

# CHALLENGES TO WOMEN CANDIDATES AND VOTERS

2018 AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS



RESEARCHED BY: **HUMAIRA SAQIB**

EDITED BY: **DR. JENNIFER EULER BENNETT**

OCTOBER 2020



WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK  
AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA

## About the Author

**Humira Saqib** is a leading Afghan journalist and a women's human rights activist. Her writings have been published in the magazine Negah-e-Zan (A Vision of Women) and in Afghan Women's News Agency. She has also worked in several key positions in various media and developmental organizations. She is a member of the Afghan Civil Society Election Network, Peace and Security Committee in UN-WOMEN, Media Assistance Compliance and researches commission, Women Peace and Security in South Asia, Entrepreneur Women, Women Journalist Association, Afghanistan Women Political Corporations, Women Leadership Assembly, Afghan Women Coordination Network, Management Board Of Afghan Women Coordination in EURO. She has received several awards and certificates. She has also attended many conferences all over the globe such as IVLP World Youth Leadership Program in USA, Women and Peace Conference in Sri Lanka, Bonn Conference and Peace Conference in Thailand.

## About the Editor

**Dr. Jennifer Euler Bennett** is an established development sector practitioner with over 23 years of diverse experience in senior management/directorship, strategy development and its implementation. She is currently working as the Regional Coordinator for the Women's Regional Network (WRN). Primarily being a researcher, Dr. Bennett has the skills of critical evaluations, writing and editing, and has authored numerous articles, research papers, policy papers and analytical reports, published nationally and internationally. She also has had the opportunity to work as a Human Security and Development consultant. She continues to serve as a human rights activist and had the opportunity to be affiliated with the Peace Boat, International. During a 10-day educational Peace Boat trip from Singapore to Sri Lanka, Dr. Bennett was one of the resource persons to interact with and deliver lectures on peace and security to more than 100 university youth on the boat.

# CHALLENGES TO WOMEN CANDIDATES AND VOTERS

2018 AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

RESEARCHED BY: **HUMAIRA SAQIB**

EDITED BY: **DR. JENNIFER EULER BENNETT**

OCTOBER 2020

## **Acknowledgements**

WRN's research *Challenges to Women Candidates and Voters in the 2018 Afghanistan Elections* would not have been possible without the necessary materialistic and spiritual aid and support, so generously extended by the NoVo Foundation, The Channel Foundation and the CarEth Foundation in order to bring to the fore the gendered aspects of the 2018 election. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation and thanks to all the women of Afghanistan, who agreed to participate in the Focus Group Discussions and the in depth Interviews, and to make this study possible. I am grateful to the field researchers who worked tirelessly to collect the data, despite the many security challenges. Last but not the least, the encouragement by the Afghan WRN members has always been there to keep our spirits high in this march for Women's Empowerment, Peace and Security.

# Table of contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Objectives of the Study</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Major Findings: Quantitative Analysis and Discussion</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Socio-Demographic Profile.....	15
<i>Age and residence</i> .....	15
<i>Education level</i> .....	16
<i>Women’s registration as candidates</i> .....	17
<i>Potential threats to women candidates</i> .....	18
<i>Election campaigns by women</i> .....	19
<i>Does gender influence voting?</i> .....	20
<i>Were women secured well by the security agencies to vote in 2018 election?</i> .....	21
<i>Specific plans of the women candidates</i> .....	22
<i>Was insecurity and presence of armed conflicts the biggest challenge in 2018 elections?</i> .....	23
<i>Did traditional cultures negatively impact women’s participation in elections and women candidates?</i> .....	24
<i>Has corruption in electoral commissions prevented women from competing with men?</i> .....	25
<i>Did most women candidates have poor financial resources for 2018 elections?</i> .....	26
Less number of female candidates compared to males .....	27
<b>Qualitative Analysis: Interviews and Focus Group Discussions</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Interviews.....	28
1. <i>Security challenges</i> .....	28
2. <i>Structural challenges</i> .....	28
3. <i>Cultural challenges</i> .....	29
4. <i>Financial Challenges</i> .....	30
5. <i>Ethical Corruption Challenges</i> .....	30
Focus Group Discussions.....	30
<b>Conclusions and Discussion</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>Recommendations and Policy Input</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix: Quantitative Data: Tables in Percentages</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Endnotes</b> .....	<b>39</b>

# Afghanistan



Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) in the three provinces of Logar, Parwan and Kabul.



## Foreword

**A**fter decades of violent conflict, wars, and widespread discrimination by various regimes against women, especially since the 1970s, the experience of democracy through re-election has been reinvigorated. Men and women were provided with the facility to participate in elections as candidates and voters. However, given the newly emerging people's democracy in Afghanistan, several foundational and relevant functions need attention. Foremost, electoral reform, one of the basic slogans of the national unity government, has apparently not been implemented in its full to manifest fair and free elections. Appreciably, reforms like the preparation of the procedure for choosing commissioners for the electoral commissions, and the creation of voters' list are important steps towards this process. In this stream of advances, unfortunately, foundational adjustments remain absent, such as, women's participation and inclusion as equal citizens to be able to exercise their right to participate in the country's political and democratic processes.

Addressing the various issues, vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women can be an opportunity to rethink the electoral system in the country and ultimately open the door to a more active and inclusive women's participation (as voters and candidates). This report showcases the voices of women, especially at the local level, and volumizes their experiences and opinions while participating in the 2018 parliamentary elections. It spells out the many challenges they confronted, in exercising their right, to participate in the elections. Not to mention that the research clearly elucidates the persistence of the barriers associated with patriarchal attitudes, lack of security, and lack of access to justice, both at the structural and institutional levels.

Against this backdrop, I hope the findings of the research will grab the attention of the election commissions, government and the international community. I call upon them to consider the recommendations given in this report, in the making of a peaceful and a prosperous democratic Afghanistan, which will not be achieved if half of its population is discriminated against and is denied basic rights as equal citizens.

Zarqa Yaftali  
Board Member of Womens Regional Network and  
Member of the High Council for National Reconciliation



Addressing the various issues, vulnerabilities and challenges faced by women can be an opportunity to rethink the electoral system in the country and ultimately open the door to a more active and inclusive women's participation (as voters and candidates).

# Executive Summary

In the past 20 years, sustained efforts have taken place to steer Afghanistan towards a democratized state system. Realization of a democratic system, created by people's votes, became possible after the fall of the Taliban regime, the Bonn conference and holding of the Loya Jirga to reach a consensus on the new Afghan Constitution. Women's participation in the political engagements also improved markedly since the fall of the Taliban. To date, three rounds of each presidential, provincial council's and parliamentary elections have taken place. These elections have been fraught, as conjectured, with several structural and institutional difficulties and were considered the most controversial elections in Afghanistan.

## Methodology

This study, conducted by Women's Regional Network, focused on understanding and exploring the various challenges and issues confronted by women voters belonging to marginalized populations, and of different ethnic groups along with women candidates during the 2018 parliamentary elections. For this purpose, using its signature Community Conversations study design, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI) in the three provinces of Logar, Parwan and Kabul.

## Findings

Research findings highlighted several ensuing factors that point to women's unequal and discriminatory social, economic and political standings. Several challenges culminating in women's insecurities were the hallmark of the research, discouraging mass female participation in the elections and consequently, negatively impacting the end results. The research results show that: lack of transparency in the electoral process; fraud; coercion and redirecting women's votes, by force in some parts of the country, as well as lack of awareness of how to participate in elections (registration, biometrics, voting, inter alia.); lack of women's independence for voting and lack of freedom to openly campaign, were some of the major hurdles and challenges experienced by women voters and candidates.

Both quantitative and qualitative information underlined the pervasive sexual harassment and abuse of women during the 2018 elections, reinforced by the dissemination of the perception that women politicians are immoral. This was one of the driving factors that discouraged women from contesting the elections, as well as voting for women candidates. The research findings also show that women candidates' lack of financial resources was avidly exploited and was another factor exposing them to sexual advances and favors by the local peers and electoral stakeholders.

Insecurity was one of the greatest challenges in 2018 elections, due to which women's participation in polling stations, especially in rural areas, was weak, thus most of them did not cast their votes. Additionally, this paved the way for misuse of women's votes and in some areas, where men voted on behalf of women, using their voter cards. This research confirms and reiterates the findings of other reports that women are still considered to be inferior. They are deemed to lack mental

and physical characteristics and the required decision-making abilities to be engaged in the political arena. To this effect, women candidates have been threatened and sometimes killed by local warlords in several provinces. Research also shows that women candidates were mistreated and demeaned through social networks. The statistics reveal that the mentioned challenges to women in the remote areas in Logar and Parwan provinces were gravely accentuated compared to Kabul.

Understanding the vulnerabilities and the challenges women face can be an opportunity to meaningfully modify the electoral system in Afghanistan. Assuming the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the government have a strong will to conduct transparent elections, there should be no doubt that this will be possible only when women attain equitable political participation.

## Conclusions

- **Power and gender inequalities in social relations** do not operate in a vacuum, but are structural, systemic and institutional in Afghanistan;
- **Patriarchy and bureaucracy are mutually reinforcing systems.** Men use patriarchy within the bureaucracy not only to create and sustain male privilege and power over women but also to sustain institutional hierarchy;
- In appropriation regarding **vote-buying by competitors in an uneven political playing field** indicates unabated institutional and structural manipulation and bad governance;
- **Restricted female mobility**, emanating from patriarchal conservatism and misogynist attitudes, has led to women's security issues and independence, as well as access to public spaces, leading to political disequilibrium;
- Women's disadvantages and deprivation are further exacerbated owing to **structural lack of resources of women candidates — be it financial/economic or sociocultural capital**;
- **Outright insecurity and conflict at the national level, coupled with socio-cultural constraints** imposed by family and/or community members, the powerful locals, political power brokers and/or religious stakeholders, amongst others, will severely impact future national development, given the current exclusion of half the population of Afghanistan.
- Gains in women's substantive representation and political mainstreaming are inextricably linked and dependent on a continued **commitment of national and international stakeholders towards women's rights and gender mainstreaming**;

## Recommendations

- A **paradigmatic shift is required to focus on gender policy interventions** and their impact on women's political empowerment and mainstreaming. For this, detailed understanding is required of not only the outputs of institutions but also the institutions themselves.
- Women candidates' equal share of political influence is overshadowed by direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers. If formal equal treatment cannot be obtained, specific **security measures and distinct government and other watchdog support should be introduced**, as a means of reaching equality of results.

- **Women candidates should form alliances** with members of the provincial assemblies and women councilors in the local government, alongside the civil society organizations, rights groups and other women activist groups.
- The government and the international community must **defend the red lines and proactively continue to portray positive imaging of the significance of women's rights**, especially in peace negotiations.
- **Education in general, and specifically that of females, must be the hallmark for attaining democratic knowledge and rights** and to counter the nexus of illiteracy, political unawareness and the lack of citizens' capacity to adequately participate in political decision-making and decisions in governance processes.
- There is an urgent need to **train and induct a greater number of women in the Election Commission**. Equally, the authorities should ensure that only women polling agents should be assigned to the dedicated women polling stations.
- **All women registered in the national database should automatically be enrolled in the voting lists** so as to encourage participation of women in the electoral process.
- Voting centers need to be organized in a way that women can easily access these centers; **women agents should be provided transport and security**.
- Women candidates run campaigns with meager financial resource and local support. It is suggested that some of the **public funding provided by international institutions for elections should be considered to assist women candidates**, through a credible institution with specific transparent mechanisms to maintain transparency.
- To date, men are not convinced that women have equal decision-making capacities and abilities to actively enter the political arena, that they are inferior, need male support, and cannot act without the permission of men. **Awareness of existing laws and issues related to women's rights** will be one of the essential requirements for addressing cultural challenges to women.
- It is recommended that a **qualified (supervisory) body should be set up by election observation and women's rights advocacy bodies**, who should closely monitor women's complaints in the Electoral Complaints Commission.
- Structural challenges and open corruption in the electoral commissions, may not be resolved in the short term, but can be countered by **stringent monitoring processes, led by both national and international election observer bodies**, and to be taken up by the justice and judicial institutions.

