

Exploring Women's Political Participation in the Post-Taliban regime in Herat province of Afghanistan

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Abstract

A table-based review and field research were conducted in Herat province to determine the level of women's political participation in the post-Taliban regime's parliament, provincial council, political parties, and other governmental organs. The findings show that women's political participation has decreased as a result of a variety of issues and barriers, including security, social, economic, and cultural concerns. To grow the country and maintain a democratic system, the government should pay more attention to women's participation; as a result, greater security measures for women's participation are required, as is an increase in their share of the parliament and the provincial council. In addition, more drastic measures to remove cultural and social barriers should be taken.

Keywords: Participation, Political Participation, Taliban, political Parties, parliament, provincial council.

INTRODUCTION

Women's political participation is a fundamental and vital principle of democratization of a society. It ensures the legitimacy of sovereign power. After the Taliban regime collapsed, Afghanistan authorized a democratic regime where women's political participation was constitutionalized as a key issue within the national documents (Lough, O. and others. 2012, p. 1). Consequently, majority of the national and international documents encourage women's political participation (Icheku, V. 2011, pp. 3). Women suffered the most discrimination and disparity in their rights and freedoms throughout the Taliban era. Women were denied their most basic rights, including the right to education, possession, and even the ability to leave the house. During the Taliban era, women were barred from attending schools and universities, and no women were permitted to study. The Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, has taken a hard line against foreign pressure on the violation of women's rights, declaring that women's access to education and educational institutions equates to pursuing an adultery policy and fostering indecency in Afghanistan. They also never allowed anyone to study or work in the governmental or non-governmental organizations (Povey, E.R. 2003, pp. 9-11).

The Taliban first prohibited women from working in women's health centers, but women were progressively allowed to provide health services to women under very stringent restrictions (Lough, O. and others. 2012, pp. 7-8). Following the Taliban's demise, Afghanistan's 20 years of democracy have provided a perfect opportunity for Afghan women to make a difference in their lives with foreign backing. Women have been able to have a strong presence in government in Afghanistan for the first time in decades (Hamedi, M. 2019, p. 1-3). Women's participation in Afghan politics is not limited to the cabinet; Afghan women now have positions in nearly all ministries, commissions, departments, provinces, parliament, schools, and colleges (Khan, A. 2012, p. 3-5). The Ministry of Women's Affairs was founded under the Afghan Interim Administration 2001 based on Bonn agreements, and Dr. Sima Samar was the first Minister of Women's Affairs. In the second round of the presidential election, Massouda Jalal ran as the first female candidate and received 1.1 percent of the vote. In the Karzai Administration, she was appointed Minister of Women's Affairs.

Over the years, the Ministry of Women's Affairs established a number of institutions and associations to preserve women's rights. Since 2001, women have been working in a variety of sectors, attempting to transform the society by altering their own circumstances (Azad, M.A. & Haidari. A. 2015, p. 13). Women try to make the most of their educational opportunities and to be useful in a variety of disciplines in order to promote women's rights and their status in society. Afghan women are attempting to restore as much as they can the damage caused by decades of war and to close the gender gap that has grown over time (De leede, S. 2014, p. 5). However, the wave of change and progress has not spread far beyond Afghanistan's cities. Women are unable to

participate as active citizens in different social activities in most rural parts of Afghanistan due to the dominance of traditional traditions, patriarchy, and illiteracy (Diyarbakirlioglu, K. 2017, pp. 212-213).

In this study, an attempt was made to look into the problem of women's political participation in Afghanistan and determine the level of participation in the executive and legislative branches, as well as political parties, from various perspectives. This research also drew on the most authoritative papers and books, as well as the most recent reports and records from national and international institutions. It also covers the numerous barriers that women encounter in entering politics, as well as the barriers that prohibit women from participating in politics. This study is also linked to a study of women's political participation in Herat province, which was written after doing field research and interviewing political civic activists, members of parliament, and provincial councils in the region. It is believed that by conducting this research and proposing answers, it will serve as an incentive for Afghan women to become more visible and aware in areas where they have traditionally had a lesser role.

