

AFGHAN PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY

A Report on Focus Groups in the Kabul Area
On the Eve of the Emergency *Loya Jirga*

Prepared for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

by

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Preface

The principal objective of the report that follows is to introduce into the ongoing discourse about the future of Afghanistan – now taking place in Kabul, Washington, New York, Brussels and elsewhere – the voices of ordinary Afghan men and women. It was commissioned by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in order to record and amplify these voices before the start of the *Loya Jirga*, the national gathering of 1,501 of the country's leaders that is to convene in early June to select a transition government and resolve other issues before full scale elections can be held.

It may help to put the findings in context to report some of what was happening in the country at the time of this research (April 29 to May 4, 2002). Three things, in particular, surprised me on my first visit to the country.

First of all, virtually all Afghan women still wear the *burqa*, the sky blue head-to-toe wrap with a tiny mesh screen over the eyes. I had the impression that women in Afghanistan had been liberated from the *burqa* with the ouster of the Taliban, but that is not so. Yet during my brief time in the country, only a handful of women journalists and professors were comfortable talking with strangers without covering their faces. A school-teacher of 45 years old, who told me she had never worn a *burqa* before the Taliban came to town in 1996, covers herself in blue whenever she leaves her home. I asked why she continues, with the Taliban now gone. She thought a moment and said carefully that she "just feels more comfortable this way now." Women in the focus groups later talked about being beaten and whipped, and of the vicious verbal harassment they had suffered from Taliban militants. Worried these thugs may return, prudent people are waiting to be sure they are gone for good. After all, it's only been six months.

The selection process for June's *Loya Jirga*, the forthcoming reincarnation of a traditional gathering of Afghan elders, was also not clear before arrival. A six-week process of delegate-selection is now underway for a body that is scheduled to meet for one week only in early June. I'd been told there would be two rounds of "elections," though it is actually a caucus-like selection procedure. Guided by the Preparatory Commission for the Organization of the Emergency *Loya Jirga*, aided by an able team of UN officials, most of the 1,501 delegates to the *Loya Jirga* are being selected from one of about 400 districts (the numbers evolve as the process goes forward).

In each district, anyone who declares himself (or herself) to be a candidate is presented to a town meeting that assembles on the designated day and time at a mosque or schoolyard. Candidates must affirm that they are "not involved in smuggling narcotics, abuse of human rights, war crimes, plunder of public property," as well as that they have "not been involved directly or indirectly in the murder of innocent people."

If no one objects to any of these candidates, they *all* move forward to the "second round" – in which these self-appointed candidates constitute themselves as the district caucus and determine which three (or so) of their number will go to Kabul as members of

the *Loya Jirga*. If the caucus cannot agree, as is usually the case, then a secret vote of the caucus members, supervised by the Commission and the UN team, is to be held.

Since Afghanistan has no working judiciary, let alone a process to address complex issues of war crimes, verdicts are to be rendered by "the people" in these town meetings. One official told me they realize that few people are likely in public to object to a local warlord or potentate, no matter his crimes. Rather, the Commission and the UN folks are counting on cool heads in the second round caucus to ensure that districts do send their worst local elements forward to the *Loya Jirga*. Some people are being disqualified in the first round, and in a few cases there have been votes organized to narrow the field when it is too large, but mostly those who want to do so become part of the second round caucus, or electorate.

One wonders whether it is worse for those individuals with non-democratic tendencies to be inside the tent, trying to influence the *Loya Jirga*, or outside, trying to undermine its authority. Neither seems ideal – and the report that follows suggests that ordinary Afghans see both sides of this, too. The men and women managing this process – with no experience and few resources – seem to be approaching this challenge in a thoughtful and judicious manner.

More troubling in some ways is the prospect of a conclave of 1,501 delegates convening with an open-ended mandate. In addition to appointing the government that is to preside until proper elections can be held in about two years, they could decide to amend the 1964 constitution, or discuss the structure of the country's security agencies – or debate whether Zahir Shah should return to the throne, in which case the *Loya Jirga* is likely to last a good deal longer than the one week envisioned.

The biggest surprise, however, was about family connections. From afar, I perceived Afghanistan to be an isolated place at the end of the earth, pretty far from just about everywhere. Afghans, however, see their country as a crossroads, in close touch with – well, just about everywhere. Before I departed for Kabul, Paula Newburg, an expert on the region who is Special Advisor to the UN Foundation, suggested I ask people in the focus groups whether they had any relatives living abroad, and where they are. It turned out to be an excellent idea. The number of participants is too small to extrapolate, and we did not ask the question in every group. But the anecdotal findings are very interesting, as Dr. Newburg undoubtedly anticipated.

One expects to hear that many Afghans have family in neighboring Iran or Pakistan, give the huge displacement of the population, and this was definitely the case. Hazaras and Uzbeks tend to mention Iran more often, while Pashtuns, not surprisingly, often have family in Pakistan. What is eye-opening, however, is the range of other places mentioned. In a single group of eight Tajik women in their 30s, in addition to those with family in Iran or Pakistan, one woman has brothers in Holland, Canada and "Czechoslovakia." Another has two brothers who live in Moscow with their families. One has a brother-in-law in Germany, while another woman says her husband is in Denmark. Perhaps feeling left behind, a fifth says her brothers were almost outside the

country – fighting with the Northern Alliance on the northern frontier. Any notion I had of this as a country whose people feel isolated from the world instantly evaporated.

On May 1, four small liberal, Western-oriented political parties held a press conference to announce their plans to collaborate in a coalition that might presage a unified campaign for elections in two years time. The "Council of Defenders of Peace and Democracy in Afghanistan," as they call their umbrella effort, is preparing for democratic politics to come. In most countries trying to move toward democracy, the dominant political idea of political organizing is often "there is no party so small that it cannot be further sub-divided." It is interesting that, in Afghanistan, at least some emerging political actors are thinking in more practical and constructive terms. It is also telling how very nervous they were, on the eve of their press conference, about the reaction their announcement might engender from political organizations with guns.

Sunday, April 28 was Massoud Day and the people of Kabul and the Interim Administration held a massive military parade. Scores of smoking, wheezing, clanking tanks tore up several of the remaining paved roads in the capital, to the cheers of many thousands of exuberant spectators. This marked the anniversary of the conquest of Kabul in 1992 by an amalgam of forces under the command of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Tajik strategist, General Dostum, and others – generally seen as the final victory of the anti-Soviet resistance movement (and the first phase of the fratricide of the mid-90s).

The military vehicles of the new national army constituted the centerpiece of the parade. Most of the tanks and trucks sported photo portraits of Interim Administration leader Hamed Karzai. All of them, however, displayed portraits of Massoud, whose standing as a leading hero of the *jihād* against Soviet communism has now been enhanced by his murder last September by agents of the Taliban. And all of Massoud's former rivals are rushing to embrace him as an icon in preparation for the battles to come.

Finally, it is important to note that military activity (along the Pakistani border and in the environs of Kabul) continued during the period of our research. This included overnight rocket attacks that closed the Kabul airport briefly, and an armed standoff in Pakhtia province in which local militias very directly challenged the authority of Karzai's Interim Administration to appoint the provincial governor. These events add valuable texture to the general sense of relief at the prevailing "peace and stability" that we heard about in the focus groups.

Several persons played key roles in making this research possible. Ross Reid has enlarged an already considerable reputation for being the political organizer of first resort, going into Afghanistan on behalf of the National Democratic Institute to assist the development of political parties before the shooting has stopped – as he did previously in Kosovo. He was not only a gracious host, but an astute briefer on political developments that he has quickly mastered. And the fact that his modest conference center has already become the place for would-be politicians to visit at all hours, by appointment and otherwise, confirms that Ross has established bonds of trust and authority.