# Introduction

## Democratization in Afghanistan

Elections can play a crucial role in stabilizing and democratizing war-affected, post-conflict and emerging countries, despite their political, structural and institutional challenges. The success of a democratic election in such countries, and as a general and an essential rule of thumb for holding elections, largely depends on key and indispensable electoral ingredients. These relate first to the timing of the elections and how the election system is tailored to the local conditions, and secondly, but more importantly, the establishment of an independent, well-functioning Election Commission and an Election Complaints System. Equally, these are considered crucial elements for the success and indicators of the credibility of the electoral undertaking.<sup>1</sup> Without these elements, the so-called free and fair electoral process is at risk of being manipulated by the influential, and those who have political powers to alter the end results.

In Afghanistan, the absence of such essentials throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marking varied election institutions, its relevant functions, especially people's participation in elections, has resulted in frequent changes in regimes and disruption of political continuity. Blueprints and historical background of elections in a modern way, as a political

option, dates back to 1923—King Amanullah Khan's Era—well known as the Social Revolution Decade in Afghan history. For the first time, representatives from the center and provinces were chosen to draft the First Afghan Constitution and make its legitimacy through law—called the Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly). Although, it included administrative measures to engage people in conducting consultative sessions and a Government Council through election, it retained the appointment of representatives and people could not directly vote for their preferred candidates.

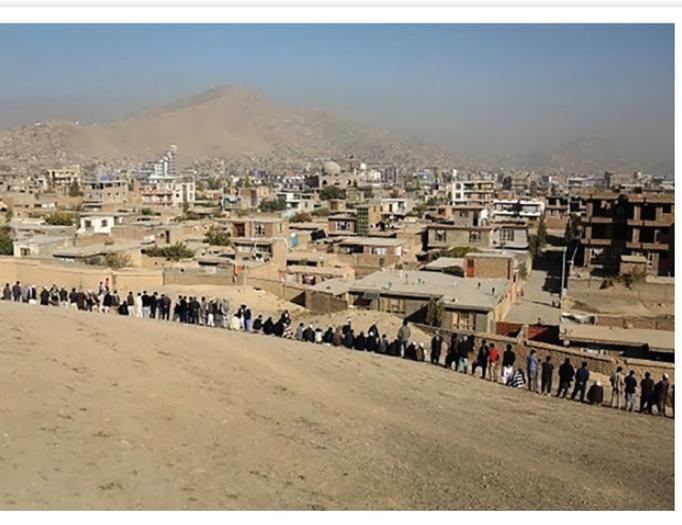
Socially, Amanullah, although a controversial figure, allowed women more rights and the freedom of press which led to intense publishing.<sup>2</sup> His transforming social and educational reforms included requiring Western dress in parts of Kabul and elsewhere, as well as discouraging the veiling and seclusion of women, abolishing slavery and forced labor, introducing secular education



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

(for girls, as well as, boys); and adult-education classes and the education of nomads.<sup>3</sup> Although Sharia (Islamic law) was to be the residual sources of law, religious leaders were against his religious and other reform programs, with the result that most of the changes he brought died with his abdication.<sup>4</sup>

Since then different rulers, who reigned the country, capriciously orchestrated the laws, the constitution, the structure of the national assembly and the socio-religious and economic policies that were put into effect. Disqualifying the Amanullah's constitution, King Nadir Shah (1929-33) reversed many of the modernization plans and favored various religious extremists, plotted to antagonize ethnic groups against one another (Tajiks and Pashtuns), raped, destroyed, and plundered the Shamali area to the north of Kabul.<sup>5</sup> Sardar Mohammad Hashim Khan, brother of Nadir Shah, aggressively pursued and put into effect the policies already put in place by Nadir, leading to widespread tyranny. There was no mention of holding elections during the time he served as the Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1929 to 1946.<sup>6</sup>



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

Democratic footprints started to become visible when, in 1949, the then Prime Minister, Shah Mahmud, allowed relatively free national assembly elections. Thus, the seventh Afghan Parliament (1949-51), known as the Liberal Parliament, allowed leeway to a few liberal reforms, such as enacting laws that catered to a free press, space for critique, including the government and traditional institutions, and allowed the opposition political parties to surface. This corridor of political equity can be best described as 'brief and temporary,' having ended with the elections of 1952 when student unions were dissolved, newspapers with dissenting views shut down, and opposition leaders jailed.<sup>7</sup>

Three National Assembly elections were held between 1955-62, under King Mohammed Zahir Shah. In 1964, a Loya Jirga (Grand Council of notables) was convened to draft and approve a new Afghan Constitution, taking Afghanistan on a course towards democracy and socio-economic modernization. Various corresponding bills were passed, including a Bill of Rights for all Afghans, specifically women.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, laws passed by parliament were to have constitutional precedence over traditional Islamic law (the Sharia). This constitutional experiment, which lasted for the next eight years, is generally viewed as a political failure.

In 1973, Daud Khan led a coup and overthrew Zahir Shah, ending the monarchy, to establish Afghanistan as a Republic until 1978<sup>9</sup> when another coup, engineered by Nur Mohammad Taraki, brought to power a communist government. The communist regimes continued to rule Afghanistan for 11 years, from 1978 to 1989.<sup>10</sup> After the fall of the communist government, the Islamic

State formed the government of Afghanistan led by many, but not all, mujahedeen Afghan parties. In 1996, the Taliban prevailed over the other Mujahedeen parties ending the Civil War. They led a brutal fundamentalist regime until 2001 when it was overthrown by the United States.<sup>11</sup> After the disintegration of the Islamic State, with the intervention of the international community, and following the Bonn Agreement,<sup>12</sup> two parliamentary elections, three presidential elections and three provincial council elections have been conducted.

Democratic reforms were initiated after the collapse of the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the last 18 years, efforts have remained afloat to instill good governance and rule of law, promote women's rights and democratize the country's political setup to bring about peace, stability and development in the long-standing war-torn Afghanistan. The Taliban, however, claim democracy is opposed to the Islamic and Sharia Laws, and, therefore, continue to fight to establish an Islamic state based on conservative principles. Women suffered the most under the Taliban with complete denial of their human rights, primarily through the enforcement of strict gender segregation and elimination of women from the public sphere (living in Purdah). This catastrophically affected their mobility, literacy rate, economic empowerment, access to health, decision-making, participation in politics and elections, to name a few.



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

## The 2018 Afghan Elections

Since the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan has made significant progress towards rebuilding its institutional structures and political system, in spite of the continued insurgency and the fall out effects of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda legacy. Some of the substantial gains, especially those related to women, include their rights enshrined in the national constitution of 2003, and the successive governments' initiatives to protect women's rights, rule of law, freedom of speech and political participation. Notwithstanding these gains, women, as also mentioned in other reports, continue to face violence and abuse, including their free and independent participation in elections and decision-making processes. According to Reuters election officials, campaigning was fraught with risks regardless of gender. Nine candidates, including one woman, were killed in separate attacks. Another two were abducted, and four others were wounded by hardline Islamist militants.<sup>13</sup>

To this end, WRN conducted research, through its signature Community Conversations, to gather firsthand information from the grassroots women voters as well as women candidates, to document and comprehensively understand the various obstacles, opportunities, issues and challenges that impacted their participation in elections.

# Objectives of the Study

## Acronyms

**BVV** – Biometric Voter Verification

**ECC** – Electoral Complaints Commission

**FGD** – Focus Group Discussion

**IDI** – In-depth Interview

**IEC** – Independent Election Commission

**IFES** – International Foundation for Electoral Systems

**UNAMA** – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

**Loya Jirga** – Grand Assembly

The following are the main objectives of this study, categorized in terms of specific and general objectives:

## Overall Objective

To identify, understand and decipher the major challenges faced by Afghan women in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections.

## Specific Objectives

- What were the limiting and challenging **local factors** for women's participation in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections?
- What were the limiting and challenging **administrative factors** for women's participation in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections?
- What were the major obstacles to **women's participation as voters** in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections?
- What have been the major obstacles to **women's participation as candidates** in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections?

## Scope of the Research and Selection Criteria

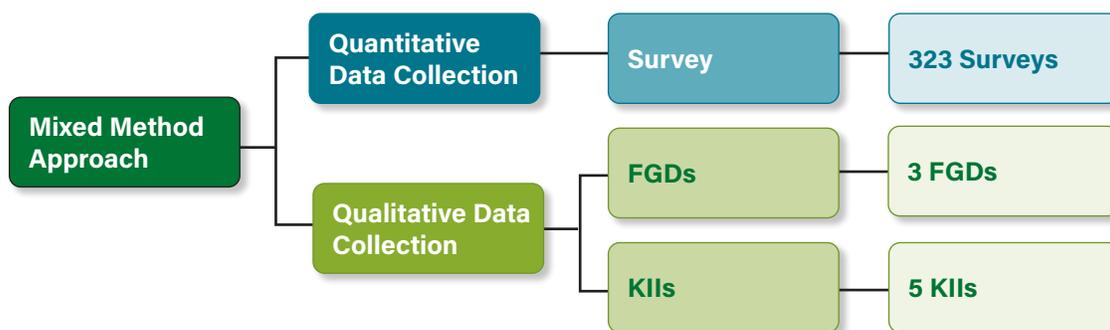
The study was conducted in three selected provinces, namely Logar, Parwan, and Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. In each province, the target areas were purposively selected comprising majority marginalized populations. Within these populations, random selection was done to include populations of different ethnic groups. Logar Province was selected to reach Pashtun women; Kabul to easily reach the stakeholders and women candidates; and Parwan province to access the Tajik women who voted under the threats of the Taliban.

## Research Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were employed to conduct this study. The primary data comprised a mixed methodology design, adopted to collect both quantitative data through surveys and qualitative data through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The mix of sources—“triangulating” information from different approaches—helped in assessing different facets of the on ground situation: demographics, social and economic statuses; perceptions and preferences, and institutional policy, yielding greater validity than from one source alone. Secondary data was collected through literature review and the published materials on the socio-political background of the country and the dynamics of different elections held under different rulers and regimes. These included statistics, newspapers, magazines, research articles and reports prepared by various UN and other agencies, including governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The following data collection methods and survey tools were used to approach different target audience. Questionnaires were prepared using SPSS software in the form of statistics, graphs and tables.

- **Surveys:** conducted with females, both married, unmarried and widowed, who were 18 years of age or above, and were eligible to participate in elections.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** conducted with groups of unmarried, married and widowed females, 18 years and above, both literate and illiterate.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** conducted with key representatives, primarily the election observers and the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission representatives.



### Quantitative Data Collection - Survey

A total of 323 respondents were purposively selected, using cluster random sampling technique in each locality of each province. The household survey was carried out with women, both married, unmarried and widowed, literate or illiterate, who were 18 years and above, to understand the reasons for their participation in the elections and the challenges met. The questionnaire was primarily comprised of closed questions with multiple choice. Certain questions were open-ended to capture the reasoning, where needed.

## Qualitative Data Collection – FGDs

A total of three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with women over the age of 18 years, who were legally allowed to participate in the 2018 election as voters. The aim of the FGDs was to triangulate the information collected through the survey and explore the socio-demographic, cultural, environmental, economic and political factors that had an impact on the women's ability to vote. The participants for the FGDs were selected from within each locality included in the quantitative survey.

