THE ASIA FOUNDATION

VOICES OF AFGHANISTAN:

Afghans Speak About Their Country, Elections, Gender & Democracy

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A REPORT BASED

ON 32 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

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Project Director:
Mark Kryzer, The Asia Foundation

Research Design
Craig Charney, Charney Research
Kelly Deuster, Charney Research

Analysis
Craig Charney, Charney Research
Amy Marsman, Charney Research
Neal Sandin, Charney Research
Erika Yeomans, Charney Research
Inna Ososkov, Charney Research

Report
Craig Charney, Charney Research

Editing
Kate Tedesco, Charney Research

Research & Fieldwork
Haji Sayed Daud, Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC)
Asaf Ikram, AMRC
Kamalhuddin Kochi, AMRC

Technical Assistance
Kaushik Mukherjee, AC Nielsen ORG-MARG, India
Sunil Pillai, AC Nielsen ORG-MARG, India

Project Managers
Karen Hirschfeld, The Asia Foundation
Amy Marsman, Charney Research

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INTRODUCTION

With the approach of Afghanistan's first democratic elections, the Asia Foundation (TAF) commissioned this preliminary assessment of public opinion to assist in planning voter education efforts there. In order to get an initial impression of what typical Afghan voters think about their country, the elections, gender and democracy, we conducted 32 in-depth interviews around Afghanistan with citizens 18 or older from November 15-21, 2003. Interviews were held with men and women of all levels of education, occupations, and ethnic backgrounds, in both rural and urban areas in each of the eight regions into which the country was divided for the *Loya Jirga* elections.[1] They were conducted using a structured discussion guide with open-ended questions.[2] This report presents the findings of this initial phase of qualitative research. This study will be followed by a nationwide poll to provide quantitative data concerning voter education messages, target groups, and media, whose results TAF plans to release in May or June 2004.

The aim of this qualitative study was to obtain a broad sampling of the views of ordinary Afghan citizens on issues related to the coming elections and possible voter education campaigns. Half the interviewees were men and half were women; half live in cities or towns and half in rural areas. Half of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 34, 13 between 35 and 49, and 3 were over 50. Half the interviewees had incomplete or no primary schooling, one-fourth had completed primary school, and one-fourth had completed secondary education. We spoke with members of Afghanistan's largest ethnic groups,

[1] A full description of our methodology is to be found in Appendix 1.
[2] The discussion guide can be found in Appendix 2.

including 14 Pashtuns, 10 Tadjiks, 4 Hazaras, 2 Turkomen, and 2 Uzbeks. While this set of interviews provides a broad representation of geographic regions, locales, ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds, it is not intended to be proportionally representative of Afghanistan. Consequently, our results cannot be statistically projected to the entire Afghan population. Such a statistically representative sample will be the goal of our forthcoming national poll. The objective of this research is simply to elaborate the range of views and mental models on election-related issues that exist among typical Afghans, and to lay the groundwork for the next phase; a quantitative survey of 800 Afghans, which will explore, in greater depth, the issues and areas of concern raised by Afghans in the first survey.

While we cannot draw any sweeping conclusions about a country as vast and diverse as Afghanistan from 32 interviews, it is one of the first surveys to gather the political views of a wide range of people – men and women, urban and rural, educated and illiterate – in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the myriad problems facing Afghans in the post-Taliban era – a shattered infrastructure, physical insecurity, lack of health care and educational facilities and little opportunity for economic growth – the Afghans we interviewed are hopeful about the elections, and are eager to exercise their civic right to vote. But there is a substantial need for education about the electoral process, voter safeguards, women's participation, and democratic values to ensure a fair election in which all can vote. Our research shows the important contributions that effective voter education programs can make to the forthcoming Afghan elections.

The National Mood

- While most Afghans we interviewed are keenly aware of the country's problems and failures, they feel optimistic about the direction in which the country is going, thanks to the onset of peace and the beginning of reconstruction. Discontent reflects a desire for more progress and foreign aid, not less.

- Respondents noted security and the economy most frequently as the country's biggest problems. At the local level, however, the need for schools, roads and health care loom as large as security.

- Security problems – both criminal and political violence – are principally blamed on warlords by our interviewees, whom many accuse of monopolizing local power.

- The economic picture varies regionally: residents of most areas we surveyed report few clear gains since 2001, but those reporting calmer conditions say prosperity has grown over that time.

- Members of the public with whom we spoke are divided about the performance of Afghanistan's Transitional Government, but President Hamid Karzai enjoys broad popularity among them.

- The Taliban is very unpopular among respondents throughout Afghanistan, as is its leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar. From our interviews, there is no evidence that dissatisfaction with the Transitional Government has translated into support for the Taliban's return.

- Foreigners working in Afghanistan are mostly well liked, though resented by some with whom we spoke. The United Nations enjoys high prestige.

Attitudes towards the Elections

- Most Afghans interviewed are aware of upcoming national elections and have high hopes for them – if the vote is free and fair.

- There is concern among our respondents that the elections may not be free and fair, chiefly because militia commanders and their followers may resort to force, bribery, or fraud.

- When asked about the most important elements of free and fair elections, the two things our respondents mentioned most often were a process without coercion and the universal participation.

- Most Afghans interviewed think that their leaders should be elected, as well as honest, national-minded, and effective, and that such qualifications count far more than does past involvement in *Jihad*. Many also long for effective mechanisms to hold their leaders accountable.

- Almost all the Afghans we interviewed intend to vote in the elections, although several said they fear they will not be allowed to do so.

Voter Education Needs

- The interviews suggested that voter education programs will be vital for the successful conduct of the elections. Most respondents know little about the details of how elections will be conducted, and some think they will resemble the *Loya Jirga* selection process.

- In addition to the basic mechanics of elections, voter education is needed to respond to concerns among our interviewees about fairness (i.e. intimidation, vote buying, and cheating at the polls). Such programs should stress ballot secrecy, discourage vote selling, and explain election monitoring.

Gender and Democracy

- Our interviewees identified two key problems facing Afghan women: lack of rights and education. Many also felt women have no voice in Afghan society.

- Most respondents – both women and men – said that women should ask their husbands' permission to vote. Many also expect that some women will not be allowed to vote by their husbands, particularly in rural areas.

- When presented with arguments in support of women voting, including one based on the new Constitution's guarantee of equal rights for men and women, many men responded favorably.

- Most of the men and many of the women interviewed felt that women should consult their husbands regarding their voting choice.

- Most of the Afghans interviewed accept the constitutional provision reserving a certain number of seats in the new parliament for women.

Civic Education Needs

- 'Democracy' has positive associations for most Afghans surveyed, including freedom, rights, popular government, and peace, but few associate it with elections or women's rights. They also want democracy to be consistent with Islam and most believe that the two do not conflict.

- Respondents are quite supportive of the basic democratic principles of equal rights, peaceful opposition, and the separation of political and religious leadership. However, they split on the utility of political parties -- reflecting the divisive role the parties played in the past – and on the complex issue of majority rule versus compromise with minorities.

- Most Afghans we interviewed feel free to express their political views publicly; those who do not tend to blame local warlords. Interviewees differ by gender and class on whether they feel that they can influence decision-making in their areas, with women and the poor feeling less influential.

Information Sources

- Radio – particularly BBC and VOA -- reaches almost all our respondents, giving radio stations, including foreign ones, a key role in Afghanistan. Television reaches many of the city dwellers in our study.

- According to our respondents, radio, posters, public meetings, TV and videos are the preferred media for voter education information. Village chiefs, religious leaders, and high school teachers are the preferred sources of information at the local level.

- Both men and women interviewed strongly support voter education for women. Clinics and girls' schools appear to be the most widely accepted sites, and house meetings with women neighbors may be possible in some areas.

THE NATIONAL MOOD: NORMALIZATION BREEDS OPTIMISM, DESPITE PROBLEMS & DISAPPOINTMENTS

Since 2001, the onset of normality after three decades of conflict has given the Afghans we interviewed a sense of hope about their country. They are under no illusions about the severity of the problems that Afghanistan faces and they are mixed in their opinions of the Transitional Government. But most are unequivocal in their support for President Karzai and the United Nations-led reconstruction effort, and in their hostility to Mullah Omar and the Taliban. Interviewees expressed a desire for more rapid reconstruction, not for the return of conflict or religious rule.

State of the country

Most of the people we interviewed say that Afghanistan is headed in the right direction, citing the end of warfare, the start of rebuilding, and the movement towards democracy, all of which have occurred in the two years since the fall of the fundamentalist Taliban regime.

- "Here there is no fighting and everything is going in the right direction" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).
- "Yes, it is going in the right direction. All the tribes have participation, the clashes are finished, and Afghanistan has been formally recognized" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).
- "In the right direction, [because] there is peace, consolation, and security in our area" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara man, 32).
- "I think it is moving towards the right direction. The reconstruction work has started, the weapons are being collected, people are interested in work, and inter-provincial travelling has started" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).
- "We said from the beginning after the destruction of the Taliban that Afghanistan would come to the right direction. People like democracy, the independence of media and political parties, and we see a bright future for our country" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).

Besides the maintenance of peace, the specific improvements cited most often by respondents are the re-opening of schools, especially girls' schools, and the return of women to the workplace. Road reconstruction, greater freedom, the approach of elections, and refugee resettlement were also mentioned. When asked if anything had worsened since the Taliban fell, most replied, "No."

The only regions where respondents tended to doubt where Afghanistan is headed were around Kabul, with its more sophisticated, politicized population, and Jalalabad, in the troubled Pakistani border area. However, in both these areas, complaints were of insufficient progress and aid, not an excess of Western influence.

- "In these two years no changes have occurred in the situation of Afghanistan" (Jalalabad city, Pashtun man, 27).
- "The doors of schools are open but the offices are not active. Hundreds of children go to the schools but there are no teachers to teach them" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).
- "Everything is the same, things have neither become worse nor improved. The country is still destroyed as before. Nothing is done for the poor and needy" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).

Thus, the discontent reported by Afghans we interviewed reflects an unmet desire for rebuilding efforts, not a rejection of them. All respondents, regardless of their satisfaction with progress since the end of Taliban rule, use the same yardstick to measure Afghanistan's progress: the restoration of normal life and basic services. All of those with whom we spoke want the same things: more progress and help from the world, not isolation and a return to the past.

Afghanistan's major problems

It will come as no surprise that most of those whom we interviewed see security as Afghanistan's principal problem, but the economy is also a major concern. "Warlords" who helped the U.S. topple the Taliban subsequently returned to power in many areas of the country. These militia commanders, who style themselves as *mujahedeen* (holy warriors), were involved in fourteen years of bitter struggle (*jihad,* or holy war) against the Soviet invaders and the communist regime they supported, then fought a destructive civil war amongst themselves from 1992-1995. Since the Taliban's fall, the commanders have regained the reputation gained in those years for violent feuds, criminal activity, corruption, and suppression of dissent, while efforts to disarm them are only beginning. For the respondents that cited security as the country's key problem, the major concern was violence associated with the warlords, not the reappearance of Taliban attacks in the south and east.

