

# **Women's Engagement in Afghanistan: Implications for Transnational Security**

Ariel Bigio

Ariel Bigio is a graduate student in the Security Policy Studies program at The George Washington University. Ariel graduated from the University of Maryland in 2009 with a B.A. in American Studies and Criminal Justice. She has worked at the U.S. Department of Justice in the International Prisoner Transfer Unit and at the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement. Prior to graduate school, Ariel also spent a semester in Ghana with the School for International Training and two years in Israel.

## **Abstract**

*This paper aims to identify the factors that preclude or marginalize women's participation in transnational security and identify key conditions for the inclusion of women in this realm. Women's perspectives in conflict and reconstruction are important to bolstering stability and require women's engagement in the decision-making and policy process. Women's engagement in Afghanistan will be examined in this paper through four independent variables: access to education, access to political rights, access to justice, and access to social/cultural rights. This paper will outline the policies that have been created by the Afghan government to foster engagement for each of these variables and evaluate how these policies have met with varying degrees of success in implementation. Lastly, the transnational security implications and policy recommendations for women's engagement will be addressed.*

This paper aims to identify the factors that marginalize women's participation in transnational security and identify key conditions for the inclusion of women in this realm. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan has been in a transitional period in which international

development investments have prioritized the increased participation of women as part of Afghanistan's national agenda. Women's perspectives in conflict and reconstruction bolster stability, and the effective expression of these perspectives require women's engagement in the decision-making and policy process. Women are equally affected by war, conflict, and reconstruction. The inclusion of women's voices and perspectives can bolster the outcome, sustainability, and longevity of critical transnational security matters. Women's engagement in Afghanistan will be examined in this paper through four independent variables: access to education, access to political rights, access to justice, and access to social/cultural rights. The dependent variable is women's engagement in Afghan society. This paper will outline the policies that the Afghan government created to foster engagement for each of these variables and evaluate how these policies have met with varying degrees of success and failure in implementation. Lastly, the transnational value of women's engagement and contribution to post-conflict reconstruction will be evaluated as well as how policy can be better directed in the future.

For the last 30 years, multiple conflicts in Afghanistan have resulted in regime changes as well as political, social, and economic instability. Under the Taliban, women faced restrictive legal and social norms. Women were not allowed to go to school, speak to men outside of their families, or work outside the home.<sup>1</sup> The exclusion and marginalization of women occurred at both an institutional and social level. Since the Taliban was overthrown in 2001, the Afghan government and international donors have committed to advancing women's engagement through financial investment and policy reform. The Afghan government has taken action at an institutional level to protect women's rights and create a platform for women to participate in civil society. Millions of dollars of humanitarian and development aid have been invested in support of women's rights in Afghanistan as the country rebuilds and transitions to democracy.<sup>2</sup> The policy changes have been gradual, and there have been barriers to the implementation of these strategies at both the national and local level. An evaluation of Afghanistan's policies and strategies to engage women is relevant given the continued transition in Afghanistan and the ramifications of this transition on regional and international actors.

The importance of women's engagement in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, reconciliation, peace-building and reconstruction efforts, and reintegration are affirmed through international norms and standards.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which was adopted in October 2000, underscores that women have a fundamental role in post-conflict reconstruction. This resolution "reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."<sup>4</sup> Integrating women into the peace and reconstruction process can have an impact on the success and sustainability of these processes. Post-conflict and reconstruction efforts in Iraq, Rwanda, and Kosovo are just some examples of recent conflicts that have prioritized women as an integral element in rebuilding efforts. While there are important parallels and differences between these conflicts, there are core properties to women's engagement that are consistent across conflicts. These include the independent variables of access to education, justice, politics, and social rights. The Afghan government created policies that address these independent variables, and their impact on women will be evaluated in the following sections.