A combination of open-ended probe questions was included in the FGD guidelines. A maximum of 25-30 participants were included in each FGD, which roughly lasted for about 60 minutes. Respect for participants, their social setting and background were taken into account at all times during data collection. The proceeding of each FGD were transcribed verbatim. Alternatively, a field member, who had experience in conducting FGDs took the notes while the main researcher conducted the FGD.

## Qualitative Data Collection – KIIs

A total of five Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with women activists, including election observers and the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission representatives, who participated in the 1979 elections. Their opinions were sought, more at the strategic and policy level to institute guidance and policy input on the socio-economic and political issues and challenges faced by women voters. A list of open-ended questions was prepared for a forty-minute long semi-structured key informant interview. The interviews were conducting by taking notes against each question to record the answers given by the participants.

## Challenges of Data Collection

The survey teams faced a number of issues during data collection. The following are some of the key challenges encountered during data collection:

Fundamentally, any research that is accomplished, is accompanied by challenges and problems, the most important are listed as follows:

1. The low level of cooperation by the respondents, because the research culture has not yet institutionalized in the society;
2. A negative and spy-centered attitude toward the work of the researchers and our questionnaire sheets;
3. The low number of female respondents (unfortunately in the provinces women were less willing to answer questions)
4. Insecurity in many provinces due to the existence and activity of the armed opposition.

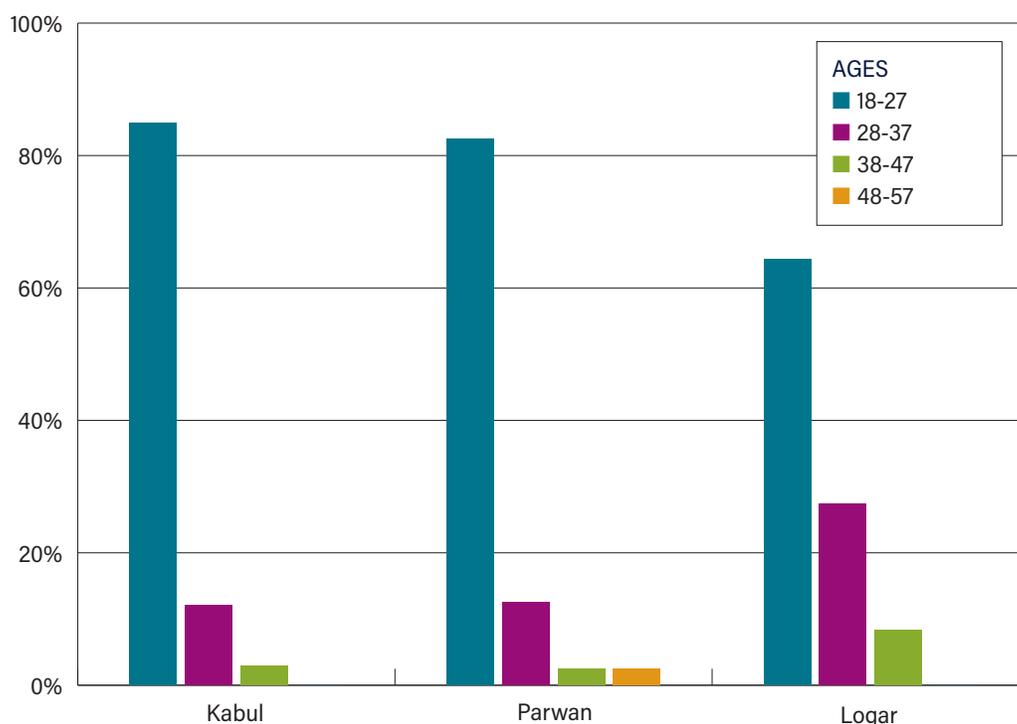
# Major Findings: Quantitative Analysis and Discussion

## Socio-Demographic Profile

### Age and Residence

Socio-demographic, cultural and economic attributes of respondents, such as their sex, age and educational level are necessary attributes to assess what influences they have on their knowledge of and access to resources and major opportunities, issues and challenges they face. Information on these attributes is based on the data obtained from a total of 323 Afghan women in the three provinces. Of these, 61.6% were from Kabul, 12.4% from Parwan and 26.0% from the Logar provinces respectively. A greater percentage (more than half) of women from Kabul, the capital, were included because of the relatively relaxed social and cultural barriers to female mobility, as well as respondent's agreement and accessibility compared to other provinces. Data in Figure 1 also show that a larger number of young females aged 18-27 years, in all the three selected provinces, participated in the survey as opposed to older women, whose willingness was comparatively overshadowed by the conservative socio-cultural characteristics, discouraging women to enter open spaces and participate in such unconventional activities. (For reference, data shown in all figures have also been provided in the form of tables in the Appendix, at the end of the report).

**FIGURE 1: Percentage distribution of Respondents by Age and Residence**



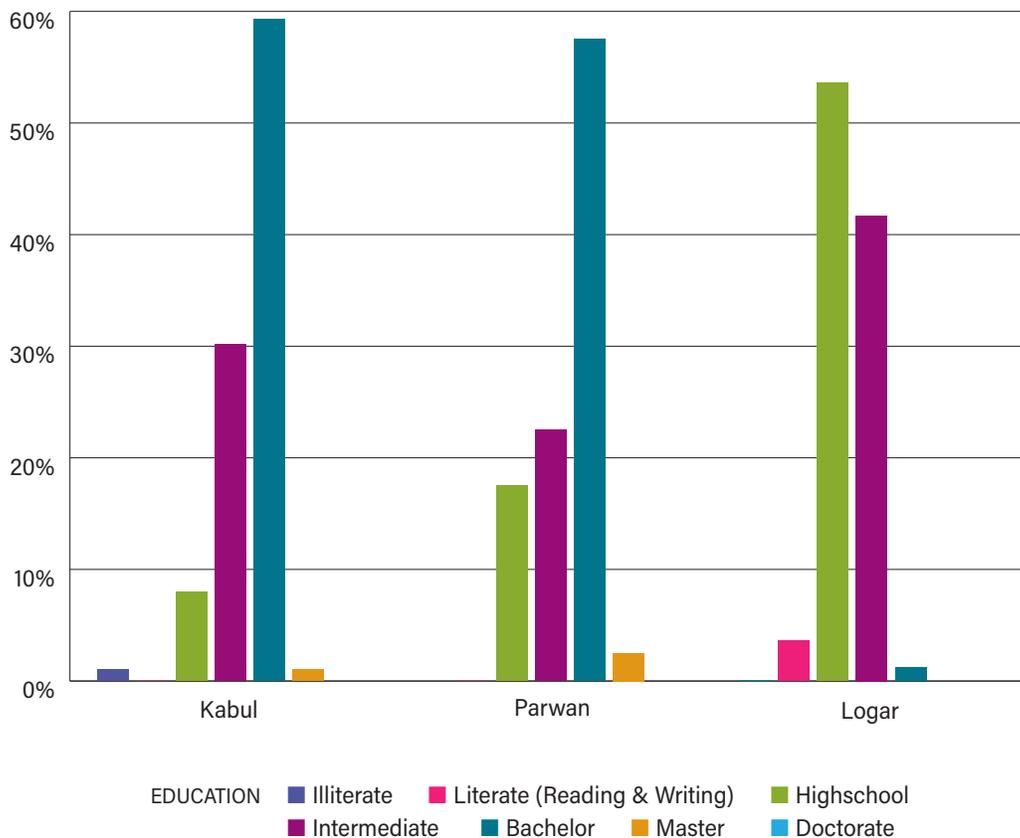


The social and cultural inhibitions and mobility restrictions in Kabul were relatively less compared to the other two provinces, which mostly comprise of remote areas.

### Education level

Figures show that the majority of the respondents, in all the three provinces were educated, with more than half (59.3%) in Kabul, 57.5% in Parwan and a miniscule percent (1.2%) in Logar having had attained a bachelor's degree. Comparatively speaking, the overall level of female educational attainment in Logar province was much lower than Parwan province and was the highest in Kabul, the Capital. A negligible number of respondents, in all the three provinces, were university graduates. As can be seen in Figure 2, the overall educational level in Kabul indicates a greater percentage of females in the Capital who had access to and were allowed to receive an education. It shows the social and cultural inhibitions and mobility restrictions in Kabul were relatively less compared to the other two provinces, which mostly comprise of remote areas. It needs to be mentioned that a large number of women who were illiterate or with a low literacy level were reluctant to be included in the survey due to cultural, as well as security issues.

**FIGURE 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Residence and Educational Level**



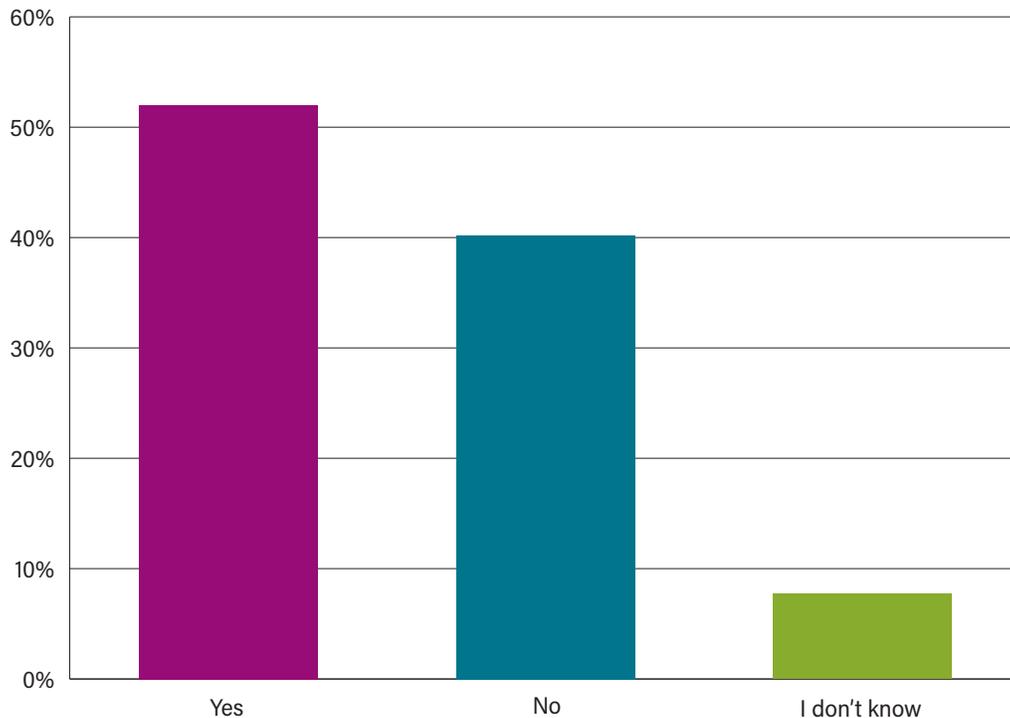
Interview with women voters in the Capital.



### Women's registration as candidates

Respondents were asked if women met any challenges in registering as candidates in their respective provinces. A large percentage (52.0%) believed there were no difficulties or issues, while 40.2% stated they faced challenges due to the strongly embedded patriarchal social and cultural norms. These norms, according to the survey participants, were linked to the perception that politics was a male's domain and men's belief that women are unable to make decisions and carry out the political affairs of a country. A small percent (7.7%) did not have any information or knowledge regarding the status of women candidates. The percentage distribution of respondents by location varies. Respondents in Kabul stated women did not meet any challenges in registering as candidates while in the other two provinces, respondents expressed it as being socially and culturally inappropriate owing to lack of advocacy and awareness activities in these provinces, along with mobility and security issues.