- "In my view the biggest problem is the insecurity. We are still facing problems with the warlords" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun male, 38).
- "Commanders and warlords are in power, and the people are afraid of them" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).
- "The biggest problem of Afghanistan is the existence of weapons in the country. The [militia] weapons are not collected yet; people are living under threats" (Herat Province, rural woman, 33).

Security is not the only issue on the minds of members of the public whom we interviewed; so is Afghanistan's war-devastated economy. "The biggest problems are unemployment and insecurity in the area" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Uzbek woman, 35). The problems of insecurity and the economy are often seen as linked. "One problem is to disarm [militias], and the other is reconstruction, which are dependent on each other. The reconstruction cannot take place because the people are not disarmed" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 35). Together,

problems with security and the economy come up far more often in our interviews than other national-level concerns, including education, governance, roads, electricity and health care.

At the local level, people's desire for basic necessities such as schools, roads, and health care facilities rank alongside the expressed need for security. The Afghans with whom we spoke stress the importance of more schools, especially for girls; rebuilt roads; and clinics and hospitals for their communities at least as often as they mention security problems.

- "The government should establish schools, roads, hospitals, and provide basic needs to the people" (Kunduz province, rural Turkoman man, 33).
- "We want the government to build for us schools, roads, and hospitals" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).
- "The main problem was security, which is somewhat improved now. Right now there are many construction problems, roads are damaged, these need to be reconstructed. Hospitals and schools should be rehabilitated, and some work for economic development should also take place" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

After these concerns come a second tier of local issues, including the provision of electricity, water, and stimulation of economic and agricultural development.

Security and Power

Ordinary Afghans we interviewed were quite explicit in linking crime and political violence in their regions to local warlords and their associates. Interviewees in the Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar regions complained that people linked to militia commanders are involved in crime.

- "The responsibility of commanders is keeping peace in the area, but they don't keep it and disturb the security instead. They want to get something for their own personal pockets. If someone is killed, they are killed by a weapon and the

weapons are with them, nobody else has them" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22).

- "The security in the area is not enough and people are living in fear. Houses are robbed, people are tortured and kidnapped without any reason. These problems exist due to the commanders. Every commander is king of his area (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).
- "[Security] is not satisfactory; there are thefts and motorcycles are taken by force from people. Most of the problems are crime, because it is the warlords who steal. They also do not accept the law; they violate the rights of the people, rob the banks, and get money from the people by different means" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).

In Mazar and Herat, both political clashes and crime associated with the followers of the regions' warlords cause concern among our respondents.

- "[Security is] very bad, there is no law. It is political violence because of the major local commanders fighting and crime because everyone who has power commits treason. Local commanders are involved in criminal activities, display cruelty, and fight" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).[3]
- "Security problems involve both crime and political violence. Local commanders in our area fight with each other for control and power. This makes the area insecure" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).

In contrast, complaints about security and warlords were less common among those residents of the Kunduz, Gardez, and Bamiyan regions whom we interviewed.

While they think commanders are sources of insecurity, most Afghans we interviewed also say the commanders' power and weapons make them the most influential figures in their areas.

- "The organizations that had a hand in the clashes of the last 25 years [have the most influence in our community.] Everyone in them wants to elevate himself to political power" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).
- "We know that warlords and members of certain organizations have influence over the people" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).
- "The groups of the two local commanders have the most influence in the minds of the people" (Mazar province, rural Turkoman man, 32).

[3] Another Mazar resident noted that the situation there has improved since a new police chief and force were sent from Kabul.

It was mainly in the cities that other influential elites were mentioned, chiefly religious scholars, intellectuals, and the literate, while tribal elders were said to matter in some urban and rural areas. Bamiyan was the sole region where those groups and government officials, rather than commanders, were said to be the predominant influences. Unstable rural Paktia was the only area where those associated with the Taliban were said to be influential, along with *mujahedeen*, scholars and elders. Thus, while the literati and elders retain some sway, in much of Afghanistan, most citizens we spoke with think that those with guns are the most influential.

Economic developments

Among the Afghans with whom we spoke, views of Afghanistan's economy over the past two years were mixed, with few net gains or losses.

- "The people who were rich are still rich and the poor people are still poor" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "The condition of the workers has become better, meanwhile the condition of villagers has become worse" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "Some have become wealthier, and some of them are still poor" (Kandahar province, rural Tadjik man, 44).

Some of those Afghans interviewed, particularly those educated public sector workers, expressed envy of relatively high NGO salaries. Some respondents accused commanders of using their power to accumulate wealth. These perceptions – of little increase in prosperity, as well as higher salaries of NGO employees and growing wealth of commanders – were heard most frequent in the parts of the country where interviewees also complained most often about security.

The economic perspectives among respondents who complained less about security in their regions (those in Bamiyan, Kunduz, and Gardez) are more positive.

- "In these two years people have become richer in all parts of Bamiyan, for example Panjal and Waras and Kabu, and the people of these areas can survive securely and safely" (Bamiyan city, Hazara man, 26).
- "I think the economic situation of the people is good and it's getting better than in the past" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man, 54).
- "Some people who were really needy and could not find bread for themselves have now found work for themselves in the districts and provinces in road construction or some NGOs" (Paktia province, Pashtun man, 50).

For the most part, economic improvements are attributed to growth in agricultural production, food availability, job opportunities, the private sector and foreign assistance. The fact that more economic progress was reported by those who worried less about security augurs well for Afghanistan: it suggests that if greater stability can be achieved, wider prosperity may follow.

The Transitional Government and President Karzai

Our interviews revealed considerable differences among the respondents regarding the Transitional Government, with many harshly critical and others supportive. The most frequent criticism was that the transitional government has not done enough reconstruction; and a related critique is that the center is weak, the warlords strong, and local officials ineffective and nepotistic.

- "So far, they have not paid any attention to our needs. There is no school, no health care center, no water, and no electricity. The streets were damaged during the war and still not rebuilt" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).
- "The government talks a lot, but does not do what it says. Administration is so very weak and mismanaged in the provinces and districts. In many districts one person is the governor and all his relatives and friends are around him in other positions. The same situation is going on in the Herat province and the other provinces. People do not obey the government in districts and provinces. The

government cannot extend its control all over the country." (Herat province, rural Pashtun man, 55).

- "They didn't do anything for the people of Afghanistan yet, because power is still with the gunmen and government cannot do anything" (Jalalabad city, Pashtun man, 27).

Those who expressed satisfaction with the government's work praised it for initiating reconstruction, economic recovery, and democracy.

- "Afghanistan's transitional government established schools and also some roads are being reconstructed" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).
- "I think it is a good government and works effectively. The people are busy in their work, the security is good, it is said electricity will be provided to the people, people are living in prosperity, the government assists the people, the roads are reconstructed, and the people are happy" (Herat province, rural Tadjik woman, 33).
- "I think it is going positively, because it is going towards democracy and the approval of the constitution" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).

The men we spoke with were more critical of the Transitional Government, as were city dwellers and Tadjiks, while the women, rural residents, and Pashtuns surveyed tended to view it positively. There were also regional differences. Interviewees in two of the regions reporting greater prosperity, Bamiyan and Gardez, reported more positive attitudes towards the government; those in the two provinces where interviewees were dissatisfied with the country's direction, Kabul and Jalalabad, expressed hostility, and those in the remaining provinces were mixed in their views.

While they are of mixed opinions about the Transitional Government, the Afghans we spoke with feel positive about President Hamid Karzai. The discontent among many of them with the transitional government has not translated into opposition to Karzai, and most credit him for working hard and building peace.

- "Karzai made a lot of efforts to bring peace and prosperity in the country and he is a really hard-working man" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50).

- "Karzai revived the expectations of people. Karzai turned the country away from disaster and laid the basis for peace" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "He is a good, active, and hard-working person. His commands are not properly followed in the country, but it is not his fault. Anyhow the central government operates well enough" (Kunduz province, rural Turkoman man, 33).
- "He always tries to work hard for the people and the nation. He brought peace and security" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 37).

The few Afghans we spoke with who were hostile to Karzai criticized him as a "puppet of Westerners" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37), and said he "couldn't stop the people with weapons" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27). But he seems to be popular among all social groups, including women and men, urban and rural dwellers, and Pashtuns and Tadjiks. Even those who were critical of the Transitional Government were mostly positive towards Karzai. However, support for Karzai does seem to be influenced by regional dynamics: his support was weakest among respondents in Kabul and Jalalabad, the areas critical of the country's direction, and among respondents in conflict-ridden Mazar-I-Sharif, where Karzai's government has had particular difficulty asserting its authority. Nonetheless, among the people interviewed, our findings suggest that Karzai has established a solid base of support in the country, one considerably wider than that of the Transitional Government he leads.

Mullah Omar and the Taliban

Almost all of the Afghans we interviewed are strongly opposed to Mullah Omar and the Taliban, who remain closely identified in the public mind. They are most often associated with violence, religious intolerance, and oppression, including violations of women's rights, while they were in power from 1995 to 2001.

- Omar: "A calamity, came and went," Taliban: "didn't do anything good, killed people and left" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).
- Omar: "Did what he wanted, didn't pay attention to other people's ideas". Taliban: "[Omar's] military force. Children, old people, youth and women were really tortured by them in the name of religion." (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).
- Omar: "Atrocities and oppression" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).
- Omar: "Massacred cruelly, didn't let women participate in society, imprisoned them in their houses" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).
- Taliban: "Internal and external terror" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).
- Omar: "Very bad, killing and atrocities, there was no period ever like that in Afghanistan's history" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).

Omar and the Taliban are also associated with backwardness and impoverishment.

- "Omar established a kind of violent government, like in the Middle Ages. Unemployment increased, artists and intellectuals fled the country. The people of Afghanistan did not agree with Mullah Omar's rule" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).
- Taliban: "Not good, poverty, unemployment, restrictions" (Kunduz city, Uzbek woman, 19).
- Omar: "Disorder and fear." Taliban: "Illiteracy and idleness" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).

Because his face was never shown in public, our respondents see Mullah Omar as a dark and mysterious figure. Some also consider him and the Taliban puppets of foreigners, referring either to Pakistan, which supported the Taliban while they were in power, or the Arabs of the Al Qaeda terrorist organization, the Taliban's close allies. The breadth and intensity of hostility to Mullah Omar and the Taliban among Afghans with whom we spoke, regardless of region or ethnicity, is impressive. A 40-year-old Tadjik woman in Kandahar city summed up the prevailing view: "I'm unhappy when I hear [Mullah Omar's] name. The people of Afghanistan hate the Taliban."

There were only a few exceptions to this view in our research, and no signs of a resurgence of support for the Taliban. The few mildly favorable comments regarding the Taliban

stressed the maintenance of order under fundamentalist rule, compared to the rule of warlords before and after, and emphasized that the Taliban, too, forms part of the nation.

- "Good, security was satisfactory, there was no theft and robbery, we were relaxed" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).
- "They are also part of this country and should be given a chance" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

However, what is most interesting about the handful of such comments is that almost all of the Afghans who made them also had positive things to say about President Karzai. On the other hand, those who were harshly critical of Karzai, the Transitional Government, or local warlords spoke little good and much ill of the Taliban and Omar. The nostalgia for the Taliban that we occasionally heard is not necessarily associated with hostility to the current regime, while the significant dissatisfaction with Afghanistan's present rulers has not weakened opposition to the fundamentalists. Indeed, no one we spoke with suggested that the Taliban were regaining popularity in their region or that they wanted the Taliban back in power.