Literature Review

With best of the author's knowledge, there are very few academic studies exploring women's political participation in Afghanistan in general and Herat in particular. Despite that, the author will critically review the existing literature in this section.

In her book (2016), *Women's Political Participation in Afghanistan*, Fatema Jafari, a former member of Herat provincial council, discusses women's political participation, identifies difficulties, and obstacles, and suggests practical solution for the problems. According to her, Afghanistan, which emerged from the post-Taliban war in 2001 under the influence of the Gender Equality Movement and international treaties to encourage women's political participation, gave women 25% of the seats in parliament and the provincial council. Although the Afghan Law system may be a significant model for other nations in the region, the position of women is still not ideal. In addition to the problems of insecurity, lack of financial independence, and women's poor professional capacity in political spheres reinforced by the traditions, and socio-cultural constraints, she highlighted more fundamental issues such as the expansion of religious schools promoting Islamic extremism, masculine political parties, Women's political dispersal and a lack of cooperation at the national level.

Rezai (2016) also discusses women's participation in Afghanistan, with an emphasis on gender equality and development interconnections. Although she agrees with Mrs. Jafari on the desirability of women's participation in Afghanistan, she focuses on factors affecting planning and policymaking rather than the variables directly restricting women's political participation in the country. She also identifies the issues undermining the government's success during the policy implementation phase.

Emadi (2008) explores the history of women's roles in the parliament in an academic paper. According to the author, "the performance of 27 percent of female parliamentarians was better than that of men, and they worked hard to achieve gender equality and to combat violence" (Emadi, 2016, p.15). She also stated that, unfortunately, because of the division of women by politics, some women were associated with parties and pursued the goals of parties, while others were independent and followed their thoughts, and because they were the bare minimum of parliament, they had no significant role in the final decision-making process. This conclusion is similar to what Mrs. Jafari sees as a major impediment to women's strong political participation in Afghanistan. A similar worry was expressed in a statement released in 2017 by the Women and Children's Legal Research Foundation, which declared that women's political participation is limited in national documents, but the reality is not satisfactory. Lough (2012) also stated the same remarks.

Maghsudi, M., and Ghallehdar, S. (2011) examine the history and forms of women's political participation in Afghanistan, as well as the most significant psychological, socio-cultural, economic, and political challenges that women face. He claimed that 27% of women in parliament are symbolic and have no effect in decision-making, and that this ratio is below 30%, the generally recognized minimum standard for women's political participation, and that women should have a 50% quota in parliament. His conclusion overlaps with the views of Mrs. Jafari and Ms. Rezaei discussed previously.

Mohammadi-Asl (2004) examined the barriers to women's political participation, focusing on traditional societies. He goes on to say that one of the hurdles is the natural power imbalance between men and women, which has contributed to patriarchy's infiltration. He also cites other verses from the Holy Quran that support women's political participation.

Wordsworth (2007) examines the performance of women elected to parliament and concludes that women's political participation is weak due to a lack of connection between them; women did not come to parliament as a single bloc and were divided politically, racially, and ethnically; also, female representatives have been influenced to prefer the goals of some political parties due to their membership in those parties; and, finally, female representatives have been influenced to prefer the goals of some political parties due to their membership in those parties. In addition, Larson (2015) discussed political parties and the extent to which women participate in parties. He asserted that while 36 women members of the provincial council were party members in 2014, only a small number of women ran the party.

Coburn, N., and Wafaey, H. (2019) looked at women's participation in the 2018 parliament election. They said that while women's political participation in political affairs and leadership positions such as ministries and embassies has increased, there are

still challenges and reactions. The main challenge, they said, is violence against women, which is perpetrated by both ordinary people and the Taliban.

