



Reaching Boiling Point: High School Activism in Afghanistan



Dr Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohmmad Ali
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Dr Antonio Giustozzi and Ali Mohammad Ali



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Acronyms

BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NDS	National Directorate of Security

Glossary

Establishment parties: Parties that have been part of the post-2001 ruling coalition and that have taken part in the distribution of the spoils (i.e., the capture of state institutions for private purposes), such as Jamiat-i Islami, Junbesh-i Milli, Hizb-i Wahdat, and others.

Legal opposition parties and organisations: Parties and organisations that are legally registered, but that have not been directly involved in government or that have abandoned it at some point after 2001, such as Rawand-i Sabz [Green Trend] (which supported Dr Abdullah in the elections, but then opposed the formation of the National Unity Government), Dawat-i Islami, and Jamiat-i Islah.

Anti-establishment parties and organisations: Groups that are not legally registered and oppose the political system as such, including organisations like Hizb-ut Tahrir and the Taliban. Throughout the text, the term “radical” is used in reference to the activists of these groups.

Islamist: Political tendency that interprets Islam as a political ideology and aims to reconcile modern sciences and technology with it. Islamists differ from fundamentalists in that they do not wish for a complete return to the origins of Islam, but for a government run by educated and committed Muslims.

Fundamentalist: Political tendency that argues for the need to return to the origins of Islam. A typical example of this tendency is the Taliban. The term was originally used to describe revivalist Christian movements and was then adopted to describe Islamic equivalents.

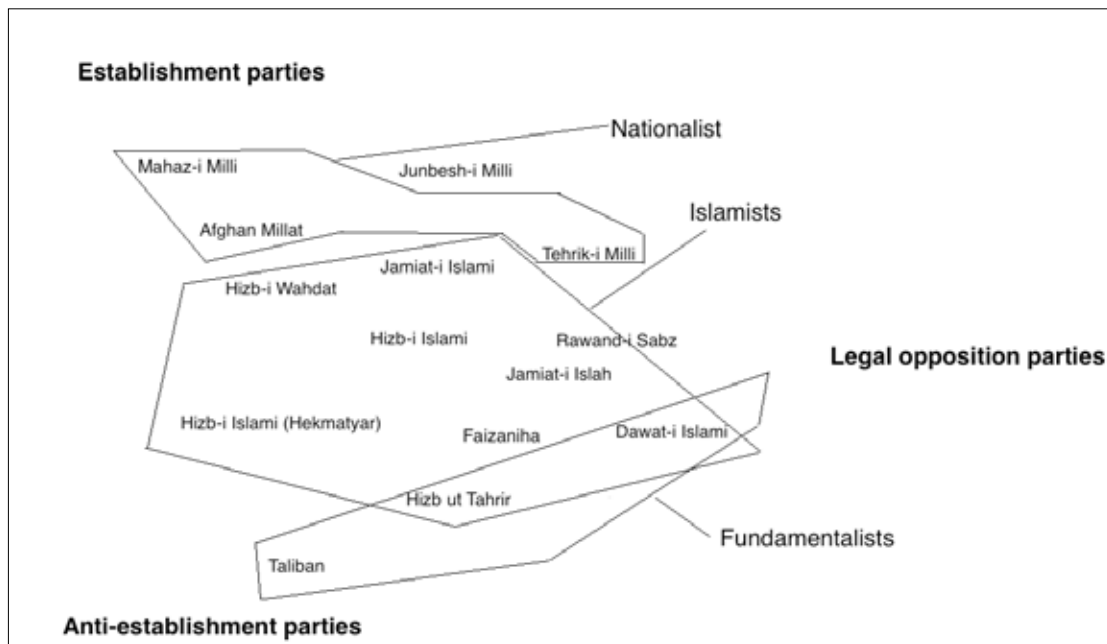


Figure 1: Matrix of Afghan political parties and organisations presented in the survey

Executive Summary

Political activities are banned in Afghanistan's high schools. Nevertheless, the ban has had a limited impact, and political activists are still very active according to the findings of an AREU survey that accompanies this study. Interviews with student activists and teachers are the main source of information in the present study, which describes the activities of political organisations within Afghanistan's high schools and the political views of their activists.

The ban on political activities in high schools appears ineffective and anachronistic: indeed, hindering concern for political matters at the doorstep of high schools is not viable in practice. If anything, the ban has affected legally registered parties more than radical, anti-establishment ones. It has particularly damaged legal organisations that are not well connected in the establishment, while leaving the large, patronage-oriented organisations and underground parties almost indifferent. Often, teachers themselves are reported to be involved in political activities in their classrooms.

The majority of interviewees were from "establishment" parties, as should be expected. They viewed their parties mainly as career avenues or tools to facilitate future employment. These activists rarely, if ever, make a break away from their families' political inclinations; quite the contrary, they are usually encouraged by their family to join specific parties. Apart from party recruitment, other typical activities include debates at school over political issues. The ideological aims of parties, if they exist, appear to linger in the background with little or no influence on the daily activities or even these debates that occur in schools.

Activists' views are quite supportive of the status quo, and criticism of the educational system is rarely encountered. Even activists from Islamist parties state their support for expanded women's rights.

It was difficult to identify opposition reformists who criticise the system from within. Those who could be interviewed tended to hold negative views not only of the political but also of the educational system. These activists are either from new, relatively secular parties or from Islamist and fundamentalist groups that have been excluded from the ruling coalition. They are united by the fact that they mostly hold negative views about the government and that they struggle to operate in schools, as they lack connections with the relevant authorities. However, these groups diverge greatly in their social and ideological attitudes.

The third and last group identified in this project includes radical opponents of the establishment, who object to the political system as such. Some of these activists even support the armed struggle against the Kabul authorities. Their activities are much more underground than those of the previous two groups, since they risk arrest and being reprimanded. These activists sometimes openly express positive views about the armed insurgents, while they are particularly hostile to western influence in Afghanistan. They even refuse to discuss issues such as women's rights. However, even the students linked to radical groups had ambitions in terms of access to higher education. This along with the observation that radical groups recruit more in less economically dynamic areas would also seem to confirm the fact that frustration along with low chances of access to higher education is a major factor in the politicisation of high school students.

Overall, with regard to the politicisation of high schools, the impression given is one of a pot under increasing pressure but that has yet to reach boiling point. Obvious manifestations of extreme student frustration, such as demonstrations and protests, are relatively rare and mostly small-scale when they occur. There is, however, evidence of some students being recruited to active insurgent groups like the Taliban, which is a relatively surprising development given that in the early years of their insurgency, the Taliban did not target high schools for recruitment.

1. Introduction

The educational sector is a very important aspect of state-building. As schools are a primary vehicle for conveying national and civic education to the youth, education is a very political subject. Arguably, studying education in Afghanistan from a political science and sociological perspective has been neglected.

One key assumption of donors in Afghanistan is that the quantitative growth in the availability of state education is always a positive indicator and that the number of students enrolling in high schools is an unmistakably positive sign.¹ However, is this always the case? The literature abounds in other cases in which the numerical rise of youth in education, not matched by an improvement in the quality of education and/or growth in educational opportunities, leads to youth radicalisation and political instability.² There is anecdotal evidence that the lack of employment prospects and the dissatisfaction about the functioning of the Afghan educational system are driving frustrated high school youth toward extremist groups.

In 2010, an AREU study investigated university students and their political orientation.³ This current project instead focuses on state-imparted secondary education. The companion policy brief to this study, “The Politicisation of Afghanistan’s High Schools,” summarises the findings of the survey of high schools in ten provinces of Afghanistan. While this report draws from those findings, it additionally tries to explain the patterns identified in the survey through the material gathered in a series of interviews. The qualitative interviews sought to gather information relative to the following questions:

How aware are student activists of the political debates going on in Afghanistan and how do they position themselves within these debates?

What factors drive recruitment to political groups?

What are the implications of political activism among students?

The interviews focused on upper secondary schools, where political engagement is more likely than in lower secondary. The existing literature on this topic is very limited.⁴

The present report is organised into five main sections. After outlining the methodology, the first section, entitled “The Ministry of Education’s Approach to Politics in the Classroom,” discusses in general terms the impact of the ban on political activity in high schools. The next section focuses on the activists of pro-government parties and groups, discussing in detail the patterns of recruitment, aims, activities, and views. Two similar sections follow to discuss the anti-government activists of legal and illegal organisations, respectively. The fifth section, “Are High School Students Becoming Radicalised?,” draws together evidence of on-going radicalisation.

1 Antonio Giustozzi, “Nation-building is Not for All: The Politics of Education in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2010); Rod Nordland, “Despite Education Advances, a Host of Afghan School Woes,” *New York Times*, 20 July 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/21/world/asia/despite-education-advances-a-host-of-afghan-school-woes.html?_r=0, (accessed 1 May 2015).

2 See, for example, Moeed Yusef, “Prospects of Youth Radicalization in Pakistan” (Analysis Paper, Brookings, 2008) http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2008/10/pakistan%20yusuf/10_pakistan_yusuf.pdf.

3 Antonio Giustozzi, “Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010) <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1004E-Between%20Patronage%20and%20Rebellion%20-%20Student%20Politics%20in%20Afghanistan%20BP%202010.pdf>. See also Robert Zaman and Abdul Ahad Mohammadi, “Trends in Student Radicalization across University Campuses in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Afghan Institute of Strategic Studies, 2014) <http://aiss.af/images/pdf/Trends%20in%20Student%20Radicalization%20across%20University%20Campuses%20in%20Afghanistan1.pdf>.

4 On the growing influence of radical groups like Hizb-ut Tahrir, see Borhan Osman, “Afghan Youth for Democracy? Not All of Them” (Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2014) <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghan-youth-for-democracy-not-all-of-them/>. On youth politics in general, see Gran Hewad and Casey Johnson, “A Rough Guide to Afghan Youth Politics” (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2014) <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR344-A-Rough-Guide-to-Afghan-Youth-Politics.pdf>; Maisam Wahidi, “Youth Political Activism in Afghanistan” (Kabul: Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2014) https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/youth_political_activism.pdf.

2. Methodology

The methodology featured interviews with teachers, students, and political activists. We interviewed 46 student activists, two adult activists and 26 teachers, for a total of 74 interviews spread across 11 provinces. Based on the findings of the survey, activists from the main political groups were identified and interviewed about their involvement and motives. The interviews were thus distributed geographically and purposively chosen (according to the availability of those identified in the survey). As a result, the distribution of interviewees was uneven, and some provinces, in particular Balkh, were overrepresented in our sample. It also proved difficult to conduct interviews with student activists in some of the provinces most affected by the ongoing conflict; in such cases, the research team opted to interview teachers instead. The exact distribution of interviewees by province is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Interviewees by category and province

	Students	Teachers
Balkh	18	0
Kabul	12	0
Logar	1	1
Baghlan	6	0
Kunduz	2	0
Parwan	4	3
Paktia	0	7
Kapisa	0	3
Nangarhar	1	8
Ghazni	0	2
Laghman	0	1
Zabul	1	0
Wardak	1	0
TOTAL	46	25

The Afghan researchers mobilised for this effort had extensive experience operating in insecure areas and had already taken part in research efforts involving insurgents. As a result, they were able to move with relative ease throughout the conflict area, which includes some of the areas covered.

3. The Ministry of Education's Approach to Politics in the Classroom

3.1 The ban and its implementation

The Afghan government's policy toward political activity in high schools is in part a legacy of the country's authoritarian past and the strife of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, which is often imputed to political parties. Former President Karzai repeatedly asked universities and schools to be kept free of political parties.⁵ All political activity is thus officially banned in high schools in Afghanistan. In principle, students found violating this ban can be expelled from school. The research team was told of some cases of students who were effectively punished for their activities:

Last year, I guess, a person was caught by the principal of our school. He was an activist of a party. He was exposed for his activities. He was trying to mobilise students against some situations, he was trying to organise some demonstrations. Our principal reported him to the government and I don't know what happened to him next. From now on, I assume that people are promoting their political activities very secretly. Fortunately, nobody, including my teachers, knows about me [Interview #16, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Last year, a person from a political group was caught by a teacher. I don't know which party he belonged to. Our school reported him to the Ministry of Education; then he disappeared. I haven't heard any more about him. I guess they charged him and transferred him to another school. Apart from him, I don't know of anyone else caught for political activities in our school [#12, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

More often, simple reprimands are issued [#26, Tahrir activist, Baghlan]. Even when the most serious measures are taken, like informing the police and the National Directorate of Security (NDS), their effectiveness appears to have been limited (see also Table 2):

Some of the teachers and students oppose what we do in some schools, but the teachers, the government and the Americans cannot stop us. Some schools have complained to the police districts and intelligence offices. They had their investigators go after some of our activists, but that was a while ago. Our activists have now gone to other provinces for their activities and for the recruitment of Muslim brothers [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

The activist quoted above was not merely being boastful. The efforts of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to keep politics out of classrooms are widely perceived as ineffective by the large majority of teachers interviewed:

The Ministry of Education has ordered all provincial departments to stop students from undertaking political activities in schools. We are trying our best, but it is not working [#42, teacher, Parwan].

The Ministry of Education has banned political activities in schools, but principals are not controlling it [#56, teacher, Jalalabad].

The Ministry of Education sent a letter to all education departments in the provinces, stating that political activity in schools is prohibited. However, it's up to principals how they can manage it. In the districts, most schools are free to have political activities [#55, teacher, Jalalabad; also #59, teacher, Paktia; #58, teacher, Nangarhar; #52, teacher, Mazar-i Sharif].

About one-quarter of the 46 interviewed students believed that the MoE staff was aware of their political activities, but chose not to oppose them for whatever reason (Table 2).

⁵ Daily Outlook Afghanistan, "On Karzai's Discouragement of Students to Join Political Parties", 28 June 2012, http://outlookafghanistan.net/editorialdetail.php?post_id=4743#sthash.gO33USwV.dpuf (accessed 1 May 2015).