Foreign aid workers and the United Nations

Most participants in the study had a positive view of foreign aid workers; the major reaction to the foreign aid community was appreciation for their contribution to services and reconstruction. They are also praised for working honestly and according to the rules.

- "They provide services to the people, also road construction" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara man, 32).
- "Foreigners working in Afghanistan have cooperated much. They have established schools and assisted in reconstruction" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55)
- "Foreign workers bring construction and orderly rules" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).

- "Foreigners are better than our own countrymen because there is no trust in Afghans" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).

However, some Afghans we surveyed, mostly in the towns, suspect that foreign aid workers are more committed to their own interests than those of Afghanistan.

- "Half the money goes into their pockets" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).
- "Large amounts of money coming to aid Afghanistan is spent for their luxury" (Herat city, Pashtun woman, 37).

Nonetheless, the prevalent attitude towards aid workers was favorable, and even their critics generally wanted more help from foreigners, not less.

Most Afghans with whom we spoke view the UN favorably, and are aware of its contributions to the peace process and to the country's development.

- "Their cooperation is highly appreciated, we are pleased with the UN" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).
- "It has done a lot of services for Afghans. They got the leaders and warlords together in Bonn, that's why I'm happy with the UN" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).
- "It is an independent international organization, they work for humanitarian causes. It has done so much assistance work for us. It even makes sacrifices. They opposition attacks them and they get killed" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "It is not free of problems, but it has done big services to us. It tries to bring peace and security in Afghanistan and to solve economic problems" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).

Grumbles about the UN resembled those concerning foreign aid workers, but were less frequent and milder. In general, however, Afghans we spoke with hold the United Nations in high regard.

In sum, the mood among Afghans we interviewed is generally hopeful. They know that Afghanistan has serious problems with warlords and poverty, and that their own

communities need schools, clinics and roads. Their opinions regarding the Transitional Government are divided between those who see it as a good beginning, and those disappointed it has not gone further in establishing central authority and implementing reconstruction. But all wish the country to advance in the same direction – towards development and peace – and the majority support Hamid Karzai and oppose the Taliban. Most have a positive opinion of international assistance and want more of it. The fragile return to normality Afghans have witnessed in the past two years has marked the return of hope in their lives: a hope for progress that few wish to abandon.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS ELECTIONS: A POWERFUL WISH TO VOTE

Our interviewees know that elections are scheduled, and have expectations for a free and fair vote, including a more responsive government and a more prosperous country. Ironically, their experience of arbitrary power has left them with a clear understanding of the obstacles to a free and fair election, including force, bribery, and fraud. But they believe strongly that leaders should win legitimacy through universal suffrage, competency, and accountability rather than on the basis of support from notables or records as *Mujahedeen*. Above all, the citizens we spoke with want to vote, although some women fear they will not be allowed to do so.

Reactions to elections

Most members of the public whom we interviewed know that elections are planned in which all Afghans aged 18 and older will be able to vote, and they are happy about this, provided that the election is fair. The prospect of voting for their leaders for the first time clearly delights them – though many also spontaneously emphasize the need for a fair, peaceful vote.

- "We feel very good about it, I wish all Afghans would participate" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33).
- "A fair election should be held, everybody wants it to happen" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).
- "It's very good, everyone can be a candidate or vote" (Bamiyan city, Hazara man, 26).
- "I feel good if it is fair. A president will be selected, security increased, democracy followed" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).
- "It is the natural right of the people. An election and polling without violence is vital to determine the fate of the nation" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man, 54).

Even at this early stage, the Afghans we surveyed are looking forward to the coming elections.

The results our interviewees most hope for after the elections included a more responsive government, and peace and prosperity. Our respondents expect that the elections will bring them more competent leaders and a government that takes their opinions into account.

- "[What will be good] is the election of a president capable of the post, who understands the problems of Afghans and works for them" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).
- "Elections will bring a government according to the people's desires" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22).

There was also the hope that the new government will help Afghanistan build peace and prosperity.

- "It is good we are getting to have elections, so a good president is elected. I will be happy to have a good administration, which will bring peace and prosperity" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 37).
- "When the election has taken place, the president will change economic and social conditions" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37).

Many of the Afghans interviewed expressed an expectation that the power of the warlords will diminish following the elections. "Now gunmen occupy posts. After the election it won't be like this" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man 54). Another anticipated result was an increased opportunity for women to participate in public life. "The big change it will bring is that women will take part and perform duties in society" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24). Thus, there is great hope among participants in our survey that elections will improve both their government and their daily lives.

Will the elections be free and fair?

Just as they are concerned about the power of local warlords today, our interviewees worry that the warlords may try to influence the elections if not disarmed beforehand.

- "If the arms are not collected, the warlords are still in power, if there is still the rule of force, then the elections will not be democratic, popular, or representative" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).
- "We are not sure [if the election will be free and fair], since armed men and commanders are everywhere." (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).
- "The election will take place, but a lot of problems will be created – intimidation, cheating, and deaths. I hope the elections will take place successfully even if there are problems. The elections won't be free and fair, because our community is not a democratic one" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

Respondents mentioned several specific concerns about election fairness, most involving fears of potential improprieties by militia commanders and local power holders.

- *Intimidation:* "People will be threatened every day by powerful people with cars with tinted windows. The gunmen are intimidating the people, who are afraid (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36). "Eight or nine warlords who got into power in the last few years [will intimidate]" Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34.

- *Vote buying:* "I worry about warlords bribing people" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22). "Influential people can get votes with money" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 37).

- *Cheating in counting:* "If election workers agree or disagree with organizations and groups, there will be cheating in counting votes" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25). "If election officials are bandits, like the people who looted Afghanistan, then it is easy to understand cheating will take place" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

One interviewee suggested that the involvement of the international community will help to keep the elections fair. "It will be free and fair, because it will be accomplished with the cooperation of the United Nations and foreign countries" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).

Understandings of free and fair elections

The members of the Afghan public with whom we spoke stress that freedom from force, fraud, or bribery are defining features of a fair election, reflecting their experience of rule by the gun over decades.

- "Fair elections are good. If people vote for their ideal leaders without pressure, it will be good" (Kunduz province, rural Turkoman man, 33).
- "Fair elections mean a country with stability and peace, no force and guns, no vote selling, and a justly run election. Otherwise there are no free elections" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).

They also strongly emphasize universal suffrage as part of free elections. There was unanimous support for the principle that all Afghans should be able to vote and universal rejection of the view that only a few influential people should make the decision.

- "It would be best to have general elections. If they are elected only by influential people, the government will just be for them" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun male, 38).
- "The entire nation should vote. If only influential people vote, the result will be clashes or disturbances" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

Some women noted that a fair election must include voters of both sexes as well: "participation of men and women" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24). In sum, despite – or perhaps because of – living under a succession of undemocratic regimes, the Afghans we interviewed grasp the basic notions of a fair election. They show no signs of wishing to defer to influential local leaders and want a chance to choose their own leaders.

Leadership and Accountability

Beyond demanding directly elected leaders, Afghans interviewed have a clear idea of the kind of leaders they seek. The most basic requirements are obvious: Afghans and Muslims.

Beyond this, they want leaders who are well-educated and caring, who are not corrupt and do not use violence, who promote the interests of the entire nation rather than one section, and who get results. These qualities are mentioned again and again by our respondents when they are asked what qualities mark a good leader.

- "Well qualified, able to work, no political violence, not fanatic, not too old" (Kunduz province, rural Turkoman man, 33).
- "Honesty, morals, good character, good politics, historical knowledge" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).
- "Cares for the people and the nation, promotes jobs, doesn't discriminate" (Bamiyan city, Hazara man, 26).
- "Righteous, merciful, a servant to the country, bringing prosperity and progress" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33).
- "A good leader works for the people and the country and serves Islam. He is educated and serves justice. He shouldn't be just anybody, we've had a taste of that" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

Indeed, as our interviewees describe the qualities they want in their leaders, they seem to be listing reverse or negative images of those who have governed them in the past.

Reflecting their demanding standards for leadership, the Afghans with whom we spoke strongly reject the commanders' claims to political authority on the basis of their role as *Mujahedeen* in the *jihad* era, preferring instead officials who can help them. When asked whether *Mujahedeen* deserved political office for saving the country or whether such offices should go to good leaders who can provide services, our respondents almost unanimously chose the latter.

- "I know the *Mujahedeen* did *Jihad*, but most of them are illiterate. High posts should be given to the well qualified, to doctors and engineers" (Kandahar city, Tadjik woman, 40).
- "It's clear the *Mujahedeen* don't have the ability to run a government. They don't know the rules and regulations of administration" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37).
- "The *Mujahedeen* liberated the country and faced a lot of problems, but they are not able to work well. Most are illiterate people who lived in the mountains, they

can't do office work. Therefore capable individuals should get those jobs" (Bamiyan city, Hazara man, 26).
- "The *Mujahedeen* fulfilled their responsibility and saved the country. But now high positions should go to those with competency in administration. Work for the capable is more important" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).
- "It's true that *Mujahedeen* removed the previous government and got independence, but it's important now to have qualified, intellectual people in government, because ignorant warlords can't do the job properly" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).

Only one of our respondents accepted that, by right, *Mujahedeen* should be entitled to political office. For most of our Afghans respondents however, the country's unhappy experience under the dominance of commanders and warlords during the civil war, and since the fall of the Taliban, has completely discredited the claims of *Mujahedeen* to political authority.

In keeping with the intensity with which they desire effective governance, the Afghans with whom we spoke were very interested in establishing mechanisms to hold government officials accountable for their performance. They were strongly in favor of passing a law to remove officials who ignored public criticism.

- "Such leaders should be removed from their posts and replaced by people who show justice and have ability and competence" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).
- "If government works for their own benefit, if they don't listen to the people, then the state and law should terminate them from power" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).
- "Every leader must listen to criticism. Every country should have a law to terminate the positions those who do not" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 27).

After decades of unresponsive and ineffective rulers, most of the respondents with whom we spoke want to find ways to keep their government honest and responsive.

Electoral participation

Those surveyed expressed a strong desire to vote in the upcoming election. Reasons people gave for wanting to vote include being able to choose their leaders, exercise their rights, voice their opinions, and help their country.

- "Yes, I will vote, I want a leader of my choice, he must be just" (Balkh province, rural Tadjik woman, 35).
- "Why not? I am an Afghan and I have the right to vote" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "Yes, I will vote, I'm a member of society, I want to express my views" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 34).
- "Yes, the election is a great fortune that the people of Afghanistan will enjoy, I will definitely vote" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).

While our female respondents were excited about the opportunity to register, some of those interviewed doubted they would be permitted to vote:

- "No, I will not vote, women have not been given this right" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "We cannot go out from our house and our men don't permit us to vote" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).
- "No, I have no permission to vote" (Kunduz city, Uzbek woman, 19).
- "There may be an opportunity for women in the city to vote, but in the rural areas, where basic rights are not given to women, how will we get the opportunity? (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).