Ibrahim (2014) looked examined women's political participation during two election cycles and the hurdles they faced. "The nature of politics in general and liberal democracy in particular, is one of the contextual issues in women's political participation. Historically, democracy has benefited men more than women (Ibrahim, M. 2014, p.2-3).

By researching the determinants of women's deprivation in politics, Bari (2005) indicated that 15% participate in women's legislation in the global arena. He expresses the most essential issues and proposes important ideas for expanding women's political participation. The most significant barriers to women's political participation were identified as ideological factors (patriarchal system), socio-cultural factors such as the dual role of women (mother and woman in society), and economic factors (large disparity in wealth accumulation between men and women).

Consequently, by doing this literature Review I can state that women's political participation has increased in the post-Taliban era, but despite the 27 percent quotas in the legislature, their views have not been heard and they do not play a key role in decision-making due to cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and other barriers. By conducting this research, I will investigate how the amount of women's political participation varies, particularly in Herat province. It's worthy to be noted that none of the studies (except Mrs. Fatema Jafari) has examined the problem at provincial level.

Methodology

The study applied a qualitative approach exploring the women's political engagement in the post-Taliban era in Herat province by examining and assessing some data on the level and challenges of women's political participation in Parliament, Provincial Councils and political parties and their performances. Literary survey and field research are the data collection techniques used in the study. The table-based literature review consists of books and papers on the subject, and the field study benefited of semi-structured interview with certain women political activists and actors in the province of Herat.

Accordingly, 40 female politicians from Herat province were interviewed (10 members of political parties, 20 civil political activist, 5 members of Herat provincial council, and 5 members of parliament). The data was analyzed using a method known as thematic analysis.

Findings

1. Women's Participation in Afghanistan Government

Afghanistan's government is divided into three branches: the executive, the judiciary, and the legislature, all of which are led by the president. The level of women's political participation in the executive and legislative branches is studied and the results.

1.1. Women's Participation in Executive Branch

The executive branch of the Afghan government, often known as the government, is the body in charge of regulating and enforcing the law. The government of Afghanistan is made up of ministers who serve under the presidency, according to Article 71 of the Afghan Constitution. Ministers are nominated to the Wolesi Jirga (lower house) for a vote of confidence by the President.

Following the fall of the Taliban administration and the installation of a democratic system in Afghanistan, considerable efforts were made to incorporate women in the country's development and progress, as well as to officially grant women the ability to vote and be elected.

In 2004 presidential election, one out of 18 Candidates was a woman. She, like other candidates, detailed her goals for the presidency if she is elected. More than 10 million people voted, 42 percent of who were women, with Massouda Jalal, the first female presidential candidate, receiving 1.1 percent of the vote. With 55.4 percent of the vote, Hamid Karzai was elected as the president. He attempted to incorporate women in his cabinet, which encompassed 25 ministries. Massouda Jalal was appointed as Minister of Women's Affairs, and he served until 2006. Hassan Banoo Ghazanfar was then appointed as Minister of Women's Affairs. He also selected a woman as Minister of Information and Culture (Ameneh Afzali), but the minister was replaced after 2006. Ms. Sedigheh Balkhi was also the Minister of State for Martyrs and Disabled Affairs from 2004 to 2006, although she was later sacked due to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' merger with it. Afghanistan had 17 ambassadors overseas in 2007, including two women.

Two of the 32 candidates in the second round of the 2009 presidential election were women, and each received less than one percent of the vote. Hamid Karzai won for the second time in this election, and this time he also considered the presence of women in cabinet formation was vital. For example, despite not receiving a vote of confidence from the parliament, Ms. Hassan Banoo Ghazanfar continued to lead this ministry. Women were also in charge of the Ministries of Public Health, and Labor and Social Affairs.

