

Afghan Youth Debates: Astute Young Voters Key to Poll Success

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Afghanistan's presidential election must have the backing of young voters if it is to succeed, an IWPR debate has heard.

Ghulam Mohammad Zia Rawan, director of the Central Statistics Office for Ghazni province, told students that their awareness of the modern world was needed to help shape a new direction for the war-torn nation.

"Most of our country's educated are young people," he told the February 12 discussion in Ghazni city. "They are the ones who are familiar with modern values and principles and aware of all the problems and challenges that people face today.

"This is why their role is so important. They understand the candidates' programmes and can decide what's best for the country."

Asadullah Jalalzai, chairman of the Reporters' Association in Ghazni province, also spoke out to encourage younger voters to take part in the April 5 poll.

He pointed out that a United Nations survey in 2009 indicated that 68 per cent of Afghanistan's population was under the age of 25. Young voters could play a crucial part in ensuring election transparency, including monitoring the vote, he said.

One student called Nematullah asked the panel what programmes the government had launched to help build public awareness among younger voters in more rural areas.

Jalalzai said he was aware of a number of initiatives in the province aimed at stimulating political debate and encouraging Afghans to take a more active interest in the future of the country.

"Young people in villages have been given educational and training opportunities," he said. "The government has also established security checkpoints in the villages to allow them to vote in a safe environment."

Rawan added that radio stations, too, were working hard to spread awareness of the election throughout Ghazni. He said that programmes discussing cultural, social and political issues were being broadcast and helping to engage listeners.

Another student, Mohammad Jawid, asked the panel whether youth unemployment was likely to have an impact on the vote.

Jalalzai replied that he was concerned by the high numbers of young Afghans who were out of work, and that he feared this had "weakened their spirits".

"Young people may not take part in the election with any enthusiasm because they don't trust anyone any more," he warned. "The media must help with informing the public and building public awareness."

Abdullah Lami is a student at Ghazni University and an IWPR trainee.

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