What is particularly striking about these responses is that they do not come from one particular region or ethnic group. They suggest that some women might not vote in the coming election, not because they do not wish to, but because they fear they will not be allowed to. The challenge is to ensure that women are allowed to vote.

VOTER EDUCATION NEEDS: ELECTION PROCESSES, BALLOT SECRECY, VOTE SELLING, AND ELECTION MONITORING

Voter education needs for the first Afghan elections will be considerable. As first-time voters, Afghans are anxious to know details of the electoral process. Most do not have clear ideas about how the coming elections will work. Some wonder if they will be similar to the caucuses that elected the *Loya Jirga*. They also need to have their fears about the fairness of the vote assuaged. The doubts about free and fair elections that our respondents indicated are potentially serious barriers to participation. Voter education programs will need to respond to all these concerns.

Knowledge of Electoral Processes

Afghans have never experienced a free election and our respondents recognize that they do not know the mechanics of how one would work. When asked what they imagined the voting process would be, they quite openly admit to their puzzlement.

- "We cannot say how it will be because after 25 years of war we do not have a positive idea about it" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).
- "I do not know what elections are. What is it?" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "The process of elections wasn't described for voters in rural areas" (Herat province, rural Turkoman man, 55).
- "I can't say anything about it, I don't know" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

We will explore Afghans' knowledge of the electoral process in more detail in the quantitative research. However, our qualitative work suggests a clear need to inform people about the basic workings of the electoral process.

The members of the public we interviewed want information on how the election process will work, whether they can trust it to be fair, and how the new government will be formed.

- "I want to know how the election will be run. Also will the election be fair, including whether there will be cheating in the count and fair results" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).
- "I don't know about all these things. I want to know about the election process" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).
- "People should know about the election process, and how the government is established. Will men and women both participate? How many rights do women have?" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).

Some respondents tended to confuse the election with the open caucuses used to select delegates to the *Loya Jirga*, their only recent experience of elections. "There hasn't been enough information given about the elections and people still don't know whether they will be secretly or in open" (Herat province, rural Turkoman man, 55). Others stressed the importance of an effective voter education campaign if the election is to create a legitimate government. "If the whole nation is informed, there will be positive consequences [to the election.] If not, if half the community is not informed, this will be in doubt. If they are not informed, who will accept it?" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).

Responses to Election Concerns

Our findings illustrate how voter education might help to lessen anxieties about problems, such as intimidation, vote buying and fraud, that could prevent free and fair balloting. Our

interviewees need to gain confidence in ballot secrecy to defuse intimidation. In order to reduce vote buying, they should be helped to understand that they need not vote for those who offer bribes. And, if they are to accept the election results, they must have an assurance that trustworthy monitors will keep the voting process under surveillance.

Ballot secrecy: Instilling a strong belief in ballot secrecy is an effective way to inoculate citizens against electoral intimidation. In its most overt form, intimidation involves demands that the voters avow their choices and agree to support the side of those who threaten them. "People might be intimidated. They would be asked who they were voting for and forced to change by powerful people" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22). If voters are certain their vote is secret, then they can offer whatever obeisance is required publicly, knowing that they can cast ballots as they wish in the privacy of the voting place. Such a belief would also give them greater confidence to vote their minds and defy less direct threats.

Unfortunately, many Afghans we interviewed are not sure about the secrecy of their votes in the coming elections. They think, in one way or another, that others will be able to find out how they voted even if they do not tell them. In some cases this is due to procedural confusion.

- "I think somebody will be informed, we vote visibly, not secretly [in the *Loya Jirga* elections]" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20)
- "Powerful people can find out. They can break the [ballot] box and see for whom someone voted. People will see into which box I dropped my vote"(Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 36).

In others, it seems to reflect a lack of confidence in officials, or fear that acquaintances will reveal their votes.

- "This depends on the person with the ballot box. If he is affiliated to a party he will tell others"(Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).
- "Some people who know us may be able to see other names on the lists and become aware of this" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

Fortunately, many of our respondents did not share these fears and believe their votes are secret.

Discouraging vote selling: Vote buying in the coming elections worries many Afghans with whom we spoke, either because they have witnessed it while refugees in Pakistan or locally in *Loya Jirga* voting.

- "We saw in Pakistan votes sold for money there. Here it also happened the last time, people sold their votes for money" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 36).
- "Yes, it already happened in our country. Last year it happened [in the *Loya Jirga* vote,] this year it will too" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

While vote buying may be less likely in the presidential election (since the number of votes required to affect the outcome would be far greater than with the small local electorates involved in the *Loya Jirga* voting), it remains a concern for voter education. The habit may be ingrained enough to continue even in the presidential vote, while in the parliamentary elections that will follow (and in any subsequent local government elections) the smaller number of voters involved will make vote buying more tempting.

Afghans need to understand that even if someone from a party gives them money or gifts, they have no obligation to vote for that party. If there is no belief that they have to keep their part of the bargain, the deal becomes invalid, and the incentive for vote buying declines as well. In our subsequent quantitative research, we will explore how many and which voters think they have an obligation to vote for those who give them something. Already however,

it appears that, building on the notion of ballot secrecy, voter education needs to encourage citizens to think they do not have to reciprocate for party money or gifts, both to reduce the effects of attempts to buy votes as well as to discourage such efforts.

Election monitors to prevent fraud: The idea of election monitors at voting places provides powerful reassurance to Afghans that the election will be conducted fairly. Those we surveyed were unanimous in their positive reactions to monitors.

- "If a monitor is there, there will be no cheating" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Uzbek woman, 34).
- "It's a good thing, there won't be cheating, they will not steal votes" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22).
- "It is good if someone comes to check up on the process" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).

The desire for monitoring and the hope that it will help to keep elections clean are both very strong among the Afghans with whom we spoke.

However, there are some differences on whether election monitors should be foreigners or Afghans. Many of our respondents said they preferred foreign monitors as more trustworthy and knowledgeable about elections than Afghans.

- "Foreigners are better than Afghans, Afghans would give preference to their parties" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).
- "Foreigners are fine, they are better investigators than us. They will show small and big defects. For good elections, it would be better to conduct the election under foreign supervision" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

(Some participants specifically suggested that the monitoring should take place under the auspices of the UN and, given the organization's prestige in Afghanistan, some way to give foreign monitors a UN affiliation or logo may be useful.) Others preferred local monitors – but most of these said that monitors should be from other areas to avoid partisanship.

- "If the monitor is from another community, it will be better, we will be free from cheating" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Uzbek woman, 34).
- "If Afghan, they should be from another community, with no relation to an organization" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).

The mistrust of Afghan monitors among the Afghans with whom we spoke was striking. These findings imply that monitoring teams should be composed of both Afghan and international monitors. They also suggest that some of the Afghan monitors be rotated into other communities, at least for parliamentary and local elections where ties to a particular candidate might be especially strong for local monitors. If credible monitoring arrangements are established and voter educators effectively publicize them, our findings suggest that the public will have substantially greater confidence in the electoral process.

The agenda for voter education efforts around the coming Afghan elections is fairly clear on the basis of our interviews. Afghanistan has an electorate that has not voted before and needs to be introduced to the mechanics of the electoral process. At the same time, since its voters are savvy enough to understand the influences that could perturb the elections, voter education will need to respond to their concerns.

GENDER AND DEMOCRACY: TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN CAN VOTE, CONVINCE THE MEN

Gender is a topic on which Afghans have conflicting views, and this is particularly clear regarding gender and the vote. In an intensely male-dominated society, Afghan women have had few opportunities to express their opinions, and, during the six years of the Taliban's rule, girls were forbidden to attend school and women were not allowed to work outside the home. Among our respondents, both sexes say that women will have to obtain their husbands' permission to vote, and many think that at least some men in their areas will not grant it. Yet most respond positively to the new constitution's grant of equal rights to men and women, including the vote, and of reserving parliamentary seats for women. Afghans are starting to work through the tensions between their traditional attitudes and the demands of democracy regarding gender. For the upcoming election, voter education efforts are needed to persuade men to allow (and to permit women to demand) a vote for women.

Women's major problems

The lot of women in Afghanistan is a difficult one. Both men and women we interviewed recognize that women are not treated as equals, either at home or school. Criticism of the status of women in the home was quite sharp, ranging from complaints about unequal rights to allegations that women were unable to leave their houses.

- "Women have a lot of problems. It's still going on; they are victimized in many incidents. The rights of women are violated" (Herat province, Tadjik man, 55).
- "Poor women need their husband's permission to go out of their houses. The word 'husband' is the name of God" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).

The other common complaint concerned the lack of educational opportunities for females, even after the fall of the Taliban, who closed girls' schools.

- "Women have many problems. The rights promised by Islam are not given to them. They are subjugated by force and deprived of education" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).
- "I studied to class 7, but there are no facilities for more education. We need courses for illiterates and female schools" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).
- "First, women are facing the illiteracy problem, then, they have no freedom" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).
- "Women are illiterate, it would be good if schools for girls were established" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 33).

Other complaints, mentioned less often, included lack of health care, the denial of social and political rights, and forced marriages. There were some regional variations – complaints that woman could not leave their homes were most common in the Jalalabad and Gardez regions, while in Bamiyan, comments focused more on education. Nonetheless, the unequal status of women was an acknowledged reality around the country. The fact that most of the men interviewed, as well as all the women, recognized that women face difficulties may be the most hopeful sign in our results here. However, they also show that Afghan women face enormous problems at home, in school, and in other facets of life.

Adding to these burdens, Afghanistan's women have very few opportunities to make themselves heard. When we asked on which issues women's opinions were sought, the only one mentioned by a number of respondents was the marriage of their children.

- "During the engagement of their sons and daughters, not in other things" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).
- "Marriage. There are not many other cases where the man needs the wife's opinion" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

A few suggested that woman should be consulted on social and political issues. "Women should be asked their problems and demands as women," (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).

Most often, however, we were told that women are not consulted about anything.

- "Women's rights are completely violated in this area. If children are engaged, 10% ask her. For other reasons, they don't" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).
- "We are not asked for our ideas, it would be better if we were. Every problem is solved by men" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).
- "Nobody consults his wife. Only men make decisions. Women have lost value in this community, especially in the last 25 years of fighting" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).
- "Afghanistan is an Islamic country, women don't have authority. Our women have no problems, because they do what we [men] tell them. Women are weak minded. They cannot do anything on their own" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

Thus, although our female respondents are profoundly dissatisfied with their situation, most say that Afghan women are generally almost powerless to express their views.

Will women be permitted to vote?

Both the men and women interviewed generally agree that women ought to seek permission from their husbands in order to vote. Men think that this is correct because wives are not permitted to make decisions on their own; some justified this on Islamic grounds. While a few respondents said that wives should not have to ask their husband's approval to vote. However, the broad consensus was that women would need their spouse's permission to go to the polls.

- "The majority of women can't do anything without their husband's permission. It's a good thing if they get permission" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33).
- "Yes, it's an Islamic principle" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

Women tended to think it was the wiser and more realistic course, to avoid the conflict that would arise if wives sought to vote without asking beforehand.

- "Afghanistan has not advanced to the stage where women can be independent" (Kabul city, Pashtun woman, 35).