Unfortunately, no female candidates tried to run in the 2014 presidential election; however, with the formation of the National Unity Government, it was hoped that more women would enter the cabinet; however, despite many challenges and the traditional Afghan society, the presence of women in the cabinet was low; even a number of female ministers did not receive a vote of confidence from the parliament on a regular basis. Ms. Narges Nahan, who was appointed Mines Minister in 2017, worked as an acting minister until 2019, when she resigned. Ms. Ghazal Habib Yar had previously led the ministry. For a period, Ms. Kamaleh Sedighi was also the Minister of Trade and Industry. In addition, two women were initially chosen as Ministers of Higher Education, but both failed to gain a vote of confidence in parliament. Ms. Safi was another cabinet minister in 2018, serving as Minister of Information and Culture. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was also led by two female ministers, one after the other.

Because of security concerns and other issues, no woman ran in the 2019 presidential election. A national unity administration was created once more, led by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. The cabinet of this government has not yet been established, although only three female ministers have been appointed thus far.

Unfortunately, no female ministers have served in the government during the last two decades of democracy representing Herat women, with the exception of two female nominees who did not get a vote of confidence. According to field data, the number of women who voted in the first round of the presidential election in Herat province was equal to the number of men, and this province had the highest turnout. The ratio was 40 percent to 60 percent in the second and third rounds, but it was equal in the fourth round, despite the fact that the total number of voters had reduced.

1.1. Level of Women's Participation in the Legislation Branch

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's legislature, often known as the National Assembly, is divided into two houses. According to Article 81 of the Afghan Constitution, the National Council of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as the highest legislative body, is the manifestation of the will of its people and represents the nation.

A parliament comprised of a 249-seat lower house (Wolesi Jirga, House of People) and a 102-seat selected upper house (Meshrano Jirga, House of Elders) elected concurrently with presidential elections, if practicable. In the lower house, 10 seats are designated for Afghan Kuchis (nomads), and at least 68 of those elected (two per province, with 34 provinces) "should" be women, giving women approximately 25% of the seats. Seats are awarded to the top two women in each province. For the upper house, 34 seats are chosen by provincial councils (one from each of the 34 provinces); another 34 are chosen by roughly 400 elected district councils; and the remaining 34 are chosen by the President, who appoints half of the members, and half of them must be female (Katzman, 2006, pp. 1-2).

Provincial and district councils are constituencies at the provincial and district levels of government that aim to accomplish the government's development goals, regulate affairs, and assure people's active participation in local administrations. Because a defined percentage of seats in parliament are designated for women, 124 of the 420 seats in the provincial council are constitutionally reserved for women. They also hold a 25% stake in the district council. Regrettably, this 25% stake of the provincial council was cut to 20%.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the law guarantees the presence of women in constituencies and does not put any restrictions on women's political participation, the presence of women candidates and their campaigning, voting, and election has dwindled in recent years. According to the survey, despite the fact that women make up almost half of Afghanistan's population¹, voter turnout has been low and has fallen dramatically over time.