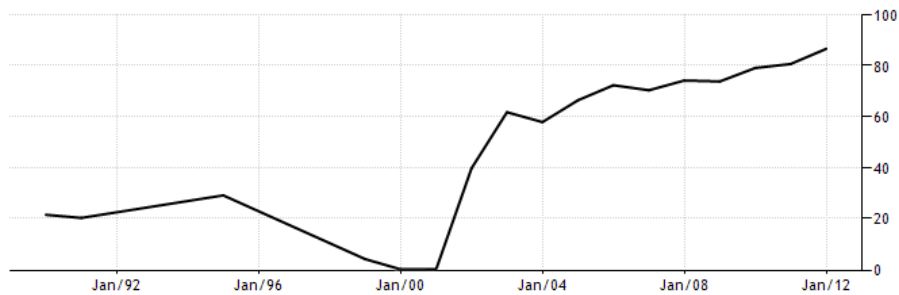
### **Access to Education**

One of the pillars of development assistance is increasing both access to and quality of education for women and girls. Education is the foundation of economic growth, which in turn improves the lives of the community and the state. By improving women's access to education, these policies are also having an effect on other socio-economic factors. Educating women and improving their access to school is linked to the eradication of poverty.<sup>5</sup> Under the Taliban, women were not allowed to attend school past the age of eight. This has had long-term ramifications for women, as the female literacy rate in 2011 was 13 percent.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, Rwanda's female youth literacy rate (15-24 years) is 78 percent, and adult female literacy rate is 86.5 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Following the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the education system in Afghanistan needed to be rebuilt. The Afghan government took steps to strengthen the education sector, and in 2008 passed the Afghanistan Education Law, which guarantees women equal access to education.<sup>8</sup> Equal access to education means having the opportunity to go to school. Under the Taliban women were barred from attending school and one of the first steps in increasing women's access to education was abolishing this ban. In partnership with the Ministry of Education and international partners, 13,000 schools have been built, and 186,000 teachers have been trained.<sup>9</sup> Investments in education have increased enrollment rates: In the 2011-2012 school year, 2.7 million girls were enrolled in school, and 270,000 were in literacy and vocational schools, up from fewer than 5,000 in 2001.<sup>10</sup> *Shari'a* schools have also seen an increase in women's participation.<sup>11</sup> *Shari'a* schools provide gender-segregated classrooms for more religious families who may not have allowed attendance at school without this type of curriculum and structure, thus providing another avenue for women to receive an education. Lastly, the National Solidarity Program (NSP) has an education component that has built a few hundred schools in rural Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Building schools in rural areas provides more access to children who may not have the means or be allowed to travel. These programs provide opportunities for women to be in school and have strengthened women's access to education.

While progress is being made in increasing enrollment rates, there are still significant barriers to women's education. Gender is still a barrier, as 74.2 percent of Afghan women report that they have had no formal education, compared to 42.1 percent of men.<sup>13</sup> Women's enrollment rates are also impacted by their geographic status: Living in an urban area increases the likelihood of access to education. Enrollment rates also differ based on security: For example, in the less secure provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, enrollment rates fluctuate.<sup>14</sup> Another challenge is how long women stay in school. Secondary education enrollment and completion is lower for Afghan girls than boys. In 2007, only 25 percent of students that graduated from secondary schools were girls.<sup>15</sup> There have been significant improvements to women's access to education, but keeping

girls in school to reach higher education levels is also imperative to social and economic development.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 1: Percentage of Female Enrollment in Primary School from 1990 - 2012<sup>17</sup>**

Education programs are a unique platform to engage different sectors of civil society, from village leaders to religious councils. Strengthening relationships and cooperation between the Ministry of Education and these civil actors helps to legitimize efforts to increase access to education. This collaboration increases communal investment in education programs, which in turn can inform whether the government initiative succeeds or fails. There are opportunities for coalition building between the government and civil society in bolstering education programs, but entrenched norms continue to undermine and hinder progress. Key threats to enrollment include normative cultural and social proscriptions opposing the education of girls.<sup>18</sup> Girls have been subjected to death threats, acid attacks, and bombings for attending school.<sup>19</sup> According to polling data completed by The Asia Foundation, while support for gender equality in education is generally high, when girls are required to travel outside of a province to receive an education, support drops significantly.<sup>20</sup> A woman's physical proximity to the home and family is central in more traditional communities, which can be an impediment to enrollment.<sup>21</sup> Through direct engagement with the community, the NSP can create strategies that better address the reality in some communities and continue to build upon the progress that has been achieved.

### Access to Politics

Afghanistan is a country in transition, and this provides an opportunity for women to have access and representation in the political process. Shortly after the Taliban took control of Kabul in 1996, they abolished women's right to vote, which the Afghanistan constitution reinstated in 2004. The Afghan government recognizes that "women's leadership and political participation are manifestations of women's empowerment."<sup>22</sup> To increase opportunities in politics and policy-making, programs have been launched to train women in leadership and increase their engagement in public life. In 2012, a program instituted by the Asian University of Women (AUW) provided internship and fellowship opportunities for Afghan female students with government ministries, including the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics (MCN) in Kabul. According to AUW, "The Ministry is participating in the program as part of an effort to improve the number of women in high-level positions, recognizing the important role that women must play in development and governance."<sup>23</sup> From an institutional level, these programs are introducing women to the policy process and further empowering them to participate in the political arena. Non-governmental organizations are also working on a grassroots level to empower and educate women about the political process. As one example, the Afghan Women's Network, a non-governmental organization based in Kabul, seeks to empower women and encourage engagement in political, economic, and social processes. This includes legal awareness programs that make sure women are informed of their rights, including suffrage.

Women in the political process are a critical component to making the government more representative of Afghan society. The first female vice presidential candidate appeared on the ballot in 2014, and 69.7 percent of women surveyed said that they voted in the last election, which is an increase of 26.3 percent from the elections in 2009.<sup>24</sup> Women also have a representative quota of 20 percent of the seats in provincial councils to ensure their representation.<sup>25</sup> As part of the state-building process, women can more effectively elevate their views and concerns on strengthening governance to the national agenda.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these structural advances, important challenges remain for women as leaders in Afghan society. Cultural barriers can prevent women from participating in the political process. Of the women who did not vote in the 2014 election, nearly a quarter surveyed cited resistance from family members as the primary reason.<sup>27</sup> In the 2004 elections, 87 percent of women surveyed said that they needed permission from a male family member to vote.<sup>28</sup> The lack of self-determination is a barrier to women succeeding in politics because it inhibits women's voices in decision-making. While rates of political participation are higher in Kabul, women are underrepresented in the provinces.<sup>29</sup> This can reinforce the marginalization of women by limiting their engagement in political affairs across the country. Policies to engage women in politics may be undermined when there is no female representation to ensure that these policies are being implemented.

