid Karzai’s legislative initiatives during his
first presidency show, the majority of his proposed bills has been successfully passed and become laws. This indicates that Karzai was able to avoid any serious confrontation with the legislature over which he had less direct influence. In fact, the case of President Hamid Karzai’s first government represents a compelling topic for academic investigations because it raises the following puzzling questions:

*Why was President Hamid Karzai able to avoid serious confrontations with the legislature led by his opposition figure Yonus Qanoni? And; how could President Hamid Karzai gain legislators’ support in legislature housing none of his co-partisan?*

Therefore, the main goal of this research has been to answer these puzzling questions by scrutinizing the executive-legislative relation during the President Hamid Karzai first term. To do so, the study started with examining the degree of legislators’ support to the president’s legislative initiatives and treated it as independent variable. The variable of legislators’ support to the president’s legislative initiatives is tested to see, to what extent President Hamid Karzai was successful in garnering legislators’ support within the legislature. For this purpose, first, the data on each year’s passed and rejected bills proposed by the president are analyzed and then compared with the legislature’s successful as well as failed initiated bills. The result of analyzing these data have shown that President Hamid Karzai played the dominant role in the law-making process; the rate of his legislation was higher than the assembly which is pointing his success in gaining support from the majority to secure the passage of his legislative initiatives.

In order to identify the reasons for President Hamid Karzai’s success in marshalling legislators’ support, this study has tested the strategy of cabinet coalition-building as a main independent variable and the factor of crisis situation (the Taliban’s military threats) as well as the distribution of patronage as less significant variable. To measure the impact of these
three variables the study used and analyzed the data gathered during the three months field-research (2009- August to October) in Afghanistan. The data were consisting of statistical information on the number of passed and rejected bills, government official documents, and interviews made with the MPs from both, pro-government as well as opposition groups.

Based on the results of the analyzed data, the study has demonstrated that in the absence of a strong partisan power, distributing the cabinet portfolios to different ethno-political groups that possessed sufficient legislative weight was Karzai’s strategy to gain support from the majority and thus secure the passage of his proposed bills in the legislature. Furthermore, the study has shown that such a success hinged, partially, on the president’s use of Taliban’s threats as well as distribution of patronage or material benefits to the MPs.

The study concludes with presenting its major finding. It claims that factors other than constitutional as well as partisan powers of a president can also be helpful in enabling a president with divided or minority government to secure support from the majority in the legislature. The case of Afghanistan’s first presidential government illustrated that by building coalition through distributing his cabinet posts to the different political groups, as well as using the strategy of distributing patronage or material benefits to the MPs, President Hamid Karzai became able to gain majority’s support within the assembly and thus secured the passages of his legislative initiatives. In fact, these factors made up for President Hamid Karzai’s lack of partisan power.