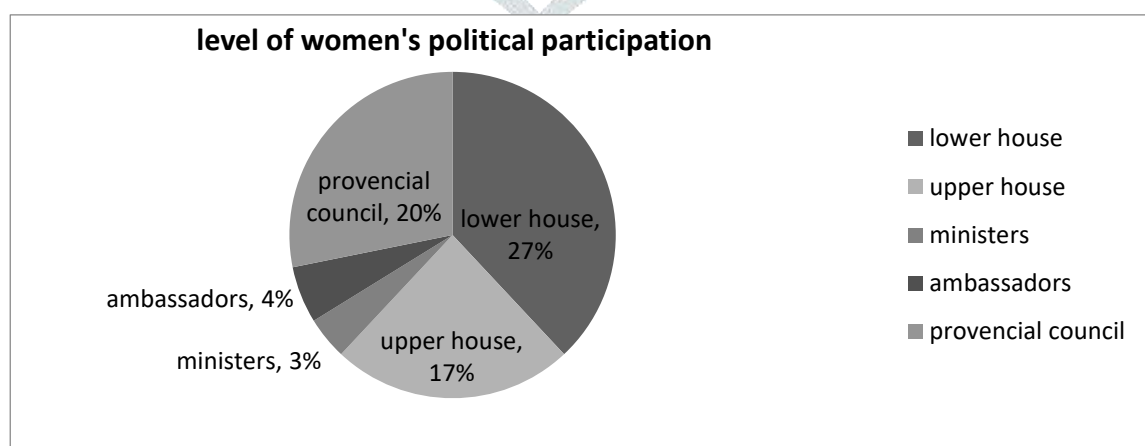


Figure 1 level of Women's political participation

¹ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/afghanistan-population>

Elections	Male voters	Female voters
Parliamentary election 2005	50%	50%
Provincial council elections 2005	50%	50%
Provincial council elections 2009	52%	48%
Parliamentary election 2010	60%	40%
Provincial council elections 2014	55%	45%
Parliamentary election 2018	51%	49%

Table 1 the level of Voters in Elections

As shown in the table (1), in 2010, the number of female voters decreased significantly. This decrease is due to security factors and threats to many polling stations. According to a report by the National Democracy Institute, many female voters used fraudulent ballots, which were annulled as a result of their disclosure. (NDI, 2010:56)

Elections	Total number of candidates	Number of female candidates	Number of female winner	Number of female candidates in Herat province	Female winners in Herat province
Parliamentary election 2005	2835	344	68		5
Provincial council elections 2005	3201	285	124	30	5
Provincial council elections 2009	3196	328	106	28	5
Parliamentary election 2010	2577	406	66	23	5
Provincial council elections 2014	2591	291		21	4
Parliamentary election 2018	2615	401	65	28	5

Table 2 Female Candidate in Elections

Although the Afghan constitution guarantees women's political participation, there are particular quotas for women in parliamentary and provincial council elections. And, despite the Afghan government's national and international pledges to the role of women in the cabinet and other top government positions, women are present in these positions, according to the findings of this study, but their participation is ineffective and unsatisfactory. Various variables are suggested as reasons for the fall in women's participation in elections, but whatever the factors are, this decline in women's participation in elections is not a good sign of Afghanistan's vulnerable women's situation.

1.2. Women's Political Participation in Political Parties

In democracies, political parties are the most powerful political actors. Political parties are an example of the greatest political body in a democracy that serves as the focal point of political action. The Afghanistan constitution recognizes the formation of political parties in Article 33. In Afghanistan, there are currently 72 licensed parties from the Ministry of Justice. Most ethnic and tribal tendencies in Afghanistan have been the primary motivation for the development of parties. In Afghanistan, most ethnic and tribal tendencies have been the main reason for the formation of parties. (Jafari, 2016: 163-164) A review of the history of political parties in Afghanistan indicates three main periods:

- The communist era and the formation of political parties;
- The period of jihad and the emergence of jihadist organizations with an ethnic, religious approach; and
- The period of modern democracy and the continuation of jihadi ethnic parties with a democratic claim.

A study of the status of women and the position of women in these parties during these three periods reveals the extreme inequality of women's positions and rights inside the parties. Although some rhetorical and symbolic parties claim to protect women's status and political rights; in reality, none of these parties have a strategic vision and action plan for institutionalizing and equalizing political participation for women, and no fundamental work has been done in this regard by the parties. And the parties' desire to involve women is simply because women have a special portion of the government machinery, which they can easily dominate.