FIGURE 3: The number of women registered as candidates without challenges



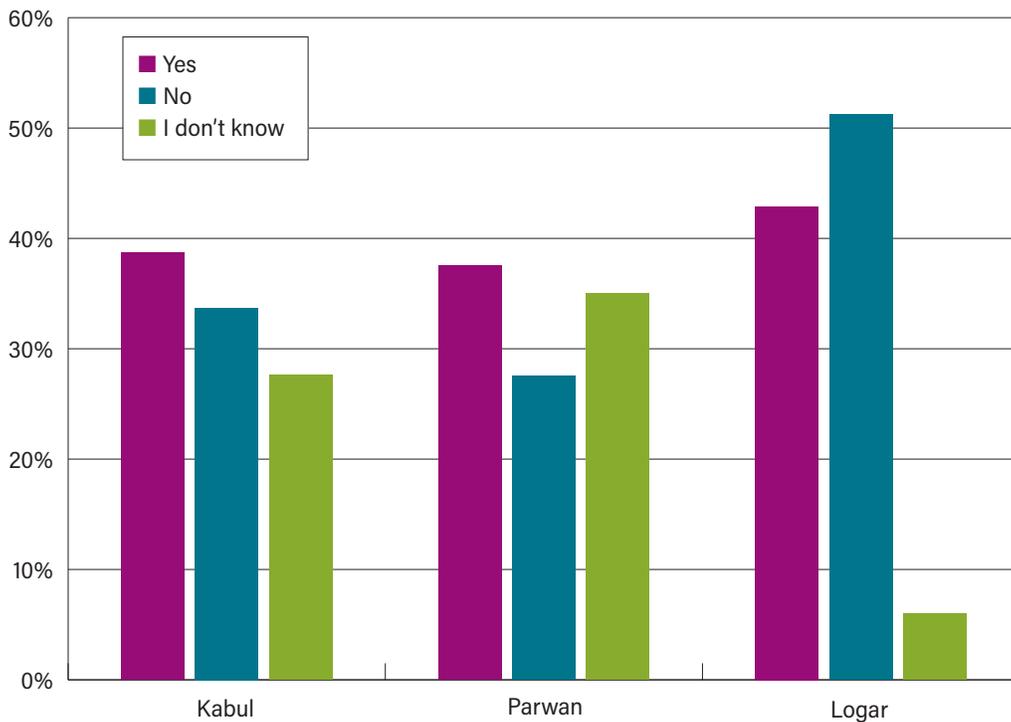


A house woman in Parwan province was not happy from the election process.

### Potential threats to women candidates

The respondents were asked whether the female candidates were threatened by the powerful locals (these include the political power brokers, clan leaders, community elders, religious clerics, the rich and the warlords/landlords) in their respective areas. In response to this question, as given in Figure 4, as high as 39.6% of the respondents were confident that female candidates were exposed to threats posed by the influential men as opposed to a slightly less percentage (37.5%) of women who disagreed. By province too, there was slight differences in respondents' awareness and knowledge about such threats imposed by the local influential. The figures show there are still many challenges for women in terms of candidacy, for a number of reasons, including traditional views and beliefs about women, misogynist and sexist attitudes, and fear of being overwhelmed by women involved in decision-making. In Afghanistan's strictly patriarchal culture, women are considered to be imperfect, lacking the characteristics and abilities of leadership.

**FIGURE 4: Percentage distribution of respondents' awareness about threats to women candidates by local influential.**



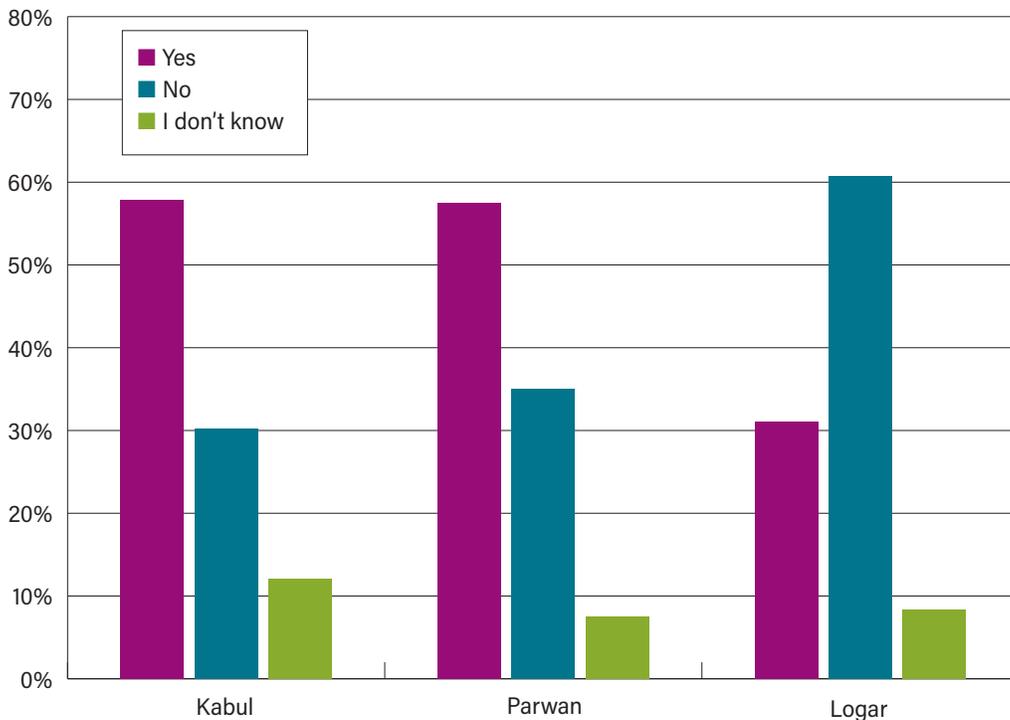


The results indicate that moving further away from the capital, especially towards the southern provinces, the number of challenges to women's election campaigns increases.

### ***Election campaigns by women***

The respondents in the survey were asked whether women in their areas were able to easily run their own election campaigns. Figure 5 shows about half (50.8%) of the respondents felt that women candidates were easily able to campaign without any social or cultural barriers, as opposed to 38.7% of the overall survey participants who felt these campaigns were a challenge as the environment is not conducive for females candidates. By province, figures show that a relatively high percentage of respondents in Logar Province felt election campaigns, run by women, in their areas was difficult and a serious challenge, again owing to remoteness, as well as the prevalent patriarchal stronghold. The results indicate that moving further away from the capital, especially towards the southern provinces, the number of challenges to women's election campaigns increases.

**FIGURE 5: Percentage distribution of respondents opinion on whether female candidates could easily run election campaigns**



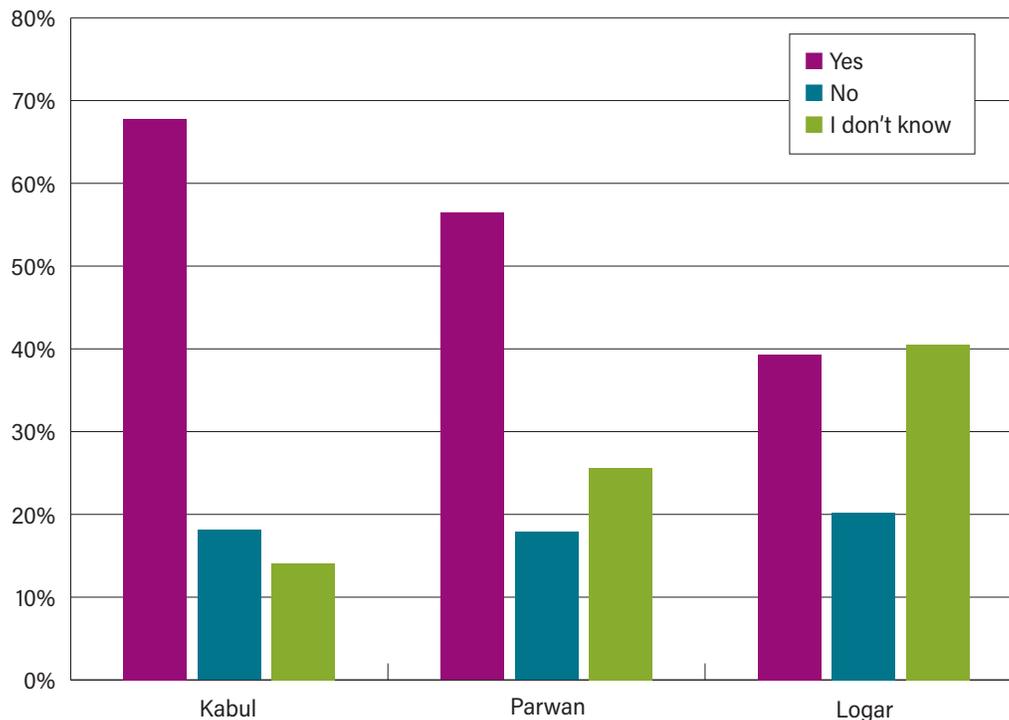


FGD with local women's rights activists in Kabul province

### Does gender influence voting?

In Afghanistan, as mentioned earlier, traditional norms discourage women's entrance into open spaces and consider it inappropriate for women to hold decision-making positions. For this reason, gender is an important issue in women's voting in the country. As experienced in the past elections, the number of women who entered the parliament by a larger number of votes than men was low. The same pattern was experienced in the 2018 elections. Statistics in Figure 6 show that 59.0% of respondents believe that the number of votes cast was directly related to the type of gender. Likewise, when segregated by province 67.8% in Kabul and more than half (56.4%) of women in Parwan Province felt the gender-based discrimination compared to Logar Province, a comparatively remote area. Using the open-ended responses to this question, survey participants strongly felt that because of their gender (being female) the number of votes is bound to decline significantly. This, being particularly the case in remote provinces.

FIGURE 6: Percentage distribution of respondents on whether gender influences voting patterns



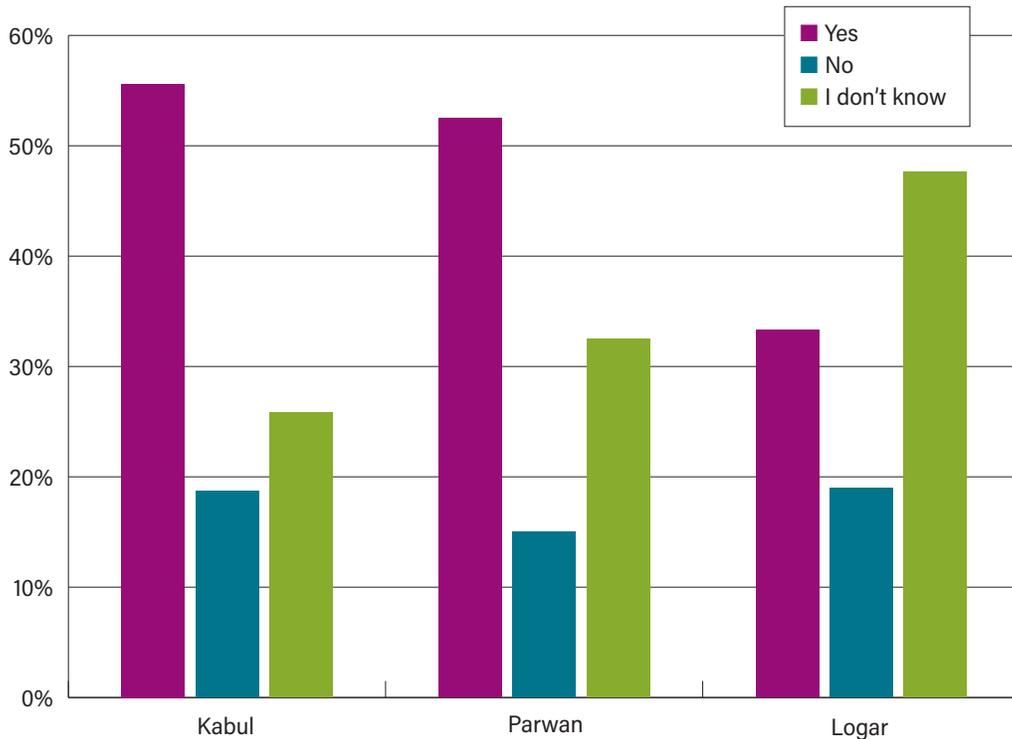


The past elections clearly show several security force personnel were attacked, while guarding the polling stations, and lost their lives in the line of duty.