Table 2: Awareness and attitude of MoE staff toward political activity in high schools, according to the high school students interviewed

	Yes	Yes
	%	n
1. School staff aware	39.1	18
Opposed	10.9	5
Aware but not opposed	26.1	12
No response	2.1	1
2. School staff not aware	60.9	28
TOTAL	100.0	46

The question thus beckons as to whether the MoE is unable to enforce the ban or whether it is unwilling to do so. Some interviewees hinted that established political parties prevented the MoE from taking more determined action against activists in high schools:

The Ministry of Education has announced that political activities are not allowed in schools. But powerful people interfere with this law, and they are the ones who provide opportunities for students to carry out political activities. The Ministry of Education is colluding with powerful people [#71, teacher, Paktia; also #68, teacher, Paktia].

In any case, even leaving aside the findings of the survey (see Appendix, Figure 1, Tables 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B), the 26 teachers interviewed broadly agreed that there was a growing level of political activism in schools. They also agreed that this activism was increasingly dominated by Islamic parties and groups (see Table 3 and Appendix, Tables 3-9).

Table 3: Parties and organisations active in high schools, as reported by the teachers interviewed

	%	Number of answers
Taliban	57.7	15
Hizb-ut Tahrir	11.5	3
Hizb-i Islami	80.8	21
Jamiat-i Islami	34.6	9
Dawat-i Islami	3.8	1
Rawand-i Sabz	7.7	2
Jamiat-i Islah	15.4	4
Wahdat	3.8	1
Junbesh	3.8	1
Tehrik-i Milli	23.1	6
Civil society	34.6	9
Religious organisations	15.4	4
Women's rights	38.5	10
Afghan Millat ¹	19.2	5
Salafis	3.8	1
TOTAL	100.0	26

No teacher openly denied that such trends exist, although about one-quarter refused to respond to the question or did not provide a clear answer (Table 4).

Table 4: Political activities in schools according to the teachers interviewed

	%	n
Growing political activism?	76.9	20
Political activism increasingly monopolised by political Islam?	73.1	19
TOTAL	100.0	26

The survey highlighted that activists from liberal, leftist, and democratic parties are rare among high school students, contrary to a variety of Islamist and Islamic fundamentalist groups, which seem to have quite deep roots in parts of the country. Indeed, the ban appears to have a greater effect in discouraging moderate forces from being active among students than in keeping away radical groups, which have little hesitation in resorting to threats to have their way. The Taliban⁶ student activists openly claim that in some areas at least, the Taliban threaten MoE staff trying to prevent the activists from working in the schools:

Once the administrator of our school complained about us to the district of Bati Kot (Nangarhar Province). We went to his house and we beat him very hard and we also blasted his house gate, warning him not to go to the police again. After that, he didn't go to the police [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar; also #72, Taliban activist, Daychopan/Zabul].

Whatever may prevent a clampdown on political activity in schools, the teachers interviewed for this project reported considerable levels of political activity. In this respect, their observations were in line with the findings of the survey. Political debates were in fact reported by almost all of the teachers interviewed (92.3 percent), with other visible activities like leafleting, meetings, and graffiti also being frequently reported. Recruitment in political organisations is harder to identify and was indeed reported by just 19.2 percent of teachers. Protests, as discussed in the survey, are rare events in Afghanistan's high schools, as confirmed by the teachers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these results differed from those of the survey; for example, in the case of recruitment, the survey showed a much higher percentage of respondents confirming its occurrence in their schools (52.3 percent vs. 19.2 percent). These differences can be easily explained by the fact that the point of observation varies—teachers are less likely familiar with what is going on among students than the students themselves. Indeed, the student activists interviewed reported an even greater frequency of recruitment than suggested in the survey results. Most significantly, students rated recruitment as one of the most common types of activities carried out—69.6 percent, second only to political debates. The activists, of course, were better placed to judge their own activities (Table 5).

Table 5: Types of political activity reported by the high school student activists interviewed (multiple answers allowed)

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Recruitment	69.6	32	75.0	9	70.0	7	66.7	16
Leafleting	37.0	17	25.0	3	70.0	7	29.2	7
Meetings	69.6	32	66.7	8	90.0	9	62.5	15
Protests	17.4	8	16.7	2	40.0	4	8.3	2
Debates	91.3	42	91.7	11	100.0	10	87.5	21
Graffiti	41.3	19	41.7	5	60.0	6	33.3	8
Challenging teachers	28.3	13	41.7	5	50.0	5	12.5	3
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

⁶ They call themselves the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, implying continuity with the government overthrown by the American intervention in 2001. They are the largest insurgent movement in today's Afghanistan, while also developing some features characteristic of a political movement. Among other things, they have started recruiting high school students.

It is worth noting that despite being able to observe only the most superficial aspects of political activity in high schools, the teachers interviewed often reported the Taliban and/or Hizb-ut Tahrir⁷ as being active in their school; Hizb-i Islami⁸ was reported to be present by 80.8 percent of the teachers, but it was usually not clear whether this was the legal or militant wing of the party (see Table 6). The survey also reported high levels of radical and illegal groups in schools (see Appendix, Tables 3-4).

Table 6: Types of political activity in high schools, as witnessed by the teachers interviewed

	%	Number of answers
Recruitment	19.2	5
Leafleting	57.7	15
Meetings	53.8	14
Protests	11.5	3
Debates	92.3	24
Graffiti	30.8	8
Challenging teachers	23.1	6
TOTAL	100.0	26

3.2 Discrimination

A common refrain, already reported above, is that the very establishment of political parties undermines the efforts to shield high schools from politics. Indeed, the interviews with student activists seemed to indicate that students linked to mainstream parties enjoy a high degree of tolerance in their activities, and as a result, they pay relatively little attention to the risk of being detected, contrary to their colleagues in the underground organisations. This is what an underground activist said:

There are many students who are activists of other political groups like Junbesh, Hizb-i-Islami, Jamiat, Mahaz-i-Milli,⁹ and other groups, but because their political parties are registered with the Afghan government and their leaders have power in Afghanistan, they openly say to other students that they belong to this or that political party, but we cannot do that. Unfortunately, people in Afghanistan think that Hizb-ut Tahrir is a threat like the Taliban, and most government people don't like our movement. That's why we conduct our activities in secret [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

7 Originally founded in Palestine in 1953, Hizb-ut Tahrir emerged in Afghanistan some years ago. Its local origins are uncertain but its establishment was probably supported by Tahrir activists in Central Asia and Pakistan, where the party is very active. On account of its secretive character, little is known about the party, but it seems to have started its activities in northeast Afghanistan and then expanded to other provinces, including the Kabul region. The party preaches the imminent apocalypse and invites Muslim to rediscover their roots and re-establish the Caliphate in order to be ready for Judgement Day.

8 After splitting from Jamiat-i Islami in 1979, Hizb-i Islami emerged as the main competitor of the former during the 1980s and 1990s. Despite their common roots in the student movement inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizb and Jamiat have often fought each other, sometimes quite bitterly. Hizb-i Islami has been generally characterised as the more radical wing of the movement, and from the 1990s onwards, it mainly attracted eastern Pashtuns (whereas Jamiat increasingly relied on a mainly Tajik constituency). Since 2005, Hizb-i Islami has been formally split into two wings: one legally registered with the authorities in Kabul and participating in the electoral process, electing even several members of Parliament, and another that is still engaged in an armed struggle against the presence of western forces in Afghanistan. The historical leader of the party, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, remains the leader of the insurgent wing. The two wings each have their youth organisations, which are often indistinguishable on the ground and organise activities together.

9 Founded in 1979 by Pir Gailani, the party mainly draws its support from Gailani's Qadiriyya Sufi Tariqa. In this sense, it should be considered a religious party, even if its outward message has always been centred on nationalism as opposed to any religious discourse. The party was active during the 1980s resistance movement as a monarchist organisation, but scarcely in the 1990s. It was incorporated into the post-Bonn settlement following the request made by Karzai and its international supporters to counterbalance the predominance of parties mainly established among non-Pashtuns with an organisation appealing mostly to Pashtuns.

His views are in fact confirmed by activists of Jamiat-i Islami¹⁰ and Junbesh-i Milli,¹¹ among others:

My teachers know that we are working for the good of society. They are aware that we are seeking development and improvements. They haven't created any problems for us so far. Last year, we had a teacher who was newly appointed to school. He insisted that we had to stop our activities, and he told us that what we were doing was illegal, but other teachers convinced him otherwise. Now, we have no problems with this issue, even our teachers are helping [#9, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

[School staff] knows that we work for the Junbesh Party, but they don't have any problems with this. They are even grateful that we are inviting and encouraging students to participate in educational training and courses [#1, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

It is worth comparing the assessment of the Jamiati student in Mazar quoted above with that of another Jamiati activist in Kabul:

Yes, I was reprimanded by school staff several times. Because they...don't know that we are working for the benefit of society, they don't know that we are also against corruption. On the whole, we don't promote our activities openly. We just conduct them in secret. We don't want them to find out [#13, Jamiati activist, Kabul].

The first two quotes suggest a more permissive environment for parties with a strong local presence, at least in the north (Jamiat-i Islami). Although our sample was small, the interviewees' responses provide no support for this thesis. The variations among other groups with a strong local presence in the north (Junbesh and Wahdat) are not significant, and groups with weaker roots in the north also appeared to encounter a more permissive environment there (see Table 7). If anything, Jamiati students might have simply found the Mazar environment more permissive compared to Kabul. Nevertheless, the Kabul sample included only two Jamiati activists and is therefore too small to draw any conclusion.

Table 7: Awareness and attitude of MoE staff toward political activity in high schools in Kabul and Mazar-i Sharif, according to the high school students interviewed, by type of political organisation

Mazar	Jamiat	Non-Jamiat	All groups with strong northern bases	All groups without strong northern bases
School staff aware	75.0%	50.0%	70.0%	16.6%
School staff opposed	0.0%	33.3%	20.0%	33.3%
n	4	12	10	6
Kabul	Jamiat	Non-Jamiat	All northern groups	All non-northern groups
School staff aware	100.0%	30.0%	40.0%	42.9%
School staff opposed	50.0%	40.0%	20.0%	57.1%
n	2	10	5	7

10 As the first party to develop out of the Jawanan-i Muslimun of the 1960s, Jamiat-i Islami emerged over the years as the main moderate Islamist party in Afghanistan. The party was very active during the 1980s resistance against the leftist regime and Soviet Army, and then during the 1990s civil wars. It played a leading role in the 2001 offensive against the Taliban regime and managed to overthrow it with the support of the United States. Jamiat-i Islami representatives were key participants in the negotiations for the formation of a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan, and several party members have taken part in each cabinet formed in Afghanistan since 2001. Sometimes they held a dominant position and sometimes less so, but overall, there is no question as to whether Jamiat-i Islami can be described as part of the political establishment. The party is also well represented in parliament and its candidate in the 2014 elections was Dr Abdullah.

11 Founded in 1992 by General Dostum as a political vehicle for his ambition to be incorporated into the post-communist establishment, the party was active during the 1990s civil wars and contributed considerably to the military effort that brought down the Taliban regime in 2001. The party participated in the division of the spoils in 2002-04, but was then increasingly marginalised due its rivalry with Jamiat-i Islami. The election of General Dostum as vice-president in 2014 revitalised the party, which can once again be considered as part of the establishment. The party is mainly based among the Uzbek minority of northwest Afghanistan, with some presence among the Uzbeks of the northeast as well.

Being linked to some of the political organisations that are part of the ruling elite might be a better explanation of the tolerance shown toward certain groups in schools. This is also confirmed by activists of the small, legally registered, but not mainstream Rawand-i Sabz,¹² who were not confident about MoE staff tolerating the activities of their party:

It depends. Sometimes when I explain the aims of the Rawand-i-Sabz party to students, they become interested in the political views of our party, but they don't want to get involved. I mean, they don't join the party, they just show their interest to us. Some of them don't want to join and they claim that it's illegal [#10, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Students are interested in the political views of our party, but they don't join because they are afraid of the government and they don't want to get caught by them. I should also add that some students are not interested in politics [#7, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

A separate but related issue is the content of the curriculum, itself controversial in some areas. A student activist insisted that the decision to ask teachers to prevent political activities in schools was itself very political:

Teachers are also involved in pursuing the Afghan intelligence agency's agenda of anti-Islamic activities. Teachers are always discouraging students from being a true Muslim, so students are discouraged from joining the Jamiat-i Islah movement [#48, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul; also #20, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

3.3 Teachers and political activities

The most blatant contradiction within the MoE policy of banning political activities emerges when teachers themselves are involved in advocating support for political parties and proselytising.¹³ Although the majority of interviewees denied seeing any signs of politically active teachers, in a few cases it was admitted to the interviewers that teaching staff were actively trying to persuade students to become involved in political activities (see Tables 8, 9). Five out of the 21 teachers interviewed admitted that some of their colleagues were involved in political activities with students (23.8 percent). As one teacher said:

Yes, I have seen teachers recruiting students during electoral campaigns, for both the parliamentary and presidential elections, to campaign and vote for specific candidates [#43, teacher, Gulbahar/Parwan].

Among students, it was also rare to hear of teachers being politically active, but some student activists admitted that:

Some of them are already working for Jamiat. They are activists of a political party. But I have no idea if they try to recruit students to the group. I don't know...I cannot say that all of them are involved, but mostly mullahs or religious teachers are interested in Jamiat-i Islami. Some of them are already members of this party. Before I forget, I should say that history teachers are also involved in political activities in our school [#14, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Yes, in some schools, the staff is aware of our activities. Some support us, but most oppose what we do. Yes, there are teachers working for the government of Afghanistan, and they have their own political affiliations with different political and ethnic parties. They often create problems and oppose our activities. They work for the Americans and Zionists...We have teachers of Islamic studies helping and contributing to our cause of the Islamic Caliphate and Islamic awareness, but most of the teachers in schools are against our cause. Americans, Europeans, and Zionists pay the salaries of these teachers, most probably your study too... [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

I have not seen any teacher recruit or indoctrinate students in their political groups, but I have seen teachers supporting the diffusion of our religious preaching [#17, Jamiat-i Islah, Kabul].