- "Because they can't go out without their husband's permission, they should get permission" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).

Many of the Afghans think some men will not permit their wives to vote, particularly in the rural parts of the country. Both women and men acknowledged this.

- "Our villagers don't let wives vote" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).
- "There are very hard restrictions in our area. Women can't see their parents without their husband's permission. How can they vote?" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "I think people in rural areas won't let women participate in the election" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).
- "I don't think women will participate in some areas. In Islam it is not allowed, so they can't" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50).
- "In our area, just the men will vote and the women won't be allowed to" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).
- "Most of them will, but some won't. It's just fanaticism, nothing else" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

In every region, most respondents thought at least some men would deny their wives a chance to vote, while some, particularly residents of rural areas, thought this would happen to most women in their areas.

Arguments in Favor of Women Voting

The widely-shared assumptions among both the women and men we interviewed is that a woman should seek her husband's permission to vote Following this logic, an effective strategy might be to find arguments that would convince men to let their wives vote. This was urged by one of our interviewees, a 37-year-old Hazara woman from Bamiyan city, who suggested that voter education should seek to encourage recalcitrant men to relent and let their wives go to the polls. "In some families, where husbands don't let their wives

participate in the elections, it should be urged through radio and workshops. This would be very good."

Our interviewees suggested four arguments that might be effective in terms of allowing women to vote.

1. *Women will vote in separate voting places, they will not vote with men.* This argument seems to reassure those for whom keeping women apart from and unseen by men outside their families is an important value. Many of the men in our study felt it would facilitate women's voting. "Yes, [they can vote] with separate elections for men. They shouldn't see women's faces" (Kabul city, rural Pashtun man, 22). ""Yes, it's good, because most families won't let women vote together with men in one place, and women's vote is very necessary for the election" "It's a good idea, but they will have to wear the veil when they vote" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).

2. *The new Constitution enshrines equal rights for men and women, including the right to vote.* An argument based on democratic notions of equal rights for all resonated surprisingly powerfully among the Afghan men. Some agreed outright: "I agree 100%, it should be like this" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38). It creates a tension for others between their democratic belief in equal rights with their Islamic belief in male supremacy, which they resolve by making elections a special case. "In the constitution it states that men and women have equal rights, but God in *Sharia* has not equaled them. If they have been given special rights in elections, we don't oppose this. Women have the right like men to vote" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, urban Pashtun man, 37).

3. *If women in your community don't vote, your community will lose half its votes and your candidate will lose the election.* This argument was a bit confusing to some, but those who understood it tended to agree. "I agree, they will really lose half their votes, if women don't vote, women should vote" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27). "In the areas where women don't vote, the number of votes will be reduced, and the candidate of their choice will lose. In every place women should be provided with a place to vote" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

4. *Men cannot vote for their wives – women must vote for themselves.* We found that several interviewees (men and women) incorrectly thought that husbands could vote on behalf of their wives. "[Women]can have their husbands vote on their behalf" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22). "If a wife tells her

> husband for whom she wants to vote, her husband can vote for that person on behalf of his wife" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

These four arguments appear to have some impact and might be considered for use in voter education. We intend to test their effectiveness in our forthcoming quantitative research. In addition, there are two other arguments we believe should be considered and tested.

- *Women are allowed to vote in Islamic democracies, such as Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia.* Recent research has shown that Afghans view Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia as Islamic democracies. Interestingly, the study also found that one of the reasons they were considered democratic was that they are thought to grant equal rights to women (at least compared to Afghanistan).[4] We should test whether this can be an effective argument for women's voting as well.

- *Islamic scholars have accepted that women have the right to vote.* Given the prevalence of women's suffrage in Muslim countries there are undoubtedly Islamic jurists who have ruled in favor of women's suffrage. While seeking details in research, we can see what the potential impact of such scholars would be in our forthcoming poll.

Women Making Their Own Choices

Many of the Afghans with whom we spoke felt that women should consult their husbands when making their voting decision, although some – mainly women – thought that women should make their own choices. Men who favored consultation tended to claim it was an Islamic view or that men know more about politics than women; some women, particularly rural and less educated ones, agreed that men were more knowledgeable.

- "If the husband advises, it's better, it's an Islamic principle" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).
- "If a woman is uneducated, she must take her husband's advice. They don't know for whom to vote" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

[4] "A Society in Transition, Focus Group Discussions in Afghanistan" Focus Group Report, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2003, p.18

- "A rural woman like me should do whatever her husband tells her" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).

Other women felt they should take their husband's advice on pragmatic grounds, to be able to vote. "It's better if men advise, otherwise women will not be able to participate" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).

In contrast, those who felt that women should make up their own minds said that women had the same right to do so as men. "Women should decide for themselves. Everyone should" (Kunduz city, Uzbek woman, 19).

It will be hard enough to ensure that all women will be able to vote freely, free from influence from their fathers and husbands. For this election, the best that can be done is to work to get women to the polls and ensure that they know that their ballots are secret, so that they can vote their minds even if they receive advice or directives from men.

Reserved Seats for Women

Interestingly, given the doubts about women voting, we found very broad support among both male and female respondents for the new constitution's provision of reserving seats for women in the parliament, as provided in the new Afghan constitution.

- "It is great to give seats to women. They should be capable and well qualified" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).
- "It would be a moment of honor if women had some seats in the parliament. It would be a good idea if the right is given to women" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33).
- "We have such persons among Afghan women who can perform. They can serve Afghan and other women" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara man, 32).
- "It's a great idea, it's their right" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

While a few individuals we interviewed opposed the idea of reserved seats, either because they thought women should win election to parliament in the same way as men, or because they thought women should not sit in parliament altogether. Most people we interviewed were comfortable with the idea of women in the Afghan parliament and pleased by the idea that seats would be set aside to ensure their place there.

The role of women in the upcoming election – as in Afghan society as whole – is problematic. In a country where women have historically had such little voice, particularly during the six year rule of the Taliban, it is not easy for them to begin to make their voices heard. The widespread assumptions among our respondents that men can decide whether or not their wives will vote and advise them on how to vote is deeply ingrained. .However, the exposure to of democratic ideas in Afghan society has offered openings for voter education in this area. Our interviews suggest that citing women's equal rights under the constitution, as well as the previously stated arguments for women's voting, may be able to move men in favor of letting their wives and daughters vote.

CIVIC EDUCATION NEEDS: TOLERANCE, DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES, AND FREE EXPRESSION

The Afghans we interviewed have incorporated many democratic ideas into their culture, including notions of freedom, equal rights, and peaceful opposition. While they see no conflict between Islam and democracy, they want an Islamic rather than a western democracy. But other key values – including the importance of elections, women's rights, tolerance, and free expression – could usefully be nurtured by civic education. The same holds for understanding of the roles of political parties, majority rule and minority rights.

Understandings of Democracy

The Afghans we interviewed generally view democracy as desirable, because they think it will make them freer and improve their lives. When we asked the qualities they associated with democracy, either for themselves or for their country, several themes stood out.

- *Freedom:* Our interviewees mentioned 'freedom' most frequently as the most basic aspect of democracy. "I have heard that democracy gives freedom, it is very different in our own country, where all depends on guns" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38). A few specifically referred to political freedom or non-interference in their lives. "[Democracy means that]people should be free to work, get an education, express their views, be secure, and live freely" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

- *Rights, law, justice:* Many Afghans also think that democracy involves rights for all. "[It means] freedom and equal rights for people," Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37). Rule of law, rather than one based on force, was also mentioned as an aspect of democracy by several people. "Democracy will bring justice and law in the country" (Kunduz province, rural Turkoman man, 33).

- *Popular government:* Some respondents said that democracy involves a government that belongs to the people. ""Government of the people comes to mind [as what democracy means for a country]" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 37).

- *Peace and prosperity:* Hope that Afghanistan would become more peaceful and prosperous if it is democratic is also felt. "We want democracy to bring peace in our country and to rebuild the country" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

Only a few of the Afghans we interviewed said that they had no idea what democracy means.[5] However, only one associated democracy with free elections, and just a couple mentioned women's rights or participation as part of democracy

Although they favor democracy, some of the Afghans we interviewed worry about its associations with communism and westernization in their country. Some interviewees, who themselves felt positively about democracy, noted that the country's brutal communist regimes of the 1970s and 1980s called themselves "democratic" and had left behind bad memories of the term. "Our country is religious and Islamic. We saw democracy at the time of the Khalq and Parcham [parties]. The name 'democracy' has bad implications in the minds of people. People have suffered a lot. The 'democratic' people have punished us a lot. If it's like the Khalq and Parcham 'democracy,' we won't like it" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37). Others said Afghans were concerned that democracy was too closely associated with westernization, including alien customs, loose morals, and nudity. "Some think democracy equals westernization and we are against such democracy" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).

[5] This is a sharp contrast to our findings in other new Asian democracies where the public had historically been passive and little involved in politics, such as Indonesia and Cambodia. It resembles most our results in highly politicized East Timor, another country emerging from a quarter-century of turmoil and struggle, but one where the population had been directly involved.

Indeed, our respondents said quite explicitly that they want an Islamic democracy, not a Western one.

- "We want democracy in an Islamic frame that respects national and religious traditions. We don't want Western democracy" (Kunduz city, Uzbek woman, 19).
- "I like democracy, but according to Islam" (Kandahar city, Tadjik woman, 40).
- "There should be democracy in the country, without losing Islamic values. If we don't pay attention, we will be a Western democracy" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).

Fortunately, our respondents do not believe there is an inherent conflict between Islam and democracy, nor do most see it as inherently linked to westernization.

- "Democracy neither westernizes nor challenges Islam. Democracy is freedom, it depends on the person. The people disagree with too much [freedom]" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 22).
- "Democracy is not westernization, it is freedom. Islam is democratic, it hasn't said one must put oneself in a religious prison" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).
- "We should be democratic and keep Islamic values. A democratic country should take the best from both East and West" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "Democracy's source is Islam. The rights of men and women are the same in Islam. If democracy is coming to Afghanistan, it is a sign of Islam" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).

Unanimously, the Afghans we interviewed said that they see Islam and democracy as compatible, and they want both. The degree of agreement we found on this point is one of the clearest and most striking findings of our study.

Political Tolerance

Many of our Afghan respondents are unwilling to allow parties they are opposed to hold meetings in their areas, although many others would tolerate them. The main reasons given

for opposing such meetings were anger at the parties' past offenses, fear that their meetings would turn violent, and belief that parties with little support had no reason to meet in their localities.

- "They shouldn't be allowed. Their hands are colored with blood, and I don't want struggle" (Kandahar city, Tadjik woman, 40).
- "No, [I wouldn't let them meet.] They are the ones to create problems and disturbances" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 27).
- "They shouldn't be allowed. They haven't pleased the people" (Kabul province, rural Pashtun man, 27).

On the other hand, many Afghans accept that all parties had the right to meet. The principal reasons they cited are the basic tenets of democracy (as long as parties remained non-violent), and the fact that all parties are part of the Afghan nation.