It appears to be an accepted rule those parties should seek the presence and support of women in their journey to power, if only to secure the trust of half the community. And, more importantly, the belief in the equal presence of women in politics and in the power structures of democratic parties is an attempt to achieve this aim and gain more popular support. Women in Afghanistan, on the other hand, prefer to avoid political parties as much as possible and enter the sphere of politics independently or through civic activities, as only two of the current members of parliament are linked with political parties, according to interviews. Perhaps the parties' less-than-stellar human rights record isn't a factor in women's reluctance to join existing political parties in Afghanistan. Jafari (2016: 168) claimed that the reluctance to joining parties has many factors and reasons, but for women the following reasons can be listed:

- Uncertainty regarding the party's political position for women;
- Women's skepticism about the parties' commitment to women's rights;
- Existence corruption and discriminatory attitudes toward women;
- Women are underrepresented in party decision-making positions.
- Excessive ethnic structures in political parties;
- Concerns about the use of instrumentalism in parties and a lack of confidence in the parties' commitment to women's human and political rights;

In the province of Herat, there are 33 political parties, but according to the interviews, the majority of the candidates were independent, and the majority of political activists who were party members did not consider women's participation in political parties to be satisfactory. However, participants stated that it has increased in comparison to the past. They claim that through parties, they can join in political activities and participate in decision-making more readily and without difficulty. I couldn't locate exact information on the presence of women because political parties in Afghanistan are not organized and do not have any specific office.

2. Challenges and Barriers

Despite the fact that Afghan law gives women a certain part, we notice that this portion is not as effective as intended and is more symbolic. The most essential factor is that women did not enter parliament as a unified bloc and are politically, ethnically, and racially fragmented. Some female representatives are linked with political parties and follow the parties' specific agendas and strategies, while others are affiliated with a specific ethnic community and pursue only the interests of their own ethnic group. On the other hand, because parties play a crucial role in shaping the country's political destiny, and these parties are created mostly on the basis of ethnicity and religion in Afghanistan. If we look at the history of these parties, we can see that they have always been opposed to the presence of women in society and politics, and their acceptance of women in their organizations today is only to enhance their power and get more seats in parliament.

Another barrier is that they only have a tiny say in choices because they are at least in parliament, therefore their decision is deemed invalid in front of a significant portion of parliament. And, as previously said, the proportion of women in significant decisions and government leadership is tiny and declining, and women are being removed from major political positions such as minister and ambassador. One of the most serious issues is disagreement and lack of unity, which caused the quota for women in the Provincial Council to be cut from 25% to 20% in 2014 when the Provincial Council statute was enacted in the House of Representatives, affecting none of the 69 female MPs. Many female members of Parliament voted in favor without even recognizing it.

The interpretation of the constitution and the election law is the next issue. According to the IEC's interpretation of the women's quota, women can only hold 27 percent of parliament seats or 20 percent of provincial council seats, and if more women vote than men in their constituencies, they have no right to take up more chairs. In some provinces, the number of women who won more votes than men were higher than the quota provided by law in the 2009 and 2014 provincial council elections, but according to the IEC, only 20 percent had the right to run for the provincial council, and other women were barred from running for the provincial council, despite the higher turnout than me.

Along with a patriarchal society where citizens are never willing to see a woman engaged in political activities. Other key challenges cited by all participants included the growth of religious schools, the influence of Islamic academics, and the propagation of Islamic radicalism. Since then, Afghanistan's religion has been Islam, and the people are religious. Islamic extremist groups have attempted to acquire power by misusing Islam in recent decades. There are numerous religious schools in Herat that have washed children's brains from an early age. They raise kids to be religious extremists.

One provincial council representative states that she recognizes the ability of female candidates who have a very high chance of winning the provincial and parliamentary elections but have withdrawn their candidacy due to pressure from religious leaders and religious scholars on themselves and even their families. They were obliged to abandon the electoral campaign in favor of the other man. As a candidate in two provincial council elections, she has been frequently persuaded to withdraw from the race in favor of a male candidate, claiming that the provincial council is not for women. During the 2014 provincial council elections, one of Herat's most prominent religious professors railed against female candidates in all of his speeches. In his talks to mosques and circles, he also said, "Do not vote for cowards in elections." And he went on to say that cowards are women. He not only labeled women as unsuitable for political participation, but he also ridiculed their courage by calling them cowards. In this context, many capable female candidates and activists have abandoned their rights to men in response to intense pressure from religious groups.