12 Founded in 2010 by the former head of the NDS, Amrullah Saleh, Rawand-i Sabz [Green Trend] targets a youth constituency and is largely dependent on Saleh's public persona—he often appears in the media making controversial statements. The party and its leaders have been very critical of the establishment, particularly on the grounds of incompetence and neglect.

13 For the political activities of university teachers, see Casey Johnson, forthcoming study, Washington, DC: USIP, 2015.

We have six teachers in our high school. Our teachers established a group called Emirul Momeneen. They were convincing us about jihad and supporting the Taliban, about Islam so we joined with them. It means that we started political activities with the help of teachers [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar].

Overall, 13 percent of the student activists interviewed indicated that teachers were involved in proselytising (often recruiting the interviewee himself), while almost 20 percent indicated that teachers tried to impart political views into the students' minds (Table 8, see also Appendix, Figure 2 and Table 10 for the survey results). Teachers of certain subjects were widely believed to be more engaged in political proselytising than others. Although most interviewees did not specify what category of teachers were mostly likely to be involved in political activities, mullahs teaching religious subjects were sometimes singled out as the main culprits of political proselytising, as shown in the aforementioned quote from interview 14 as well as those below:

In my opinion, all teachers are involved in this. No matter what they teach. But mostly mullahs who teach religious subjects are involved because they don't want to see any bad points in Islam. Therefore, they want to impose their own thoughts on students [#13, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

Teachers of Islamic studies are mostly involved and supportive of our activities. We have a large number of Islamic teachers in Afghanistan's high schools who are senior members of Jamiat-i Islah. Otherwise, we would have not been successful in our activities [#48, Jamiat-i Islah].

There were also significant regional variations (Table 9). The two locations with the highest number of interviewees were Mazar-i Sharif (16) and Kabul city (12). While 12.5 percent of Mazar's students claimed that teachers were involved in recruiting for political groups, none of the Kabul students confirmed this. In the case of teachers trying to influence the political views of students, this appeared to be much more common in Mazar than in Kabul (37.5 percent vs. 8.3 percent).

Table 8: Involvement of teachers in political activities in high schools, according to student activists

	% answering yes	# answering yes
Teachers try to recruit students	13.0	6
Teachers try to influence students' political views	19.6	9
TOTAL		46

Table 9: Involvement of teachers in political activities in high schools, according to student activists: Kabul city vs. Mazar-i Sharif

	Mazar	Kabul
Teachers try to recruit students	12.5%	0%
Teachers try to influence students' political views	37.5%	8.3%
	16	12

4. The Political System Reproducing Itself: Establishment Party Activists

Establishment political parties need to recruit a new generation of activists and members to participate in future campaigns and expand or consolidate their territorial presence. A previous AREU study on political activities among university students found that establishment political parties were very active in attracting students into their ranks and were even willing to commit significant resources to achieve this end.¹⁴ Why then are establishment parties so keen to recruit even high school students?

In our sample, we found that only very rarely did the surveyed activists change organisation or consider other parties. Among the few exceptions was a Junbesh activist, who admitted to previously considering Jamiat [#29, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif]. The stability of party membership probably encourages adult party activists and leaders to try their best to attract members when they are still in their teens before another party captures their attention. The findings of this research also seem to suggest that parents and students are either born into a party or seek to join political parties, even before the parties reach out to them.

4.1 Recruitment patterns

The large majority of student activists admit that their colleagues are mostly uninterested in politics. It is usually not the most disadvantaged students who join them:

I am in a poor school. Most students are from poor and needy families. They just work as labourers and try to earn money for their families. For this reason, they cannot join us. I believe that if a person has bad problems, then it is hard for him to think about the development of the community [#18, Mahaz-i Milli activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

One of the defining aspects of recruitment to the establishment parties is the view that joining a party might represent a career avenue. Some of the interviewees stated this explicitly:

This is my first step in joining a political party. In the future, I will try hard to become a popular person so that I will be able to run for Parliament. This is my hope, to become the people's representative. Through politics, I will work hard for my people [#12, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

I would really like to be a popular and important politician in the future politics of Afghanistan. I know that I will achieve my goals. I have always been very interested in politics and will continue to be. It will be a pleasure to serve my community and country [#10, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

My personal aim is to be up-to-date about situations in Afghanistan. I want to know what is going on in our country. I feel a responsibility in the community. We are the next generation. If someone wants to be part of the government, it's better for them to start early. I was interested in politics, so I decided to start my political career by joining a political party [#19, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Aside from desiring a political career, another consideration in joining any of the establishment parties is the potential benefit in becoming part of a patronage network. A teacher stated that:

Students want to have a political supporter in order to gain educational opportunities and scholarships, and also find a job through them [#55, teacher, Jalalabad].

Other teachers sometimes dismissed the students' activism, because this was their primary aim:

Students mostly join a political party to find a job or continue their higher education [#64, teacher, Ghazni].

Mostly young people join political parties with the aim to earn money and achieve personal goals like earning a scholarship [#69, teacher, Paktia].

¹⁴ Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion."

They force teachers to give them high marks. Sometimes, they create problems in school [#68, teacher, Paktia].

Another defining aspect of recruitment into the establishment parties is that it very rarely represents a generation break. Indeed, 17 of the 20 students (85 percent) responding to the question said that they had been encouraged by family to join their organisation. Most of the 28 student activists (78.6 percent) affirmed that their family held the same political views. Typically, recruits tend to follow the path of their fathers [#45, teacher, Kapisa] (Table 10). A typical statement in this regard is as follows:

My father encouraged me to take this path. He is also a member of Junbesh. He knows that I will be successful in my life if I continue my political career with this party. When I [was still] young, I mean, when I was in tenth grade, my father told me to join this party. Therefore, I started my political activity with the mentioned party [#1, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Table 10: Student activists’ relationship with family members

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Family agrees	78.3	36	66.7	8	100.0	10	75.0	18
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

The result is that in some schools, in areas with a strong presence of establishment parties, whole clusters of students may join one party:

The number of students in our class is about 50, and 20 of them work as activists for Jamiat-i Islami. There might be some activists working as teachers in our school, this is what I think, but I am not sure [#14, Jamiati activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

There are around six activists of Jamiat in the same class as me. I don’t know exactly how many activists there are in our school. The six people who are my classmates are also friends of mine [#8, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Horizontal recruitment (students recruiting students) occurs, but it seems relatively rare in the case of establishment parties, at least as far as recruitment in schools is concerned. Cases of horizontal recruitment were reported:

I was thinking about politics, and my classmates grabbed my attention with this political party. They recruited me as an activist of this group. Besides, I was also interested in political issues, and I still am [#14, Jamiati activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

However, even when horizontal recruitment occurs, there appears to be some encouragement from family, or at least, some pre-existent connection. Some of the interviewees who were recruited by friends and peers thus said:

Well, my family encourages me. They want me to work for this country in political ways. I know that they are thinking of what is good for me and for my country. When I was in eleventh grade, I knew someone who was working for the Mahaz-i-Milli political party; he was in a different class. I asked him to explain the aims of this party to me. He explained it to me, and I found it very good for our future. Therefore, I decided to join them. Then, he introduced me to the representative of this party, commander Akhtar Mohammad, and I gained membership [#18, Mahaz-i Milli activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

I had a classmate named Wasihullah who was working for this political party; he recruited me to this group. He explained everything about this party to me. I found the aims of this political party pretty beneficial for the new generation of Afghanistan. Therefore, I decided to join them. Besides, I have an interest in politics and I want to serve my country in this way. I have always liked the idea of working for General Dostum’s party and one day becoming like this man [#9, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Outside schools, establishment parties have been increasingly relying on the organisation of educational courses as a way to approach the youth and create recruitment opportunities. Junbesh was probably the first party to rely heavily on educational courses in parallel to high school education [#1, #20]. Some interviewees acknowledged being attracted to these very courses:

This party, Junbesh Milli Islami, has provided good educational programmes for youths. It made me interested in this party, so I decided to serve Afghan youth through this party. I have attended their short-term courses [#5, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Even when the courses were not directly related to recruitment, they advertised Junbesh's commitment to education as a path to a modern Afghanistan:

The main aim of this party is about increasing the balance of education among youths. Actually, not only education, but the development and improvement of youths in all terms. It brings hope to the young generation of Afghanistan as well as providing facilities for youths. This aim actually attracted my attention [#19, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

The model appears to have been judged successful by other parties as well, as they try to emulate it:

Our party mainly shows its efforts by finding a way to improve the education and society of the country. Providing educational courses is part of its programmes. We invite students to join our course. Once they join our educational courses, they will find out that we are working for the good of this country. Then, they will probably join us [#18, Mahaz-i Milli activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Our main goal is to encourage the young generation in terms of education. We also run some campaigns in villages about Kankor (university exam), because they don't know about it. We also promote some training courses for youths. These activities are organised by the party [#11, Jamiati activist, Kabul].

Everything that was discussed in this section suggests that the establishment parties largely appeal to the aspiring professional middle class; that is, families who view education as the key to social advancement and who are also aware that education alone will not open all doors in Afghanistan's patronage-dominated society. The ambitions of these students are, at a minimum, to be employed in the government bureaucracy and, at best, to climb the social ladder through a party career. The typical establishment party activist wants to continue studying and attend university, ideally even study abroad. He is not openly critical of the Afghan educational system (it would delegitimise his efforts if he were so), claims to be optimistic about the future, and supports the status quo (Table 11). Often these students are "legacy" party members, as older family members are already members.

Table 11: Student activists' views and expectations about education

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Satisfied with Afghan education system	41.3	19	0	0	40.0	4	62.5	15
Optimistic about future	78.3	36	66.7	8	70.0	7	87.5	21
Planning to study abroad	76.1	35	66.7	8	80.0	8	79.2	19
Wants to attend university	91.3	42	75.0	9	90.0	9	100.0	24
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

4.2 Aims

Making student activists clearly state their party aims turned out to be more difficult than expected. Often, vague statements such as the welfare of Afghanistan were all that could be obtained. Rather than shyness, the impression was that many of these activists were only superficially involved in the party and had not truly assimilated its programme and views; this would seem to confirm the idea that joining one of the establishment parties is often a pragmatic choice aimed at gaining some support in students' academic and future life.

When answers were given, secular party activists seemed to find it easier to argue why they supported the status quo in Afghanistan. Says an activist from Junbesh:

In fact, people in the past were not interested in education and the development of society. Now, I can see significant changes in their minds. They also want to be part of the improvement [of Afghanistan]. In fact, some foreign countries brought racism among Afghan people. People were very racist. But now, they have become educated people, and there is not that much racism in society like before [#1, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

It is worth noting that Junbesh's share of the spoils after 2001 has been modest compared to Islamic parties like Jamiat-i Islami. Nevertheless, Junbesh activists as a whole provided the most ringing endorsement of the status quo among the establishment parties. The typical Junbesh interviewee was an Uzbek from northwest Afghanistan and was well aware that this part of the country had benefited greatly from the post-2001 order, even though Junbesh itself had received few of the benefits distributed through the Kabul-centred political system.

Activists of the establishment Islamist parties struggled much more in describing in detail the aims of their party, particularly vis-à-vis the status quo from which their leaders drew very substantial gains, even if the new post-2001 order remained very far from these parties' ideal of an Islamic government. The views expressed by members of Jamiat-i Islami, for example, varied from some vague statement of commitment to the welfare of Afghanistan to the establishment of an Islamic state in Afghanistan [#39, Jamiat-i Islami activist; #14, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif]. The most detailed description of Jamiat-i Islami's aims was the following:

Development and progress in Afghanistan under the jurisdiction of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The implementation of Shari'a and eradication of corruption as well as development in the education sector [#22, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Logar].

Interviewees felt the need to qualify what they meant by "Islamic state": "our aim is an Islamic regime very different from the Taliban's" [#31, Jamiat-i Islami, Baghlan]; such an Islamic government would seek good relations with the rest of the world [#35, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif]. These qualifications are very interesting, because they highlight how establishment Islamist parties struggle to claim the founding of an Islamic system as a core aim, thus distancing themselves from more extreme groups. The establishment Islamist parties also have to explain why, despite being a part of the government since 2001, they have not achieved any significant progress in making the system more Islamic than it was before—quite on the contrary, they presided over the liberalisation of the political system. A particularly sore point for them is their support of western intervention in Afghanistan (see below).

4.3 Activities

Much of the students' activity that is observed by teachers is unorganised, like seemingly spontaneous debates, noted by 92.3 percent of the teachers interviewed. As one teacher said:

Yes, I have seen unorganised political activities among students, which is natural in Afghanistan's high schools. Students engage in political activities in classes, like arguing with other students about different political issues in the country [#41, teacher, Tagrabwee; also #42, teacher, Parwan].

“Debates” were the form of political activity most commonly reported in the schools by students and teachers alike (Table 6 and Appendix, Tables 11-12).