- "Political parties, even the ones that are disliked, should have offices and campaigns. They must introduce candidates for elections. People should be taught that in an advanced society, a democracy, everyone can express their opinions" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "Yes, [let them meet.] They are also members of the Afghan nation" (Balkh province, rural Tadjik woman, 32).
- "As long as they don't hurt us, they are free to hold meetings" (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).

A few suggest that people are so tired of conflict or afraid of clashes that they will allow opponents' to meet undisturbed

Inter-personal political tolerance is also an important issue, though a less severe one. Some of our respondents said they would become angry and break off a friendship if a friend voted for a party they opposed. Given the history of bitterness between parties in Afghanistan, several said they could not trust someone who backed an opposing party. Others feel that a friend who supported another party would be a bad friend.

- "[We've had] too many problems from opposition. We wouldn't allow them in our group. If they vote for the opposition, they might be your friend, but not that of others. It is treachery" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50).

- "If they give their vote to people with blood on their hands, they are not suitable for friendship" (Kandahar city, Tadjik woman, 40).
- "Somebody's friend should not vote for an opposing party. [If a friend of mine does,] I will end my friendship. When a friend works against another, it causes resentment" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33).

Fortunately, most of the respondents took a different view, saying that the choice of a party is a matter of personal opinion and that it will not affect their relationships with friends. The typical view was expressed by a rural woman in Kunduz province, 42, who said, "It's up to [my friend.] I will not end my friendship, it's his idea and his business." However, the share of respondents who display intolerance towards friends with different political outlooks is large enough for civic education efforts to also highlight this issue.

Despite the unpopularity of the Taliban, most Afghans interviewed are willing to let members of the Taliban contest and vote in the election if the movement lays down its arms. They note that this would bring peace and end the conflict and say that peaceful participation is the right of all Afghans.

- "I hope they lay down their weapons, they would do a service to all Afghans, because the struggle is a big problem for the nation and society" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).
- "These elections are free, every party, even the opposition, can participate if they lay down their weapons" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).

Some were opposed, however, citing their bitterness at the Taliban's past deeds and their fear of further intimidation or disruption if they did participate, even if unarmed.

- "No, [they should not be allowed to participate.] They are international criminals. They have played with hundreds of lives, their hands are red with blood" (Kandahar province, rural Pashtun woman, 34).
- "The Taliban shouldn't participate. They may create problems" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).

The willingness of most of the Afghans we interviewed to accept a disarmed Taliban's participation in elections is encouraging.

Principles of Democracy

Our interviews show that there is a broad consensus among respondents on equal rights, peaceful opposition, and separation of religious and political leadership. However division on the utility of political parties and compromise points to these concepts as possible topics for civic education.

Equal rights for all: A very strongly worded statement insisting that all have equal rights, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender, won strong support from most of our interviewees.

- "That is very accurate and comprehensive. Everyone as a citizen should enjoy civil rights without any separation by religion" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man, 54).
- "This is good. All should have equal rights" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara woman, 24).
- "That is a good thing. It will bring prosperity to the country: (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50).

Just one dissenter argued that only men should have rights, and one other argued that Muslims should have greater rights than non-Muslims. Otherwise, Afghans were strongly supportive of the notion of equal rights.

Peaceful opposition to government: Permitting peaceful opposition to government has powerful support in a population that has lived under a succession of authoritarian, intolerant, and unresponsive regimes, where only armed opposition was possible.

- "Every government must have peaceful opposition. If not, it can impose its opinions on the people" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik man, 27).
- "[Peaceful opposition] should be allowed. Because of peaceful opposition government improves its work, makes improvements, pays attention to problems" (Herat province, rural Pashtun woman, 33)

- "If opposition is peaceful, discusses in a peaceful environment, till a compromise is reached, then it is better than armed opposition" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

The few who voiced doubts about peaceful opposition worried that it might become a cloak for movements fomenting violence. "Peaceful opposition should be allowed, but in the past 30 years it was a cover for violent struggle and many died" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).

Separation of religious and political leadership: Although they want an Islamic character for their democracy, the Afghans surveyed clearly support separating religious from political leadership. After six years under the Taliban theocracy, most of our interviewees agreed strongly with a statement that religious leaders should guide in matters of faith while political leaders should decide how government is run.

- "Experience has shown that a religious government doesn't serve the people. Religion follows religious duties, politics, political duties" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37).
- "We want Afghan leaders to follow Islamic policies, not political Islam " (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).
- "Everyone was created for their own work. Religious leaders should continue their work, political leaders should lead the government" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).

The few who disagreed argued that religious leaders should have a role in politics, though they did not suggest that religious figures should run the government. "Religious leaders should guide the people and government" (Bamiyan city, Hazara man, 26).

Political parties: Members of the public whom we interviewed are divided as to whether political parties are good things. Many accept them and see them as vehicles for peaceful political competition.

- "It will be good if people compete through parties rather than imposing their ideas" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

- "Without opposition parties and a multi-party system, society cannot reach its ideals. The opposition should exist to oppose the negative aspects of government" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man, 54).

However, many others remember the role the *Mujahedeen* played in the civil war years and earlier and have bitter memories of them

- "[Political parties are] not good, in their time there was no peace or freedom. They destroyed the country" (Kunduz city, Uzbek woman, 19).
- "Political parties are good in the world, but they have not had good results in Afghanistan. They destroyed Afghanistan" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

Some of the respondents are conditional in their acceptance of parties. Several said they approve only of parties that are serious or helpful for the country; if the parties are fractious, divisive, or tools of neighboring powers, they disapprove. Thus, even as elections approach, parties receive an equivocal welcome from Afghan voters. While the parties' own conduct will doubtless have the greatest influence on voters' opinions, voter education could address their proper role in a democracy.

Majority rule: This complex issue divides Afghans. Many are drawn to the notion of compromise, in order to minimize conflict.

- "If the majority and minority agree, this would be good, because there would be no opposition" (Kandahar province, rural Tadjik man, 44).
- "We want the majority and the minority together to make a good government. If the majority and minority don't unite, government will be unstable (Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).

Others, however, view the rights of the majority in a democracy in a rather absolute fashion.

- "The decision should be made according to the views of the majority because the majority represents more people"(Gardez province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).
- "We have a proverb in Dari, 'The part is a function of the whole' in a uniform structure. The things that the majority does the others should accept. Why? Because it's the majority" (Kunduz city, Tadjik man, 54).

Some suggest that there should be efforts to incorporate the views of minorities within majority decisions. "If the majority can make a decision, it is their right. If [the minority] are asked for their views, and these are considered, it will be better" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25).

Free Expression and Political Efficacy

The ability to freely express one's political views is widespread but not universal among our respondents. Most of our respondents felt that people in their areas could speak their minds about politics.

- "Yes, they can freely express themselves. Everyone is free, they can make decisions" (Bamiyan city, Hazara woman, 37).
- "Yes, why not? They feel free enough." (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).

However, some voters we interviewed said people in their areas felt inhibited about publicly expressing their views, due to fear of reprisals from warlords or authorities.

- "No, they cannot. Commanders and people with guns won't let them" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).
- "People do not feel free to express their political views in our area. They are under the influence of authorities and influential people" (Herat city, Pashtun man, 34).

Complaints that the atmosphere is not free were most common from respondents around Kabul, Jalalabad, and Herat, who also said the influence of local commanders in their areas is strong, while those in Bamiyan and Kandahar felt the freest to speak.

The Afghan voters in our study were divided over whether people like them could influence decisions in their areas, with gender and social class having a strong and acknowledged

relationship to political efficacy. Those who felt a sense of power derived this from two sources: citizenship and participation or education and influence.

- "Yes, because they are the people of the same community, we sit together in the mosque and discuss daily problems, have an idea" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).
- "Yes, knowledgeable and literate people have influence" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).

A few referred specifically to the election as a source of influence: "Our government is elected by the citizens, so they have influence" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik man, 22). Those who said they had influence tended to be men and to have completed at least primary school. On the other hand, those who said they lacked influence offered three reasons: their sex, their poverty, or the local power structure.

- "We are women, we have no influence over decisions. If we cannot leave our houses, how can we influence decisions?" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).
- "We are very poor and uneducated people, it doesn't sound good to talk about government. It sounds good when the favored people are asked. What will be the view of a poor person like me? What can I do, what we say has no effect" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).
- "Civilians like me have no effect on decisions, because they don't have weapons and authority" (Gardez city, urban Pashtun man, 25).

Among our interviewees, women and the uneducated tended to be those who felt powerless.

In conclusion, among those Afghans surveyed, there is a relatively strong acceptance of many of the key principles of democracy. These include the notions of freedom; equal rights; peaceful political opposition; and the separation of religious and political leadership roles. Those interviewed also hold a conviction that Islam and democracy are compatible, yet distinct from 'Western democracy'. However, years of strife have also left scars. These include a legacy of uncertainty about the roles of elections and women's rights in democracy;

intolerance and a deep suspicion of political parties; uncertainty over reconciling the rights of minorities and majorities; and fear among some of speaking out. These latter issues may form part of the civic education agenda.

INFORMATION SOURCES AND VOTER EDUCATION MEDIA

The choice of the correct messages for voter education programs in Afghanistan must be complemented by the choice of the right media if the programs are to be effective. Like other low-literacy, underdeveloped countries, our interviews underline that Afghanistan remains an oral society. For our respondents, radio is the chief medium nationally and word of mouth is the main source of news at local level. For the voter education effort, this places radio, especially international radio, in a particularly important position, although television, posters, and meetings also have roles to play. For women, an enormous yet hard-to-reach group, our interviews suggest that it is worthwhile to supplement electronic media campaigns with programs at clinics and girls' schools, and perhaps also through house meetings.

Information Sources

Almost all of the Afghans we interviewed said that they listen to the radio and that it is their most important source of information about national affairs. Most said they listened to the BBC; many said they listened to the Voice of America and Azadi (the US-sponsored Radio Free Asia), some said they listened to local FM radios such as Arman FM (a Kabul station), and a few mentioned Radio Afghanistan.[6] While we cannot offer precise listenership estimates, we also found evidence of differences between the audiences of these stations.

[6] These proportions contrast somewhat with those from listener surveys. A 1999 national survey of men only found listenership rates of 70-80% for VOA, BBC, and Radio Afghanistan (then called Radio Shariat).

- *BBC:* In our research, the BBC was the only station whose listeners included roughly similar proportions of men and women or that reached most of our rural respondents as well as most urban ones. Its listeners included people both over and under 35. However, there was an education bias in its audience, with most listeners having completed at least primary school.

- *VOA:* The VOA listeners in our study were mostly male, urban, under 35, and tended to have completed at least primary school.

- *Azadi:* Radio Free Asia's Afghan listeners tended to be male (but not as exclusively as VOA's) and downscale (most had no schooling or a few years of primary school). It attracted listeners both over and under 35, largely in towns.

- *Local FM radios (Arman, etc).:* These radios were the only ones to have a mostly female audience, and one with listeners of all ages and education levels. However, reflecting the short range of FM signals, they tended to be mostly in urban areas. At present, there are 35 such stations in 24 of Afghanistan's 32 provinces.

Obviously, qualitative research results cannot be extrapolated directly to the Afghan population, and we will pursue these issues further in our forthcoming quantitative study. But these results do offer some useful indications of listenership and allow some initial thinking about voter education media. It is clear that all the radios stations – particularly the foreign ones with big audiences, as well as national and local Afghan radio – must be involved if the voter education campaign is to have national reach.