There are opportunities that can be leveraged to increase women's access to politics. One of the goals of the 2008 Afghanistan National Development Strategy is to promote gender equality and secure equal rights and opportunities for women in politics.<sup>30</sup> This national strategy focuses on increasing women's engagement, which will in turn create a platform for greater social acceptance.<sup>31</sup> The National Development Strategy was written in consultation with women and women's groups, which demonstrates the government's commitment to empower women to have an influence in the political process and in policy-making. The Development Strategy also increases women's capital by promoting and encouraging women in the provinces to take on leadership roles in the community. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has also identified mechanisms to increase women's leadership. These include: promoting mentoring relationships between men and women in the same professional field, gender awareness programs for senior officials and decision-makers, the establishment of a career path program for women in politics, and

**ONE OF THE GREATEST  
THREATS TO WOMEN'S  
SELF-DETERMINATION AND  
ACCESS TO POLITICS IS  
TARGETED VIOLENCE  
AGAINST FEMALE  
POLITICIANS AND CIVIL  
SERVANTS.**

creating networks of women already in professional environments to provide support for each other and other women in the community.<sup>32</sup> These programs demonstrate the importance of having a range of programs that target women and bolster their status both at an institutional and a communal level.

One of the greatest threats to women's self-determination and access to politics is targeted violence against female politicians and civil servants. Between 2012 and 2013, six high profile assassinations of women in politics occurred.<sup>33</sup> Two of the women had been the head of women's affairs in the Laghman Province: One was shot traveling to work, and the other killed by a car bomb.<sup>34</sup> Zufenon Safi, who represents Laghman Province in Parliament, said: "[t]here is only one reason behind killing women: to prevent women from working in the government ... We should expect more similar assassinations in the upcoming weeks and months because they (the Taliban) have threatened every female civil servant, including members of the provincial council and teachers."<sup>35</sup> In a country where women's representation is already low, these targeted assassinations threaten to undermine the national policy of gender equality and female empowerment. There has been positive progress in increasing women's access to politics, but the expression of opposition to women's participation through violence and execution is a threat not only to women, but to rule of law in Afghanistan as well.

### **Access to Justice**

After the fall of the Taliban, rule of law and civil society's confidence in the judicial system needed to be reestablished. Women experience the judicial system both as victims and perpetrators, and improving women's access to the justice system requires strategies that respond to both. Programs to enhance rule of law address three elements of the justice system: law enforcement, courts and the judiciary, and corrections. These reforms must be coupled with specific efforts to increase women's access to justice, as such access is often limited or undermined. A strong justice system is important because it supports and legitimizes progress made to women's access in other sectors.



One important step in improving women's access to justice was the passage of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Act in 2009, which created a separate class of crimes for acts of violence committed against women. This act criminalized rape, underage or forced marriage, and 20 additional offenses of violence against women.<sup>36</sup> This act also established and recognized legal rights for women. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) asserts that: "[p]rogress in implementing the EVAW law can contribute to improving the realization of women's human rights to enable them to fulfill their crucial and imperative role in the country's political, economic, and social development."<sup>37</sup> By implementing and prosecuting cases under EVAW, the Government of Afghanistan is ensuring the protection of women under the law. Another aspect to the EVAW law is the establishment of women's shelters. These shelters serve women and children who have been abused or battered. By removing women from dangerous situations and providing housing and counseling, these shelters reinforce the state's commitment to protecting women's rights.

**HAVING WOMEN PRESENT IN  
THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS  
IMPORTANT TO MAKING THESE  
INSTITUTIONS MORE  
APPROACHABLE AND  
INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD  
THAT WOMEN WILL PURSUE  
JUSTICE THROUGH THE  
FORMAL SECTOR.**

Improved access to education has also seen an increase of women pursuing law careers. Women are lawyers (19.3 percent), judges (8.4 percent), and prosecutors (6.4 to 9.4 percent).<sup>38</sup> Having women present in the justice system is important to making these institutions more approachable and increasing the likelihood that women will pursue justice through the formal sector.<sup>39</sup> Women's presence is also important for cases that fall under the EVAW and women may not feel comfortable describing a case to male lawyers, which could affect the prosecution and outcome of the case.<sup>40</sup> While there have been increases in the number of female professionals in the justice sector, representation remains low. Women can

be discouraged to pursue professional careers in this sector because of familial and social pressure to stay at home, a lack of acceptance in the workplace, and marginalization at both the national and the communal level.<sup>41</sup> Two consequences of the lack of representation are that women have less influence in the criminal justice process and lack the authority to effect change at decision-making levels.