In part, this impression must derive from the fact that external observers see only the most superficial manifestations of political activity in high schools. However, it also appears that some of the establishment parties do not demand much from their student members, perhaps because of their age:

Personally, I like to have political discussions with people. I don't have a particular job to carry out; it's enough for our party that we joined them. When I graduate from school, we may participate in some more political activities. For now, all school students accept only the membership of the party, but when we graduate and go to university, we will start our activities [#8, Jamiati activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Yet this does not apply to all establishment parties. Even some of the legal parties seem to have a strongly pyramidal structure, hidden from view and with secret policies and aims:

Well, the important aims might be secret and have not yet been revealed. However, as far as I know, we are being instructed by the party to encourage students to join this group. It shows that our party wants the new generation to be involved in politics. Therefore, we are trying hard to attract students [#15, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

I cannot reveal all of the aims and perhaps I don't know them all, but what I do know is that this party encourages us to be a part of politics. It has some educational programmes. Hizb-i-Wahdat wants students to become familiar with political stuff, because tomorrow we are going to face it, so then we can deal with it. We need to know what is going on in Afghanistan's politics. In my opinion, we should not only learn about the current situation, but also read some historical books in order to learn about the past situation in Afghanistan, so we will be able to know who our old and new enemies are [#12, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Most of the time, it depends on the situation in Afghanistan: we get directions from the central office. They tell us what we need to do. I myself always advise my friends to be aware of politics and be up-to-date regarding situations, because it is very important to us. We need to know about it, because we are the next generation. We are the ones who need to control the situation in the future. Mostly, I attract people into our party [#6, Wahdat].

4.4 Political views

Western presence and westernisation

For secular establishment party activists, the western presence and what the armed opposition calls “westernisation” tend to be viewed in a highly positive light (Table 12):

Unless the Afghan government can stand on its own feet, we need the aid of international community and the US [#28, Junbesh activist, Balkh].

Even among secular youth activists, however, there are doubts over some of the consequences of over-relying on the western presence and support:

I think we would be better standing on our own. I mean, we shouldn't just sit here and rely on westerners [emphasis added]. We have to work hard. I hope that I see Afghan forces take over security with no need for foreign troops. As everyone knows, they are also here for their political goals. I know that they will leave here once they have achieved their aims. Therefore, we need to be well prepared for it [#1, Junbeshi activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Table 12: Student activists' assessment of the influence of foreign countries

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Positive Western influence	54.3	25	0.0		50.0	5	83.3	20
Positive Pakistani influence	8.7	4	25.0	3	10.0	1	0.0	0
Positive Iranian influence	10.9	5	25.0	3	10.0	1	4.2	1
Positive Saudi influence	15.2	7	33.3	4	30.0	3	0.0	0
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

The typical view expressed by activists of pro-establishment Islamic groups is that, far from supporting any kind of westernisation as the armed opposition claims, what they want is to restore genuine Islam (as opposed to the Taliban's interpretation of Islam) and promote a positive image of Islam in the west. The establishment Islamists have to tread a thin line, making clear their rejection of westernisation while simultaneously defending the presence of western troops and financial support:

We believe Islam has nothing to do with the West, but westernisation sometimes interferes with our religion...Of course, we have some discussions regarding the foreign troops' presence in Afghanistan. In my opinion, their presence is beneficial for the military and economy. People were very worried about their withdrawal, but they were satisfied when the security agreement was signed [#3, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

My opinion about the interference of other countries is that they don't want us to improve our country. They failed in the past, but they couldn't mess up people's thoughts. Now, they want to make it happen again. First of all, they want to ruin our religion, and thereafter, they want to bring adversity to our country. However, they are unable to make it happen because the new generation will be aware of this situation...If foreigners stay here, they will be able to change our thoughts and religion. Second, we know that if the foreigners leave here, then we will be in trouble. As we know, there are the Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan... [#13, Jamiat-i activist, Kabul].

This ideological conundrum is faced not only by the activists of Jamiat-i Islami. The legal wing of Hizb-i Islami must address these same issues, made only more complicated by the fact that one wing of the party has declared jihad on the western presence in the country. Hizb-i Islami activists state similar reformist aims as Jamiat-i Islami, even when they belong to the illegal wing of the party, still engaged in an armed insurgency:

This is an Islamic society, but unfortunately, some people don't have an awareness of what real Islam is. I hope they can gain some real awareness of the fruitful culture of Islam and change their paths [#30, Hizb-i Islami (Hek [Hekmatyar faction]) activist, Baghlan].

The role of their wing of the party in the insurgency is portrayed as having very limited aims:

I do not oppose any of these political parties, but fighting against the government at this time is not right. Our amir [Gulbuddin Hekmatyar] has announced jihad against foreign troops, not against the Afghanistan government [#30, Hizb-i Islami (Hek) activist, Baghlan].

The difference between the members of the legal and illegal wings of Hizb-i Islami is that the former want to reconcile their aims ("We want Islamic and holy Quran dominance") with the need to support the western presence in the country:

The presence of westerners has a positive and negative impact on our country. Since we need their financial and military support, we should be supporting them [#27, Hizb-i Islami (legal) activist, Balkh].

With this response, the interviewee reveals that he still considers Hekmatyar as his leader, despite the fact that the old leader is committed to the insurgency and fails to recognise the legal wing of the party. By quoting Hekmatyar, the activist seems to suggest that jihad against the western military forces is legitimate, whereas fighting against Afghan government forces is not. However, members of the legal wing of the party were part of the cabinet of ministers during the years of the heavy western military presence in Afghanistan. These unresolved contradictions might contribute to explaining why new radical groups manage to make inroads on a political scene already dominated by Islamist and fundamentalist groups (see Section 6 below).

Women's rights

All of the establishment party activists either did not comment on the issue of women's rights or stated their support for their expansion (28 percent of those interviewed), albeit mostly with vague formulas, such as:

Of course, we debate women's rights. Personally, I am very sensitive about it. Today, women's rights are quite wasted. We just want their rights to be equal to men's. They are also human beings. We have some programmes in this regard as well [#9, Junbesh, activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

We always raise the issue of women's rights. We don't want women's rights to be wasted. Afghan women have already suffered a lot, and we should stop people who are violent toward women [#19, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Yes, we also debate women's rights. This is pretty important because women's rights have been wasted in the whole of Afghanistan. They don't have their own rights. I hope to see their rights become equal to men's [#18, Mahaz-i Milli activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

We also debate women's rights. As we know, today, women's rights are disrespected... [#16, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

We sometimes talk about women's right as well. We need to consider them a lot, because today women's right are neglected in the Afghan community. We don't want this to continue in the future. Women's rights should be equal to men's [#15, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Today, the poorest aspect of the Afghan community is women. They don't have rights. Our government should take some action on this issue. As you know, day by day, the number of rape cases is growing. We also discuss this, because we want the government to understand and pay attention to women's rights [#12, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Whether these activists (all males) were simply being politically correct or actually meant what they said is difficult to say; Junbesh and Wahdat¹⁵ do, however, have a record of being parties that favour pro-women legislation. Only one activist admitted that the impact of all of these "concerns" was very modest:

Today, Afghan women are in trouble, as nobody cares about their rights. We sometimes discuss this issue to find a solution. Actually, we are not very capable of making all people consider women's rights, but, of course, we try our best to make people understand their rights [#1, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Attitudes toward insurgents

The establishment parties are all opposed to the armed insurgency and very critical of it. However, while Jamiat-i Islami activists tend to be hostile toward the armed opposition groups, at least one activist identified reconciliation with opposition groups as one of the determinants of what a successful government should do:

If the government aimed for reconciliation with the opposition groups and eradicating corruption, it would have a bright future; if not, it's not a good government [#22, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Logar].

¹⁵ Formed in 1988 as the fusion of eight different Shi'ite parties, mostly of Khomeinist leaning, Hizb-i Wahdat was an important player during the 1990s civil wars and one of the main participants in the 2001 offensive that brought down the Taliban regime. It joined the post-Bonn establishment, with its members appearing in almost all of the post-2001 cabinets. The party has splintered over the years, but as of late 2014, the main faction has been led by Mohammed Mohaqqueq, who was allied with Dr Abdullah in 2014 and became his deputy after the formation of the National Unity Government.

The role of mullahs

Paradoxically, the activists of secular parties tended to be the most reluctant to openly criticise mullahs:

Mullahs still have some influence, especially in the remote areas. They are well-informed people in terms of Islam. If the Taliban call themselves mullahs, then this is absolutely wrong. They are defaming Islam [#1, Junbish activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Mullahs or religious scholars, especially those who think positively about development and technology, are truly working for the good of this country. They have a good influence in this area. Nevertheless, the Taliban are trying to defame Islam as well as religious scholars, but they cannot do this. We always respect mullahs. They are our religious leaders. We follow them [#5, Junbish activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

It seems clear that their political leaders have instructed them to be cautious when talking about mullahs—they know that secularists are quite isolated in Afghanistan and surrounded by a sea of Islamists and fundamentalists. By contrast, it was from the ranks of the Islamist parties of various tendencies that open criticism of the mullahs was often heard during the interviewing effort:

Most Afghan mullahs are ignorant people. They don't know about politics. They have to be aware of the situation. In remote areas, the Taliban are funding mullahs, and these mullahs encourage the young generation to join them. Of course, we have open-minded mullahs as well. And their current influence is normal. It is neither too much nor too little [#3, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

I think the role of mullahs is not good in the current situation of Afghanistan, because they want to impose their own thoughts on people. As we know, in the Western and Eastern provinces of Afghanistan, mullahs have a better position among the people than the President or Governor. Because of the mullahs' lack of information and education, they want to take Afghanistan backward [#13, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

Well, mullahs have less influence in society. They don't play a big role in the community. They just want to impose their own thoughts on people, which is not effective. Educated people do not care about mullahs. I shouldn't forget to tell you that some mullahs have a huge influence in remote villages [#11, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

Indeed, among the Jamiat-i Islami activists, only one defended the role of mullahs in society:

Mullahs are our real teachers. We respect them because they know more about Islam than we do. We need to follow them. But, first of all, we need to make sure that they are not the Taliban's supporters, because some mullahs in remote areas work for the Taliban and encourage people to stand up against our government [#14, Jamiat-i Islami, activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

The Islamists tend to distinguish between modern-minded mullahs who are better educated and exposed to science and technology, and poorly educated village mullahs. That Sunni Islamist parties might tend toward some form of anti-clericalism is not too surprising. Indeed, the Islamists, in the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood, regard themselves as modernists in a way:

In my view, Afghanistan is witnessing a different kind of culture in society. In the past, we had our old culture, but nowadays, it has changed. The traditions that do not interest modern people will change [#13, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

The educated cadres of the Islamist parties compete with the mullahs for influence over the population and for Islamic legitimacy. This is the case even in a Shi'a group such as Hizb-i Wahdat, which is actually led by clerics (such as Mohaqqueq):

Mullahs don't play an important role in Kabul anymore. People are educated now, and they can use their own common sense. Mullahs act as leaders in remote areas. In villages, people do what the mullahs tell them. They think the mullahs know everything. But, you know, mullahs are from the lowest strata of the community. Today, most mullahs also engage in political activities, which is why I don't trust them and neither do other people [#15, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Yes, it depends on our own logic. People who don't use their own common sense do what the mullahs tell them. In general, mullahs have lost their role, especially in the central areas. They don't have much influence now. During the Taliban government, mullahs played a major role in society [#12, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Mullahs have a role in society, but they don't play a significant role in centres like Kabul province. They just have a role in remote villages, because uneducated people make mullahs their leaders. They do what their mullahs say, and the mullahs impose their thoughts on them. In the central areas, people are educated, and they do what their logic says. In a nutshell, we can say that mullahs are very influential in remote areas, while they don't have any influence in central areas [#6, Wahdat activist, Kabul].

Among the 46 student activists interviewed, 28.3 percent expressed critical views about mullahs. However, this percentage fell to 8.3 percent among the activists of illegal groups (radical Islamists or fundamentalists), rising to 40 percent among activists of legal anti-establishment groups (mostly activists of Rawand-i Sabz expressed critical views) (Table 13).

Table 13: Student activists' views of insurgents and mullahs

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Hostile to insurgents	63.0	29	8.3	1	60.0	6	91.7	22
Critical of mullahs	28.3	13	8.3	1	40.0	4	37.5	9
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

Criticism of the Karzai era

Although less than 40 percent of the student activists interviewed expressed positive views about the Karzai administration, this percentage rose to over 50 percent when excluding the activists of illegal groups from the count (Table 14). A typical criticism of Karzai's government was the extent of corrupt practices, about which there was almost unanimity among students. While some interviewees blamed Karzai himself, others criticised his habit of surrounding himself with dishonest people:

I was not very happy with the Afghan government during Karzai's time. As I mentioned earlier, he didn't consider professionalism very much. Government officials were busy with bribery and other forms of corruption. They appointed their relatives to positions, and none of them were educated or professional [#9, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

He was a good man, but he couldn't control his cabinet. His own people and officials failed him. He couldn't do as much as people expected. He worked as president for 13 years, but he didn't work well enough. My thoughts differ, though some people are happy with what he has done. But, I admit, he is a good man, but not a good leader [#3, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Table 14: Student activists' assessment of Ghani and Karzai

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Positive assessment of Ghani	47.8	22	8.3	1	40.0	4	70.8	17
Positive assessment of Karzai era	39.1	18	16.7	2	20.0	2	58.3	14
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

Attitude toward the Ghani administration

At the time of conducting the interviews (late 2014 to early 2015), President Ghani was still riding a wave of popularity. Over one-half of the pro-establishment activists expressed favourable views about his work (Table 14). Support from the parties that were part of his coalition in the electoral campaign should be obvious, but he also scored well in the interviews, even among the Jamiat-i Islami and Wahdat activists (parties in Abdullah's coalition):

[Ghani] seems professional. I think he will bring more development and improvements to this country in terms of education, the economy, etc. Well, in my opinion, he is an honest person and he will do as much as he can...I know his decisions will be much better than Karzai's [#3, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

In fact, there were lots of failures in the Afghan government, like corrupt people in important positions, but it's getting better day by day. In Karzai's government, there was one failure, namely that very few people were honest to Karzai, while others were working for themselves. This was the reason for the corruption in the Afghan government. But I must say that corruption is going to be removed very soon. I can assure you about it [#14, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

In my opinion, the new president of Afghanistan, Dr Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, has been doing a good job so far. Even though I was not his supporter during the presidential election and I was in favour of Dr Abdullah, I now believe that Ashraf Ghani is also fit to be president of Afghanistan. He has good ideas for the new generation, and he will lead this country in better ways. He will bring happiness to our country [#11, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

In part, such positive assessments might have derived from the formation of the National Unity Government:

Well, in fact, I did not support him during the presidential elections. I was in favour of Dr Abdullah. I really wanted him to be our president. However, both have agreed on a united government. I believe they will do a great job together. President Ghani is also an open-minded person. He is also capable of leading this country. He has started his job very well. We are waiting for the results. History will judge him [#10, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

A lone voice warned that Ghani and the National Unity Government might be flying too high, forgetful of the difficult realities of the country:

When Amanullah Khan achieved the independence of Afghanistan, he started by improving the people instead of making the army strong. First of all, we need to have a great army, police, and security force in Afghanistan. We should first have a good security situation in the country, then we can improve the people very well [#13, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

On the whole, it seemed that the pro-establishment activists were more concerned about the preservation of the status quo and political stability than any specific party or ideological issue. The establishment of a more Islamic system government is, for these Islamist activists, a very distant goal.

