

Afghan Youth Debates: Helmand Turnout Depends on Security

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Villagers in Afghanistan's volatile Helmand province have said they will only consider voting if the authorities act to improve security.

Young voters attending an IWPR-backed debate held in Helmand on February 11 said the threat of violence posed by insurgent groups opposed to the election remained high, and many people feared reprisals.

Shir Khan Omari, a youth representative from Nadali district, said that while villagers understood they had a right to take part in the April 5 ballot, they would not risk their safety. He urged officials to bolster security.

"Village youths are threatened all the time when they discuss voting," he told the audience. "They are likely to be deprived of the chance to take part."

Shafiqullah Safi, a regional spokesman for the Independent Complaints Committee, assured audience members that everything possible was being done to protect them. He said ballot boxes were being brought to schools and mosques to be within easy reach of voters.

"Effective elections and good security are interdependent; they are inseparable," he said. "If there is no security, then people will be denied their right to vote."

"We will bring ballot boxes to schools so they are located closer to villages. Where there are no schools, we will put them in the mosques. There will be no problems."

Mohammad Wali Zirak is a university student in Helmand and an IWPR trainee.

*This report was produced as part of **Open Minds: Speaking Up, Reaching Out - Promoting University and Youth Participation in Afghan Elections**, an IWPR initiative funded by the US embassy in Kabul.*

Location: [Afghanistan](#)

Topic: [Elections](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghan-youth-debates-helmand-turnout-depends-security>