Another barrier to women's access to the formal legal system is that only 19.2 percent of women are aware that the formal system exists.<sup>42</sup> Informal justice, such as community elders or councils, may be employed to settle disputes rather than the formal justice system. As a consequence, women may not be fully informed of their rights or know that there are other options to settle disputes or claims. For example, applying the EAW has been limited because of cultural values that discourage women from reporting violence committed against them.<sup>43</sup> In 2011, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan produced a report about the implementation of the EAW law. In the report, "UNAMA highlights that most incidents of violence against women still remain largely underreported, especially in rural areas, due to social norms and cultural restraints, discrimination against women (leading to wider acceptance of violence against them), fear of social stigma or exclusion and, at times, fear of reprisals and threat to life."<sup>44</sup> Implementing policies created to protect and strengthen women's rights in civil society is undermined by women's lack of knowledge of protections in the formal system and community pressure to use the informal judicial process. This also weakens the effectiveness of the justice system, when policies such as the EAW Act do not have the opportunity to be upheld.<sup>45</sup>

While social norms challenge the effectiveness of the justice system, there has been progress. Specialized EAW units have been established in eight provinces to support the prosecutorial staff and to inform women in the community of their rights under this law.<sup>46</sup> Reports of violence against women are higher in provinces where these units are located, and expanding the program will be advantageous to developing the law's effectiveness. More female professionals studying law and pursuing careers in the justice sector can also strengthen these units, as women in

Afghan culture are more comfortable and likely to report a violent crime to a female police officer or lawyer. The increase in the number of cases reported and the increase of women studying law are positive indicators of progress. Leveraging these gains by expanding the relevant programs will possibly contribute to new social norms surrounding women's access to justice.

There are a number of threats to women's access to justice. Women's perception of the justice system is lowered by the prosecution and incarceration of women for moral crimes, such as *zina*, or running away from home. This undermines women's perception of the court as fair and just.<sup>47</sup> Women can also be arrested for leaving abusive or forced marriages. These moral crimes are informed by religious laws, which mullahs in Afghanistan have authority over as well-respected members of Afghan society.<sup>48</sup> Another threat to women's judicial rights is religious leaders in Afghanistan speaking out against women. In 2012, the Afghan National Ulema Council stated that women were subordinate to men and should not mix with men professionally or in education.<sup>49</sup> These religious leaders and councils have influence and can threaten the efforts of the state to enhance women's rights. Lastly, targeted violence against women in the justice sector threatens women's participation. One woman working on security issues in Afghanistan, who gained particular prominence as a female Afghan police officer, was Malalai Kakar. Kakar was shot and killed in her car by the Taliban in 2008 because she was a woman, and the Taliban forbade women on the police force.<sup>50</sup> This act is one example of the violent reprisal to which women can be subjected. One of the challenges to creating policy is to address these violent outliers and to prevent the pre-conditions of violence when women do participate. These weaknesses and threats, taken together, demonstrate how social norms can limit women's access to justice, jeopardizing the overall progress made to legitimize the rule of law.

### **Access to Social Rights**

A 2011 Thompson Reuters Foundation survey found that “ongoing conflict, high maternal mortality and domestic violence rates, limited

access to health care, and 'near total lack of economic rights' combine to make Afghanistan the world's most dangerous country in which to be born a woman."<sup>51</sup> This survey sheds light on some of the challenges facing women, but there has been positive progress in changing the status of women. Article 22 of the 2004 Constitution gave equality to men and women, and policies such as the 2008 National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan have been created to promote gender equality.<sup>52</sup> The strength of civil society in working to advance the status of women also contributes

to improved access to social rights.

**AS MORE WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES ARE EDUCATED ABOUT THEIR RIGHTS, MORE ARE EMPOWERED TO ASSERT THEM IN CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, LAND OWNERSHIP, AND DISCRIMINATION.**

Afghan women's groups are actively working to improve the status of women through education, advocacy, and community organizing. One of these groups is the Women for Afghan Women (WAW), a non-governmental organization with

offices in eight provinces and an office in New York. WAW has provided training and workshops for women about their rights, family guidance centers, women's shelters, halfway houses, and support centers for children.<sup>53</sup> Through their advocacy efforts, WAW has helped over 7,000 women and trained more than 125,000 Afghans in human rights.<sup>54</sup> The Afghan Women's Network (AWN) is another NGO whose mission is to empower women and ensure women's equal participation in society.<sup>55</sup> The Afghan Women's Network has lobbied political leadership to ensure that women's perspectives are taken into consideration, created networks of women in government, NGOs, and international stakeholders to exchange ideas, identify areas of expertise, and enlarge the advocacy base for women's issues, and facilitated interviews and roundtables about the status of women.<sup>56</sup> As more women and communities are educated about their rights, more are empowered to assert them in cases of domestic violence, land ownership, and discrimination.<sup>57</sup>

While there have been improvements, women's status and opportunities remain limited. One of the largest barriers to women's access to social rights is a woman's lack of mobility. Many women are not able or allowed by their families to travel to other provinces or within their own province without a male relative or legal guardian, which has ramifications across the four variables outlined in this paper.<sup>58</sup> Limited freedom of movement has consequences in two ways. First, women in remote areas may not be able to travel, which prevents them from learning, being informed about their rights under Afghan law, voting in elections, and utilizing the formal justice system through services or professional representation. Second, for women in the professional sector, they may not be able to travel to villages to provide services such as leading legal awareness programs and reaching women who may be victims in situations of domestic violence.<sup>59</sup> There is a disconnect between women being able to receive and distribute services. The lack of freedom of movement is at the heart of this divide between policy and implementation.