Mohammed Nabi and Gul Ghutai, two school-teachers who accepted the challenge to moderate focus groups – and thus to establish that the views of ordinary people should be heard in debate about the future of their country, an inherently democratizing activity – were vital to this exercise. Both were agile and creative in managing the groups without straying from our purpose. And they quickly overcame the schoolteacher's instinct to provide the "correct" answer to participants in this exercise in which every opinion is equally valid.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the particular contribution of Dr. Hussain Ramoz, who served not only as my translator for each of twelve focus groups – a Herculean feat of simultaneous translating over six consecutive days – but also oversaw the work of a team of recruiters who assembled twelve very different groups according to the specifications laid out. Hussain also manages to find the right balance between strictly literal translation, no matter how ungainly, and succinct explanation of the words spoken so that they actually make sense. He was in every sense a full collaborator in this research, and it literally could not have been done without him.

Along with everyone at NDI, I also want to express appreciation to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), willing as ever to step into the breach to enable things to happen quickly, for funding the Institute's political party development program in Afghanistan, and this research.

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Executive Summary

Midway through the process of selecting delegates to June's Emergency *Loya Jirga*, Afghans are hopeful that the forthcoming national conclave will continue the progress they have seen in recent months under the stewardship of Hamed Karzai and the Interim Administration. They believe it can secure the peace that has been partially established and that it will move the country toward the democratic system they desire.

There is near universal appreciation among residents of the Kabul area for the *Loya Jirga's* venerable history as the traditional Afghan mechanism for resolving conflicts among the country's tribes and deciding who shall govern. Indeed, expectations may be unrealistically high that June's gathering will resolve the country's numerous problems.

Hopefulness is accompanied, however, by unease about ongoing efforts by those warlords opposed to the current government. Many people are alert to the fact that some *Loya Jirgas* in the past have been "fake" and were perverted to suit narrow interests, and they fervently desire that the upcoming gathering be a genuine exercise in national consensus building.

Particularly among men, there is tremendous concern about the failure to date to disarm the country's many militias. It is striking how many use phrases like "gun-ocracy" (*tufang salary*) or "rule by warlords" – or commanders (*qumandan salary*) – as everyday terms that need no elaboration. They fear that, unless the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is expanded throughout the country, the country's newfound gains in order and civility, as partial as they are, will give way once again to the interminable internecine combat they know all too well.

Hamed Karzai is warmly embraced by Uzbeks, Hazaras, Tajiks and Pashtuns alike as a man of integrity, achievement and inclusion. Notwithstanding concerns that he may not actually have all the levers of power securely in his hands, many hope Karzai will continue in office following the *Loya Jirga*.

The Taliban is almost universally reviled as the destructive agent of foreign powers (mainly Pakistan), and tales of abuse by Taliban militants abound. Afghans are delighted at its departure from power – and from the country. The Taliban's cruel zealotry clarified for many that not everything done in the name of Islam is positive or constructive – and this seems to have fostered an appreciation for at least a modicum of personal space in the practice of one's Islamic faith.

The current international presence in Afghanistan, on the other hand, is broadly welcomed despite disappointment at the perceived shortfall in delivery of assistance compared to what has been promised. As in the case of the *Loya Jirga*, expectations regarding what the international community will do for Afghanistan are probably unrealistically high.

Support for a democratic form of government in this devoutly Islamic nation is very strong across Afghanistan's four principal ethnic communities. Even among the

least educated Afghans, there is a strong sense that Islam may even *require* that a country be organized on a democratic basis.

Afghans do not believe there is necessarily any incompatibility between Islam and democracy; they believe they can and should have both. At the same time, however, men and women alike distinguish between a democracy consistent with their Islamic faith and what they understand to be the "excesses" of Western democracy (seen primarily as licentiousness among and with regard to women).

Some people, mainly illiterate women, hesitate to embrace the term "democracy" (*mardum salary*) saying they are not learned enough to discuss such things. Yet, by and large, Afghans desire that their country should enjoy much of what one normally associates with democracy. They want to have an elected government that is responsive to people's interests. They believe everyone should be equal under the law, and that even the highest government officials should be held accountable. Afghans are also very keen about their right to free expression, including specifically the right to criticize government when it fails to deliver – without fear of retribution.

Many people say – unprompted – that women have rights that should be protected by law and the government, though equal rights for men appear to be different than equal rights for women. At least as often as do women, men cite the recent re-opening of schools to girls and the workplace to women as signal accomplishments of Karzai's Interim Administration, and some men also support a woman's right to choose her own husband in a free society.

Afghans are, however, concerned that women's rights not lead to a breakdown in family and social order and they fear that this is where Western influence will lead. Some Afghan women (including those with university educations) note that foreigners seem overly focused on superficial things, such as the *hijab* or *burqa* – and do not pay enough attention to issues that really matter, like education and work opportunities.

These are among the principal findings from 12 focus groups convened in the Kabul area from April 29 to May 4, 2002. Each group was stratified by gender, age, education and ethnicity, in order to create homogeneous groups conducive to frank discussion. Some groups were composed of people from the countryside outside Kabul and one group was organized in a rural farming area of Logar Province.¹

Due to security concerns and budget constraints, this research could only be conducted in and around Kabul. Over the coming months, the Institute plans to conduct additional focus group discussions in Kandahar and in as many other parts of Afghanistan as possible. The findings of additional focus groups will be added to those included in this report. Accordingly, and notwithstanding the considerable degree of demographic diversity represented in these groups, this report should not be presumed to reflect the

¹ See Appendices A and B for additional notes on methodology and the composition of the focus groups.

views of Afghans in other parts of the country. For instance, as the British-led ISAF is present only in Kabul, the enhanced sense of security and freedom that is so vividly conveyed by many participants in these groups may not be shared by residents of areas where fighting continues or warlords govern.

Other findings from this research include:

- Those with at least a high school education understand the role that can be played by civil society in holding government accountable, as well as in providing services. At the same time, a strong aversion to conflict leads many to say such groups should be cooperative with government rather than adversarial.
- Political parties are seen as synonymous with the political-military organizations of the warlords, and as divisive, and are not well regarded at present.
- Only Pashtuns strongly desire that Zahir Shah be returned to his throne. Uzbeks and Hazaras say nice things about the king, and some in each community would not be averse to a role for him as a symbol of national unity. Tajiks, however, are strongly opposed to a Pashtun monarchy in almost any form, as are some Uzbeks and Hazaras.
- Women see the biggest problem at present as the dearth of housing, and fervently hope that "the international community" will build apartment buildings, as the Soviets did once upon a time.
- Men and women alike say that education should be a major governmental priority, both for their own children's sake, and as a key to national development.
- Better-educated men and women in the capital are angry that many high profile positions have been allocated to returned refugees, instead of those who endured the dark years. Complaints about salaries not having been paid in six months to schoolteachers and other public officials also mitigate the enthusiasm for the restoration of a functioning government and the reopening of schools.

Afghans in Kabul are remarkably upbeat about the direction of their country

Notwithstanding the devastation that has befallen their country, continuing military operations and the painful dislocation of so many of their fellow citizens, Afghans in and around Kabul are remarkably upbeat in May 2002. Central to this buoyancy are the enhanced sense of personal security, expanding economic opportunity, and a quite palpable joy at their liberation from the violent and incompetent rule of the Taliban.

