



EU AFGHANISTAN
PEACE SUPPORT
MECHANISM



میکانیزم حمایت اتحادیه اروپا
از پروسه صلح افغانستان
د افغانستان د سولې څخه
د اروپایي ټولني د ملاتړ تگلاره



POLICY BRIEF

Non-Dominant Minorities and the Afghan Peace Process

Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization (HREVO)



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Key Questions

How do Afghanistan's vulnerable minority groups view the peace process? What are their main concerns and demands with regards to the peace process? How to address them?

Context

After nearly four decades of violent conflict and instability, there is widespread support for peace across Afghanistan's political and social divides. Despite a bumpy hurdle, the signing of the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban on 29 February 2020 and the launch of the intra-Afghan dialogue in September have bolstered optimism for reaching a peace deal. The political message so far, especially from international community, is that a future peace process must be inclusive and representative of the country's various political groupings and "micro-societies". There is a strong normative expectation that the peace process and its political outcomes represent the demands and aspirations of Afghanistan's diverse political and social groups, including minorities especially the non-dominant minorities, women and the youth.¹ This recognition is underpinned by Afghanistan's own history of recurrent failures of peace efforts since 1987 as well as international norms and experiences that appreciate the importance of inclusivity in sustaining peace and preventing the recurrence of violent conflicts.

International experience also shows that effective peace agreements and processes also ensure the rights of minority groups.

It seems that with the ongoing peace process, the tendency has been to prioritise short-term top-down agreements over building the long-term foundations for positive peace and to focus on the views and the interests of elite groups at the exclusion of ordinary civilian populations. Such an approach is likely to marginalise and alienate non-dominant minorities from the ongoing peace process, seriously undermine its credibility. The search for peace through a "grand bargain" as what Afghanistan experienced at the 2001 Bonn Conference between dominant groups has the potential to further marginalise the voices and the interests of the smaller minorities and vulnerable groups.

¹ In Afghanistan, the dominant groups are often recognised to be the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks. The non-dominant groups are Aimaq, Qizilbash, Pashai, Turkmen, Baluch & Brahui, Arab, Sadat, Nuristanis, Wakhi, Kyrgyz, Gujur, Ismaili Shias, Sikhs and Hindus, Magat/Jat and several others. For details of the research findings and policy recommendations see the HREVO's report, *Towards an Inclusive, Lasting, and Sustainable Peace: Recognize, Legitimize, and Empower Afghan Non-Dominant Minorities*.

Sustainable Peace? Neglect, Marginalisation and Credibility

Since vulnerable groups tend to be impacted disproportionately by violence and instability, they are also more likely to support a peaceful end to the violent conflicts in the country. A recent study by Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization (HREVO) and Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN) have found that almost all of the non-dominant minority groups expressed strong fear that a combination of elite-driven and centrally managed process, and the Taliban’s history of persecution of minorities, will create new threats to their fundamental rights and freedoms.

These communities have a strong feeling of victimhood and marginalisation in their collective consciousness. As such, they deeply feel betrayed and neglected both by international community and the Afghan government in ongoing peace process. They are inimical to the current peace dialogues as they strongly believe that their voices have hardly been heard. Few stakeholders have tried to reach out to them to hear and address their concerns and interests. This is reflected in our survey in which 80 percent of survey respondents expressed a desire to be included in peace-related initiatives, however, majority (79.1 percent) said they had not been part of any peace-related initiatives.

Have you ever participated in any program related to peace?

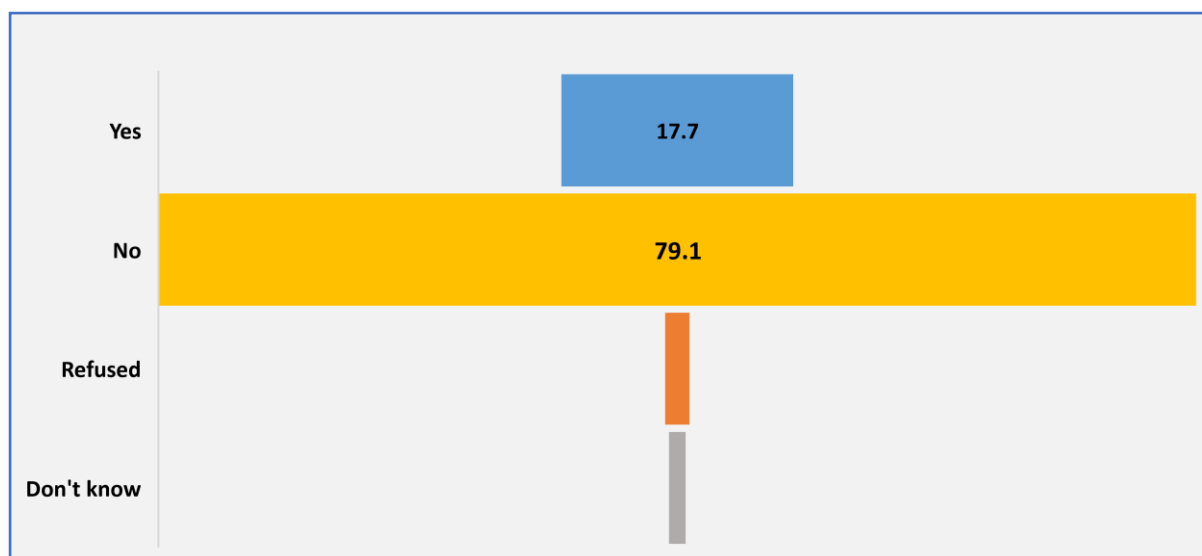


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents involved in the peace process

When sought of their perception about whether they, the respondents or their communities are represented in the peace process, most of them said they are not represented.