There has been progress in reaching women in rural communities and provinces throughout Afghanistan. Civil society organizations such as the Afghan Women's Network and Women for Afghan Women have programs throughout the country and are building the capacity to expand. These organizations have cited the importance of networking with stakeholders both nationally and internationally to expand their programmatic reach and increase female engagement. A recent story highlights the progress that has been made and the relationship between civil society and the government. A 10-year-old girl was sexually assaulted in the Kunduz province by a mullah. After the girl reported the case to authorities, Women for Afghan Women was contacted and assisted the girl in seeking medical treatment, placed her in a women's protection center, and engaged an attorney from the EVAW units to prosecute the case.<sup>60</sup> The mullah was sentenced to 20 years in prison and fined approximately \$30,000, one of the most severe sentences that has been handed down since the EVAW law went into effect.<sup>61</sup> This case demonstrates how women's groups can connect policy with implementation at a local level. It also shows how NGOs can connect the resources and capacity of civil society with the government and increase

women's access to social rights. This was a recent case, from 2014, but given Women for Afghan Women's success, it could represent a turning point for further engaging NGOs.

Key threats to women's access to social rights are the social and cultural norms that limit public support for civil society actors promoting these rights and for the new policies passed by the Afghan government to empower women. In 2014, 30 percent of Afghans surveyed said that women should not be allowed to work outside the home and less than half (40.9 percent) of Afghans think that it is acceptable for a woman to work for an NGO.<sup>62</sup> This poll demonstrates that women still lack social support for engaging in society, including working in NGOs to advocate, educate, and empower women throughout the provinces.

### **Transnational Security Implications**

After 30 years of war, Afghanistan is in transition to become a more politically stable and secure country. In 2014, democratic elections successfully transferred power from President Hamid Karzai to President Ashraf Ghani, and a new unity government is being established. Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan has continued to develop in key areas of governance, including supporting the rule of law through the establishment of the Counternarcotics Justice Center, strengthening the economy through agricultural productivity, improving the political process, and expanding health and education for all citizens. The United States, along with other international donors, has committed to providing Afghanistan \$16 billion in aid through 2015.<sup>63</sup> This is an important time in Afghanistan as newly elected President Ghani forms his political cabinet and transitions Afghanistan after nearly 13 years of Karzai's leadership.

Two upcoming events could have profound ramifications on women in Afghanistan and the progress that has been made to support women's rights. The first concerns how the new government will address the Taliban. International investments and the combined Afghan, U.S., and NATO military partnership have weakened the insurgency. These efforts, though, have not eliminated the threat of the Taliban, and conflict

continues. Violence throughout the provinces and in Kabul has escalated as the Taliban intensifies their attacks against Afghans and foreign workers.<sup>64</sup> This increased violence has a destabilizing effect on the government and the capital city of Kabul, which was largely insulated from these types of attacks in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Taliban.<sup>65</sup> Peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have started, but no agreement has been reached. Women were excluded from the negotiation table, which has many civil society groups fearing a reversal of gains made for women's rights.<sup>66</sup>

**WOMEN WERE  
EXCLUDED FROM THE  
NEGOTIATION TABLE,  
WHICH HAS MANY  
CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS  
FEARING A REVERSAL  
OF GAINS MADE FOR  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS.**

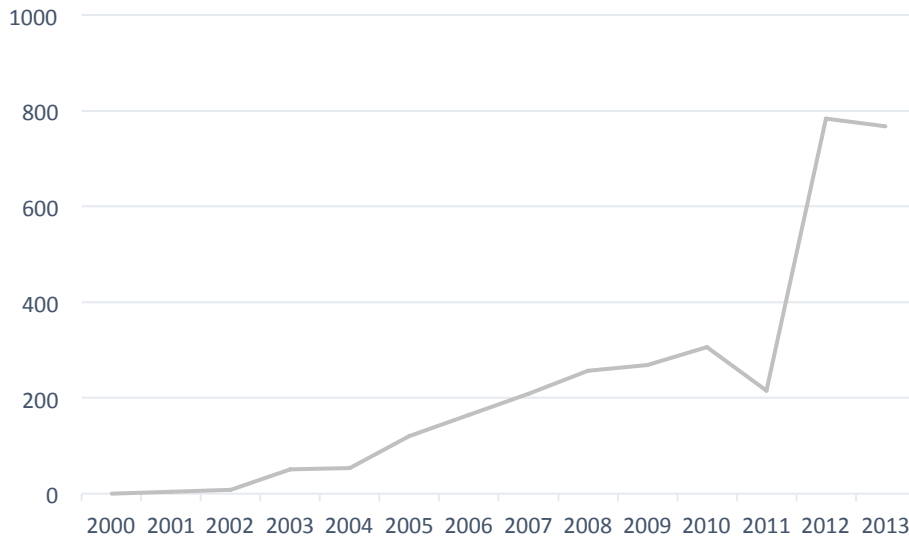
The second event is the future withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces. The Taliban and the new government's response to the lack of physical support or deterrent of foreign troops could impact the gains made for women. It is possible that the Afghan government could agree to a peace deal with the Taliban that would give the Taliban legal status as a political party and representation in the Afghan government in exchange for a cessation of violence.<sup>67</sup> Providing the Taliban a political platform could restrict further gains in women's rights. As the Afghan government transitions to new leadership under President Ghani, the permanence of advances made in promoting women's engagement are uncertain, especially under the cloud of these peace negotiations.