Many of our urban interviewees, and some of the rural ones, also said that they watched television. For those who watched it, television was also an important source of information about national affairs.

"International Radio in Afghanistan: Main Findings form 1999 Survey," Research memorandum, Office of Research, International Broadcasting Bureau, Aril 2000. A more recent poll of men and women in Kabul and Mazar-I-Sharif cities found that over half listened to Radio Afghanistan, around half to the BBC and VOA, and roughly 30% to Azadi. Radio Sations Listener Percentage in Kabul and Mazar Cities, Afghan Media Resource Center, November 2002. A 2003 survey of radios heard in shops and homes found an upsurge of listenership for two new local FM radios in Kabul, Arman and Killid. "Independent radio takes Kabul streets by storm,

At the local level, word of mouth remains the major source of information. "About the community close to us we get information from people in the area" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50). In some cases, local radio is also a source of information. Word of mouth also repeats and extends the reach of radio broadcasts of national news. "I don't have a radio to listen to. We sit and ask women with radios" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).

Voter Education Media and Sources

According to our respondents, radio, posters, public meetings, TV and videos are the preferred media for voter education information. At the local level, they said that they preferred to receive information from village chiefs, religious leaders, and high school teachers.

When we asked Afghans about a variety of potential voter education media, interest in radio stood out, followed by several other media – posters, TV, meetings, and videos.

Radio clearly received the most interest among Afghan interviewees as a voter education medium, since it can be heard in the home, in urban and rural areas, and by both sexes. "Radio is better than anything else" (Kabul province, rural Tadjik woman, 41).

Posters were also an acceptable medium for most of those we interviewed. Their ability to illustrate aspects of the vote, even to illiterate Afghans, are particularly appreciated.

Internews survey shows," Internews, 2003. The international stations broadcast only on short and medium wave, except in Kabul, where they have FM repeaters.

"Pictures will be very good, every literate and illiterate person can understand" (Kabul city, Tadjik man, 36).

Television was a favored voter education medium for many respondents, of both sexes, but principally those in urban areas, since few rural respondents had a TV.

Public meetings regarding the election were accepted by most men we interviewed, but only by some of the women. "It's possible, but it has negative points, women can't participate" (Gardez city, Pashtun man, 25). In some areas, people also feared meetings could lead to violence. "Impossible, we always have problems with public meetings" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).

Voter education videos shown also appealed to many respondents, both men and women, urban and rural as a way to present lively, visual material to people without televisions. "If they make such programs, many people would see everything with their own eyes. It would be very good if it could be shown" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun man, 50). Such videos could include voter education spots or programs also shown on TV.

Most voters we interviewed did not favor one voter education medium used in some other countries: house visits. These are seen as contrary to local customs. "We don't have this tradition in our area" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).

We also explored the local sources our interviewees trust for voter education information and found that they preferred community leaders and village chiefs, religious leaders, and school teachers as conduits for such information.

Community leaders and village chiefs are accepted by many people we interviewed in urban areas and some in rural communities. However, some voters were actively hostile in their reactions. "Many leaders have sold themselves; they depend on the commanders" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

Many of our respondents accepted the idea of utilizing religious leaders to convey elections-related material. "Area elders and mosques, they tell us about elections" (Bamiyan province, rural Hazara man, 32). However, this idea was more appealing to men than women, who are not allowed into mosques. "We are women and unable to go to the mosques" (Gardez city, Pashtun woman, 20).

Schoolteachers were also seen as a good source of voter education by many. "Yes, we do listen to them. They should be more just, they are educated people" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37). However, they received much more acceptance among men than among women, who may be reluctant or unable to listen to men from outside their families.

These three groups, community leaders, religious leaders and school teachers, if willing to participate, would appear to be credible local spokespeople for voter education efforts at the local level.

Having popular singers record election-related songs would appear to be another potential source of voter education. Although we did not test them specifically in this regard, our respondents were very enthusiastic generally about well-known Afghan singers such as Naghma, Sadar Tawakali, Parasto, or Rashida Jhala. Songs about elections, voting procedures, and democratic values by such figures are worth considering as voter education media.

Most people with whom we spoke believed that children should not be used to communicate voter education ('too young," Kandahar city, Tadjik woman, 40). Governmental agencies were viewed with some suspicion ("not trustworthy, Kunduz City, Tadjik man, 54), and some rural respondents felt that NGOs were not responsive to the needs of people in remote areas ("they don't come, our house is in the village," Kunduz province, rural Pashtun woman, 42).

Voter Education for Women

Our interviews with Afghans include good news on voter education for women: respondents of both sexes favor such programs. Despite the skepticism voiced about men allowing women to vote, almost all of the participants in our research supported women's voter education programs.

- "It would be a good thing if women participate, information about the election is important for all" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun man, 38).
- "Such programs are very necessary for women" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37)
- "The educated and the illiterate should participate. They should get information, how to use the fingerprint, which ticket to carry, which box to put [the ballot] in" (Mazar-I-Sharif city, Pashtun man, 37).

- "Women are half of society, they have the right to take part" (Jalalabad city, Tadjik woman, 38).

Our participants emphasized the importance of non-partisan venues to attract women. "If it happens in a village or neighborhood, the women gather and are taught about elections, as about health, it will be possible for women to learn about the election. But if they are gathered and asked to vote for [someone for] President, I doubt they will gather" (Nangarhar province, rural Pashtun woman, 32).

According to our interviewees, the most acceptable venues for women's voter education appear to be clinics and girls' schools, places were women and their children have permission to go, while house meetings may be possible in certain areas. "The perfect place is somewhere women can go without problems," said a 36-year-old Tadjik man in Kabul city.

- "If programs are arranged for women in health clinics, it will be possible for them to attend" (Paktia province, rural Pashtun woman, 39).
- "In crowded places like clinics, hospitals, and schools" (Herat province, rural Tadjik man, 55).
- "It should be possible to arrange women's programs in girls' schools" (Balkh province, rural Turkoman man, 32).
- "In schools and clinics" (Kandahar city, Pashtun man, 34).

Many female respondents were skeptical of the possibility of house meetings among neighboring women. "Because men have prejudices, they don't let their wives go to another house" (Herat city, Tadjik woman, 37). However, many men with whom we spoke accepted house meetings, suggesting that it is worth investigating further whether such meetings may be possible. Some of the women thought so, too. "A neighbor's house with other women" would be an appropriate place for voter education, according to a 32-year-old Hazara woman in Bamiyan. On the other hand, while men thought religious centers might be sites

of women's voter education, most of the women we interviewed disagreed, as women are not allowed into mosques in Afghanistan.

When asked what times would be appropriate for women's voter education programs, interviewees responded that the main times to avoid are early in the morning and in the evening, when women are busy with household chores.

To sum up: our respondents suggest that media selection for voter education in the Afghan elections should focus first and foremost on radio. However, some indicate that TV, meetings, posters, and videos also could be of interest to them. They suggest that involving credible local voices could make an important contribution as well, be they teachers, mullahs, or chiefs, and it seems that singers and songs might be useful education tools. To reach women, voter education will have to be available where they can be found in the course of the day. Together, these media can ensure that people like the Afghans we interviewed receive the information they want in order to participate effectively in Afghanistan's first election.

CONCLUSION

Thirty-two qualitative interviews with men and women from throughout Afghanistan, with various education levels, give us some insights into Afghans' mood and hopes for the country. The Afghans we interviewed are optimistic about their country's future, because the beginnings of peace, normality, and reconstruction outweigh their disappointment over continuing problems of insecurity, warlordism, and poverty. Although many of them are critical of the country's transitional government, most of our respondents support President Hamid Karzai and want to accelerate rebuilding efforts, not bring back the Taliban. The Afghans who responded to our survey also are hopeful about the coming of democracy. They want political leadership based on fair elections and accountability rather than religious authority or participation in Jihad. Those with whom we spoke look forward to voting in the coming national elections, although some of them worry that husbands may not let their wives vote. In order to be able to participate, they want details of the voting process, as well as reassurances regarding their fears of intimidation, vote selling, and fraud during the election. While our interviewees accept many of the basic values of democracy, such as peaceable opposition and equal rights, others, such as political tolerance, acceptance of compromise, and freedom of expression are relatively fragile among them. Radio is the principal source they suggest for voter education, though they are interested in other media as well.

This report, one of the few based on interviews with Afghan citizens regarding their political views since the fall of the Taliban, is the product of the first stage of a two-stage research

program. The aim of this initial phase is to listen to what Afghans have to say for themselves about their country, the coming elections, and other key issues. It will be followed by a national public opinion poll among Afghans to be released in May or June 2004. Together, these studies are intended to reflect the views of the Afghan people during a significant period for Afghanistan's new democracy; as the preparations take place for the country's first free and fair election.

APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews allow for face-to-face contact with respondents, using a structured but open-ended questionnaire. The character of the interview allows the interviewer to explore topics in detail if desired and when required. Since qualitative data is narrative and not numeric, an analysis of respondents' discourse can also be undertaken. The ability to probe deeper and analyze in greater detail in a qualitative study allows for richer, more detailed explorations of responses than does quantitative research.

In-depth interviews also offer an overview of the range of ideas and beliefs in any given population. Because these are qualitative findings, not quantitative ones, the results of our work cannot be projected numerically to the population at large. However, the findings illuminate important patterns of public opinion currently held across Afghan society.

In order to prepare for the interviews, staff from ACNielsen/ORG-MARG India and Charney Research conducted briefing and training sessions for experienced local interviewers working for the Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC) in Kabul. Pre-tests of the discussion guide were also conducted in Kabul. After training and pre-tests were complete, interviewers went throughout the country to recruit a cross-section of participants. To facilitate interviews with women, they also recruited and trained educated female interviewers in the regions where AMRC did not already have women staff.

We conducted 32 in-depth interviews around the country, drawing respondents from the eight regions designated for the *Loya Jirga* elections: Kabul, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Gardez, Bamiyan, Mazar, Herat, and Kandahar. Half of the interviews were conducted in the main cities of the regions and the other half in rural areas at least one hour's drive from the city. Half the interviews were conducted with men and half with women. We also sought participants of different ages and levels of educational attainment, from the various ethnicities found among prospective Afghan voters in each region. This was done in order to reflect a broad cross-section of the different sectors of the population. The interviews were conducted from November 15 to November 21, 2003 and ran 30-60 minutes.

The details of our interviewees are as follows.