Frustration with the education system

The vast majority of interviewees linked to the establishment parties expressed positive views about the education system. Only from within the ranks of Jamiat-i Islami were critical voices also heard:

According to my understanding, Afghanistan's education system is not good, as we expect much from our government. The current system is very weak. In fact, most of the teachers are not fit for teaching students. Some of them are newly graduated from high school, but they are appointed as teachers in schools. We are witnessing these kinds of untalented teachers in our own school. Our government should take serious action regarding this issue, because the education system is very important for students. They should deal with it [#11, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

Honestly, I am not happy with the Afghan education system. We are not learning to global standards. Up-to-date information is not included in our books. We have to be like western students. They have modern materials for learning. Besides, our teachers must be intelligent and professional people [#3, Jamiat-i Islami, activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

One of these interviewees was sufficiently frustrated to justify students openly challenging teachers:

Students challenge teachers, but not all of them. We only challenge the teachers who have no talent as teachers, the ones who were recruited through high officials in government [#11, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

Perhaps these urban Tajiks have greater expectations in terms of education than their counterparts from communities whose access to education was very limited until 2001 (northwestern Uzbeks and Hazaras).

5. Challengers from within the System

Finding activists from registered, legal parties that were in opposition to the ruling elite proved difficult. The research team found three types of “challengers” from within the political system, two of which claimed to be part of the mainstream of political Islam: the conservative fundamentalists of Ittehad/Dawat-i Islami¹⁶ and the “new party” Rawand-i Sabz. The third group is an avowedly non-political organisation called Jamiat-i Islah,¹⁷ which promotes Islamic values:

Our objective is to educate all Muslims in Afghanistan, particularly the youth, through Jamiat-i Islah's courses held all around Afghanistan. We have courses in Quranic interpretation, memorisation of the Quran, and studies in hadith and fiqh... This is not so much a political activity [#48, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kunduz].

In practice, its activities and aims have a strongly political content:

The majority of students are interested in our political views. We have some students from communist families who oppose our Islamic views and other Afghans who work for the Americans and other westerners... We have close collaborations with all Muslim brothers in schools and other parts of Afghan society. We have young Hizbi, Jamiati, Ittehad, and Tahrir brothers working together in raising Islamic awareness among young Afghan students... I have organised protests against Israel's invasion of the Holy Land and the signing of the bilateral security agreement between Afghanistan and the US [#48, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kunduz].

Hizb-ut Tahrir is very much active in schools and has a brotherhood relationship with Islah. There is one problem with Tahrir: they are not registered, and so the NDS and Mol [Ministry of Interior] harass them by accusing them of terrorism [#17, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

My father was one of the members of Hizb-i Islami of Gulbudin Hekmatyar. One of his friends from Hizb is now a member of the leadership of Islah in Afghanistan, so he encouraged me to join Islah since Hizb and Islah have the same ideology... We receive encouragement from almost all jihadi leaders, including former Taliban telling us that our activities have a positive impact on Afghan youth [#20, Jamiat-i Islah, activist, Kabul].

Jamiat-i Islah is considered by some as the most active and best organised political organisation among youth.¹⁸

Not one of the interviewees in this project belonged to secular, non-establishment parties. Asked to comment on this issue, a teacher thus replied:

Liberal ideologies are in contradiction with Islamic ideologies, which is why they have fewer activities than Islamic groups. The Islamic groups are active, and students go toward these groups [#42, teacher, Parwan].

The teacher clearly implied that secular groups are out of tune with the dominant cultural and political trends. The findings of the companion survey, published separately by AREU, also confirm this. However, it should be considered that many secular individuals are disinclined to join or form political parties, opting sometimes for civil society organisations.¹⁹

16 Formerly known as Ittehad-i Islami, Dawat-i Islami was founded in 1980 by Prof. Rasul Sayyaf, one of the leaders of the 1970s Jamiat-i Islami. The group was characterised by views closest to Saudi Arabian Wahhabism, as compared to other strands of Afghan Islamism. The group was active in the 1980s resistance movement and 1990s civil wars. It was also part of the anti-Taliban coalition of 2001, and as a result, it was initially rewarded with appointments to positions of power and influence in the early years of the Karzai administration. Despite Sayyaf's personal closeness to President Karzai, the party was gradually marginalised from official appointments, in part due to western pressures (its views often being incompatible with those of pro-western reformers). As of late 2014, the party could be described as no longer part of the establishment and often in opposition to it. In 2014, Sayyaf ran as a presidential candidate on an ultra-conservative platform.

17 The party's full name is Jamiat-i-Islah Wa Inkeshaf Ejtema-i-Afghanistan (Society for the Reform and Development of Afghan Society), and it was founded around 2004 by Atif Ur Rahman (from Takhar Province). The party emerged from the wave of criticism toward the squabbling faction of the Afghan Islamist movement, criticism dating back to the mid-1980s. The organisation is notoriously well-funded and runs various media outlets, including a TV channel in Herat and an Islamic radio in Kabul. It also runs a private (but registered) teacher training institute. It is one of the heirs to the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood and seems to attract many Hizb-i Islami members and sympathisers. It mainly consists of a youth wing called Nehad-i Jawanan-i Musalman (Bureau of Muslim Youth).

18 Casey Johnson (USIP), pers. comm., July 2015.

19 Casey Johnson (USIP), pers. comm., July 2015. These considerations may apply to university students more than high school students.

5.1 Recruitment patterns

Finding recruits is more problematic for non-establishment parties than it is for establishment ones, despite the fact that they are still perfectly legal organisations. The fear of retaliation from the educational authorities reportedly deters some from joining:

Well, yes, they like some of our political views, but they don't want to join us because they will have problems. Some have personal problems, while others claim that it is illegal, which is why they don't get involved. They just have to accept the risk like me [#16, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Given the few interviewees belonging to this category, it is not appropriate to speculate about what the most common patterns of recruitment might be. However, at least in the case of new parties, horizontal recruitment is plausibly more common than in the case of relatively old establishment parties, simply because there will not be many older generation cadres to push their offspring into the party:

Well, there are a few people who are members of Rawand-i-Sabz. They are in different classes. One of them attracted me to the party; previously, I didn't know anything about it. He explained to me the aims of the party, and I found it better, so I joined [#16, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

5.2 Political views

Western presence

The anti-establishment fundamentalists view western influence as a factor of corruption [32, Dawat-i Islami activist, Baghlan]:

Afghan society needs to be changed. The current changes are extremely negative. The changes of recent years have to be rolled back...Westerners are the main problem in Afghanistan. They are here to destroy our society, so we shouldn't have any more westerners in Afghanistan. There has been insecurity and killing every day, just because of the westerners in Afghanistan. They must leave now [#48, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

Westerners are here to achieve their religious, cultural, and political goals by destroying our religion and culture. We don't need westerners' support in Afghanistan [#17, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

We see that Afghan media has become so westernised. There are too many singers and nonsense programmes on TV that are wasting the people's time [#20, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

Some of these activists acknowledge that the western intervention did also bring some good to Afghanistan, but nonetheless they think that the benefits were more than offset by the damage done:

Westerners helped us on some issues but they really destroyed our society. We are an Islamic society and we want to remain an Islamic society, but the westerners are helping women's rights and civil society groups to raise their voices against their religion and culture [#20, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

By contrast, Rawand-i Sabz activists share the establishment Islamists' view that western presence is a necessity:

I wish that our own military would become capable of standing on its own, so that there would be no necessity for the presence of foreign troops. Right now, I guess their presence is better, because we are free to focus on other issues [#16, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

These activists claim to embody an alternative view of Islam, which would be much more acceptable in the west while remaining true to genuine Islam.

Today, the conspiracy theories say that Muslims are responsible for terrorist's attacks...However, this is so untrue, and we know it. If, today, the Taliban are carrying out terrorist's attacks, it's not what Islam wants. They need to know that the Taliban are a puppet, and that they don't even know what Islam is. They just try to defame the Islamic religion. It is also my hope that tomorrow I become a powerful person in the politics of Afghanistan, and then I will surely show the meaning of Islam to western civilisation. They need to know that Islam means peace, not fighting [#10, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Women's rights

Predictably, the fundamentalist interviewees viewed any advancement in western-defined women's rights as a negative development:

Afghan society is a religious society. People react to everything that is against Islamic values. We see that the government is wrong in giving women freedom, and so inappropriate developments have started...We don't have any criticism about the education system, but young girls and boys in university are getting together and disregarding the Islamic hijab [dress code] [#32, Dawat-i Islami activist, Baghlan].

One interviewer dismissed the defenders of women's rights as mere profiteers:

Yes, I have seen the activities of these civil society organisations and women's rights groups, but they are taking projects from the embassies just to make money. They don't have any Islamic or ideological views [#20, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

Jamiat-i Islah even has a very active women's wing (called the Sisters of Islah), which nevertheless defends very conservative positions in women's affairs.²⁰ By contrast, the view of Rawand-i Sabz activists resembles those expressed by the establishment Islamists:

We also discuss women's rights, because we don't want their rights to be wasted. We need the government to consider their rights. Today, women live in poor conditions, especially in remote areas [#7, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Attitude toward the Ghani and Karzai administrations

The anti-establishment fundamentalists reject President Ghani as a secularist and sometimes even express sympathy for Karzai, who, between 2001 and 2014, was consistently cosy with the so-called "mujahidin" (see also Table 14):

Ghani has a western ideology; he has no significant place in Afghan society...Karzai was a good person, as he had good relations with the mujahidin, although he didn't make any significant contributions to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan [#32, Dawat-i Islami activist, Baghlan].

By contrast, this activist from Rawand-i Sabz appeared pleasantly surprised by Ghani's early performance:

To be honest, according to our research, Ghani is also capable of leading this country, but I voted for Dr Abdullah Abdullah during the elections...I wasn't counting on him to lead this country. But now, I find him better. I think it is too soon to judge him. Let's judge him after five years, then we will discuss what he has done for this country. However, I hope he brings more development, which is much needed in Afghanistan [#7, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

²⁰ Casey Johnson (USIP), pers. comm., July 2015.

Attitudes toward the insurgents

Rawand-i Sabz activists are, of course, bitterly opposed to the insurgents, in accordance with the positions of their leader, Amrullah Saleh, who used to be the chief of the NDS. By contrast, despite its legal status, Jamiat-i Islah activists are not alien to sympathising with the insurgents—the anti-establishment students who did not condemn the insurgents (40 percent of the total) all came from this group (Table 13):

We support any kind of military resistance against invaders. We at Islah always debate about their fighting against the ANSF [Afghan National Security Force], we cannot comment on their fight against the ANSF, but we do support their resistance against the leadership of the ANSF [#48, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

If their resistance is doing jihad and fighting against western perpetrators, then their resistance is justified [#17, Jamiat-i Islah, activist, Kabul].

If they are fighting the Americans, their armed resistance is justified [#20, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

The role of mullahs

On the role of mullahs in society, Rawand-i Sabz are aligned with the majority of establishment Islamists:

Well, mullahs still have their own major role in the villages. People who lack education and logic still follow the mullahs. Mullahs just try to impose their own thoughts on people. In Kabul, Mazar, Herat, and those cities where people are educated, they no longer follow the mullah's advice. In fact, we need to use our own logic, not others'. Of course, there are some mullahs who are open-minded, but we need to think first before following them [#7, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

People are educated now, they are open-minded, and they know what to do, so there is no need for the leadership of the mullahs anymore. In the past, people were doing things under the orders of mullahs. Now, people use their own logic. Perhaps, mullahs play a strong role in remote villages, because the people there are still not educated [#16, Rawand-i Sabz activist, Kabul].

Nevertheless, radical Islamists of various tendencies beg to differ and claim to support conservative mullahs:

Of course, politics should be led by religious scholars. We further politics in Islamic ways. If people think consciously, then they will discover that the Islamic party is the only party that tries to work for the good of this country. We only do what benefits the country and people [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

Mullahs are influential in Afghanistan and in any Muslim society. We have two types of mullahs in Afghanistan. 1) Those who work for western intelligence agencies hired through the NDS and Afghan civil society. 2) We have real Islamic scholars as mullahs whose aim is to educate and serve the people of Afghanistan. Those whose aim is to work for the Afghan and western intelligence agencies are less influential, but those who are real Islamic scholars are more influential, and their role should be increased in Afghan society [#17, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

In the first ten years or so of its existence, Hizb-i Islami accumulated quite a reputation for anti-clericalism. Today, closer relations with clerics and madrasas can be observed, so perhaps the party has amended its ways; the quote above suggests a continuing predominance of the party over the clerics.