We have survived a lot, and now we see bright possibilities for the coming year. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

We have survived the Taliban, and now women can go to school and every ethnic group can play their role in society. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

There are a lot of work opportunities and people can work now. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

We now have security, freedom and employment. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar Province, 25 to 40 years old)

For those Afghans in the most difficult circumstances, however, this optimism is cast mainly in contrast to the grim recent past.

We don't have much to eat, just some potatoes and cereal. But because no one is beating us, it is good. (Illiterate Uzbek woman 18 to 30 years old)

Life for everybody is bad. But the hope is that, with the help of God, there will be more work for people – for masons, for carpenters, for everyone. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

There is, moreover, a sense among residents of the capital city that even the benefits they enjoy do not extend very far beyond Kabul, particularly among those with advanced educations.

If you compare these three or four months of the Karzai Administration, yes, schools have opened – but only in Kabul and not in other provinces. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

We suggest that [Koffi Anan] send more peace and security forces to other provinces of Afghanistan. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Afghans eagerly anticipate the forthcoming *Loya Jirga*

Midway through the process of selecting delegates to June's Loya Jirga, Afghans are hopeful that the national conclave will continue the progress toward stability and freedom they have seen under the leadership of Hamed Karzai and the Interim Administration. Though the caucuses have not taken place in Kabul or Logar provinces at the time these discussions occur, residents are quite attentive to news of the proceedings as they unfold around the country. There is near universal appreciation for the *Loya Jirga's* venerable history as the traditional Afghan mechanism for resolving conflicts among the country's tribes and deciding who shall govern. Indeed, some expectations in a number of cases seem unrealistically high.

In history, whenever we had problems, Afghans came together to solve problems. And so it is today, when the Loya Jirga will convene and solve our problems. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

There is no doubt about the Loya Jirga. We are happy about it and we expect that all the problems of Afghanistan will be solved. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

We hope that all the suffering that has been felt by people inside and outside the country will be resolved in this Loya Jirga. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

From the day the Interim Administration was established everything is happiness for us. Now we are waiting for the Loya Jirga and, God willing, there will be more good news from the Loya Jirga. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

At the same time, concerns are expressed about the integrity of the process leading toward the Loya Jirga. Many people are alert to the fact that some *Loya Jirgas* in the past have been "fake" and perverted to suit narrow interests, and they fervently desire that the upcoming gathering be a genuine exercise in national consensus building.

Most of the people participating in these discussions would prefer that those with blood on their hands not be permitted to participate, although one Tajik man says, "It is their country, too, so they should participate." Even in the province of Logar, south of Kabul, it is apparent to illiterate Pashtun farmers that those warlords responsible for much destruction over the years are trying to suborn the process, mainly with money.

Delegates will be sold to other parties as wood is sold in the market. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

We have doubts because money is being distributed, and everybody is doing something for himself. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar province, 25 to 40 years old)

In the past, sometimes the real representatives were not the delegates. Now this Loya Jirga has opened a new light for the future by selecting people who are qualified and who have the support of the people. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

There has never been a truly representative Loya Jirga, and never has one acted in the people's interests. They have always reflected the views of the strong. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

Some of them have been tricky or fake Loya Jirgas. They were done just to advance the interests of a tribe or certain people. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Karzai praised for inclusive national vision, though he is considered too 'soft' for some Pashtuns

Hamed Karzai himself is warmly embraced by Uzbeks, Hazaras, Tajiks and Pashtuns alike as a man of integrity and achievement – and many hope he will continue in office following the *Loya Jirga*. In what is probably a reflection of Afghanistan's legacy of strong man rule, virtually every accomplishment (or event) that has coincided with the tenure of the Interim Administration he leads is attributed to Karzai personally – even the recent end of the drought!

Our country was in a long dark night, and Hamed Karzai changed it to daylight. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

If we saw him, we would kiss his hands. Schools are open and women can work. (Illiterate Hazara woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Thanks to him, al-Qaeda is removed. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

He brought a lot of economic, social and political changes to the country. He eliminated ethnic and linguistic discrimination among the people. (University-educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Since the Interim Administration came in, the prices have gone down – and the rains have come. (Illiterate Hazara woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Since Karzai came, the rains have returned. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

My desire is that Mr. Karzai should be continued in office. The after that there will be another Loya Jirga and that will be OK. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

Some, however (and Pashtuns in particular), point with dismay to the constraints they see on Mr. Karzai by the warlords and others.

Karzai has begun to rebuild a destroyed country. But he shows too much softness. For example, there are a lot of warlords dominating in various places. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar province, 25 to 40 years old)

Several people say they hear criticism that Karzai travels abroad too much (one Pashtun woman says she may have heard this on Voice of America). Yet there is very little sense expressed in these twelve focus groups that this is problem. Indeed, his international diplomacy is one of Karzai's strong points, as it is associated with the arrival of assistance for the country's rehabilitation. Moreover, the fact that he has turned over to the national treasury some gifts that he has received from foreign governments in his travels is seen as further confirmation of his upstanding personal character.

He is going everywhere, trying to bring some aid to the hungry people here. Why are not other people doing this, too? (Illiterate Pashtun Man, 40 to 50 years old)

One night there was criticism of him, form VOA or somewhere, that he is just roaming in foreign countries. I do not think he is just roaming. We do not have anything and he is going to countries to get assistance for us. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

I even heard that one of the countries he visited gave Karzai a gold watch – but he sent it to the National Bank to increase the government's reserves. (Illiterate Pashtun Man, 40 to 50 years old)

When he went to Moscow, he got a gift. He brought it back and gave it to the budget of the Government and did not allocate it to his personal expenses. (Illiterate Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

The fact that Hamed Karzai travels throughout the country, and makes a point of reaching out very visibly to non-Pashtuns, is warmly appreciated by those in these smaller communities.

He is not going to different places just to attract attention. He speaks very well the language of people, wherever he goes. (Illiterate Uzbek Man, 30 to 50 years old)

He traveled to Bamyan and told of the bravery of the Hazara people, and it was appreciated. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

When Karzai goes to Bamyan and asks the Hazara people what their problems are, that brings credibility to the country. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

He is doing the same thing for all the groups – Uzbek, Tajik; he is not favoring the Pashtuns. (Illiterate Uzbek Man, 30 to 50 years old)

Good riddance to the Taliban

The Taliban is almost universally reviled as the destructive agent of foreign powers, and people are delighted at its departure from power – and from the country. Tales of petty cruelties abound. The return of music to people's lives is noted by several women, and greater personal freedom after the Taliban's removal is noted by many men.

We saw with the Taliban that they were applying the Shari'a, but it was not the real Islam, and they were doing it at the direction of foreigners. For example, people had to have beards. But this is not Islam, that you have to wear a beard. People lost their independence of action. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Music was banned which is a spiritual food. We had no places for recreation and rest. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Now if there is a wedding, it is our choice. If we want, we can have singing. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

The Taliban were whipping our sons for not having proper beards. (Illiterate Hazara woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Now people with their own choice they can have a beard or not. In the past, if you came outside your house without one, you would be beaten. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

In Kabul University, at prayer time, I was sitting on the ground listening to BBC News. And the Taliban came and said "Is this BBC news more important than prayer?" and started beating me with whips. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

During the Taliban years, we were always afraid that they would come inside our home even at night. If even one cassette were found, a person would be imprisoned for ten days. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

Eighty percent of the people were jobless in those days, and everyone who had a job, also had a gun on his shoulder. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

As in other repressive systems throughout history, it also appears that abusive agents of the regime could be manipulated to settle personal grudges among neighbors and rivals. One older illiterate Pashtun man in Kabul says: "If anyone had a grudge, he would report his neighbor to the Taliban and then they would come and punish him."