Another issues raised by the participants included security concerns, which included various forms of violence (physical, psychological, and sexual). During elections, for example, women's election campaigning locations were attacked and destroyed. They proceeded to threaten them in order to keep them from fleeing. Threats were sent by the Taliban, Islamic clerics, certain male candidates, and family. Also, for a time in the city of Herat, ladies were unable to leave because they were acid-sprayed and stabbed. Psychological assault has also been used to insult and defame them. According to one political activist, her images were often manipulated, and they attempted to isolate her from society by disseminating immoral photos.

"I collaborated closely with numerous political parties in Herat during the second round of the presidential election in 2014. Despite the fact that women made up roughly half of the voters in Herat, the facilities offered to the women's campaign were far fewer than those provided to even one of the campaign's lesser-known men's committees "One of the provincial council members stated. As a result, it is clear that the parties just exploit the votes of women and women's representatives as a tool, and prejudice persists.

Another barrier that women in Herat encounter in their political activities is a lack of financial resources, which sometimes prevents them from participating in political activities. Running for a seat in a provincial council or parliament, for example, implies significant campaign costs; sadly, a lack of these resources has forced many qualified women to withdraw their candidacy or join parties and prioritize party decisions.

Despite all of the challenges and obstacles, the women of Herat have not given up and are always trying to erase these impediments in order to provide a better playing field for future generations. However, the current situation in Afghanistan and the peace talks have renewed concerns about women and their status, and women have always expressed their demands through large rallies, and they do not want to return to the dark days of the Taliban.



Figure 2 Challenges and obstacles

Conclusion

Democracy entails participation in social, economic, political, and cultural issues by all individuals and groups, both men and women. In Afghanistan, which has had a democratic system since 2001 following the Taliban government, participation is unstable, so that although having the right to participate, the participation and presence of women in many professions, particularly politics, is not proportional to men and is very low.

This study found that many Afghan laws, including the constitution encourages women's political participation, and that international assistance has always been offered to help them attain this aim. However, the findings of this study reveal that the participation of women in political institutions, particularly at decision-making levels, is ineffective, and in many situations, their presence is fraught with problems and challenges. This has narrowed the scope for women's inclusive participation and created impediments for them. Despite the passage of 20 years, the study found that women in parliament and provincial councils, particularly the Herat Provincial Council, continue to hold fewer seats than their respective 27 percent and 20 percent shares, and their participation is lower than in the past. According to statistics and surveys, women's political participation has been falling. The number of candidates has gradually fallen as well. Simultaneously, women's education and awareness of their rights have risen greatly, and popular and civil society support for women's political participation has grown significantly. Furthermore, the rate of women's participation in political parties, which now play a prominent role in politics, is symbolic and only a means of gaining a seat in parliament and the provincial council.

One of the most important findings of this study is the identification of the most critical deterrents that cause women to be purposely denied their rights. Security challenges such as threats and violence (physical, physical, and sexual), religious barriers, social barriers such as a patriarchal culture, the expansion of extremist religious schools, women's disunity, and economic barriers such as women's dependence on men, as well as a lack of sufficient resources to enter the political race, are among them. Despite all of these obstacles and challenges, women remain agitated and persistent in their pursuit of equal rights with men in all fields. They have also accomplished significant progress, such as establishing women's training centers, resolving conflicts, preventing violence, combating corruption, and so on.

With the expansion of peace talks and the Taliban's pressure on the Afghan government, the field for women's political participation has shrunk, and Afghan women remain fearful of returning to the dark days of the Taliban. As a result, the Afghan government and Afghan women are working hard to ensure that history does not repeat itself and that Afghan women, like men, play an active role in the government and political spheres.

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