5.3 Two oppositions

In sum, the “challengers from within the system” are clearly split into two camps. On the one hand, the activists of the “new party” Rawand-i Sabz consider that the system is being poorly managed and is insufficiently meritocratic. They are close to the activists of Jamiat-i Islami in many ways, but resent the patronage-oriented character of the latter. On the other, the fundamentalists oppose the status quo, but hope to be able to use the system to reinforce the role of Shari’a; they do not want to overthrow the system altogether, as they too benefit from it. They are just as keen on advancing education as the Rawand-i Sabz and pro-establishment activists are.

6. Challenges to the System: Radical Opposition Activists

The most difficult task in this research effort was interviewing underground activists of illegal organisations. Those who were successfully contacted were mostly Hizb-ut Tahrir activists (seven), with a lone Hizb-i Islami activist, three Taliban activists, and one member of a non-party organisation (Faizaniha),²¹ comprising a total of twelve interviewees.

6.1 Recruitment

Recruitment into an illegal organisation represents a much more difficult task than recruitment into a legal one, particularly of an establishment party. The interviewees in this group of “challengers to the system” all indicated how careful they have to be when approaching potential recruits:

We ask people whom we really trust. We don't ask everyone to join us because it's too dangerous, as our group is seen by the people and government as a dangerous group. But we are not dangerous; we only work to bring an Islamic and Shari'a-based government... We only invite those people who have our complete trust and who have been our friends for a long time, not just any student... Believe me that to recruit someone, we work for two or three months on that person, until we are fully assured that he is honest and won't create problems for us in the future, then we invite him to join our team. We cannot invite just any friend any time. This is our procedure, to be friendly with the person for at least two months and become certain that this person is honest. Then we invite him into the team [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Recruitment into groups like Hizb-ut Tahrir is either the result of efforts by teachers (see Section 3 above) or horizontal in character:

A friend of mine...is from Badakhshan province. We sometimes chatted about Islam and about Islam in Afghanistan, and I told him my motivations about Islam in Afghanistan. He then asked me to join Hizb-ut Tahrir Afghanistan Wolaya. I didn't know about Hizb-ut Tahrir before that. When he told me about the activities of Hizb-ut Tahrir, I became interested in joining this party, and I liked their way of working in Afghanistan [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

As a new organisation to Afghanistan, the chance of fathers recruiting sons is very slim. In fact, it is only among this group of student interviewees that we heard tales of activists clashing with their parents:

When my father and family discovered this, they got angry and sent me to Mazar to continue my education and be far from Hizb-ut Tahrir, but because I promised the Hizb-ut Tahrir team to be an honest person, I cannot leave the team. When I came to Mazar, I made contact with our officials in Badakhshan and told them the story about how I came to Mazar. They then introduced me to the Mazar cadre responsible for Hizb-ut Tahrir. So now, I am active in Mazar for Hizb-ut Tahrir [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

While the establishment parties largely tolerate each other, the radical activists claim that their relationship with parties such as Jamiat-i Islami, the legal Hizb-i Islami, and even Dawat-i Islami is quite hostile:

These Islamic groups think we are replacing and recruiting their members. Our aim is to recruit whoever corresponds to our ideology [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

The activist quoted above had direct experience of Tahrir stealing members from other groups, as he was previously a member of Dawat-i Islami. Another interviewee admitted to have considered joining Hizb-i Islami, before opting for Hizb-ut Tahrir:

²¹ A group of followers of the late Maulana Muhammad Attaullah Faizani, founder of the Hizb-i Tauhid (the Monotheism Party). Faizani was executed after his involvement in an attempted coup in the 1970s, but some of his followers escaped persecution. Faizani tried to integrate elements of Sufism and scientific-technological modernity, arguing that only an accomplished Islamic scholar could show the way to achieve this. Faizani had a mixed following of Shi'as and Sunnis. He was close to the Jawanan-i Muslimun, but there no longer seems to be any such connection between the present-day Faizaniha and the follow-up parties of the Jawanan. Some of Faizani's present followers consider him the “deputy of the messiah” and await his return.

I thought about joining a political party, but unfortunately none of the political parties like Jamiat, Junbesh, Wahdad, and the others work for Afghanistan and Islam. They only think about their own position and having seats in government. They never think of how to bring a real and complete Islam or how to turn people into complete Muslims...I also considered Hizb-i Islami before joining Hizb-ut Tahrir, because I didn't have any information about Hizb-ut Tahrir. The only thing that I didn't like about Hizb-i Islami was that this party shows people the real way of Islam by force and fighting. In Islam, when you invite people to Islam or when you want to show them the real way of being a complete Muslim, you should talk to them, chat with them, and give them reasons and proof why Islam is the best religion in the world. You cannot invite people for force, fighting, and killing [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Despite the difficulties, the radical activists claim that their recruitment efforts have been surprisingly successful:

Before I became head of Tahrir in Afghanistan, I was thinking that in a country like this, Tahrir wouldn't be able to have a large recruitment in a short time, but no, I became head of Tahrir and I was amazed by the number of youths who have joined Tahrir in cities rather than villages, so now our target is 50/50...At the beginning, our focus was to be more in rural Afghanistan, but our focus is to be as active as possible in cities [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

6.2 Aims

Hizb-ut Tahrir is relatively unique, as it opposes both the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban, viewing the former as un-Islamic and the latter as myopic in its pursuit of an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan alone. Ideologically, Hizb-ut Tahrir stands against all forms of Islamic government that do not follow a strict caliphate model. The party hesitates about grounding its rhetoric too much in Afghanistan-specific grievances.²² In a nutshell, the medium-term aim of Hizb-ut Tahrir is to lead Afghan society toward compliance with Shari'a, according to the interviewees [#50, Tahrir activist, Kunduz, and others quoted below]:

We have to bring Shari'a to the people. We have to prevent Afghans who were in western countries but have come back to Afghanistan with different views from trying to change the view of the Afghan people too...I am a religious person, and my main aim is how to bring a real and complete Islam to Afghanistan. I knew that I could not do anything alone; I needed to join a team in order to work together for a better Islamic Afghanistan. You should realise the situation in which Afghanistan is right now. You may know, but Afghan people are forgetting their real religion and copying western religion more each day [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

We are the soldiers of the Prophet Mohammad, and our mission is to bring Muslim people back to their own Islamic traditions and bring Shari'a to Afghanistan. My personal aim in becoming involved with Hizb-ut Tahrir is to support my other colleagues fulfil their aims in Afghanistan [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Afghan society needs to be changed fundamentally. 99.9 percent of Afghanistan is Sunni-Muslim, so we have to reintroduce our Islamic values into Afghan society and propose changes based on what Islam wants. All of the changes made in recent years must be rolled back at any cost. Our slogan at the beginning was stopping the Americanisation and westernisation of Afghanistan [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

My aim in joining this Islamic group is to turn Afghanistan into an Islamic state, removing the interference of western countries in Afghanistan, preventing people from going the wrong way, and instead working for Allah [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

These aims of Hizb-ut Tahrir are not very different from those of the avowedly non-party groups:

Our aim is Islamic sovereignty in the light of the holy Quran and Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) hadiths. We have educational programmes. We are not like other parties that act sentimentally [#23, Faizaniha activist, Baghlan].

²² Kabul-based political analyst, pers. comm., July 2015.

The aims of Jamiat-i Islah are similar:

Our activities are to raise awareness and help young Afghans obtain an Islamic education, so they can fight the western religious and cultural invasion in Afghanistan through intellectual debates [#17, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

However, in its long-term aim, Hizb-ut Tahrir differs markedly from the religious associations, as it claims to be working for the reestablishment of the Caliphate:

Our aim is the Islamic Caliphate in the Islamic world and other parts of the world. In Tahrir, we would introduce our own socio-economic and financial systems in the framework of the Quran and hadith by cutting off the western social and financial systems from the Islamic world. This is our aim [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

The main difference within this group of “challengers” is found between fundamentalists and Islamists:

In high schools, we give a lot of importance to Islamic subjects, but Hizb-i Islami students give a lot of importance to science subjects...We are also against the curriculum of the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, but Hizb-i Islami is not against it [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar].

6.3 Activities

The standard activities of the radical parties are recruitment and regular party meetings to coordinate activities; it would appear that the radicals meet much more frequently than the establishment party activists do [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif]. Like the Islamist parties of the 1970s and 1980s, Hizb-ut Tahrir employs a classic cell model. Cells of 10-15 members are led by a *mushref* (leader or mentor). Since they are not registered with the Afghan government and are regarded as a source of competition by the Taliban, Hizb-ut Tahrir operates with varying degrees of secrecy in each of the provinces surveyed. Hizb-ut Tahrir is most active in Nangahar, where it holds study groups in well-known mosques, while it is also active on the Nangarhar University campus. Outside of the survey provinces, Hizb-ut Tahrir has a greater presence in areas outside the traditional Taliban support zones, being strongest in Badakshan, Kapisa, Panjshir, and Parwan, with less support in the southeast and south.²³ In addition, the radicals either organise prayer groups that aim to bring students back toward religious practice [#23, Faizaniha activist, Baghlan] or work to infiltrate the educational establishment and therefrom influence the new generation (as in the case of Hizb-ut Tahrir):

Only some of this Muslim society has lost its way and copies western traditions and culture. We need to work to bring these Muslim people back to Afghan traditions and culture; this is the job of our group [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

The exception to this pattern is represented by the Taliban, whose main purpose for being active in schools is recruiting fighters and non-military supporters for the insurgency [#72, #73, #74, Taliban activists in Nangarhar, Wardak, and Zabul].

6.4 Political views

Western presence

The dislike of the western presence in Afghanistan by Islamist activists is not a surprise. A few typical statements against the western intervention follow:

There is no need for their presence in Afghanistan. They are here to promote western values in our society and promote western imperialistic values among Muslims...They invade our country just to promote their western values and interests, and they are here to indoctrinate Afghan youths to their own imperialistic cultures by promoting and establishing liberal educational institutions [#49, Tahrir activist, Kunduz; also #50, Tahrir activist, Kunduz].

²³ Kabul-based political analyst, pers. comm., July 2015.

We lost dozens of our Muslim children, women, and men in Afghanistan, because of the presence of foreign troops. One of the main missions in our group is getting foreign troops out of Afghanistan... Foreign troops and western countries control Afghanistan now. They select the president for Afghanistan, and they select ministers and governors. This is something more than influence [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Our main aim or motivation at this time is to get foreign forces out of Afghanistan. We are against there being foreign forces in Afghanistan; we are against this corrupt and American-made government. Our aim is to prevent the Afghan Muslim people from undertaking non-Islamic activities [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

The Taliban activists are even bitterer in their statements against the western presence in Afghanistan [#72, #73, #74, Taliban activists in Nangarhar, Wardak, and Zabul]. More generally, radical activists have a strong distaste for anything western. Typically, they accuse the old Islamist parties and other establishment parties of corruption, abuses, and betraying the cause of Islam:

I never thought of other political parties like Jamiat, Junbesh, Wahdat, etc., because they are criminals who have committed lots of crimes in Afghanistan. The reason for there being foreign troops and Americans in Afghanistan was because of the leaders of these political parties; the reason why Americans came to Afghanistan and changed the minds of Muslim people was these leaders [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif; also #26, Tahrir activist, Baghlan].

Westernisation is not progress, argue the radicals:

Afghan society is very much against non-religious and non-hijabi people. A group of people, who lost their Islamic values, does not mean, as westerners claim, that we have achievements...Islam is against western culture, Islam is a religion that has programmes for each aspect of our lives. We don't need the nonsense culture that westerners bring to us [#25, Tahrir activist, Baghlan].

I think that Afghan people are Muslim people, but some organisations called civil society and others are trying to turn people the wrong way, trying to spread Christianity among people. Our movement's job is to prevent people from cooperating with these organisations and bringing Shari'a law to society [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Westernisation is against our country and religion. We really hate westerners. They are not here to help Afghans, but they have come here to achieve their political goals. They had a negative impact on Islam. They are working to the disadvantage of people...Afghan society is almost corrupted. People don't pay much attention to Islam. This is what foreigners brought to this country. For instance, they often watch movies and listen to music instead of praying and worshipping Allah. This society must be changed. Islam should be expanded further. As long as these foreigners are here and our people are unwise, we can't expect a fully Islamic society...We don't want them here [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

The radicals sense that the odds are shifting in their favour:

[Westerners'] influence was very strong before, but since foreign troops have left the country, their influence is growing weak and we are winning by spreading Islam among the people [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Women's rights

None of the interviewees responded to this question; one explained that such a topic is not a matter of discussion among Islamic activists:

Mainly, our debates are about infidels. We don't talk about women's rights. We always try to find a way to make these foreigners leave the country [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

A Taliban activist explained:

We do not have any debates about women's rights. There are other important things that we should debate about first. Our leaders also don't give us permission to debate about this...The freedoms of women that the Americans and westerners brought must be ended. We want the kinds of roles that existed in the Taliban's time [#72, Taliban activist, Daychopan/ Zabol].

Another Taliban activist framed the issue in more elegant terms:

We do not disagree with women's rights; we also accept women's rights. But what Americans and other foreign and European countries are saying about women's rights, they are not women's rights. Those are the women's rights that Islam gives to women. More than this, we are against it [#74, Taliban activist, Wardak].

The role of mullahs

For radical Islamists, criticising mullahs in the context of the western intervention is not very politically correct:

Our mullahs are always helping us, but they do not work as teachers in our school. As I mentioned, mullahs could be better leaders than other people. Our leaders are mullahs and religious scholars. I must say that mullahs are the reason why we are proud of ourselves today. We are nothing without them. They are very valuable people to us. They are the lamp of our religion. In other words, they make our lives brighter, and we are in a massive darkness without them [#2, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Similarly, the Taliban activists are heavily supportive of the mullahs [#72, #73, #74, Taliban activists in Nangarhar, Wardak, and Zabol]. When the mullahs are criticised, it is for a different reason than the criticism expressed by establishment groups and Rawand-i Sabz: the mullahs are sometimes on the pay book of the Americans or the puppet government.

