

## **Afghan Youth Debates: NGOs Should Step Up and Monitor Polls**

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Afghan civil society groups are critical to ensuring transparency in elections this April, academics and political activists in the west of the country have said.

Independent groups and the media will play a vital role by monitoring events on polling day and reporting any instances of foul play which could damage the legitimacy of the process.

Speaking at an IWPR debate in Herat, Adela Kabiri, a lecturer in journalism at the city's university, highlighted what she saw as the failure of civic groups to acknowledge the importance of the role they should be playing.

She argued that NGOs could help guarantee a free and fair election and allow the winning candidate to claim that "people have really voted for him".

"The Independent Election Commission should find a solution to ensuring a strong presence of civil society organisations in the upcoming elections," she told the students who made up the the audience. "If media outlets and civil society groups are able to monitor the vote as representatives of the people, they will be able to assure the public that the election was transparent. The presence of media institutions has [to date] been weak, and this weakness may create concerns about transparency."

Ahmad Tariq Arian, an official from the Independent Election Commission, told the debate that around ten political and civic organisations and 50 media outlets had so far obtained permission to observe the electoral process in Herat province.

Arian argued that if civil society groups attempted to interfere in the election, this could endanger the result rather than ensure its success.

"If the law allows civil society institutions to comment on electoral matters or to be directly involved on the election day, that will create a conflict of interest," he said.

He argued that only representatives of political candidates were allowed to monitor the polls.

Earlier this week Noor Mohammad Noor, a national-level spokesman for the IEC, was quoted as saying that up to 300,000 national and international observers across Afghanistan would monitor the coming poll on April 5.

**Harun Hakimi is a student at Herat University 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](#)

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