### ***Were women secured well by the security agencies to vote in 2018 election?***

In response to this question, 49.4% as opposed to 18.3% of the respondents were of the opinion that the security measures were effective. However, a high 32.3% did not know or were not sure if women were safe at the polling stations as security in Afghanistan only means no violence. It also indicates respondents' ignorance to the presence of security personnel. Notwithstanding, the challenges of the local powerful influencers and the conservative culture itself looms high, putting women's security at stake. The past elections clearly show several security force personnel were attacked, while guarding the polling stations, and lost their lives in the line of duty.

***FIGURE 7: Percentage distribution of respondents' opinion whether women were secured by the security agencies while at polling stations***



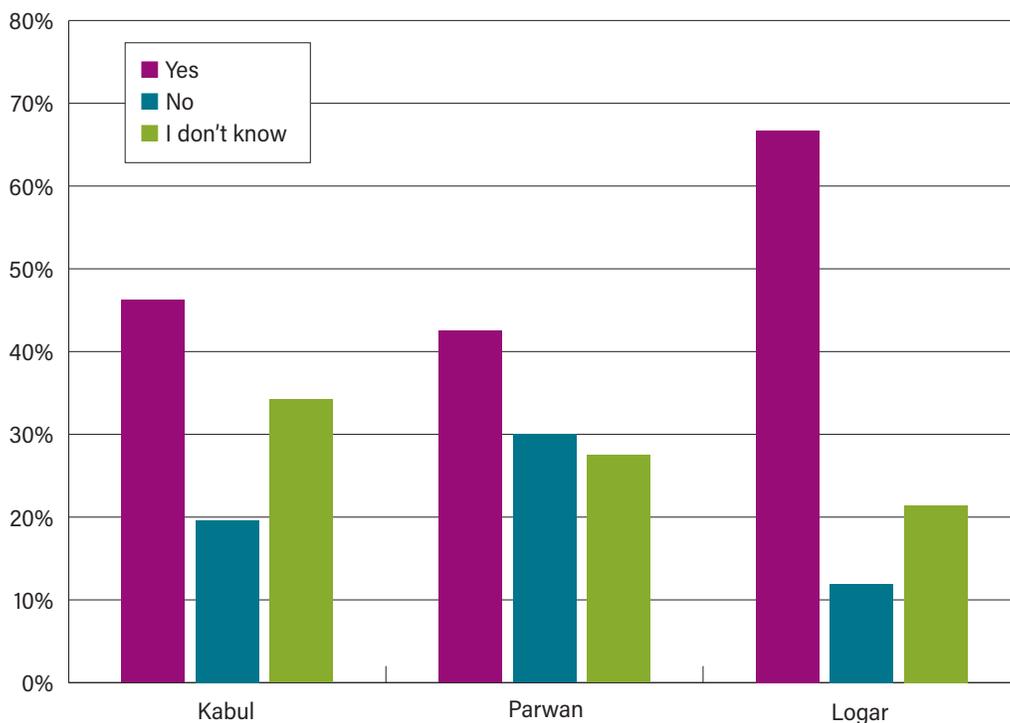
Interview with Shukria Paikan, a failed parliamentary candidate.



### Specific plans of the women candidates

Respondents were asked if the women candidates in their areas had a specific agenda and a plan while campaigning as candidates for parliament. A large number of respondents (51.1%) stated the candidates had a manifesto, a specific plan as to the actions they will take if voted into the parliament. Eighteen percent of respondents thought otherwise. A sizeable percentage (30.0%) did not know or were not sure (Figure 8), either because they lacked the knowledge or had inadequate understanding of the political agenda of the candidates.

**FIGURE 8: Percentage distribution of respondents on knowledge about specific plans of women candidates**



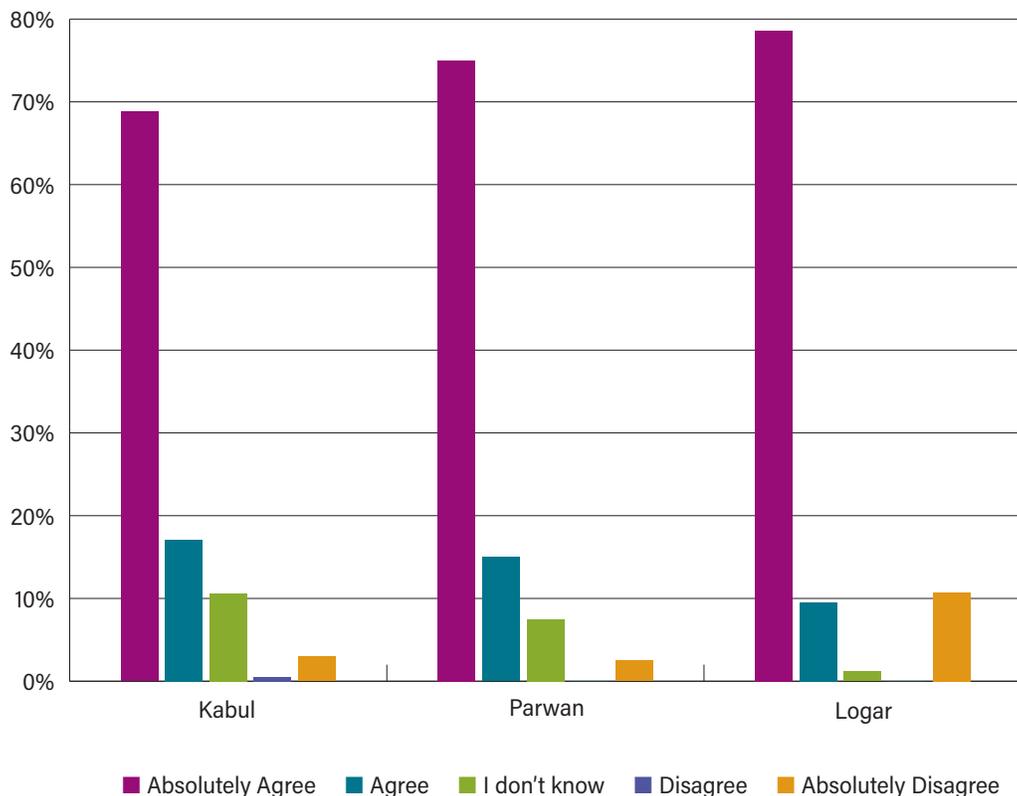


Women are more likely to be harmed than men, and in the event of insecurity and war, they are undoubtedly far less likely than men to go to the polls and exercise their right to vote.

### ***Was insecurity and presence of armed conflicts the biggest challenge in 2018 elections?***

A number of responses catering to multiple choice were designed, for the following five questions, in order to measure the level of agreement and disagreement amongst the respondents. In response to this question (Figure 9), a large majority (72%) of the respondents considered insecurity and the presence of armed conflicts (in several areas), as the biggest challenge in conducting the 2018 elections. The insecurity was directly related to the level of remoteness of the area (Logar 78.6%; Parwan 75.0% and 68.8%). The responses to the question support other findings and analysis that women and children are the most vulnerable in terms of war and insecurity. In other words, women are more likely to be harmed than men, and in the event of insecurity and war, they are undoubtedly far less likely than men to go to the polls and exercise their right to vote.

***FIGURE 9: Percentage distribution of respondents on whether insecurity and presence of armed conflicts was the biggest challenge in 2018 elections***



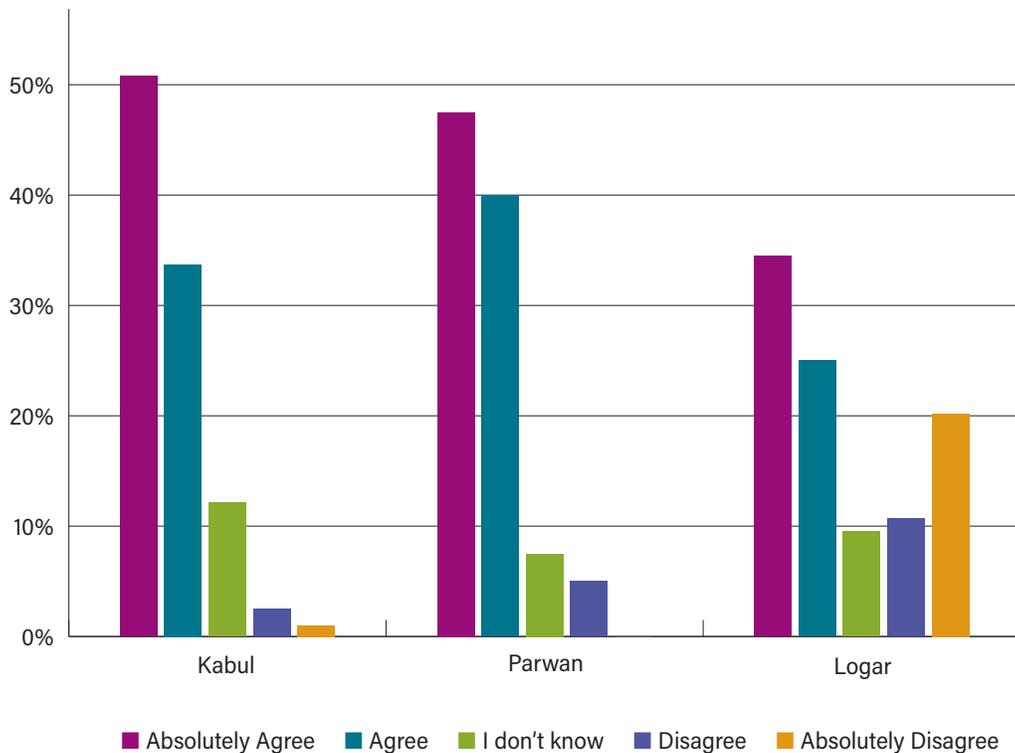


One of the major challenges for women (candidates and voters) was the traditional cultural norms, false beliefs and misinterpretation of the religious texts on women.

### ***Did traditional cultures negatively impact women's participation in elections and women candidates?***

As mentioned, one of the major challenges for women (candidates and voters) was the traditional cultural norms, false beliefs and misinterpretation of the religious texts on women. In response to the question whether traditional community cultures and misogynist attitudes made women less likely to run as candidates, a large majority of the respondents (78.3%) agreed, out of which 46.1% said they absolutely agreed and 32.2% agreed. They were collectively of the opinion that cultural traditions disallowed women to participate in elections and related activities. Enough literature supports this finding which indicates that women struggle with traditional and restrictive cultures, even in urban centers, including in the capital city of Kabul.