A politically empowered Taliban has regional implications regarding the emerging ISIL threat. If the Taliban were to gain political legitimacy, ISIL and the Taliban could join forces. This has significant policy implications for the United States and NATO, as troop withdrawal is forthcoming. A more stable and secure Afghanistan could help contain ISIL as well as counter other extremist threats that have regional and transnational consequences. If, however, a stable and secure Afghanistan is one where the Taliban has legal status as a political party, this could lead to instability if ISIL were to expand operations to Afghanistan.

The Taliban, ISIL, and the impending withdrawal of American troops are three external factors with potentially destabilizing effects. Afghan regional and international stakeholders who have invested in promoting women's rights to strengthen national security, governance, and rule of law look to President Ghani to demonstrate his commitment to women's engagement in Afghan society. Preserving these developments is an important priority for the newly elected Afghan government. According to the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, more than half of all peace agreements fail within the first 10 years.<sup>68</sup> The Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security goes on to say: "[e]vidence from around the world and across cultures shows that integrating women and gender considerations into peace-building processes helps promote democratic governance and long-term stability."<sup>69</sup> Women's access to education, justice, political, and social rights are not just independent variables, but fundamental factors to empowering women. By increasing women's access across these four factors, the Afghan government can counter the destabilizing effects of the current transition and continue to build upon the progress that has been made.

Failure to protect and expand upon the efforts to engage women in Afghanistan could further destabilize the country and lead to an escalation of violence from the Taliban and ISIL. Empowering and educating women bolsters the economy of a state, and women can also support the Afghan government in areas of national security. Women are an excellent source of intelligence in less secure areas of Afghanistan where insurgent presence is stronger. Women observed the arrival of arms caches in Kosovo, and women in Sierra Leone knew of plans to attack UN peacekeepers.<sup>70</sup> Fear for personal safety prevented the women in Sierra Leone from coming forward with this knowledge, which demonstrates the necessity of platforms for women's engagement. Women are an underutilized resource in Afghanistan for issues of national security, and failure to engage women across these four factors is a lost opportunity for the Afghan government.





**Figure 2: Annual Number of Terror Attacks in Afghanistan by the Taliban from 2000 to 2013<sup>71</sup>**

**Policy Implications**

The Afghan government has made significant developments in guaranteeing women’s access to education, promoting women in leadership, protecting women through the ERAW Act, and supporting civil society. There are internal threats to these developments, including violence against women and the social and cultural norms that perpetuate this violence. Across all four variables, women were targets of violence or even assassination. Women’s engagement is limited by their subjection to violence as a result of their engagement, indicating that the Afghan government needs to address violence in all four factors. The ERAW Act is important legislation that helps to address and criminalize violence against women for acts such as rape, but this legislation is most closely connected to the justice sector, and women’s access to formal justice remains limited. The National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan

(NAPWA) outlines policies and strategies to engage women, including by addressing gender-based violence, but the plan for implementation is vague and leaves a lot of responsibility on the ministries to enact these recommendations. For example, “[E]ach ministry/agency will designate the Planning Department as overseer and coordinator of all processes related to the implementation of NAPWA at the ministry level.”<sup>72</sup> By March 2015, each ministry should be required to write a report on the status of their compliance to the NAPWA. These reports will also incorporate how violence is a factor in implementation and steps the ministry is taking to mitigate these effects. By addressing gender-based violence, the Afghan government is investing in women’s engagement in society and more broadly in the country’s stability.

Within the first six months of office, President Ghani can demonstrate his commitment to women’s rights by announcing a new policy to promote women’s engagement in society by ending violence against women. Some of these strategies could include: appointing more women in key positions in his cabinet, announcing female representatives at all future peace talks with the Taliban, broadening the national strategy to respond to violence against women across all sectors, and continuing prosecutions of perpetrators of violence. When the Mirwais School for Girls in Kandahar was attacked in 2009, girls stopped going to school. The headmaster, Mahmood Qadari, called for a meeting at the school with all of the parents and implored them to have their daughters return. When only a few returned, he turned to the local government for support and was told by the governor that he would increase police presence and provide a bus to transport the girls. The local government did not deliver on these pledges, but Qadari called another meeting with parents to implore them again to send their daughters back to school, saying, “[I]f you don’t send your daughter to school, then the enemy wins.”<sup>73</sup> The students did return to school, and the strategies used by Qadari could be used on a national level. Qadari was successful because he engaged civil society and local community stakeholders to invest in their daughters’ education. This type of dialogue between local government and civil society across all four factors (education, political rights, social rights, and justice) could help bolster local commitment and help implement these national policies.

