

# Local perspectives on peace and elections Herat Province, western Afghanistan

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Unit (AREU), the Center for Policy and Human Development (CPHD) and Creative Associates International. He has a degree in journalism from Kabul University.

## ABSTRACT

The following statements are taken from longer interviews with community members across two different rural districts in Herat in western Afghanistan between November 2017 and March 2018. Interviewees were asked about their views on elections, peace

and reconciliation. Respondents' ages and ethnic groups vary, as do their levels of literacy. Data were collected by Abdul Hadi Sadat as part of a larger research project funded by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

### **Female worker with the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development**

Reconciliation with the Taliban will impact everyone's life, especially women and shiite minority communities. The Taliban are the delegation [proxies] of Pakistani intelligence services – suicide bombers and killers of our people. There should not be any reconciliation with them because those who kill us and destroy our infrastructure are not one of us. They are the slaves of the Pakistani ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] with their outdated ideology and their barbaric actions.

We live in a traditional community. Our people follow the village leader and if the government needs to solve a problem at the village level it asks for the elders' support. Our villagers respect their elders and follow their orders and advice to resolve disputes. Elders inform villagers about the election and other issues. We have very active elders who could facilitate reconciliation with Taliban in regards to the election. Both sides in any reconciliation or peace process need to have some flexibility during negotiations in order for the process to be successful. But as far as I know the Taliban do not believe in negotiation and reconciliation.

The International community should not forget why they are in Afghanistan. Negotiation with the Taliban shows the weakness of ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] and NATO in fighting against the common enemies of humanity like the Taliban and Daesh [Islamic State in Khorasan – ISK]. The international community should rather equip and train our national police and national army

to fight against our enemies instead of trying to strike a deal with them. Reconciliation means that the Taliban is very powerful and the government does not have the ability to fight against them.

### **Female teacher**

I am not very optimistic about reconciliation with Taliban – they are the most ignorant human beings on the earth. They should be destroyed rather than wasting money on reconciliation or peace! They don't believe in peace. The government should put more resources into military operations against insurgents. At the same time the international community can talk with insurgents to persuade them to allow people to participate in the election. But I do not think that Taliban will allow this and will try to disturb the election.

The leadership of Taliban will not accept negotiation over the parliamentary election but if the government and international community try to talk with local commanders of Taliban then maybe it will be possible. But I am not sure because ... they do not believe in logic or reason, they just use their power against the government.

Community elders can encourage ordinary people in their community. But in last 40 years there has been no impartial elder throughout the province. Some elders support [former governor of Herat] Ismail Khan, so this group is well-mobilised and they have money and power. Now sometimes the public does not trust them because they will only work for you if you pay them money.

## Male shopkeeper

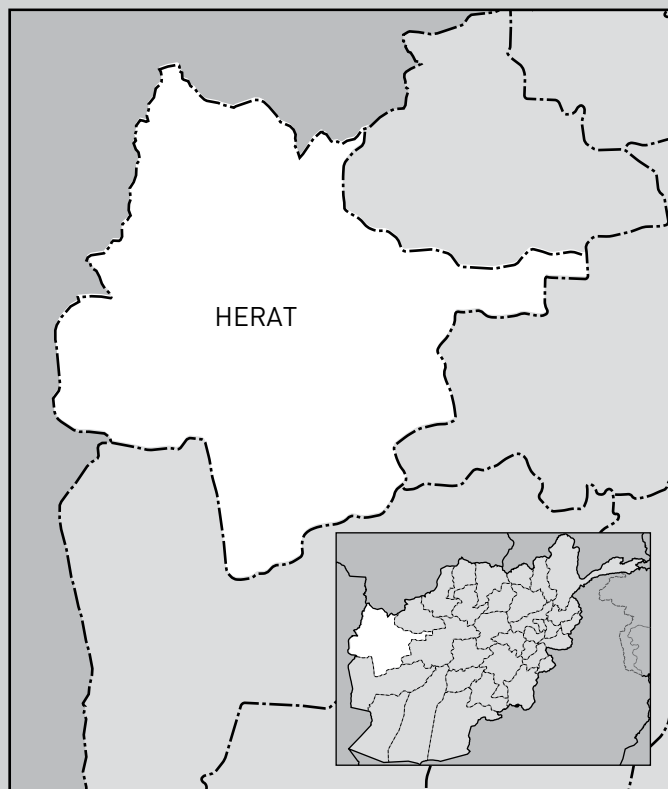
Local influential individuals will directly try to influence the election process in our community and use their power for their own candidates! Elders will pave the way for fraud because the elders who have relationships with insurgent groups will support their desired candidates and the candidates who do not have these relationships will lose. And insurgent activities are a big challenge ahead of the election. The government should control insurgent activities.

The Taliban and the government are both sides of one coin. They're financed from one source. If you still believe that the Taliban are funded by ordinary people through such religious rules and regulations such as Oshr (charitable land tax) and Zakat (alms) then you are deluded. Attempting reconciliation with the Taliban and other insurgent groups will pave the way for wide-ranging fraud in the election. I do not agree with reconciliation with the Taliban.

We live in a traditional community. In such a community elders have their influence but this is a very dangerous game. Insurgents are not only one group: they are divided into different groups. If the elders reconcile with one group this may not be acceptable for other groups. It is better for the government to continue its operations in order to control insurgent activities. Community elders are good for exchanging messages between the government and insurgents. But I do not believe that the insurgents will allow the IEC [Independent Electoral Commission] to hold elections in their areas because they are fighting to sabotage the national process. The insurgents want to show themselves as powerful and undermine the credibility of the government.

## Male elder

Without international involvement the government is not capable of holding elections. Peace and reconciliation are also not possible without the technical and financial support of internationals. I remember a month ago President Ghani announced that the government would not be alive without international support. But I believe we need to solve the issue of peace in the region because some countries in the region support the Taliban in Afghanistan for their own benefit. This issue needs to be solved with governments, not with a group of people who don't know why they are fighting.



Herat Province, Afghanistan.

## Male doctor

I don't think anything will change after the upcoming elections because parliament and the elections cannot solve the current problems. These are systematic and in order to find a solution we need to start to educate a generation. Positive change cannot be brought about with the current education system and politicians. The current system teaches our children materialism not spiritualism.

The elections don't solve the problem but they help us to practice democracy for good deeds. I will go to voting centres and I will vote for the right person, for the person who is willing to work to bring about the required change into our education system.

I know some areas of the country are in the control of insurgent groups [Taliban and ISK] but this doesn't mean that we cannot hold the elections – although there will be some problems. The government should prove its presence and politics should progress. Because if the government delays the election it means that the insurgents are very powerful and gives the impression they can hinder the government's political progress.