***FIGURE 10: Percentage distribution of respondents on traditional culture's negative impact on women's participation in elections & women candidates***



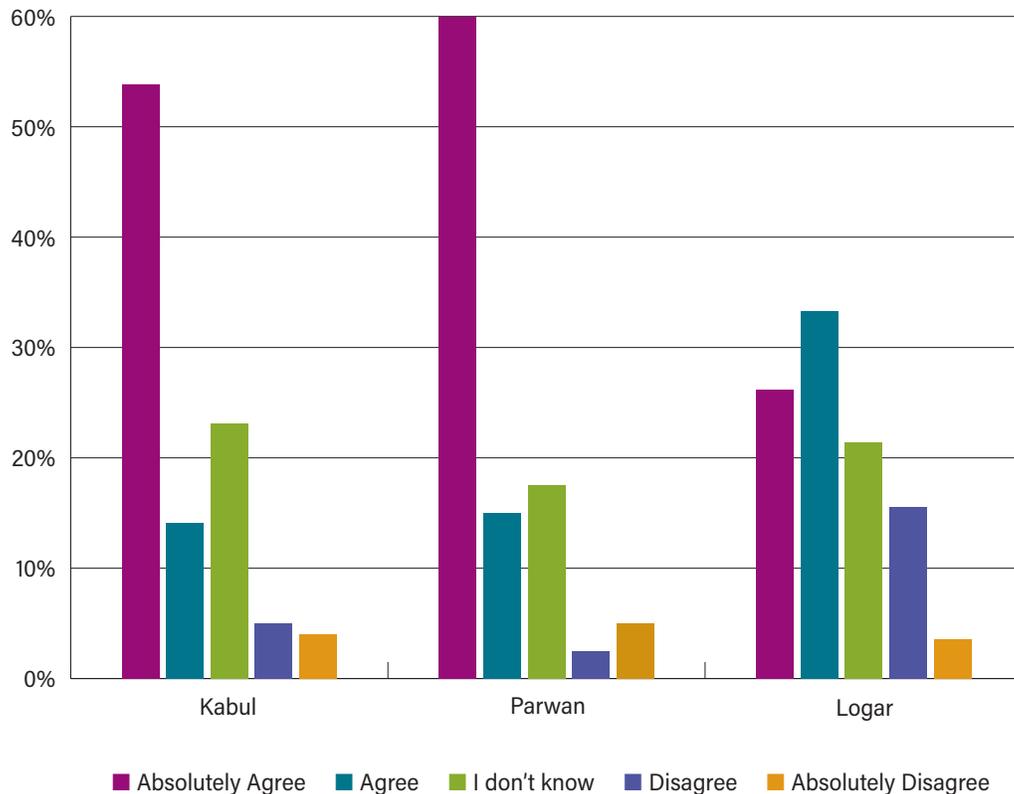


FGD with women voters in Parwan province on women access to Tazkira (ID card).

### ***Has corruption in electoral commissions prevented women from competing with men?***

As shown in Figure 11, a high 66.6% of the respondents (47.4% absolutely agreed and 19.2% agreed) were of the opinion that corruption was one of the main factors hindering women from competing against the male candidates. This finding is well-supported by other research and reviews that reported allegations of financial corruption and damaging ethical issues in the electoral commissions, although these allegations have, so far, not been proven. Such allegations, hinged on moral corruption, are likely to seriously damage the entire institution of democracy and is likely to dramatically reduce the number of women in the electoral field, especially the candidates competing in the elections.

***FIGURE 11: Percentage distribution of respondents on whether corruption in electoral commissions prevented women from competing with men***



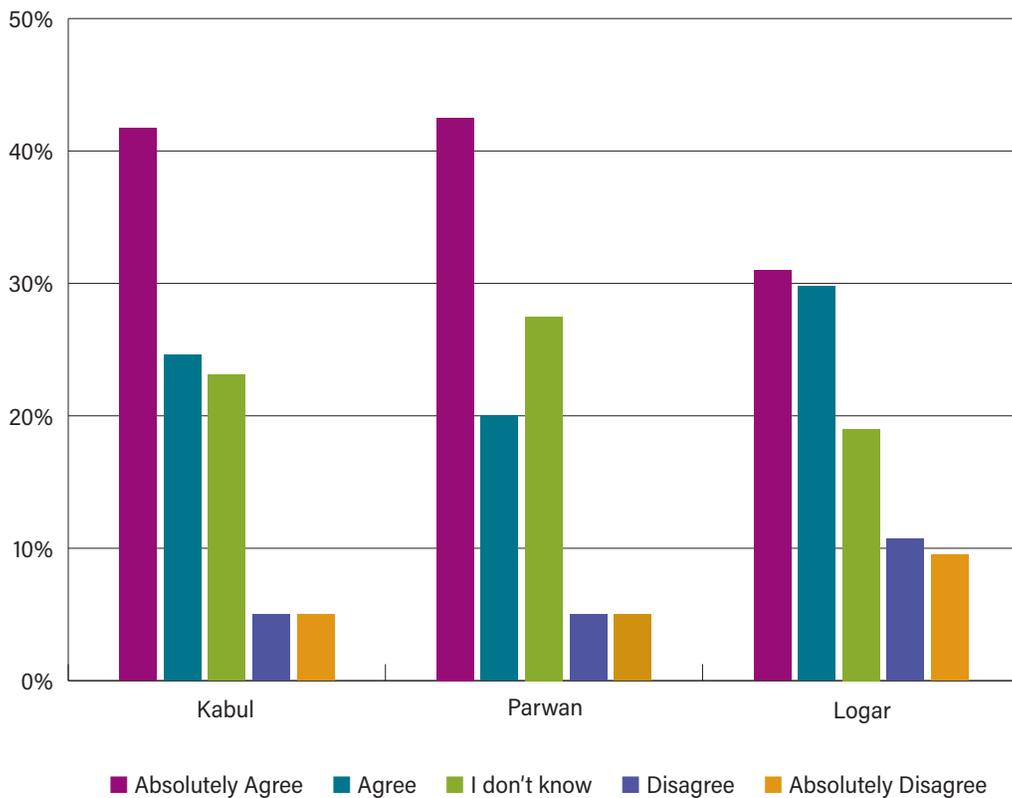
Lack of trust by women over Afghanistan Election process.



### ***Did most women candidates have poor financial resources for 2018 elections?***

A serious concern that has always been a challenge for women in Afghanistan is the lack of economic self-sufficiency. This has a direct bearing on being a candidate, campaigning and other electoral affairs. Statistics in Figure 12 show that a large percentage of respondents (64.4%) agreed and believed lack of finances is a serious issue for most women candidates, depriving them of campaigning either modestly, widely or effectively compared to men candidates who are not so bereft financially.

***FIGURE 12: Percentage distribution of respondents on whether women candidates had poor financial resources for 2018 elections***



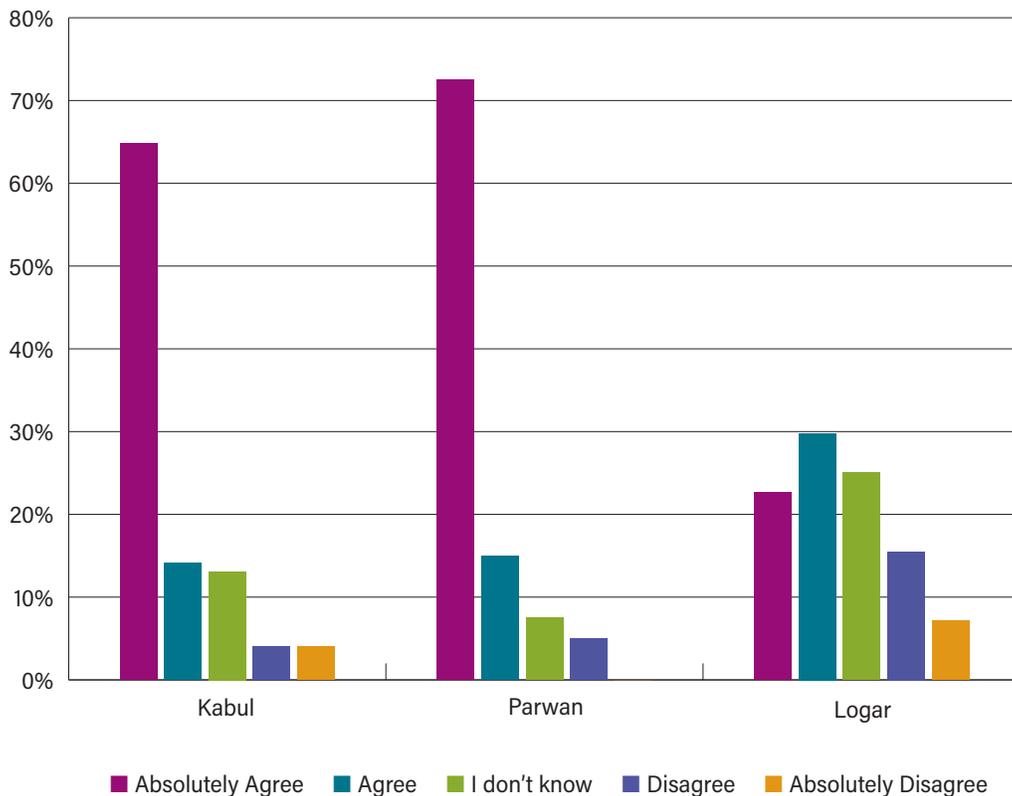


One of the most important issues that existed in the past, and, prevalent to date, is the comparative marginal proportion of women candidates who stand up for the elections.

### *Less number of female candidates compared to males*

One of the most important issues that existed in the past, and, prevalent to date, is the comparative marginal proportion of women candidates who stand up for the elections. Figure 13 shows that a huge majority of the respondents (73.1%) believed female candidates were disproportionately few (54.8% absolutely agreed and 18.3% agreed), although the numbers have visibly increased over the past few years. Women, however, still need to go a long way to be able to attain an acceptable level of male and female equality.

**FIGURE 13: Percentage distribution of respondents on the proportion of female candidates**



# Qualitative Analysis: Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

## Interviews

In depth Interviews were conducted with women activists and women who participated in the 1979 elections, in order to understand comprehensively the different dynamics and concerns associated with the challenges confronted by women in the Afghan society. The inclusion of women who had participated/stood as candidates in the 1979 elections was intentional to gather a detailed account of women's experiences in the election process, and to cater to the differences in the challenges, considering that the political environment in 2018 was visibly much more supportive towards women compared to 1979. A total of five dedicated interviews were conducted. The information from these has been synthesized below, under the different types of challenges. For confidentiality, the identity or names have not been disclosed, as requested by the interviewees. The issues or barriers confronted by women who participated in the elections has been bifurcated into two barriers: (i) Barriers to voters and (ii) Barrier faced by women candidates.

### 1. Security challenges

One of the main issues raised in the interviews was the issue of women's security in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections. Given the power politics, threats to women candidates by the local powerful influencers was identified as one of the most significant and threatening challenges for women in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections. The power politics manifested itself as threats received by one of the female candidates and a respondent before she was killed by the local militants. The protracted war and women's restricted mobility has led to women living in constant fear, especially in the remote provinces, which results in women being debarred from going to the polling stations.



Threats to women candidates by the local powerful influencers was identified as one of the most significant and threatening challenges for women in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections.

### 2. Structural challenges

The most common challenge, faced by the majority of the women, was related to the structural setup of the Independent Election Commission (IEC). Several mis-handlings were reported related to corruption, non-transparency and lack of governance. Many women who either enquired about the process or complained, one anomaly or the other, were ignored instead of being attended to; material favors were demanded for voting, therefore many women opted not to vote. Almost all the women interviewed, believed that the IEC failed to act transparently before and after the voting day. They were of the view that women's votes were heavily manipulated, and in many cases were reported lost or wasted due to incorrect polling. Other structural challenges

in polling stations related to the use of the newly introduced Biometric Voter Verification (BVV) devices, late attendance of the workers on the Election Day, and lack of assistance or proper guidance.

Another marked transparency issue related to the monitoring process. Women candidates or their representatives (women) were not allowed to monitor the entire vote counting process. This was more conspicuously practiced in the remote provinces, where women were not allowed to stay back in the polls, or at polling centers late in the evening, while counting carried on, leaving the field open to misappropriation. All women interviewed believed that despite the challenges of previous elections and promises to address them, no positive action had been taken and no serious attention was paid to the problems confronted by women candidates and voters. One respondent stated ‘the security departments of the polling stations were not active in the office of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) at night, and that there was a great deal of manipulation with the votes of women during vote counting.’ On the other hand, women interviewees were of the opinion that the Election Commission and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) paid attention to the complaints and demands of the authorities only, whereas women’s complaints were ignored or not dealt with properly, especially in the provinces, affecting the actual counting of their votes, and subsequently, the number of votes announced. *“The intention was to minimize the chances of their representation in the parliament,”* stated a woman candidate.

