

Afghan Debates Highlight Current Political Concerns

Author: [IWPR Afghanistan](#)

Events in July cover political challenges and unease at election delay.

Participants in a series of IWPR debates say they are proving more informative than the current affairs coverage available in the Afghan mainstream media.

Debates held in Nangarhar, Zabul, Khost and Herat last month discussed the long-delayed parliamentary election, which should have been held 30 to 60 days after the current legislature's five-year mandate expired on June 22.

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has since issued a decree to extend the current parliament's term until new polls can be held. (See also **Afghans Impatient for Electoral Reform**.)

"No media outlet provides as much essential information about the elections as these debates do," said participant Asrarullah Qarizada. "These debates give young people an opportunity to grasp the importance of elections, and most are now prepared to vote for deserving candidates."

"The public is unaware that the state and government are often too weak to be able to take action," added Zahid Almas, another participant. "But these debates help people understand their government's problems and weaknesses."

In Kunar, Ghor, Kandahar and Paktia provinces, the debates discussed the issues raised by the law on the elimination of violence against women.

Although passed by presidential decree in 2009, this law was rejected by parliament in May 2013, and has been shelved ever since. Conservative parliamentarians claim that it contradicts Islamic sharia law.

"These debates are very admirable and very valuable," said Salma Sahadat, a participant. "These debates can raise the awareness of our sisters and bring about positive changes in society."

Rohina Mushwani, a member of the Kunar provincial council, argued that it was imperative for the law to be put in place.

"If the law is implemented, it will prevent harmful traditions [like] forced marriages, and the level of literacy will increase," she said.

"There are some problems with the law on eradicating violence against women, but it would still be better to amend the legislation," added political scientist Nayeb Khan Safi.

However Sarajulhaq, from the department of women's affairs in Kunar, said, "If our people act in accordance with Islamic provisions, there will be no violence against women, because no law or religion protects the rights of women as much as Islam."

Elsewhere, a roundtable on voluntary work was broadcast live on Zabul's National Radio on July 6. Listeners got the chance to phone in and put their questions to participants including Abdul Muqim Halimi, the deputy head of the Sur Ghar Civil Society Association.

Halimi said community action was an integral part of Afghan life, but decades of conflict had harmed the tradition.

"People have been given a message to reach out to one another, roll up their sleeves and get to work for the sake of their country, and not to wait for foreigners to help them," he said.

Voluntary work was also the subject of an inter-provincial debate organised via Skype between young people in Kunar and Kapisa provinces.

Hashmat Zhman, of the Young Thought Movement Association in Kunar, said community activism had been undermined by the legacy of conflict.

“Our country has suffered through many wars and disasters. Economic failings and people’s increasing need has weakened the spirit of voluntary work among us,” he said, adding that nonetheless such traditions had been preserved in some parts of Kunar province.

“We ask other government and NGOs to work with the public the way IWPR does,” said one debate participant. “They should gather people together so that they can take practical steps towards building awareness.”

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of IWPR’s **Afghan Youth and Elections** programme.*

Location: Afghanistan

Topic: Elections

Focus: Youth and Elections, Afghanistan

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-debates-highlight-current-political>