I would call them Imams, as they are influential in our society. The problem with our Afghan Imams is that they are not well-educated and well-informed. The Americans and Afghan government pay them so that they follow their political goals, which is not fair. They have to be true Imams and not take any money from Afghan intelligence organisations [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

Attitudes toward the Karzai and Ghani administrations

Views about former President Karzai among the radicals vary somewhat, from the most negative appraisals to relatively positive ones. A common criticism of Karzai relates to him being a puppet of the Americans:

President Karzai was an honest dog of western countries, especially an honest dog of America. He brought the Americans to Afghanistan. He was what put Islam in danger in Afghanistan. Our team or group was also against President Karzai [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Hamid Karzai is another junior employee at the CIA. His anti-American statements are a joke; he was told to be anti-American [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

Another common criticism was that he privileged his own personal interests over those of the country:

Karzai doesn't believe in anything except money and power. The BSA [Bilateral Security Agreement] with westerners that he did not sign was not for the sake of Allah, but because his own personal demands were not accepted by the Americans [#25, Tahrir activist, Baghlan].

However, some radical activists appreciate the anti-Americanism of Karzai's later years:

Karzai did a great job in the end when he did not sign the BSA [#26, Tahrir activist, Baghlan].

I must say that President Karzai served this country and its people very well. We should not forget what he has done for the good of Afghanistan. But it is worth saying that we didn't want him to let the foreigners walk in this country. It is kind of disrespecting to the Islamic holy religion. These foreigners don't let Afghan people develop. They misuse every opportunity. He needed to get them out of here, but he didn't. We were against this decision that he made [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

Predictably, the Tahrir activists all showed little sympathy for President Ghani:

A useless and non-Muslim president, President Ghani is not a Muslim. His wife is Christian, and before, he himself was a Christian. How is it possible that a Christian family became the president of an Islamic government? We never supported him, and we are against Ghani [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Ghani is not helpful for an Islamic community. He is at the service of westerners and criminals [#26, Tahrir activist, Baghlan].

He's a so-called President of Afghanistan and a junior employee at the CIA [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

The Taliban showed some sympathy for President Ghani during the 2014 campaign,²⁴ but by 2015, this had fully evaporated. All three interviewees belonging to this group made negative statements about Ghani, for example:

We do not think positively about President Ghani. He is appointed by the American side. We did think that he was a great Pashtun, but he is not. He shared power and authority with the Northern Party (Abdullah), which has killed thousands and thousands of Pashtuns. The very worst thing about Ghani is that he signed a strategic contract with America [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar].

Only one Hizb-i Islami activist (from the illegal wing of the party) still gave Ghani the benefit of the doubt:

On the whole, the Afghan government needs honest people. Currently, corrupt people are in the positions. They just work for their own pockets. As you know, all of them have lots of buildings and properties in Afghanistan and outside the country. It shows that they take bribes from innocent people. They care for no one but themselves. Therefore, we want Ashraf Ghani to appoint honest and professional people. He should consider professionalism [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

More generally, the radical Islamists view the current Afghan government as “un-Islamic, corrupt, illegitimate, and western-oriented” [#50, Tahrir activist, Kunduz], which “serves the interest of foreigners by depriving its own citizens” [#49, Tahrir activist, Kunduz]. Similar views are shared by other radical activists like the Taliban [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar].

The radical views of the Tahrir activists extend to neighbouring countries:

Muslim countries are influential in the wrong way, not saving Islam and Muslims. The Islamic scholars of other Islamic countries are influential in Afghanistan in a positive way, but the governments of Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia are against Islam...The governments of Islamic countries should not have any influence in Afghanistan, because they are also western puppets. The Islamic scholars of these countries must have an influence in Afghanistan [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

²⁴ Antonio Giustozzi, “The Taliban and the 2014 Elections in Afghanistan” (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2014), <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW94-The-Taliban-and-the-2014-Elections-in-Afghanistan.pdf>; Antonio Giustozzi and Silab Mangal, “Violence, the Taliban and Afghanistan’s 2014 Elections” (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2015) <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW103-Violence-the-Taliban-and-Afghanistan-s-2014-Elections.pdf>.

Attitudes toward the insurgents

While none of the activists of registered parties was willing to show any sympathy for the insurgents, the contrary proved true for the radicals, for whom expressing some solidarity with the armed insurgency was almost a duty. While this was obvious in the case of the Taliban activists, it was not as obvious for the Tahrir activists, whose party is not engaged in the armed struggle. Only 8.3 percent of the “radicals” expressed hostility toward the insurgents (Table 13). Although Hizb-ut Tahrir is not engaged in the armed opposition, a typical view expressed by its activists was the following:

I think that the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami of Hekmatyar have the same view as our group, as they are also fighting to bring Shari'a to Afghanistan, but their way of fighting and ours are different. We are fighting through discussions and arguments, but the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami's way of fighting is through killing people. That's the reason why we don't support the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami's policy [#21, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

Those who are fighting this government and western invaders are mujahidin to us; they are not the Taliban, Hizbis, Al-Qaida, or Islamic State. They are jihadis and true Muslims. We support them, and their military and ideological resistance are justified for Hizb-ut Tahrir...We have a pretty good relationship with the Taliban, Jamiat-i Islah, and Tablighi Jamaat²⁵ of Afghanistan and Pakistan and other independent tablighis [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

Our movement supports the ideas of the Taliban and its role, because the Taliban also follows Shari'a, but we are against military activities that kill innocent people in Afghanistan. This is the reason why we do not support the Taliban as an organisation [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

The Hizb-i Islami activist was more cautious:

This is my advice to them. If they want to make a bright future for Afghanistan, then they have to join other brothers and find a solution to the problems. We should further our activities through Islamic ways. They have to make peace with their enemies. Peace is the Islamic environment. Of course, we should fight against the infidels, because they harm our religion and country, and it is our job to stop them [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

Even the majority of the Tahrir interviewees were keen to distance themselves from the insurgents, at least in terms of condemning the indiscriminate tactics used by the latter. Nevertheless, there was, on the whole, more sympathy than condemnation in their words.

²⁵ As a religious movement established in 1927 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in India, this group aims for spiritual reform “from below.” Originally linked to the Deobandi Movement, it has spread to Afghanistan in relatively recent times.

7. Are High School Students Radicalising?

Overall, regarding the politicisation of high schools, the impression is one of a pot under increasing pressure, but one that has not yet reached boiling point. Obvious manifestations of extreme student frustration, such as demonstrations and protests, are relatively rare and mostly small-scale when they occur: even among the activists, only 17.4 percent reported such events (Table 5). When it was possible to obtain information about the character of these protests, they turned out to be political protests not aimed at the conditions of the education system but demands for prisoner release, solidarity with other Islamic causes, and so forth.

Once, the Afghan government arrested some students at our school, because they were working for the Taliban, but we made protests and administrative appeals against this. So the Afghan government released the students [#73, Taliban activist, Nangarhar].

For example, there was a restriction on motorcycles in Zabul Province, so the Taliban told us to tell the Afghan government that we were going to school on motorcycles so that the government would abolish the restriction on motorcycles and so it happened. Or, when a big Taliban commander was arrested by the Afghan government and the Americans, we made bigger and bigger protests for their release [#72, Taliban activist, Daychopan/Zabul].

The only case of a protest motivated by specifically educational issues concerned a demand for education in Pashto:

At the beginning, all of the subjects were in the Dari language and only one subject was in Pashto—it was the Pashto language itself—but the number of Pashtun students was higher than Dari students. Therefore, we put a lot of pressure and obtained a curriculum in the Pashto language for us [#74, Taliban activist, Wardak].

7.1 Conflicts among students

One source claimed to have witnessed relatively frequent violence among different establishment groups, particularly during the electoral campaign:

During the election period, those who belonged to Jamiat were supporting and defending General Atta and Dr Abdullah, but those who belonged to Junbesh supported Ashraf Ghani and General Dostum. Sometimes, this disagreement turned into clashes [#4, Tahrir activist, Mazar-i Sharif].

It is, however, rare for activists to admit their clashes with activists of other parties (two exceptions are #29, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif, and #74, Taliban activist, Wardak, both admitting to a clash with a Wahdat activist). Sometimes, these clashes had an ethnic or sectarian background (see also previous paragraph):

When the students of the Mohaqqueq party [Wahdat] posted the picture of Khomeini, we debated with Hizb-i Islami and Milli Tehrik²⁶ students. We told them that we would take this picture off the wall and then we all came together to shred the pictures to pieces [#74, Taliban activist, Wardak].

It should be noted, of course, that Wardak is one of the main hotspots of ethnic tension in Afghanistan, following years of Hazara-Pashtun fighting over pastures.

None of the interviewees from the establishment parties admitted that language-related issues were part of their political debates, even though the survey found that such issues do feature in discussions among students (Table 15 and Appendix Table 4). Typical arguments used to explain why language issues were not considered legitimate for debates included the risk to national unity (“if we talk about Pashto or Dari issues, it will tear us apart” [#9, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif]) and the fear of being accused of racism [#1, Junbesh activist, Mazar-i Sharif; #16, Jamiat-i Islami activist, Kabul].

²⁶ This party recently founded by Ismail Yun is an extreme Pashtun nationalist movement that initially supported Ashraf Ghani in the 2014 elections. Ghani had to distance himself from the group, however, due to the controversial views expressed by Yun. Yun also operates a TV station that diffuses his political ideas. The party is mainly present in east and southeast Afghanistan.

Table 15: Student activists and Dari-Pashto debates

	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Discuss language issues	26.1	12	33.3	4	30	3	20.8	5
TOTAL		46		12		10		24
	All		Illegal		Legal, anti-establishment		Legal, establishment	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Discuss language issues	26.1	12	33.3	4	30	3	20.8	5
TOTAL		46		12		10		24

On the whole, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees asserted that they were on friendly terms with other activists in their schools or, at worst, indifferent to them. A fight with other students could lead to expulsion, and the typical high school activist had much greater ambitions than becoming a high school dropout.

7.2 Causes of politicisation

There is an obvious contradiction between the post-2001 political liberalisation and the desire to insulate high schools from politics [#61, teacher, Nangarhar; #52, teacher, Mazar-i Sharif]:

It is due to the growing number of TV channels that have a lot of political debates, and these debates have penetrated every social class. Meanwhile, the political parties are active in recruiting the young and fresh minds in society [#43, teacher, Gulbahar/Parwan].

This seems a sensible consideration. Indeed, often interviewees reported that the 2014 presidential campaign stimulated a lot of political activity in schools, turning it into one of the preferred topics for political debates in the schools (see Appendix, Table 12). One teacher added that the perception of injustice in educational institutions is also a factor incentivising recruitment [#56, teacher, Jalalabad; see also Section 8.3 Recruitment into the insurgency, below]. According to one teacher, in Nangarhar at least, political activities are more common among the students of district schools than in Jalalabad [#55, teacher, Jalalabad]. This would also seem to confirm the idea that the frustration associated with low chances of accessing higher education is a major factor in the politicisation of high school students. Taken as a whole, the 46 interviews with student activists seem to confirm these considerations: only 41.3 percent of the student activists stated their satisfaction with the Afghan educational system, a percentage falling to 40 percent for the activists of the legal anti-establishment groups and zero percent for activists of illegal groups (Table 11). Although the answers provided by activists of illegal groups are likely to be biased toward the negative, this is also likely to be an indicator of their frustration with the system. Other responses that point in this direction are the comparatively low percentage of respondents from illegal groups planning or hoping to further their studies at university (75 percent vs. 100 percent for pro-establishment students) or to study abroad (66.7 percent vs 100 percent for pro-establishment groups), although in absolute terms the percentages are still very high.

7.3 Recruitment into the insurgency

Despite the “discrimination” discussed in Section 3.2 above, even in the case of banned organisations, overall, the MoE does not appear able to prevent underground political activities and recruitment in schools. Some teachers even report seeing students join the Taliban:

I know a young student who joined the Taliban, and then his family brought him back from the mountains to his home [#43, teacher, Gulbahar/Parwan].

I have seen numerous students and heard that so many have joined the Taliban and Hizb-i Islami fighting the Afghan government and the Americans [#44, teacher, Laghman].

Yes, I saw many of them join the Taliban group. The current Taliban commander was a student of this school [#54, teacher, Mazar-i Sharif].

In total, nine out of 26 teachers knew of students who had joined insurgent groups (34.6 percent), even if, in some cases, their families later forced them to leave:

Yes, I saw some students join armed groups and stand against the government...Most of the time, their families threatened them to make them leave these extremist groups [#59, teacher, Paktia].

At first, they join extremist groups without the permission of their families. When their families find out about their activity, they force them to leave [#57, teacher, Behsud/Nangarhar].

The three Taliban activists interviewed all claimed to have sent students to the Taliban to fight [#72, #73, #74, Taliban activists in Nangarhar, Wardak, and Zabul]. Apart from armed groups proselytising in schools, the only other reason given to explain why students joined armed groups was the frustration with their failure to be admitted to the country’s universities:

Some students who couldn’t go to university joined armed groups [#71, teacher, Paktia].

One intelligent student couldn’t attend university because powerful people’s sons are the only ones who can attend university, which shows the extent of corruption. Now that intelligent person is in the Taliban ranks [#64, teacher, Ghazni].

Apart from any flaws in the Afghan education system that may have directly pushed students into the insurgency, there is no question that the “challengers to the system” tend to share with the “challengers within the system” a poor opinion of the Afghan education system:

I have to tell you that if this education system continues, then we will be counted as uneducated people, because we don’t have meaningful subjects and good facilities here. We need to have better subjects and Islamic programmes in the education system [#2, Hizb-i Islami activist (Hek), Mazar-i Sharif].