Mullah Mohammed Omar remains a shadowy figure, though not very tangible to the people of Afghanistan for someone who was head of government for more than five years. While opinions are divided on whether Omar was actually even an Afghan national, many are persuaded that he was an active agent of the Pakistani intelligence agency (the "ISI") who was deployed to Afghanistan to weaken and damage it. The belief that Afghanistan's nearest neighbors are not friends is strongly felt in this context.

We never really heard him on the radio or TV, and we never knew whether he was an Afghan or a foreigner. He was a symbol. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Nobody participated to elect him. He was imposed on us. He was selected by some fighters and some terrorist gangs. There were not 20 people who thought he as a good leader. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

Omar was not really Afghan. He was a Pashtun, but he was Pakistani. He was from ISI and even the ordinary people knew he was not really a priest. He was not even a mullah, but he was given the title "Amir-al Mumineen" which means leader of all the Muslims of the world." This was an insult to the Muslim religion. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

All these adversities that we have had come from Iran and Pakistan. This is the main obstacle. The borders should be closed to these countries. These two neighbors are not happy that we are rebuilding. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

International presence welcomed, and an object of disappointment

The current international presence in Afghanistan is broadly welcomed despite disappointment at what is perceived to be a shortfall in delivery of assistance compared to what has been promised. As in the case of the *Loya Jirga*, expectations regarding what the international community will do for Afghanistan are probably unrealistically high.

The international community has promised a lot, but what they have delivered is almost nothing. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

The Americans have guaranteed us that they will help rebuild our country. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

The international community now pays attention to our country and they are taking care of us. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

It is because of ISAF that we are sleeping well at home at night. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

Since these ISAF forces have arrived, complete tranquility has prevailed. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

Lack of disarmament exacerbates anxieties about who controls the government

Particularly among men, there exists tremendous concern about the failure to date to disarm the country's many militias, as many people believe was promised by the Bonn Agreement. Occasional announcements from the government that arms are being decommissioned are simply not persuasive.

We believe the future is going to be better, but we see that weapons are still being distributed in various areas. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Even though on TV they say there are certain provinces or areas that are disarmed, we know that this is not true, and this is a disappointment to us. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

The most disappointing thing is the dominance of the warlords and the fact that the Mujahaddin are actually running the country. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

There is a great deal of anxiety that, unless the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is expanded throughout the country, the country's newfound gains in order and civility will give way once again to the interminable internecine combat they know all too well.

If ISAF is not among the people there will be more fighting. I hope they will not be leaving the country. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar province, 25 to 40 years old)

While we have security in Kabul, we certainly don't have it in other provinces. I hope ISAF will go to other provinces. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

It is striking that so many people use phrases like "gun-ocracy" (*tufang salary*) or "rule by warlords" or "rule of the commanders" (*qumandan salary*) as everyday terms that need no explanation.

There is still too much rule by the commanders. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

For five years, I saw only the rule of the warlords and gunmen. I am a shopkeeper and they would come and take things without paying. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

The warlords and the gun-ocracy are why we need to have the Loya Jirga and that is why we are trying in the Loya Jirga to make the government a people's government. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

A good person, a good Muslim, should be in charge and then this gun-ocracy should end. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

In addition to disappointment that guns have not been collected, there is also grave concern, especially among Pashtuns, about what happens to the weapons that *are* seized. The following exchange took place among university-educated Pashtun men in their 30s.

Through the mass media, they announce they have collected two missiles, five machine guns, or whatever, but it is not enough. In each province and district of Afghanistan, there are thousands of weapons and artillery. They must speed up this process.

There are thousands of weapons everywhere. Collecting five of them here and there is nothing.

You cannot deceive the people by saying that you have disarmed the soldiers, because they want to know where the weapons are and who took them.

Whoever is responsible for collecting the weapons must be known and it must be the national army. Unfortunately, in our country it has changed to an ethnic army – which doesn't represent all the tribes of the country. If they gather weapons, they just put them in their own depot and for their private purposes. So we are not sure about the collecting of arms.

Essence of democracy is understood and embraced by Afghans

Even though some people, and particularly illiterate women, hesitate to comment on the meaning of democracy, citing their lack of education and experience, it is apparent that many Afghans have a sound understanding of modern principles of democracy. They think it means government that is popularly elected – government that is, moreover, accountable and responsive.

We have not studied at school... democracy means freedom. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

Democracy? We do not know. We think it means freedom of expression. The aim of democracy is that people should be free. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

Practically, of course, democracy means free elections and freedom of expression. It means respecting everyone's rights. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

Government should be elected by the people and they should do things for the people. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

People govern themselves. It means the government of the people, selected by the people, and accepted by the people. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old).

Equality for everyone before the law, and a system in which people in high places do not enjoy impunity, is also understood to be a necessary and valued part of a democracy. Even illiterate people recite Koranic scripture as authority for the notion that everyone should be treated equally regardless of their position, or religion.

[Democracy] means equal rights of the people. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

In the Fourth Caliphate of Islam, a person came to the king and said this whip belongs to me. When they went before the judge, the king did not have any witnesses on his side, so he lost. And the whip was returned to the man. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

During the time of the Messenger Mohammed, a non-Muslim had a problem with a Muslim and the Messenger said the non-Muslim was right in this case, so there is equality for everyone. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar province, 25 to 40 years old)

Afghans of all stations frequently equate democracy with freedom of expression and the right of the individual to criticize government and make demands on public officials, without fear of retribution.

It means having the right to criticize and to not have fear. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

If people have something to say, they should be able to express it. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 30 to 50 years old)

Freedom of expression means the people should have the right to say something about the government, and to see if the government has the same opinion as the people. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

*Freedom of expression, clothes, religion, expression, and in commerce.
(University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)*

There is a strong sense – particularly, but not exclusively, among those with education – that government should be responsible to the public, and that citizens should be free to criticize officialdom when it fails to deliver. Yet there is also a strong belief in an orderly process, in which individuals exercise rights within a legal framework. The ideal is a government that works harmoniously with the people of the country, rather than an adversarial system, which may seem too conflictive to people in this war-torn country.

People should do what they want, within the governing framework – not just whatever they want outside the law. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Democracy within the bounds of the law. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 30 to 50 years old)

People and government need each other. Without one the other doesn't make sense. ... There should be a cooperative relationship between people and government; not like servant and master. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

Democracy does not mean that everybody should just do whatever; but that they should respect the laws. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

People must be responsible to the government and the government must be responsible to the people, and they should cooperate with each other. (High school educated Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Democracy and Islam are seen as compatible despite concern about the 'excesses' of Western democracy

Support for a democratic form of government in this devoutly Islamic nation is very strong across Afghanistan's four principal ethnic communities. There is very little concern expressed that Islam is somehow incompatible with democracy. In fact, even among the least educated Afghans, there is a strong sense that Islam may even *require* that a country be organized on a democratic basis.