### 3. Cultural challenges

One of the major challenges that women candidates and women voters faced, was the false beliefs about women’s abilities. A respondent noted that *“men believe that women are unable to handle important issues.”* On the other hand, as mentioned by another interviewee, *“the majority of women were not able to properly campaign because it was not possible to post photos of women candidates in some areas.”* Another new challenge women faced during 2018 elections was the inappropriate use of social media. Informed, fake accounts were made in the name of women, which led to posting of wrong and false information, in an attempt to defame them, discouraging people to opt for their candidate. Interviewed women agreed there was a comparative change in a forward-looking mindset at the community level, in terms of accepting the role of women beyond the household, but were of the opinion that women still needed to go a long way to be treated and accepted with respectable social equity in order to be able to participate like men in the collaborative processes. Cultural practices, the lower social status ordained to women and, more importantly, the misconceptions about women’s abilities in all walks of life appeared to be incessant challenges women continue to face.



Cultural practices, the lower social status ordained to women and, more importantly, the misconceptions about women’s abilities in all walks of life appeared to be incessant challenges women continue to face.

### 4. Financial challenges

An important point raised by the interviewees was the lack of funding available for women in the election campaigns. Women were unable to launch their campaigns effectively compared to men, due to lack of sufficient funds and the

material resources necessary for campaigning. The prominent contributing factor to this issue was women's restricted mobility and choices to gain employment, lack of general social support for women's empowerment, with the result that the majority of the women candidates and their supporters were unable to garner the required material or personal assistance.

## 5. Ethical corruption challenges

The respondents disturbingly stated that a large number of women claimed and reported to have been subjected to immoral (sex) demands. In response to this shocking practice, and complaints by responsible activists and citizens, the government formed a committee comprising of civil society organizations and judicial institutions to investigate the matter. Lack of sufficient documentation as evidence, led to discarding the issue with no legal course adopted to explore the matter at hand. Many women, as reported, were telephonically contacted or were sent messages by the election commissioners and their secretariat staff, illegally demanding them to vote for specific candidates. According to the respondents, *"there were voice and text messages, but these, as informed, would not serve as a solid evidence and as a proof, in the court, against the perpetrators."*

Although many concerned women rights activists and human rights defenders raised their voices against such unethical practices, the government offices were quiet leaving the issue unaddressed. From the perspective of women interviewees, the riskiest and the most pressing challenge for women that may arise in the future is the issue of sexual abuse of women for votes.

## Focus Group Discussions

Responses and opinions of the women who participated in the three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Kabul, Parwan and Logar identified some challenges women faced that were common to those identified in the in depth interviewees. These challenges were interestingly also common inter-provincially (in all the three provinces). In each province, other challenges were also identified, which were specific to that province, indicating the impact of differing environments, exposure and access to election related activities.

**Lack of women's material resources** for election campaigns was a challenge in all the three provinces. Focus group participants believed that one of the reasons women could not vote was the lack of material resources for election campaigns.

**Women's security** was another challenge that was identified in all the three provinces, though the problem was considered relatively more severe in Logar. Women who participated in the FGDs in Logar Province, said *"Taliban and other armed militants in many districts of the province maintain extremely traditional and conservative views about women and their social roles, meaning in many areas they did not allow women to campaign and post photos. For the same reason, a lot of women could not go to the election districts, neither for attending the campaigns nor for voting."*

**Cultural challenges** were also highlighted in the FGDs. The majority of the women collectively expressed that *"men are still not ready to accept that women too are capable of playing significant roles outside of the house and have the intelligence to perform well as parliamentarians."*

In the same vein, especially in the remote areas of the Logar Province, male misogynist attitudes engulfed in conservative approaches towards the role of women, *“consider it a shame and below their male dignity to vote for a woman”* as voiced by the FGD participants. Women at the FGDs felt discontented and angry while discussing some of the steep and culturally ingrained male beliefs tied to women’s roles in the society. The FGD participants shared the negative views men carry, such as, women are a weaker sex, sexually vulnerable, are not capable of making the right decisions, are not fit to participate in politics or to hold political or government positions. These were opinions common to women in all the three FGDs, despite their regional backgrounds and influences, including in the capital city of Kabul.



Especially in the remote areas of the Logar Province, male misogynist attitudes engulfed in conservative approaches towards the role of women, *“consider it a shame and below their male dignity to vote for a woman”*.

**The lack of proximity to polling stations** was another challenge women voters referred to, especially in remote areas. For those who had to travel long distances to reach the polling stations, it was an added effort as women are generally not allowed to travel alone and many men resist accompanying them, thus denying them permission to vote. For those who did manage to vote, many of them either did not have the right perspective or the political knowledge to make a choice. Others were pressured to follow the choice of their male relatives, and many more were influenced by their peers or the clan leaders and elders.

**Corruption in Election Commissions** and Government’s interference in Electoral affairs was another challenge raised in the FGDs. Many participants contended that the IEC failed to conduct an impartial and transparent election process. Some women mentioned that they did not take the women voters very seriously, manipulated with their voting rights, and were not directed properly, especially in using the biometrics or when filling in the forms.

The FGD participants also held the opinion that there was widespread **financial and ethical corruption** within the IECs. This was *“specifically true for how women’s complaints to the provincial and central complaints commissions were dealt in with—in a non-serious and incorrect manner.”* Others expressed that *“failure to address complaints and disregard for women candidates is a political issue and has deprived women of their legal and citizenship rights.”* The younger participants were especially disgruntled about such denials.

It needs to be mentioned that democratic elections in Afghanistan are an emerging phenomenon, considering that the process of democratic elections (presidential, parliamentary and provincial councils) began after the fall of the Taliban regime. All of these elections have had ups and downs and have been bereft of transparent, equal rights electioneering processes.

## Conclusions and Discussion

1. There seems to be no controversy that women's political participation as voters and as candidates has had an impact, and has indented the traditions to a certain extent despite conflict legacies and a politicized, volatile environment. This research, aimed at deciphering the major challenges faced by the Afghan women in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections found that women are better positioned within the ideological space of politics. However, the overall political trends, as seen, move into different directions with significant implications for gender-specific barriers and institutional constraints to women's issue-based agenda and political mainstreaming.
2. Findings of both the Focus Group Discussions and in-depth Interviews with eligible women voters and women activists, including election observers and the Afghanistan Independent Election Commission representatives, who participated in the 1979 elections, referred to the body of cultural and religious extremism coupled with political violence as the major forces and trends constricting women's space in the political arena. These findings alluded to the deliberate attempts afloat during the voting period to bar women from voting in order to maintain local patriarchy. This is avidly linked to the overall patriarchal nature of the Afghan society and was identified as a significant structural barrier to women's substantive candidacy, representation and voting rights.
3. Alongside, variation was noted between cities and rural areas and from region to region, within the overall growth in the socio-cultural acceptability of women in political roles and participation. As a consequence, the numbers and the type of women's participation in elections varied in major cities and remote provinces. With specific reference to the remote areas, survey participants shared that men used women's cards or stickers to vote and voted on behalf of their wives; in some cases, women were influenced by their peers or the local elders/influential, and voted for men, and in other cases insecurity and restricted mobility refrained women to go to the polling stations. Another interesting aspect in the 2018 Parliamentary Elections was the introduction of the voter lists and the use of biometric devices introduced at the polling stations. These modern introductions were a challenge for most women, especially those from the remote areas, as they were not guided or were misguided in the use of these elements, leading to either their votes being wasted or misused.
4. Afghan politics is still immersed in conflict features and legacies of previous political regimes, amounting to influential conservative power brokers and former conflict actors shaping voters' preferences. Findings of this research show that the power brokers have an overpowering influence on the locals and largely impact the social contours of their areas. Given the misogynistic mindset, women's social role of participating in elections, either as candidates or voters was viewed to pose a significant threat to such traditional stakeholders, who would strive to maintain the status quo, in order to uphold their power and privilege. This was evident in various scenarios where women were intentionally not allowed to campaign, potential women voters were misinformed about the female candidates, including character assassination to discourage them to vote for females.

5. This research shows that the Afghan bureaucracy continues to be largely dominated by men with a negligible number of women working in senior management positions. The majority of the women interviewed and in group discussions, all mentioned male domination and masculine bias as the underlying cause, including at the official level. Perpetuating patriarchy in terms of values, discourses and practices is, thus, not the mainstay of cultural and religious indentations alone, it is visibly and equally marked within the so-called liberal realms.
6. Related to corruption in election commissions, statistics from the study show that women candidates and women voters found the IEC ineffective, non-independent and weak. According to the information obtained from this research, women votes were mishandled, women did not receive the right information and guidance, their complaints about their votes were ignored, depriving women of their right to vote, and feeding into manipulating the end results. .
7. Deeply immersed in patriarchal values, the mindset prevails despite the fact that women candidates undergo and are subjected to the same electoral competitive process of building constituencies, as well as ensuring votes that qualify them for parliamentary mandate. Through this lens, women continue to be subjected to cultural challenges defined by misogynistic attitudes that define explicit gender stereotyping, such as domestic chores-related comments, sexism, dress code / appearance, judgmental preconceptions such as: women are weak and do not have the abilities to be politicking and making major political decisions; women's entrance into the open or political space does not comply with the dominant (patriarchal) gender roles, prescriptions, values and subsequent behavior in public, inter alia.
8. Encapsulating the overall scenario, women candidates and voters were threateningly exposed to security issues, which culminated as one of the major challenges faced by women. Women candidates could not campaign effectively in their constituencies, for fear of the threats posed by the powerful and/or local abusers; those who managed a campaigning process were not allowed to post photographs, they were vandalized and/or subjected to inappropriate comments or irrelevance. The security challenge optimized brutality to the extent that a female candidate was killed by local abusers, manifesting their influence, power and the ability to enforce their authority.
9. Sexual abuse of women in the polling centers and sexual advances to women candidates for favors, privileges and other political gains, was the most shocking. It should be noted that allegations were made against the commissioner and staff of the election commissions, but were not substantiated due to lack of documents. If these allegations are true, it is tantamount to an embarrassment for the nation and the young democracy in the making.



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

## Recommendations and Policy Input

---

1. To attain equitable political participation, a paradigmatic shift is required to focus on gender policy interventions and their impact on women's political empowerment and mainstreaming, particularly viewing participation beyond numeric concerns and individual women's agency and capacities towards structural and institutional constraints. In order to achieve this goal, detailed understanding is required of not only the outputs of institutions but also the institutions themselves, in both their formal and informal guises
2. Women candidates' equal share of political influence is overshadowed by direct discrimination and a complex pattern of hidden barriers. If formal equal treatment cannot be obtained, compensatory measures, such as specific security measures and distinct government and other watchdog support should be introduced as a means of reaching equality of results. In other words, compensation for structural barriers that women meet in the electoral process should be put in place.
3. Women candidates should form alliances with members of the provincial assemblies and women councilors in the local government, alongside the civil society organizations, rights groups and other women activist groups. With the collective voice and agency, women candidates can garner both social and structural support.
4. The government and the international community must defend the red lines and proactively continue to portray positive imaging of the significance of women's rights, especially in peace negotiations with insurgents, as argued and lobbied by women's activists and politicians.
5. Education in general, and specifically that of females, must be the hallmark for attaining democratic knowledge & rights and to counter the nexus of illiteracy, political unawareness and the lack of citizens' capacity to adequately participate in political decision-making and decisions in governance processes.
6. There is an urgent need to train and induct a greater number of women in the Election Commission. Equally, the authorities should ensure that only women polling agents should be assigned to the dedicated women polling stations.



