

Afghan Youth Debates: Female Voters Should Make Up Own Minds

Author: [Abdullah Omar](#)

Academics and politicians in Afghanistan's Ghazni province have spoken out about the difficulties faced by women hoping to vote in this April's elections.

Shukria Wali, who heads the provincial branch of the ministry of women's affairs, said female voters faced numerous barriers to greater political participation, but that progress was being made.

She was addressing more than 150 people attending an IWPR debate at Ghazni University on December 24.

Wali said high illiteracy rates as well as reliance on men were significant factors that prevented women from acting independently.

"Factors like financial dependence, cultural traditions and illiteracy all hamper women's ability to make decisions independently," she said.

She reminded female students that "voting is done in secret".

"If men pressure you to vote for a specific person, you should still only vote for the candidate you want. You should be the decision-maker," she added.

Another speaker, politics lecturer Amanullah Tabesh, addressed a different issue – the risk that certain foreign governments would try to manipulate the election. He argued that this was highly likely since "neighbouring countries had never wanted Afghanistan to become a prosperous, independent nation".

Zamin Ali, local government chief in Ghazni's Malistan district, said a degree of outside influence in the voting process was inevitable, and this would remain the case until the Afghan economy was able to function independently of foreign financial assistance.

Abdullah Omar is a student at Ghazni University.

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