It is mentioned in the Koran that they should elect the government according to its Islamic character. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Even in Islamic countries, democracy is essential. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

Why not Islam and democracy? They can be in the same family. (Illiterate Pashtun Man, 40 to 50 years old)

Islam is not against democracy. It protects and confirms democracy. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

No religion has contradictions with democracy – neither Hinduism, nor Buddhism, nor Christianity or Islam. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Islam and democracy are the same in that they ensure the welfare of the people, but they can both be perverted to mean something else. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

Interestingly, some even note that in a democracy the right to worship in one's own way can be protected – and that this is a good thing. In part, this appears to be a response to the horrific rule of the Taliban – whose cruelty and zealotry in pursuit of small tenets confirmed in many people's minds that not everything done in the name of Islam is just or constructive.

Whether or not this tolerance was widely present before the Taliban governed, Afghans today evince an appreciation for at least a modicum of personal space in the practice of one's Islamic faith. While it is not surprising that this would be the case among the beleaguered Hazara minority, who belong to the Shi'ia tradition in this mainly Sunni society, the sentiment is shared more broadly.

The Taliban had a very poor understanding of Islam. Instead of doing those things that are obligations in Islam, they were obsessing on a few minor aspects of Islam, and treating them as supreme. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

Some people think that to be in a democracy is to abandon Islam. But that is not true. It just means you have a choice. If you want to pray five times a day, you can. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

There are some people who interpret [democracy] in various ways. For example, there is a mosque and you are free to go and pray, or not, as you want. The Taliban would stop you and say 'why are you not praying?' In democracy you can decide. (Illiterate Pashtun Man, 40 to 50 years old)

Democracy means equality, brotherhood and it means that a person can be Islamic. He listens to music, or whatever, but he can be familiar with his God. When it is time to study, do that. When it is time to say your prayers, do that. And when it is time for relaxing, do that. Your faith is your own to live. (Illiterate Pashtun Man, 40 to 50 years old)

Everybody has different ideas, including different religious ideas – and the government should not regulate the religious activities of the people. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

At the same time, however, men and women both distinguish between a democracy consistent with their Islamic faith and what they understand to be the "excesses" of Western democracy (which is consistently described in terms of licentiousness among and with regard to women, regardless of education level).

We want to share in democracy and to learn, but if it is outside the context of Islam, then we do not want it. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

I do not like the Western democracy because it is an extremism and it has abandoned the middle road. We do not want our sisters to go outside with bare bodies. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

We are not against Western democracy, but we have different cultural values. Like in sexual relations, they think that cohabitation without marriage is OK, but we do not. So that is different for their culture. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

I think democracy more or less means Islam. They are not opposite of each other. But not the extreme democracy of the Western countries.... in the West a woman can do anything she wants, go anywhere. But Islam doesn't allow women to do so. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

For example, in the West a woman can divorce from her husband in one minute. Here we stay with our husband until the end of life. We do not want to be like Western women. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

For example, in Europe, if a girl likes a man and her father won't let her go with the man, then she can call the police and they put the father in prison. We do not like that. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

Women's rights

As puzzling as it may seem to outsiders who note that virtually all Afghan women continue to wear the *burqa* when outside their homes, Afghans tend to see themselves as supportive of rights for women. Men and women alike fluently recite Koranic scripture to explain that equal rights are fully consistent with Islam. As often as women, men cite the recent re-opening of schools to girls and the workplace to women as signal accomplishments of Karzai's Administration. As in any other country, men's perception of their own commitment to women's rights differs from women's assessment of that commitment.

Opening of schools to girls is the best thing that has happened. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

[The best things Karzai has done] he has helped the women get their freedom. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Islam says that men and women can sit beside one another and learn. And democracy says the same. So having Islam is not inconsistent with democracy. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Of 1,501 seats in the Loya Jirga, only 160 are given to women – and this is not enough. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Everybody here has complimented the Interim Administration, but now I want to say that I was a teacher – but they won't let me teach the more senior students. They said only men should teach the more senior students. I say, 'why are we having this discrimination again?' (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

They think women don't know anything. If women could manage their families during these last five years, then they could manage the country. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

In some families, the men say 'what more rights do you want?' you are now uncovered. But we say No, we should be able to participate in the elections and be elected. These are our rights. We should be able to work shoulder to shoulder with our brothers. (Illiterate Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Those women who have to stay at home because they have prejudiced men in their house and the men won't let them come out. They should be given some kind of employment they can do at home, so they can earn some money. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

Even the staunchest advocates for women's rights, however, are concerned that women's equality not lead to a breakdown in family and social order and they fear that this is where Western influence will lead. Some Afghan women note that foreigners seem overly focused on superficial things, such as the *hijab* or the *burqa* – and do not pay enough attention to issues that really matter, like education and work opportunities, and equitable representation in the Loya Jirga.

Islam accepts that women go to school, but they should respect the hijab. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

In some Islamic countries they have democracy, and it is better than the democracy in the West. For instance, women can go to work – but wearing the Islamic hijab. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 30 to 50 years old)

Democracy means learning. It doesn't mean only to remove the hijab and to look like westerners. ... Democracy means to participate in society and democracy means the right to learn and to participate. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Democracy means equal rights. Some people think that if we look like Westerners, we will have democracy, but that is not the real democracy. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Understanding for the role of civil society

Among those with at least a high school education, there is an appreciation for the role that can be played by civil society, in providing services and holding government accountable. The effective collapse of government in Afghanistan through much of the 1990s and the role played by international aid agencies confirms that organizational pluralism is necessary and good.

In the past, the governments have not trusted the people, so these civil groups have established credibility and done good work for the people. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Civil society is very important. Internally we have some groups that are links to WHO and UNICEF, and they can complain to the Government. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Associations are very important, especially cultural centers as they help develop the country. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Government is one voice, but every group has a voice – and among them one will have a real voice and be true. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

Civil society plays an important role because they also give opinions, and sometimes they express the views of the majority of the people. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

An association can exist alongside government. They can go out in the provinces and propagate and say if the government is good or if the government is bad. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

However, a strong aversion to conflict leads many to say that such groups should operate strictly within approved mandates and cooperate with government rather than adopt an adversarial posture.

These groups should work according to their charter. Outside that, they should not be allowed to operate. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

They should be registered at the Ministry of Planning and they should be very complementary with the Government. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old).

Political parties

Political parties, on the other hand, are generally seen as divisive ("factions"), and even as synonymous with warlords and their political-military organizations, and thus are not well regarded at all

Behind the national flag, there is also a party flag and that is calling in to question the unity of the country. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

Political organizations mean that people support mainly their own people. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

When these parties emerged, Afghanistan turned to ruins. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

The parties will either come from Pakistan or Iran or somewhere else, and no good will come of it. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar, 25 to 40 years old)

We have a factional system, so everybody works for his faction or party. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Even a young Hazara man who believes in the utility of political parties notes that Afghanistan's experience with them has not always been beneficial. "People in this country will hate the role of political parties because they can set us backwards," he says. " But I think that political parties are vital for the development of the society, as they can present their ideas for the people and they can criticize the government."

Memory of the Daoud regime and Communist period muddles the meaning of democracy for some

In 1973, Mohammed Daoud overthrew his cousin, Zahir Shah and sent him into his long exile in Rome. During the five years he governed before he was murdered in a coup, Daoud styled his one-man rule as "republican" and democratic. The Soviet-backed Communist regimes that followed Daoud's administration also styled themselves as "democratic." These episodes have left some people, at least, with the impression that this is actually what one means by democracy.