	Province	Locale	Gender	Education	Ethnicity	Age	Language	Occupation
#1	Kabul	Rural	Female	Illiterate	Tajik	41	Dari	Housewife
#2	Kabul	Rural	Male	Primary	Pashtun	22	Pashto	Unskilled worker
#3	Kabul	Urban	Female	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	35	Pashto	Housewife
#4	Kabul	Urban	Male	Secondary	Tajik	36	Dari	Shopkeeper
#5	Nangarhar	Rural	Female	Illiterate	Pashtun	32	Pashto	Jr. Executive
#6	Nangarhar	Rural	Male	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	38	Pashto	Shop owner
#7	Nangarhar	Urban	Female	Secondary	Tajik	36	Dari	Jr. Executive
#8	Nangarhar	Urban	Male	Primary	Tajik	27	Dari	Petty trader
#9	Kunduz	Rural	Female	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	42	Pashto	Housewife
#10	Kunduz	Rural	Male	Primary	Turkoman	33	Pashto	Agriculture
#11	Kunduz	Urban	Female	Illiterate	Uzbek	19	Dari	Housewife
#12	Kunduz	Urban	Male	Secondary	Tajik	54	Dari	Senior Executive
#13	Paktia	Rural	Female	Secondary	Pashtun	39	Pashto	Nurse
#14	Paktia	Rural	Male	Illiterate	Pashtun	50	Pashto	Shopkeeper
#15	Paktia	Urban	Female	Primary	Pashtun	20	Pashto	Student
#16	Paktia	Urban	Male	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	25	Pashto	Unemployed
#17	Bamiyan	Rural	Female	Incomplete Prim	Hazara	24	Dari	Housewife
#18	Bamiyan	Rural	Male	Illiterate	Hazara	32	Dari	Unemployed
#19	Bamiyan	Urban	Female	Primary	Hazara	37	Dari	Housewife
#20	Bamiyan	Urban	Male	Primary	Hazara	26	Dari	Shopkeeper
#21	Mazar	Urban	Male	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	37	Pashto	Shopkeeper
#22	Mazar	Rural	Female	Primary	Tajik	35	Dari	Housewife
#23	Mazar	Rural	Male	Secondary	Turkoman	32	Turki	Petty trader
#24	Mazar	Urban	Female	Secondary	Uzbek	34	Uzbek	Teacher
#25	Herat	Urban	Male	Secondary	Pashtun	34	Pashto	Housewife
#26	Herat	Rural	Female	Illiterate	Pashtun	33	Pashto	Doctor
#27	Herat	Rural	Male	Illiterate	Tajik	55	Dari	Skilled worker
#28	Herat	Urban	Female	Secondary	Tajik	37	Dari	Executive
#29	Kandahar	Urban	Male	Illiterate	Pashtun	34	Pashto	Shopkeeper
#30	Kandahar	Rural	Female	Incomplete Prim	Pashtun	34	Pashto	Housewife
#31	Kandahar	Rural	Male	Primary	Tajik	44	Dari	Professional
#32	Kandahar	Urban	Female	Secondary	Tajik	40	Dari	Teacher

APPENDIX 2:
INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION:

- I am working for Afghan Media Resource Center, a research organization with no relation to the government. I want to ask some questions about "matters of interest to Afghans". I am interested in your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to know what you think. All answers will be kept confidential and that your name will not be given to anyone.

- Where were you born?

- Are you married?

- Do you have kids?

- What are your favorite activities?

I. MEDIA EXPOSURE AND INFORMATION SOURCES

1. Please tell me,

   - Do you listen to the radio?
     IF YES. How often?
     Which station do you prefer?
   - Do you watch television?
     IF YES. How often?
   - Do you regularly go to the mosque? How often do you go?

2. How do you normally get to know about what is happening in the country?

3. How do you normally get to know about what is happening in your area ?

4. In your area , which people or groups have the most influence on what people think about politics and government?

II. MOOD

5. Generally speaking, do you think Afghanistan today is moving in the right direction, or do you think it is moving in the wrong direction? How? Why?

6. In your view, what are the biggest problems facing Afghanistan as a whole?

7. What are the biggest problems in your area?

8. Now please think for a minute about Afghanistan in the past two years:

   a. What has improved, if anything?

   b. What has gotten worse, if anything?

   c. In general do you think people are more or less prosperous today? In what ways?

9. What do you think about the work the Afghanistan's Transitional Government is doing?

   PROBE: Why do you say that?

10. Do you feel that the government listens to the opinion and pays attention to the needs of people like you?

   PROBE: Why do you say that?

11. What's happening with security in your area? **IF NO PROBLEMS, THEN GO TO THE NEXT QUESTION.**

   PROBE: Are the problems mostly crime or political violence?

   PROBE: What are the local commanders doing about this, if anything?

III. ASSOCIATIONS

12. Now let's play a word game. I'll mention some words and names, and I just want you to tell me the first things that come into your mind, whatever they are – a thought, idea, feeling, anything. But if you don't know them, please tell me.

PROBE FOR AT LEAST 2 RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS IN THIS SECTION. START BY ASKING THE RESPONDENT ABOUT A FAMOUS SINGER FROM HIS REGION.
ASK – "WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND IMMEDIATELY WHEN I SAY _____?" ANYTHING ELSE?

FOR PASHTUN, ASK NAGHMA
FOR HAZARAS, ASK SAFDAR TAWAKALI
FOR TAJIK, ASK PARASTO
FOR UZBEKS, ASK RASHIDA JHALA

NOW, ASK THE FOLLOWING ONE BY ONE.

ASK – "WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND IMMEDIATELY WHEN I SAY _____?" ANYTHING ELSE?

a. King Zahir Shah.

b. President Hamid Karzai.

c. Mullah Omar.

d. Democracy.

e. Fair elections.

f. The Taliban.

g. Foreigners working in Afghanistan.

h. Constitution.

i. The UN or the United Nations.

IV. ELECTION AWARENESS, PERCEPTIONS, AND EXPECTATIONS

13. Have you heard anything about the elections expected to come to Afghanistan next year?

IF YES:

a. What have you heard about them?
b. What do you think about these elections?

14. **EXPLAIN** "Under the draft of the Constitution for Afghanistan, a President of Afghanistan will be elected in 2004. This will be followed by an election for the members of Parliament. Every Afghan over 18 will be able to vote in these elections."

ASK ALL:

a. How do you feel about these elections? Why is that?

b. Do you expect anything good during the election? If so, what?

c. Do you expect anything bad during the election? If so, what?

d. Do you think the elections will make a difference?
IF YES: How?
ASK ALL: Why do you say that?

e. Is there anything you would like to know in advance about how the elections work?
IF YES: What would you like to know about them? Anything else?
(ACCEPT ONE OR TWO RESPONSES.)

f. From what source would you like to receive the information on the election process?

PROBE REACTION TO ALL OF THE FOLLOWING NOT MENTIONED BY RESPONDENT. ASK ONE BY ONE.

- Radio
- Village chief/community leader
- TV
- NGOs
- Governmental organizations
- Religious leaders
- High school students
- School teachers
- A special election video shown in your neighborhood
- A public teaching
- House visits

- Posters with pictures

g. What do you think will be the voting process?

h. Have you heard anything about people needing to register in order to vote in these elections?
IF YES: What have you heard about this? From whom? From where?

i. Do you think you will vote in these elections? Why?

V. ELECTION LEGITIMACY AND CONCERNS

15. Do you think the elections will be free and fair? Why do you say that?

16. Do you think anyone will be able to find out whom you voted for without you telling them? Why or why not?

17. Are you concerned about anything that may stop people from voting or make the election unfair?

AFTER RESPONDENT ANSWERS, ASK IF THEY EXPECT:

- Violence or intimidation aimed at voters or party activists. **IF YES:** From whom?
- Threats to make people vote for a specific party. **IF YES:** From whom?
- Gifts or money for votes
- Husbands not letting wives vote
- Cheating in counting of votes

18. Suppose a monitor comes to your voting place to observe the elections and make sure there is no cheating. How would you feel about that? Why?

a. Would it make any difference if the monitor is Afghan or a foreigner? And why?

b. Would it make any difference if an Afghan monitor were from your area or from somewhere else? Why?

VI. DEMOCRATIC VALUES

19. Do you think that all political parties, even the ones most people do not like, should be allowed to hold meetings in your area? Why or why not?

20. If a friend voted for an opposing political party from yours, how would you feel about that?

IF RESPONDENT WOULD BE UNHAPPY: Would you end the friendship? Why or why not?

21. Do people feel free to express their political opinions in your area? **IF YES, GO TO NEXT QUESTION**

IF NOT FREE: Why is that?

22. If a country is called democratic, what does that mean to you?

23. What, if anything, do you think democracy in Afghanistan will bring you personally?

24. In your view, what are the characteristics of a good leader?

25. Some people think the best way to elect Afghanistan's president is for every person 18 or older to vote. Others think the best way is only a few influential people in each community to vote. What do you think? And why is that?

26. Do you think members of the Taliban or other armed opposition groups should be allowed to run for office in the elections if they lay down their weapons? Why or why not?

27. People have different views about things. Some people say: "Decision should be made based on what the majority wants, even if the minority disagrees." Others say: "It is more important to get as much agreement as possible between the minority and majority, even if the majority must compromise."

What do you think? Why?

28. Some people say: "The *mujahedeen* saved the country, for this they deserve both honor and important positions in government." Others say: "Those people deserve to hold government office who are good leaders and capable of providing the services that people need."

What do you think? Why?

29. Some people say: "Democracy will bring Westernization and too much freedom. Islamic values will be challenged." Other people say: "An Islamic country can be democratic without becoming too Western. It can still keep its Islamic values"

What do you think? Why

30. I'm going to read some ideas. Please tell me what you think about each.

a. "It is a good thing that peaceful opposition to the government is allowed." What do you think about this idea?

b. "Everyone should have equal rights under the law, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or sex." What do you think about this idea?

c. "Political parties are a good thing." What do you think about this idea?

d. "Religious authorities should lead people in obeying the obligations of their faith while political leaders should make decisions about how the government is run." What do you think about this idea?

e. "Every citizen has the responsibility to the country to vote." What do you think of this idea?

f. "If government leaders do not listen to criticism from the people, there should be a law that can remove them from their position." What do you think of this idea?

31. Do you think people like yourself can have any influence over decisions in your area? Why or why not?

32. What would you most like the government of Afghanistan to do for your area?

VII. WOMEN AND PUBLIC LIFE

33. Now let's talk about something else. What are the biggest problems facing women in your area?

34. If women have a separate voting place of their own, do you think that women should vote in the coming elections? Why or why not?

35. Do you think women should get their husband's permission to vote? Why or why not?

36. Do you think your neighbors will let their wives vote? Why or why not?

37. Do you think that women should decide for themselves for whom to vote, or do you think men should advise them on their choice? Why do you say that?

38. If there are programs to teach people about the elections, should women be included as students to learn?

IF NO: Why not?

IF YES:

a. Where should such programs be held?

PROBE REACTIONS TO HOLDING THEM IN:

- Religious centers
- Schools
- Health clinics
- Women neighbors' houses
- Her own house, with another woman

b. Which time of day should the programs be held?

39. Now, I'd like to how you feel regarding something people have been saying. Some people say: "In some places Afghan women will be voting. In the places where women are not, the community will lose half their votes – and their candidate may lose the elections." How strongly do you disagree or agree with this statement?

PROBE: Why?

40. "The constitution states that women have equal rights to men. This means that they have the same right as men to vote." How strongly do you disagree or agree with this statement?

PROBE: Why?

41. Are there particular issues in your community in which women's opinions must be asked? **IF YES:** Which? **IF NO:** Why not?

42. The draft of the constitution says there are certain number of seats in Parliament that will be reserved for women. What would you think about that?