These perceptions of exclusion from the peace process are reinforced by structural conditions that limit the ability of these minority groups to exert their voice in the national political processes. Afghanistan's highly centralised political system as

well as the rugged geography and insecurities make it difficult for small minority groups to influence political processes at the national level. The influence of these groups is often limited to their local and provincial environments. To address these challenges, many research participants called for specific institutional mechanisms that can identify and amplify the voices of minority groups at the national level.

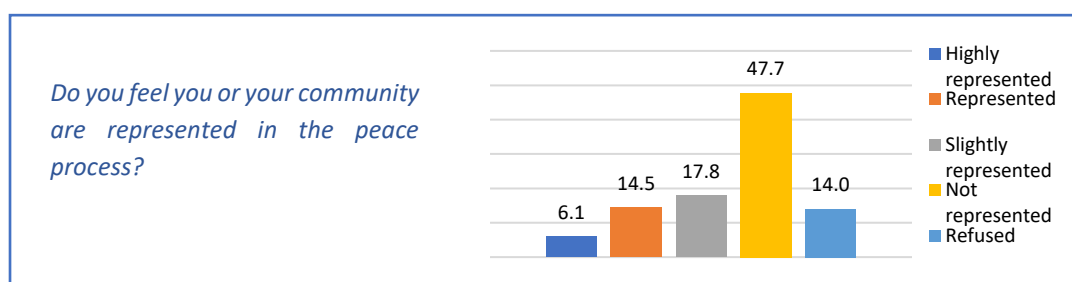


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents' communities involved in the peace process

Failing Minority Groups' Aspirations and Concerns

The most important concern for non-dominant minorities has been fear of violation of peace agreement and relapse of the country into another, potentially more violent, period of civil war. Other concerns included violation of minority rights in a peace agreement, lack of ownership of the process by Afghans, the exclusion of minorities from the peace process, violation of the rights of women, interference by regional countries, Taliban's unwillingness to commit to a peace process and rising poverty and deteriorating economic conditions.

The minority demands often vary. But ceasefire is key for them to give the space needed to mobilise as a scattered and small group for advocacy efforts around peace process. This will also help them preserve the gains of the last 18 years for their communities by reaching out to key stakeholders in the peace process. The fact that these groups have had the space and time to mobilise to raise their concerns and interests around key issues is alarming. The Afghan government and International community must pay urgent attention to this.

Members of minority groups naturally express strong support for an end to violence and a peace process that preserves fundamental human rights, including the rights of minorities to maintain and practise their specific cultures and traditions.

Non-Dominant Groups and the Taliban: Assurances and Guarantees

The Taliban have not taken a clear stand on minority rights especially on non-dominant groups except few vague statements. In the recent survey, there were widespread concerns that a peace agreement, which may give the Taliban a prominent role in the government, has the potential to jeopardise the fundamental rights of minority groups. These concerns markedly stem from the Taliban's history of violence against minority groups and its ideological character that refuses to recognise social, cultural and religious diversity. Minority groups, particularly religious minorities, fear the most from the reimposition of an ultra-conservative Taliban government that can threaten their rights to preserve and practice their social, cultural and religious identities.

Key Recommendations

The ongoing peace process with the Taliban is presenting important opportunities for institutional reform and expanding opportunities for inclusion and participation of all segment of Afghan society in the peace process. It presents an excellent opportunity to revise efforts to carry out successful peacebuilding and nation-building.

To the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

- The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan must take practical and institutional measures to address perceptions and experiences of exclusion and marginalisation among the social and culturally vulnerable groups.
- Minority groups must be represented in the decision-making roles of the peace process, likewise, consulted to gather their concerns, and demands.
- Help set up the formation of a national council of minority groups that can advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups in the peace process.
- Strengthen the capacity of national institutions to monitor and advocate for the rights of vulnerable minorities, especially by creating a dedicated section for minority rights at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

To the Taliban

- The Taliban must respond to widespread concerns that its ideological stances and behaviours are likely to impact the fundamental human rights of minority groups in Afghanistan. They should formally make their stand on minority rights clear and give solid reassurances on the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizens of Afghanistan without any discrimination.
- Avoid targeting minority communities in areas under their influence and take practical steps to protect them.

To the international community

- The international community must help and ensure that the protection and advancement of the rights of minority groups are at the centre of international peace and development efforts.
- Advocate the concerns and interests of non-dominant groups with Taliban leadership in Doha given their access to them. Explore the possibility of making future settlement conditional on the recognition and preservation of the rights of minorities.

About Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organization (HREVO)

HREVO was established in 2009 by a group of dedicated individuals comprised of lawyers, human rights and civil society activists and advocates academics and development professionals who all have been involved in different sectors of non-governmental work over the last decade. As a rapidly growing organization, HREVO has established itself as one of the leading and active civil society organizations in Afghanistan particularly in the areas of human rights, women's rights, peace building and good governance.

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