In the past we also had democracy, but it was extreme. And people hated it. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

If we look back at the time of Daoud, we can see how democracy and Islam were mixed with one another. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

People here cannot tolerate Western style liberty. It was tried here and it did not work. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

Royal restoration backed mainly by Pashtuns, despite kindly view of Zahir Shah

Support for restoration of the monarchy varies significantly by ethnicity. While Zahir Shah is seen as a kindly old gentleman by most everyone, it is mainly Pashtuns who desire that he return to the throne. They mostly recall the years of his reign as a time of peace, stability and progress – and contrast it favorably with what has transpired since his ouster. Better-educated Pashtuns, however, note that Zahir Shah's government was not an unalloyed success, and speak more of constitutional monarchy in which the king's role is minimal.

His rule was a very peaceful, comfortable time and everything was well in those days. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

People should ask themselves what they got from all this internal fighting. Everybody was pulling people over to their side – Rabbani, Hekmatyar, and Masoud. Zahir Shah has the experience to gather all people to his side, the one side. (Illiterate Pashtun farmer, Logar province, 25 to 40 years old)

For establishing national unity, we need a constitutional monarchy – like in Britain, where even with four peoples they still have one queen. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

In his day, we had national unity and a Pashtun could easily travel to Bamian, and a Hazara could work in Kandahar. The only negative is that during his forty years, he did not advance the economic and social standing of the country. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Remember, the monarchy was not ended by popular unrest. It was just by a military coup d'etat. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Uzbeks and Hazaras have nice things to say about the king, and they remember the years before 1973 as peaceful, if not remarkable for substantial national development. At least some in each of these two communities would be amenable to a purely symbolic role for the Shah, though others would not be so disposed.

During Zahir Shah's time, it was peaceful. When he left destruction started. But he is an older man and I don't know if he can do it or not. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

The Shah can be a symbol of national unity. But he cannot be king, because he is old and he is weak. (High school educated Hazara man, 18 to 30 years old)

As an Afghan, he has a role here. But as a leader, I don't think he can do it. If he wants to become a King again, it is impossible. (Illiterate Uzbek man, 30 to 50 years old)

Tajiks, however, and especially men, are strongly opposed to the monarchy in almost any form. Though they do not express their opposition in explicitly ethnic terms, these statements seem in some ways to mirror the concerns noted above by Pashtuns about the large role that Tajiks are now playing in the Interim Administration. Tajiks recall Zahir Shah's time as monarch as a period of stagnation and discrimination, and clearly do not want to see any reprise. Several Tajiks compare Zahir Shah's time unfavorably to the reign of the Shah in neighboring Iran.

If you look at the world today, and all the advanced countries, I don't think there is a role for a monarchical form of government. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

In his forty-year regime, our country did not advance as it must. During his rule, the kingdom was backwards. I prefer Karzai rather than Zahir Shah now. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

If we speak about the man himself, he is a sympathetic man and kind to people. But if we look at his activities, he has done nothing for our people. The current problems we are facing are the result of that regime. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

If you compare Zahir Shah to Reza Shah, the king of Iran, we clearly see that Zahir Shah did nothing for the country. In the reign of Reza Shah, Iran advanced so much that it is now a self-sufficient country. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

For women, the housing crisis is the number one priority

In a city where vast stretches have been turned to rubble over the past decade or so, every group of women sees the biggest problem at present as the dearth of housing. Many who have survived recently as squatters in abandoned buildings are now being pushed out onto the street as refugees return to claim their property. A number of women express the fervent hope that the international community will build apartment buildings, as the Soviets did once upon a time.

Lack of housing is a problem for every Afghan. We are living in a house that does not have windows, and the ceiling is broken from the fighting. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

First they should build housing and yet they are talking about building monuments. Monuments can be done in the future, but first real problems should be solved. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

The returning refugees from Iran and Pakistan are saying we have to leave their houses.... (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

I brought my brother from Pakistan with me, but our baggage is in the doorway of a friend's house, and we have been searching for a long time for housing and not found it. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

The UN should help the poor people build their houses. (Illiterate Hazara woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Russians built those housing blocks. We hope the Americans and the United Nations will do the same. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

These countries could build housing easily; it's not a big deal for them, like the Russians did. All these countries say they are going to rehabilitate Afghanistan – Japan, Europe. We need housing. I am living in one room with my mother-in-law. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

Even those with little schooling see education as a critical national priority

After security and jobs (for men) and housing (for women), the priority that is spontaneously raised most often in these discussions is education. The exclusion of girls from school, as well as restrictions on what boys were permitted to study, are among the legacies of the Taliban that are most despised. Some young women who lost out on some of their education would like a chance to resume schooling, despite their relatively 'advanced' years.

When our children went to school, we could no longer expect that they could become doctors, teachers or engineers – they were being trained to become talibs. (Illiterate Tajik man, 30 to 40 years old)

The girls can now go to school. In the past they were only knitting rugs at home. (Illiterate Hazara woman, 30 to 40 years old)

Not only me, but many other young girls were kept from reading even one book for years during the Taliban years. (Illiterate Uzbek woman, 18 to 30 years old)

*The first thing they should do is campaign against illiteracy. We are old, and we cannot go to school. They should give notebooks and pens to older people, too. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old).
They should fight against illiteracy. Because if people cannot read, then power and diversity will not come among our people. (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)*

When we see the schools, we become happy that illiteracy will come to an end. (Illiterate Pashtun man, 40 to 50 years old)

An illiterate person is like a blind person. (Illiterate Pashtun woman, 20 to 30 years old)

A discussion of education policy illuminates how complicated a challenge modernization is in a country with such a massive problem of literacy. The Interim Administration may have found a neat and simple way to square a sensitive cultural circle. The following exchange unfolded in the group of Tajik women in their 30s, when they were prompted to consider the relative merits of Zahir Shah and his reign. The group did not include any university graduates, but did include several elementary school teachers.

In the past, the King did not do so well, especially in education. All the ethnic groups did not have equal rights during his reign and the illiteracy we have today is a result of that.

... only a small group had the right to be educated.

For girls to go to school in the King's day, the girls had to uncover their face, and so many simply did not go. They were introducing democracy in a Western way and people did not want to go in that direction.

Just like the insistence of the Taliban that girls must always be covered, in the King's day they insisted that girls must not be covered.

One of the good things about the Interim Administration is that they said that anybody – whether covered or uncovered – can participate in education.

Frustration among elites in the capital who feel overlooked

An issue that the Interim Administration, and the government that is to emerge from the *Loya Jirga*, may want to address is the frustration and anger felt by better-educated men and women in Kabul who feel they are being left by the wayside.

Sometimes this is expressed as jealousy regarding high profile positions being allocated to returning refugees at other moments, it is expressed as concern about the rise of unqualified persons with connections. People who believe their education and experience should qualify them for jobs in the Administration, and who survived the long dark years, are resentful at being overlooked during this transition period. A flurry of promotions to senior ranks in the military in the days prior to these interviews clearly rankled some.

There are some women coming from outside the country, from Iran and Pakistan and Europe, and they are brought in to the meetings. But not the women who lived here all the time. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

If Karzai employs people, from Germany or Europe, as minister or as an expert – how do they know what is happening in this society? We who have been here throughout and have suffered under the regimes, we are left out. We have been educated to do this work. Why not us? (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

If unqualified and unprofessional people have the jobs, then we go backward. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

The biggest disappointment is that professional people are not given the places that go to less well-educated people. Look at the military, where they have marshals and generals who are not even educated. (University educated Pashtun man, 30 to 40 years old)

Everyday he is promoting three generals. Does this country really need more generals? (High school educated Uzbek man, 18 to 30 years old)

Complaints about salaries not having been paid in six months to schoolteachers and other public officials mitigate the enthusiasm for the restoration of a functioning government and the reopening of schools, as it makes these accomplishments seem temporary.