Courtesy of TKG in Kabul

7. All women registered in the national database should automatically be enrolled in the voting lists so as to encourage participation of women in the electoral process; voting centers need to be organized in a way that women can easily attend these centers; women agents should be provided transport and security.
8. Women candidates, generally speaking, run campaigns with meagre financial resource and local support. Lack of finances and independence have affected women in effectively managing election campaigns in their respective areas. It is suggested that some of the public funding provided by international institutions for elections should be considered to assist women candidates, through a credible institution with specific transparent mechanisms to maintain transparency.
9. To date, men are not convinced that women have equal decision-making capacities and abilities to actively enter the political arena. Especially in remote areas, women are still considered inferior who need male support and cannot act without the permission of men. Therefore, awareness of existing laws and issues related to women's rights will be one of the essential requirements for addressing cultural challenges to women.
10. One of the challenges highlighted by this study related to the investigation of complaints by women candidates in the Electoral Complaints Commission. It is recommended that a qualified (supervisory) body should be set up by election observation and women's rights advocacy bodies, who should closely monitor women's complaints in the Electoral Complaints Commission.
11. Structural challenges and open corruption in the electoral commissions may not be resolved in the short term, but can be countered by stringent monitoring processes, led by both national and international election observer bodies, and should be taken up by the justice and judicial institutions.

# Appendix:

## Quantitative data: Tables in percentages

		AGE				Total
		18-27	28-37	38-47	48-57	
Residence	Kabul	84.9%	12.1%	3.0%	0.0%	61.6%/199
	Parwan	82.5%	12.5%	2.5%	Total 2.5%	12.4%/40
	Logar	64.3%	27.4%	8.3%	0.0%	26.0%/84
Total		79.3%	16.1%	4.3%	0.3%	323

		Illiterate	Literate (Reading & Writing)	Baccalaureate	14 Grade Pass	Bachelor	MA	PhD	Total
Residence	Kabul	1.0%	0.0	8.0%	30.2%	59.3%	1.0%	0.5%	199
	Parwan	0.0%	0.0	17.5%	22.5%	57.5%	2.5%	0.0%	40
	Logar	0.0%	3.6	53.6%	41.7%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	84
Total		0.6%	0.9	21.1%	32.2%	44.0%	0.9%	0.3%	323

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes	168	52.0%	52.0%	52.0%
	No	130	40.2%	40.2%	92.3%
	I don't know	25	7.7%	7.7%	100.0%
	Total	323	100.0%	100.0%	

		Yes	No	I don't Know	Total
Residence	Kabul	38.7%	33.7%	27.6%	199
	Parwan	37.5%	27.5%	35.0%	40
	Logar	42.9%	51.2%	6.0%	84
Total		39.6%	37.5%	22.9%	323

		Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Residence	Kabul	57.8%	30.2%	12.1%	199
	Parwan	57.5%	35.0%	7.5%	40
	Logar	31.0%	60.7%	8.3%	84
Total		50.8%	38.7%	10.5%	323

**Table 6: Does Gender influence voting patterns?**

		Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Residence	Kabul	67.8%	18.1%	14.1%	199
	Parwan	56.4%	17.9%	25.6%	39
	Logar	39.3%	20.2%	40.5%	85
Total		59.0%	18.6%	22.4%	323

**Table 7: Location \* Were women well secured by the security agencies so as to vote in the 2018 election?**

		Yes	No	I don't Know	Total
Residence	Kabul	55.6%	18.7%	25.8%	198
	Parwan	52.5%	15.0%	32.5%	40
	Logar	33.3%	19.0%	47.6%	85
Total		49.4%	18.3%	32.3%	322

**Table 8: Location \* Did the women in your place of residence as a candidate for Parliament have specific plans?**

		Yes	No	I don't Know	Total
Residence	Kabul	46.2%	19.6%	34.2%	199
	Parwan	42.5%	30.0%	27.5%	40
	Logar	66.7%	11.9%	21.4%	84
Total		51.1%	18.9%	30.0%	323

**Table 9: The insecurity and presence of armed opposition in some areas was the biggest challenge in the 2018 elections.**

		Absolutely Agree	Agree	I don't know	Disagree	Absolutely Disagree	Total
Residence	Kabul	68.8%	17.1%	10.6%	0.5%	3.0%	199
	Parwan	75.0%	15.0%	7.5%	0.0%	2.5%	40
	Logar	78.6%	9.5%	1.2%	0.0%	10.7%	84
Total		72.1%	14.9%	7.7%	0.3%	5.0%	323

**Table 10: Location \* Traditional community cultures have made women less likely to participate in elections as candidates**

		Absolutely Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Absolutely disagree	Total
Residence	Kabul	50.8%	33.7%	12.1%	2.5%	1.0%	199
	Parwan	47.5%	40.0%	7.5%	5.0%	0.0%	40
	Logar	34.5%	25.0%	9.5%	10.7%	20.2%	84
Total		46.1%	32.2%	10.8%	5.0%	5.9%	323

**Table 11: \* Corruption in Election Commissions has made women unable to compete with men.**

		Absolutely Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Absolutely disagree	Total
Residence	Kabul	53.8%	14.1%	23.1%	5.0%	4.0%	199
	Parwan	60.0%	15.0%	17.5%	2.5%	5.0%	40
	Logar	26.2%	33.3%	21.4%	15.5%	3.6%	84
Total		47.4%	19.2%	22.0%	7.4%	4.0%	323

**Figure 12: Most women had poor financial opportunities**

		Absolutely Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Absolutely disagree	Total
Residence	Kabul	41.7%	24.6%	23.1%	5.0%	5.0%	199
	Parwan	42.5%	20.0%	27.5%	5.0%	5.0%	40
	Logar	31.0%	29.8%	19.0%	10.7%	9.5%	84
Total		39.0%	25.4%	22.6%	6.5%	6.2%	323

**Figure 13: The proportion of female candidates was very low compared to male candidates**

		Absolutely Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Absolutely disagree	Total
Residence	Kabul	64.8%	14.1%	13.1%	4.0%	4.0%	199
	Parwan	72.5%	15.0%	7.5%	5.0%	0.0%	40
	Logar	22.6%	29.8%	25.0%	15.5%	7.1%	84
Total		54.8%	18.3%	15.5%	7.1%	4.3%	323

## Endnotes

- 1 Winrich Kuhne, The Role of Elections in Emerging Democracies and Post-Conflict Countries: Key Issues, Lessons Learned and Dilemmas; *International Policy Analysis*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; August 2010; <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/07416.pdf>; retrieved on 8th Sept, 2020.
- 2 Afghanistan in portal online Magazine Maihan; <http://www.aminarman.20m.com/>.
- 3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan\\_Civil\\_War\\_\(1928%E2%80%931929](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_Civil_War_(1928%E2%80%931929)), retrieved on 5th Sept, 2020.
- 4 <https://www.khaama.com/king-amir-amanullah-khan/> retrieved on 5th Sept, 2020.
- 5 Jafri, H.A.S. and Jafri, S.A.H, The Democratic Process in Afghanistan: Notes on the Emerging Party System, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April—June 1969), pp. 165-176; Abdullah Qazi, Indian Political Science Association, <https://www.afghan-web.com/biographies/biography-of-mohammad-nadir-shah/>; retrieved on 5th Sept, 2020.
- 6 <https://peoplepill.com/people/mohammad-hashim-khan/>; retrieved on 7 Sept, 2020.
- 7 [https://www.google.com.pk/search?q=Shah+Mahmud+Khan&rls=com.microsoft:en-US:{referrer:source?}&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&sourceid=ie7&rlz=117ADFA\\_en](https://www.google.com.pk/search?q=Shah+Mahmud+Khan&rls=com.microsoft:en-US:{referrer:source?}&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&sourceid=ie7&rlz=117ADFA_en); retrieved on 15 S.
- 8 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964\\_Constitution\\_of\\_Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1964_Constitution_of_Afghanistan), retrieved on 15 Aug, 2020.
- 9 <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohammad-Daud-Khan>; retrieved on 18 Aug, 2020.
- 10 <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-worldhistory2/chapter/the-soviet-invasion-of-afghanistan/>; retrieved on 18 Aug, 2020.
- 11 Lindsay Maizland and Zachary Laub, The Taliban in Afghanistan, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>; retrieved on 5 Sept 2020.
- 12 The *Bonn Agreement* (officially the *Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions*) was the initial series of agreements passed on December 5, 2001 and intended to re-create the State of *Afghanistan* following the U.S. invasion of *Afghanistan*.
- 13 Abdul Qadir Sediqi, Rupam Jain, Women candidates face 'small-scale war' in Afghan election, *World News*, Oct 16, 2018; retrieved on 5 Sept, 2020.

## Members, Staff and Board of WRN

### Board of Directors

Farhat Asif, Pakistan  
Najla Ayubi, Afghanistan and USA  
Abha Bhaiya, India  
Patricia Cooper, USA and Canada  
Nimalka Fernando, Sri Lanka  
Rita Manchanda, India  
Rukhshanda Naz, Pakistan  
Sauyma Uma, India  
Zarqa Yaftali, Afghanistan

### Staff

Jennifer Euler Bennett (Interim) Regional  
Coordinator  
Padmini Ghosh, India Country Coordinator  
Shad Begum, (Interim) Pakistan Country  
Coordinator  
Fatema Kohestani, Afghanistan Country  
Coordinator

### Afghanistan - Core Members

Fariha Easar (Parwan)  
Rangina Hamidi (Kandahar)  
Frishta Karimi (Kabul)  
Amina Mayar (Kabul)  
Najla Raheel (Kabul)  
Maryam Rahmani (Kabul)  
Humira Saqib (Kabul)  
Forozan Rasooli (Herat)  
Nabila Noori (Bamian)  
Lema Anwary, (Kabul)  
Lia Jawad (Kabul)  
Adila Ahmadi (Bamyan)  
Masouda Kohistani (Kapisa)

### Pakistan-Core Members

Rukhshanda Naz, Peshawar  
Farhat Asif, Islamabad  
Shad Begum, Islamabad  
Farhat Parveen, Karachi  
Huma Fauladi, Quetta  
Gulalai, Peshawar  
Farzana Ali, Peshawar  
Saima Jasim, Lahore  
Neelam Hussain, Lahore  
Parveen Ashraf, Islamabad

### India

Zainab Ahkhter, Ladakh  
Abha Bhaiya, Dharamshala  
Suvarna Dahle, Nagpur  
Sahba Hissain, Delhi  
Anuradha Bhasin Jamwal, Jammu & Kashmir  
Rakhee Kalita, Assam  
Rita Manchanda, Delhi  
Swarna Rajagopalan, Chennai  
Richa Singh, Delhi  
Sarika Sinha, Bhopal  
Nusart Sultanpuri, Jammu and Kashmir  
Sauna Uma, Mumbai and Delhi  
Sudha Vargese, Bihar



## WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK

AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA

The core purpose of Women's Regional Network is to amplify the voices of unheard, marginalized women, and together address the interlinked issues of peace and security, justice and governance and growing militarization in South Asia. To this end, WRN connects women peace activists, committed to working collectively within and across national borders in an open, respectful, learning environment. WRN presents an effective flexible platform for collaborating on research and analysis, joint advocacy and representation, and the implementation of well-designed initiatives. WRN develops and delivers specific advocacy campaigns to ensure that grassroots women's concerns and their voices directly shape political discourse, policy development and programme implementation.



**WOMEN'S REGIONAL NETWORK**

AFGHANISTAN • PAKISTAN • INDIA

c/o The Colorado Non-Profit Development Center  
Box 6552 Denver, Colorado, 80206.

Email: [infowrn@gmail.com](mailto:infowrn@gmail.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/WomensRegionalNetwork](http://www.facebook.com/WomensRegionalNetwork)

Twitter: [@WRNnews](https://twitter.com/WRNnews)

[www.womensregionalnetwork.org](http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org)