These four factors to women's empowerment affect communities at local, national, and international levels. As an example, increased access to education at the local level improves women's opportunities and prospects for jobs. This in turn can strengthen Afghanistan's workforce nationally, which bolsters its economy. A strong workforce increases productivity, which has regional and international effects on trade. By increasing women's access in all four factors, the Afghan government is advancing civil society and taking steps to stabilize the country. Transitions to stable democracies require the promotion of women's rights and the inclusion of women's voices.<sup>74</sup> In "The Role of Women in Global Security," Valerie Norville writes: "[t]hese conflicts cannot be brought to a lasting end without making women's lives more secure, and it is women who are best positioned to determine how that security is achieved."<sup>75</sup> Women are a core piece of creating a more stable and secure Afghanistan, which has regional and transnational significance.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tim Luccaro and Erica Gaston, "Women's Access to Justice in Afghanistan," *PeaceWorks*, no. 98 (2014): 1-64. [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW98\\_Women%27s-Access-to-Justice-in-Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW98_Women%27s-Access-to-Justice-in-Afghanistan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Clar Ni Chonghaile, "Afghanistan's Gains Could Be Reversed If Donors Turn Away," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2014, Accessed February 9, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/dec/04/afghanistans-gains-reversed-donors-aid>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council (SC), Resolution 1325, "Women and Peace and Security," October 13, 2004, Accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> "Afghanistan's Education Dilemma," *Economist.com/Global Agenda*, March 25, 2002, Accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/node/1056055>

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF, "Afghanistan Country Office Education Factsheet," November 2011, Accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/ACO\\_Education\\_Factsheet\\_-\\_November\\_2011\\_.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/ACO_Education_Factsheet_-_November_2011_.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF 2013., "Rwanda," December 27, 2013, Accessed February 9, 2015, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/rwanda_statistics.html)

<sup>8</sup> Zach Warren, "Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan People," ed. Nancy Hopkins, Kabul: The Asia Foundation, November 18, 2014, <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2014final.pdf>

---

<sup>9</sup> United States Agency for International Development, "Education," Accessed November 26, 2014, <http://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/education>

<sup>10</sup> Warren, 125.

<sup>11</sup> International Development Law Organization, "Out of the Shadows, Onto the Bench: Women in Afghanistan's Justice Sector," Rome: IDLO, 2014, [http://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/IDLO\\_Afghan %20Legal %20Professionals %20summary.pdf](http://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/IDLO_Afghan%20Legal%20Professionals%20summary.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> The World Bank, "Education is a Promise for a Better Future in Rural Afghanistan," September 10, 2013, accessed November 29, 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/09/10/education-is-a-promise-for-a-better-future-in-rural-afghanistan>

<sup>13</sup> Warren, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Allison Rubin, "School Support Grows Even Under Specter of a Taliban Return," *The New York Times*, January 28, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/29/world/asia/growing-support-for-education-in-a-volatile-afghan-province.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/29/world/asia/growing-support-for-education-in-a-volatile-afghan-province.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "The Development of Education: National Report Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," October 15, 2008, accessed November 26, 2014,

[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/ICE\\_2008/afghanistan\\_NR08.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/ICE_2008/afghanistan_NR08.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Mercy Tembon and Lucia Fort, eds., *Girls' Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008, Accessed February 9, 2015,

[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080014368/DID\\_Girls\\_edu.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099080014368/DID_Girls_edu.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> "School Enrollment - Primary - Female (% Gross) in Afghanistan." Trading Economics. Accessed April 29, 2015. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/school-enrollment-primary-female-percent-gross-wb-data.html>.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "For Afghan Girl, Going to School is Act of Bravery," *NPR* September 3, 2012, accessed December 2, 2014,

<http://www.npr.org/2012/09/03/160501527/for-afghan-girl-going-to-school-is-act-of-bravery>

<sup>20</sup> Warren, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, "National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan," May 19, 2008, accessed October 13, 2014, [http://mowa.gov.af/Content/files/CHAPTER %206.pdf](http://mowa.gov.af/Content/files/CHAPTER%206.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Asian University for Women, "AUW's Internship Program Expands in 2012." Updated 8/23/2012. <http://www.asian-university.org/academicPrograms/documents/2012InternshipMemoFinal.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Warren, 130.

- <sup>25</sup> Rod Nordland, “Afghan Women See Hope in the Ballot Box,” *The New York Times*, April 1, 2014, accessed December 10, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/world/asia/afghan-women-see-hope-in-the-ballot-box.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/world/asia/afghan-women-see-hope-in-the-ballot-box.html?_r=0)
- <sup>26</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 51.
- <sup>27</sup> Warren, 130.
- <sup>28</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 54.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “Afghanistan National Development Strategy,” accessed November 21, 2014, [http://www.undp.org.af/Publications/KeyDocuments/ANDS\\_Full\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.undp.org.af/Publications/KeyDocuments/ANDS_Full_Eng.pdf)
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 14.
- <sup>32</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 56.
- <sup>33</sup> Anastasiya Hozyainova, “Sharia and Women’s Rights in Afghanistan,” *United States Institute of Peace*, no. 347 (2014): 1-8, [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR347-Sharia\\_and\\_Women%E2%80%99s\\_Rights\\_in\\_Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR347-Sharia_and_Women%E2%80%99s_Rights_in_Afghanistan.pdf)
- <sup>34</sup> Alissa Rubin and Habib Zahori, “Afghan Women’s Affairs Aide Shot Months After Killing of Predecessor,” *The New York Times*, December 10, 2012, accessed November 19, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/world/asia/gunmen-assassinate-afghan-womens-affairs-official.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/11/world/asia/gunmen-assassinate-afghan-womens-affairs-official.html?_r=0)
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Warren, 125.
- <sup>37</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, “A Way to Go: Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law in Afghanistan,” (2013): 2, <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Press%20Statements/UNAMA%20EVAW%20Law%20Report%202013%20%28Revised%20on%2016%20Dec%20%202013%29.pdf>
- <sup>38</sup> International Development Law Organization, 7.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs.
- <sup>42</sup> Warren, 127.
- <sup>43</sup> United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 26.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Ministry of Women’s Affairs, “First Report on the Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law in Afghanistan,” January 2014, Accessed November 28, 2014, [http://mowa.gov.af/Content/files/EVAW%20Law%20Report\\_Final\\_English\\_17%20%20March%202014.pdf](http://mowa.gov.af/Content/files/EVAW%20Law%20Report_Final_English_17%20%20March%202014.pdf)
- <sup>47</sup> Hozyainova, 2.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid., 4.