Officials in the government are also not getting paid for the last five or six months – and this of course leads to bribery and corruption. (High school educated Tajik woman, 30 to 40 years old)

One of the disappointments is that we have not been paid our salaries at school. The Interim Administration has only six months and now there is one month left to go, and it has still not done certain things. (University educated Pashtun woman, 50 to 60 years old)

Appendix A:

Demographic profiles of groups

Monday, April 29

9:00 AM Tajik men (illiterate, ages 30 to 40)

2:00 PM Pashtun men (university educated, ages 30 to 40)

Tuesday, April 30

9:00 AM Hazara men (high school education, ages 18 to 30)

Wednesday, May 1

9:00 AM Tajik women (high school education, ages 30 to 40)

2:00 PM Pashtun women (university education, ages 50 to 60)

Thursday, May 2

9:00 AM Hazara women (illiterate, ages 30 to 40)

1:00 PM Uzbek women (illiterate, ages 40 to 50)

3:00 PM Uzbek men (high school education, ages 18 to 30)

Friday, May 3

10 AM Pashtun men, Logar Province (illiterate, ages 25 to 40)

Saturday, May 4

9:00 AM Pashtun men (illiterate, ages 18 to 30)

12:00 PM Uzbek men (illiterate, ages 30 to 40)

3:00 PM Pashtun women (illiterate, ages 20 to 40)

Appendix B:

AFGHAN PERSPECTIVES ON DEMOCRACY

Focus Group Guidelines

April 29 to May 4, 2002

I. Introduction

Moderator. Hello, my name is XXX, and I am the moderator for this discussion. My job is to move the conversation along and make sure that we cover several different subjects. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that I will pose to you. The purpose of this research is to find out what the people of Afghanistan honestly think. In the new period for our country, where we hope that the people's voice will be respected, my colleagues and I believe it is important to find out what the opinions of the people really are. That is why there are no right answers or wrong answers. In fact, you may find that you disagree with another person's opinion, and I hope you will say so when that happens - - in a respectful and polite way, of course.

Confidential/anonymous research. This discussion is completely anonymous and confidential. There will no record of what you say with your name on it. We are not going to quote anyone specifically. I have this small tape recorder, like a journalist, so that I can go back and be sure that I capture your words accurately for the research, but no one will know which person says any specific statement. This way, I do not have to take notes while we talk and I can concentrate on you and on our discussion.

Introductions. Now let's go around the table and introduce ourselves. Just say one thing about yourself, like where you were born or how many children you have.

[AFTER INTRODUCTIONS:] OK, thank you. Now let us begin.

II. Country Direction

A. First, tell me how are things going in the country these days? Are things going generally in the right direction, or have things gotten off in the wrong direction?

B. What is the best thing about the current situation in Afghanistan at the present?

C. What is your biggest disappointment at this point?

III. Family Direction

A. How are things going these days for your family?

B. What is the best thing (happiest thing) that has happened in your family in recent months?

C. What has been the biggest disappointment for your family recently?

D. Do you have family members currently living in other countries? Which countries?

IV. Personalities

A. Now I am going to give you the names of some prominent people and I would like you to say the first words that come to mind. Just a word or two, and quickly.

1. Farhad Darya /Naghma/ Nashinas (Popular Singer – varied with group)
2. Koffi Anan
3. Mullah Omar
4. Hamed Karzai

Now, I want you to think of both some positive things and some negative things about Hamed Karzai.

First, tell me the positive things, even if you do not like him so much. What positive words come to mind, when you think about Hamed Karzai?

Now, tell me some negative things about Hamed Karzai, even if you do like him. What are you disappointed about when you think of him?

5. Mohammed Zahir Shah

Now, I want you to think of both some positive things and some negative things about the King, Mohammed Zahir Shah.

V. Democracy

A. Now, we will shift to another subject. When I say the word "democracy" what comes to mind for you? In just one word or a few words.

B. In a democracy, what do you think the relationship between the government and the people should be? Does the government tell the people what to do or does the people tell the government what to do in a democracy?

C. What do you think is the place of the individual person in a democracy?

D. What do you think of individuals or independent groups – civic groups – that try to do things apart from the government on their own initiative? Is that a good thing, or not?

E. What are some examples of groups of citizens that are independent of the government?

F. What do you think about political parties?

VI. Islam and Democracy

A. Can Afghanistan have both democracy and Islam? Is Islam consistent with democracy?

B. In what way should Islam influence democracy in Afghanistan?

VII. Loya Jirga

A. What is the Loya Jirga? If you had to explain it to a child, how would you describe what it is and what it is supposed to do?

B. What do you hope will result from the Loya Jirga?

C. Do you plan to participate in selecting delegates to the Loya Jirga?

1. When you are voting for a delegate, what is the most important factor that influences your vote? Why do you choose the person you do?

2. What factors should determine the actions of the Loya Jirga? Who or what should influence their decisions?

D. Should certain people be excluded from the Loya Jirga?

E. Do you think the Loya Jirga should include representatives from all the ethnic groups and factions in the country, or that it should be composed only of the best individual experts on democracy and governance?

F. Do you have any concerns or doubts about the Loya Jirga?

VIII. Monarchy

A. What role should the King play in the future of Afghanistan?

B. What about his sons or grandsons after him? Should they have a role?

IX. Interim Administration

- A. How well do you think the Interim Administration is doing?
- B. What is the best thing it has accomplished?
- C. What has been your biggest disappointment so far with the work of the Interim Administration?
- D. Do you believe that the members of the Interim Administration are working for the best interests of the country overall -- or just for themselves and their friends?
- E. If there were a disagreement between the Interim Administration and the international community about what is the right thing to do – which opinion would prevail?
- F. If there were a disagreement between the Interim Administration and local leaders around the country ["tribal leaders" for Pashtuns] about what is the right thing to do – which opinion would prevail?

X. Priorities

- A. Tell me what you think the highest priority should be for the next government. What is the most urgent problem that needs to be addressed?
- B. What is the biggest obstacle the country faces?

XI. Future

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about Afghanistan for the next year?

About the next five years?

Thank you. Those are all the questions I have for today.

Appendix C:

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

Focus groups are semi-structured discussions conducted by a trained moderator. Groups are generally homogenous, in order to obtain information about that particular segment of the population (e.g. women, youth, pensioners, disabled, business professionals). Focus groups are not scientific surveys and do not constitute a “random sample.” However, results from focus groups can reveal underlying values and orientations, thought processes, emotions, reactions and understandings.

Public opinion research in Afghanistan in 2002 is complicated by a number of unusual challenges. A series of wars have disrupted the country for almost a quarter of a century. Since the last census figures were collected in the 1970s, several million people have since been displaced from their homes, and hundreds of thousands have become refugees in neighboring countries. More than one million people (in a country of roughly 25 million) have died as a result of military conflict since 1979. Accordingly, it is difficult to know precisely the composition of the population, and all statements on this subject should be couched (and read) in quite tentative terms.

Then there is the immense personal danger associated with expression of one's opinion in Afghanistan, particularly during the recent misrule by the Taliban regime (1995 to 2001). Moreover, while a measure of order has been established in Kabul and some other parts of the country, military action continues in various places between the U.S.-led international coalition and its al-Queda and Taliban foes – as well as between several Afghan militias trying to assert their authority vis-a-vis the Interim Administration. Establishing a comfortable environment in which Afghans feel free to express their views on important or sensitive matters poses special challenges.

Fortunately, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. conducted research in Afghanistan in the summer of 1999 and prepared a comprehensive report for the International Committee of the Red Cross on Afghan attitudes toward the rules of war, including the Geneva Conventions. That report (entitled *People on War: Country Report Afghanistan* and available at www.greenbergresearch.com) remains one of very few comprehensive assessments of Afghan attitudes, reflecting both qualitative and quantitative data.² It provided valuable points of reference for the present research.

Several considerations led NDI to decide to conduct focus group research only at this point. Ideally, one conducts focus groups prior to a quantitative survey in part in order to develop issues and hypotheses to test subsequently in a quantitative survey. In a place such as Afghanistan today, where so little is known of the public's views, it is all the more necessary and valuable to begin by listening intensively to people's responses to open-ended questions. So focus groups would logically be conducted first, and would

² As part of its support to the Special Commission for the Organization of the Emergency *Loya Jirga*, the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) conducted interviews around the country about expectations regarding the process of selecting delegates to the *Loya Jirga* in June, although that report is not publicly available. The Office of Research of the International Broadcasting Bureau commissioned a survey of Afghan listeners to VOA's Dari and Farsi services in 1999, and it was published in April 2000.

also help address the methodological difficulties that have to be overcome in order to conduct a credible quantifiable national survey.

One other principal factor was decisive in limiting the research to focus groups at this point: the limited funding available to NDI for work in Afghanistan. Interestingly, given the many substantial governmental and intergovernmental commitments to the rehabilitation of the country, no funds have yet been made available to organizations like NDI to provide advisory assistance to civic or political groups there.³ So it was important to conduct this research with great attention to economy.

In mid-April, a trilateral exchange of email between Ross Reid, NDI's chief of mission in Kabul, Les Campbell, NDI's Washington-based Director of Programs in the Middle East, and Tom Melia established the parameters for the focus group research. Apart from Reid and Campbell, who are accomplished Canadian political leaders, and Melia all those participating in this project in Afghanistan were undertaking this sort of work for the first time. The careful attention to detail and the generally professional approach to the work on the part of our Afghan partners are therefore all the more impressive.

Geography: After considering the merits of conducting the groups throughout the country, it was determined to concentrate on the Kabul area for reasons of security, timing and economy. Overland travel in Afghanistan at present remains time-consuming and dangerous. Air travel to major centers is possible in some cases, though it means traveling with the UN's humanitarian air service via Islamabad, and is time-consuming and expensive. So this research was confined to the Kabul area, with one focus group conducted in a rural community in Logar province, about two hours drive south of Kabul.

Kabul is distinct not only because it is capital city, and thus the location of major institutions and a meeting place for the country's diverse nationalities. It is also at present the only part of the country where the international community has undertaken to secure the peace, with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) patrolling the streets. For these and other reasons, as noted in the body of the report, the findings are not necessarily reflective of the views of Afghans outside that area.

Homogeneity: In order to enhance the comfort level of participants, each of the twelve focus groups was recruited to be relatively homogeneous. The groups were stratified by gender, age, ethnicity and educational attainment. In this manner, each participant is more likely to feel that everyone's opinion matters equally, that there is no need to defer to another person, and this encourages frankness and participation. As the table in Appendix B indicates, groups were composed of one or another of the country's four largest ethnic communities – Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik or Uzbek. Several of the groups included individuals who had spent some time outside the country as refugees.

³ *The Washington Times* on May 20, 2002 carried a report from Tehran in which UNDP Administrator Mark Malloch Brown is reported to have said that less than \$1 billion of the \$4.5 billion pledged in January at the Tokyo conference has reached the country. Although the aid pledged was intended to help stabilize the country, Brown said, apparently without a trace of irony, "The money has not yet flowed into Afghanistan due to instability. [Donors] are waiting for the Loya Jirga in June."

Random Recruiting: In addition to creating peer groups of about ten individuals, it is also important that the participants do not have personal knowledge of one another, so that they are less likely to hedge the expression of their views due to concern about what others will think. So the recruiters were instructed on how to draw randomly and from as wide a pool as possible.

Two Afghan human rights activists were engaged to coordinate the recruitment of the groups and to arrange for the transportation of participants to the site. Consistent with local customs, men sought out male participants, and women recruiters looked for female participants. Recruiters spoke in the maternal language of each of these communities, as well as Dari, which is for most purposes the national lingua franca.

The recruiters were instructed in how randomly to select ten different spots on the map of the Kabul area where they had reason to believe that the ethnicity in question was likely to be found. Thus, Tajiks were sought mainly, but not exclusively, in north Kabul, and Hazaras were recruited largely in west Kabul. From these randomly selected starting points, a recruiting team would follow a rough version of a "skip pattern" in order to determine which households to approach. At each household thus identified, a mini-interview would be conducted that would, *inter alia*, establish whether a person fitting the desired demographic profile resided there and was willing to be interviewed. At that point, the respondent was invited to participate in the appropriate focus group, for which transportation and an honorarium would be provided. Participants were provided an honorarium of 250,000 Afghanis (equivalent to about seven and a half U.S. dollars).

If an interview successfully yielded a participant, the recruiting team moved to another pre-determined location and started the process again. If an interview (or an approach to a household) was unsuccessful, the team continued within that neighborhood according to the pattern. Recruiters were specifically coached to avoid a "convenience sample" (in which they might tend to approach only households that are close to the main road, or that appear to them more attractive or appropriate, etc.). Spot checks with some of the recruiters afterwards confirmed that were alert to these issues and confident they had abided by the instructions. The moderators and the translator also confirmed that the groups did not appear to contain individuals familiar with one another.

Moderators: Both moderators were schoolteachers. Mr. Mohammed Nabi, a teacher of mathematics and engineering at a technical college, moderated the men's groups. Ms. Gul Ghutai, who teaches fifth grade for girls, was moderator for the women's groups. Each of them is fluent in Pashto (for the Pashtun groups), as well as in Dari (which was used for the Uzbek and Tajik groups) and also in the distinctive Hazara dialect of Dari which was utilized for the Hazara groups. The group discussions took place in one or another of these languages.

Each moderator was trained prior to the commencement of the project and then de-briefed after each of the groups to review the conduct of the discussion. They conducted the discussions according to the Guidelines that were developed in consultation with NDI (see Appendix C). On a few occasions, notes with suggestions

were sent in to the moderators, but mostly they were conducted without interruption. The discussions ranged from about ninety minutes to just over two hours.

Translation, Transcripts and Transparency: In order to enhance the comfort level of the participants, and to remove any potential incentive to alter responses to suit the audience, it was determined to conceal the sponsorship of the research. While some time was invested in crafting ways to explain the purpose of the research that would be both truthful and not reveal the sponsors, this turned out to be unnecessary. Participants were not told that it was being conducted for NDI, and none expressed curiosity. They seemed more comfortable with the exercise than had been anticipated – pleased to be asked their opinions, and satisfied with the honorarium provided.

When participants arrived at the focus group site (brought in cars by the recruiters), they were offered tea and snacks and ushered into what had been the dining room of a home. Chairs were arranged around a coffee table, where the discussions took place. On the other side of a door left ajar, a translator provided simultaneous translation to a note-taker, who transcribed the English version of the discussion.

This simultaneous translation provided an opportunity for interventions in the groups, which was done on several occasions via written notes. The quality of this translation was very good, but necessarily incomplete. A tape recording was therefore made of each discussion. Afterwards, a second translator listened to the discussions and provided additional notes or clarification of things that may have been missed in the initial transcription. These notes were incorporated into the English versions of the transcripts that became the basis for the analysis.