- <sup>49</sup> Kathleen Kuehnast, Manal Omar, Steven Steiner, and Hadei Sultan, "Peacebuilding Efforts of Women from Afghanistan and Iraq," *United States Institute of Peace*, Special Report 319 (2012): 1-8, accessed December 1, 2014. <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR319.pdf>
- <sup>50</sup> John Burns, "Taliban Claim Responsibility in Killing of Key Female Afghan Officer," *New York Times*, September 28, 2008, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/29/world/asia/29afghan.html>
- <sup>51</sup> Luccaro and Gaston, 7.
- <sup>52</sup> Hozyainova, 2.
- <sup>53</sup> Women for Afghan Women, "What We Do," Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://womenforafghanwomen.org/index.php/waw-in-afghanistan>
- <sup>54</sup> Women for Afghan Women, "Spirit Indestructible," Accessed November 30, 2014, [http://womenforafghanwomen.org/documents/spirit\\_indestructible.pdf](http://womenforafghanwomen.org/documents/spirit_indestructible.pdf)
- <sup>55</sup> Afghan Women's Network, "Our Mission," Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.awn-af.net/cms/content/1>
- <sup>56</sup> Afghan Women's Network, "Networking and Coordination," Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.awn-af.net/cms/content/111>
- <sup>57</sup> Global Rights, "Afghanistan," Accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.globalrights.org/afghanistan>
- <sup>58</sup> International Development Law Organization, 12.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Jocelyn Rafferty, "Advancing the Rule of Law Provides Protections for Women and Girls in Afghanistan," *DipNote: U.S. Department of State*, November 24, 2014, Accessed December 1, 2014, <http://blogs.state.gov/stories/2014/11/24/advancing-rule-law-provides-protections-women-and-girls-afghanistan>
- <sup>61</sup> Rafferty, 1.
- <sup>62</sup> Warren, 137.
- <sup>63</sup> Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Afghanistan Fact Sheet," October 31, 2014, Accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>
- <sup>64</sup> Rod Nordland, "International Aid Agencies Call for Temporary Exit from Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, December 1, 2014, Accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/asia/international-aid-agencies-exit-afghanistan.html>
- <sup>65</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan, "Taliban Brings War to Afghan Capital, Threatening Stability and Endangering Foreigners," *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2014, Accessed December 2, 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-afghanistan-taliban-fighters-attack-foreign-compound-in-capital/2014/11/29/f0aef902-77d4-11e4-a755-e32227229e7b\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-afghanistan-taliban-fighters-attack-foreign-compound-in-capital/2014/11/29/f0aef902-77d4-11e4-a755-e32227229e7b_story.html)
- <sup>66</sup> Clar Ni Chonghaile, "Taliban Peace Talks a Threat to Women's Rights in Afghanistan, Oxfam Warns," *The Guardian*, November 23, 2014, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/nov/24/taliban-peace-talks-a-threat-to-womens-rights-in-afghanistan-oxfam-warns>

---

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Biddle, "Ending the War in Afghanistan: How to Avoid Failure in the Installment Plan," Council on Foreign Relations, September/October 2013, Accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/defense-and-security/ending-war-afghanistan/p31305>

<sup>68</sup> The White House, "United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security," December 2011, accessed December 6, 2014, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/email-files/US\\_National\\_Action\\_Plan\\_on\\_Women\\_Peace\\_and\\_Security.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/email-files/US_National_Action_Plan_on_Women_Peace_and_Security.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>71</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). (2013). Global Terrorism Database [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd>

<sup>72</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs, 108.

<sup>73</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Afghan Girls, Scarred by Acid, Defy Terror, Embracing School," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2009, accessed December 6, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/world/asia/14kandahar.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>74</sup> The White House, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Valerie Norville, "The Role of Women in Global Security," *United States Institute of Peace* Special Report 264 (2011): 1-6, accessed December 2, 2014, [http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR264-The\\_role\\_of\\_Women\\_in\\_Global\\_Security.pdf](http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR264-The_role_of_Women_in_Global_Security.pdf)