I don’t think there is any education system in this country. The curriculum is useless; westerners have imposed their values through the textbooks, which keep Afghan youth in darkness. We are committed to changing this through Islamic activism [#36, Tahrir activist, Kabul].

Westerners invaded Afghanistan in the name of bringing a good education and health care system, but just look at what is going on today with the education system. It’s worse than during the communist, mujahidin, and Taliban times [#17, Jamiat-i Islah activist, Kabul].

8. Conclusion

This study and the companion survey (briefing paper) have highlighted a number of developments that policy makers and observers of all descriptions have largely ignored to date. The first development is the extent to which high school students are politically active, which, although perhaps a surprise, could be seen as a positive development, as it highlights that there is some life still within the Afghan political system. The second development is the widespread presence of radical activists among the wider mass of high school political activists. These radical activists tend to sympathise with the insurgency to varying degrees. Undoubtedly, a trickle of high school students has been recruited to the Taliban insurgency. Although Afghanistan's high schools have not yet reached the stage of widespread mobilisation and protests, they seem to be drifting in that direction; they are indeed likely to arrive there, particularly if the economy does not recover and employment opportunities do not improve.

The present report explored possible interpretations of what is driving the politicisation of high school students. It is clear that, in part, it is simply a natural outcome of the introduction of an open, competitive political system after 2001. As they approach voting age, it is only natural for students to begin debating political issues, including at school. In this sense, it can be argued that the existing ban is a relic of an authoritarian era. There are, however, other, less noble reasons for the ongoing politicisation.

One such reason appears to be that many students already understand the nature of the Afghan political system so well that they are keen to be integrated into one of the dominant political patronage networks from a very early age. They seem to believe that without the protection of a political patronage network, they will not be able to gain good marks, be admitted into university and eventually secure a good job.

These are the students who believe that the patronage-oriented political system will continue as it did from 2002 to 2015. During the interviews, several students were heard speaking the language of reform: down with corruption! Down with nepotism! Oddly, however, they joined the same parties and groups that have been practising nepotism and patronage on a large scale over the past few years. Former President Karzai was often scapegoated as being responsible for corruption in the past, while the rest of the political system is absolved wholesale. But how would these students react if their hopes that the status quo might be indefinitely viable were destroyed? The large majority of the interviewees in this group, 24 pro-establishment activists, asserted a blind optimism about the future, despite the negative news on the economic and military fronts.

The majority of politically active students belong to the category just discussed: opportunists who are trying to ride the waves of a political system, fuelled by nepotism and patronage. There is, however, a minority of students who reject this system, either because they believe that they would not be able to "ride the waves" as easily as their better networked colleagues, or because of a principled stand of rejecting what they consider a corrupt system. These are people who often come from remote, poorly networked areas and communities, and who would struggle to compete for the favours of the establishment.

Much of this disgruntled minority—which might well be a majority in some parts of the country—is attracted to groups and organisations that reject the system as a whole. In the context of 2015 Afghanistan, this appears to mean radical Islamic groups of various denominations. These students group together nepotism, corruption, and westernisation in wholesale condemnation. No secular political ideology seems to be able to even remotely compete with the belief that a return to a strict implementation of Shari'a would guarantee a fairer and better-functioning society. Even the mainstream Islamist groups seem to struggle to offer viable alternatives; indeed, they have mostly been compromised from within the existing system. Their claims to be planning to install a genuinely "Islamic" state in the future sound hollow when considering that they have been part of government for the past 14 years and have hardly tried to make any progress in that direction. As the "western footprint" of the status quo is so strong, it is natural for disgruntled youth to turn toward rejectionist groups that want to purge every western influence from the system. Because these

groups also identify themselves as Islamic revivalists, many teachers with roots in the Islamist and fundamentalist parties that fought the 1980s and 1990s wars tend to underestimate the extent to which the new generation of radical Islamist and fundamentalist groups represent a threat to today's political system. The following statement by a teacher is typical of this mind-set:

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, and there is no risk in Islamic ideology [#61, teacher, Nangarhar].

In fact, the Afghan political system, which claims legitimacy from both the 1980s jihad and Islam, is ill-equipped to resist the pressure of groups calling for more Shari'a and less western influence

8.1 Policy recommendations

The ongoing radicalisation of high-school students has not yet reached a critical point, where it could contribute decisively to the destabilisation of the country. Rather than waiting for that to happen, the competent authorities should reconsider their educational policies and, first and foremost, their ban on political activities in high schools. If the ban were to be revoked, at least there would be a more level playing field in high schools, thus allowing a greater variety of parties and organisations to compete for the loyalty of the younger generations. To date, the ban has mostly been successful in keeping out moderate and progressive groups.

While the ban could easily be revoked, improving the quality of high school education is a much more complex task, given the sheer number of students enrolling every year. In the current economic environment, it is not likely that much funding will be available to be invested in improving educational levels. While this study does not deal with the issues relating to the selection of high school teachers and the incentives that could attract qualified teachers back into teaching, these are areas that the government could investigate as relatively affordable achievements. Unless something is done to contain the frustration of high school students, wider student mobilisation should be expected in the future.

9. Appendix

9.1 Survey Tables

Table 1A: Timing of political activities as witnessed by interviewees

Province	Question 2.2A: When did you start observing these signs of political activity?					Number of answers
	In the past month	In the past 2-3 months	In the past year	More than a year ago	No answer	
Zabul	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	85.7%	0.0%	23
Kandahar	0.0%	2.9%	20.0%	77.1%	0.0%	35
Helmand	0.0%	5.9%	5.9%	88.2%	0.0%	17
Ghazni	0.0%	0.0%	31.3%	50.0%	18.8%	16
Paktia	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	70.0%	22
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	81.3%	12.5%	16
Wardak	0.0%	5.0%	30.0%	45.0%	20.0%	20
Kabul districts	2.6%	25.6%	53.8%	20.5%	0.0%	40
Kabul city	0.0%	4.5%	36.4%	50.0%	9.1%	22
Kapisa	0.0%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	9.1%	12
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	16
Takhar	0.0%	30.0%	56.7%	13.3%	0.0%	30
Kunduz	0.0%	23.3%	53.3%	16.7%	6.7%	30
Baghlan	30.4%	21.7%	47.8%	30.4%	0.0%	30
Badakhshan	5.3%	47.4%	42.1%	10.5%	0.0%	21
Balkh	0.0%	39.3%	28.6%	0.0%	32.1%	22
Herat	0.0%	6.3%	18.8%	75.0%	0.0%	16
Kunar	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	81.3%	6.3%	16
Laghman	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	62.5%	25.0%	26
Nangarhar	0.0%	0.0%	19.0%	57.1%	23.8%	21
Rural schools	0.0%	12.7%	23.0%	54.0%	10.3%	126
Town schools	3.1%	16.2%	31.1%	44.3%	5.3%	227
City schools	0.0%	12.8%	25.6%	59.0%	2.6%	78
All schools	1.6%	14.6%	27.8%	49.8%	6.3%	431

Table 1B: Frequency of political activities as witnessed by interviewees

Province	Question 2.2B: How often did you observe cases of political activity?					Number of answers
	Just once	2-3 times	4-10 times	More than 10 times	No answer	
Zabul	9.5%	14.3%	4.8%	76.2%	0.0%	23
Kandahar	2.9%	2.9%	8.6%	85.7%	0.0%	35
Helmand	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	17
Ghazni	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%	62.5%	18.8%	16
Paktia	10.0%	0.0%	10.0%	80.0%	20.0%	22
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	87.5%	12.5%	16
Wardak	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%	50.0%	20.0%	20
Kabul districts	22.5%	35.0%	40.0%	2.5%	0.0%	40
Kabul city	0.0%	4.5%	31.8%	54.5%	9.1%	22
Kapisa	0.0%	18.2%	72.7%	9.1%	0.0%	12
Parwan	0.0%	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%	0.0%	16
Takhar	0.0%	20.0%	50.0%	30.0%	0.0%	30
Kunduz	0.0%	30.0%	36.7%	26.7%	6.7%	30
Baghlan	10.0%	30.0%	36.7%	23.3%	0.0%	30
Badakhshan	10.0%	25.0%	50.0%	20.0%	0.0%	21
Balkh	0.0%	25.0%	42.9%	0.0%	32.1%	22
Herat	0.0%	6.3%	18.8%	75.0%	0.0%	16
Kunar	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	87.5%	6.3%	16
Laghman	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	62.5%	31.3%	26
Nangarhar	0.0%	0.0%	19.0%	57.1%	23.8%	21

Rural schools	2.4%	10.3%	31.0%	48.4%	7.9%	126
Town schools	3.1%	15.8%	26.8%	49.1%	5.3%	227
City schools	1.3%	10.3%	25.6%	60.3%	2.6%	78
All schools	2.5%	13.2%	27.8%	50.9%	5.6%	431

Table 2A: Timing of political activities as heard by interviewees from third parties

Provinces	Question 2.4A: When did you start hearing about these signs of political activity?					Number of answers
	In the past month	In the past 2-3 months	In the past year	More than a year ago	No answer	
Zabul	0.0%	0.0%	21.7%	78.3%	0.0%	23
Kandahar	2.9%	0.0%	8.8%	91.2%	0.0%	35
Helmand	0.0%	5.9%	5.9%	88.2%	0.0%	17
Ghazni	0.0%	6.3%	31.3%	43.8%	18.8%	16
Paktia	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	20.0%	22
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	87.5%	0.0%	16
Wardak	0.0%	5.0%	30.0%	45.0%	20.0%	20
Kabul districts	5.3%	28.9%	50.0%	21.1%	0.0%	40
Kabul city	0.0%	0.0%	4.5%	27.3%	59.1%	22
Kapisa	0.0%	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	9.1%	12
Parwan	0.0%	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	0.0%	16
Takhar	0.0%	33.3%	60.0%	6.7%	0.0%	30
Kunduz	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%	10.0%	6.7%	30
Baghlan	0.0%	26.7%	56.7%	16.7%	0.0%	30
Badakhshan	5.0%	70.0%	20.0%	10.0%	0.0%	21
Balkh	0.0%	46.4%	28.6%	0.0%	25.0%	22
Herat	0.0%	0.0%	37.5%	56.3%	6.3%	16
Kunar	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	81.3%	6.3%	16
Laghman	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	75.0%	6.3%	26
Nangarhar	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%	21
Rural schools	0.8%	15.9%	26.2%	53.2%	4.0%	126
Town schools	1.8%	18.9%	32.5%	44.3%	2.6%	227
City schools	0.0%	15.4%	26.9%	55.1%	2.6%	78
All schools	1.2%	17.4%	29.6%	48.8%	3.0%	431

Table 2B: Frequency of political activities as heard by interviewees from third parties

Provinces	Question 2.4B: How often were cases of political activity observed?					Number of answers
	Just once	2-3 times	4-10 times	More than 10 times	No answer	
Zabul	4.3%	13.0%	8.7%	73.9%	0.0%	23
Kandahar	0.0%	5.7%	11.4%	82.9%	0.0%	35
Helmand	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	17
Ghazni	0.0%	18.8%	12.5%	50.0%	18.8%	16
Paktia	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	16.7%	22
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	81.3%	0.0%	16
Wardak	0.0%	15.0%	15.0%	50.0%	20.0%	20
Kabul districts	22.5%	37.5%	35.0%	5.0%	0.0%	40
Kabul city	9.1%	0.0%	4.5%	40.9%	45.5%	22
Kapisa	0.0%	18.2%	72.7%	0.0%	9.1%	12
Parwan	0.0%	44.4%	33.3%	11.1%	0.0%	16
Takhar	0.0%	20.0%	50.0%	30.0%	0.0%	30
Kunduz	0.0%	30.0%	36.7%	23.3%	6.7%	30
Baghlan	10.0%	33.3%	40.0%	16.7%	0.0%	30
Badakhshan	9.5%	23.8%	42.9%	19.0%	0.0%	21
Balkh	0.0%	39.3%	35.7%	0.0%	25.0%	22
Herat	0.0%	12.5%	25.0%	56.3%	6.3%	16
Kunar	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	87.5%	6.3%	16
Laghman	0.0%	6.3%	18.8%	68.8%	6.3%	26
Nangarhar	0.0%	0.0%	43.8%	87.5%	0.0%	21

Rural schools	1.6%	15.9%	23.0%	55.6%	4.0%	126
Town schools	1.3%	15.8%	30.7%	49.6%	2.6%	227
City schools	0.0%	15.4%	32.1%	50.0%	2.6%	78
All schools	1.2%	15.7%	28.7%	51.4%	3.0%	431

Table 3: Reported presence of political groups by typology

	Islamic groups	Ethnonationalist groups	Maoist and leftist groups	Groups derived from the militias of the civil wars	Liberal and democratic groups
Zabul	95.7%	18.2%	9.5%	81.0%	4.5%
Kandahar	80.0%	68.6%	40.0%	80.0%	5.8%
Helmand	88.2%	64.7%	47.1%	94.1%	5.9%
Ghazni	50.0%	12.5%	0.0%	75.0%	12.5%
Paktia	91.7%	41.7%	0.0%	58.3%	8.3%
Logar	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Wardak	80.0%	25.0%	0.0%	95.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	72.5%	5.0%	0.0%	87.5%	0.0%
Kabul city	90.9%	72.7%	45.5%	59.0%	54.5%
Kapisa	100.0%	9.1%	0.0%	81.8%	0.0%
Parwan	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Kunar	81.3%	50.0%	18.8%	50.0%	0.0%
Laghman	62.5%	31.3%	0.0%	81.3%	6.3%
Nangarhar	61.9%	57.1%	19.0%	47.6%	0.0%
Balkh	67.9%	7.1%	32.1%	75.0%	0.0%
Takhar	100.0%	100.0%	10.0%	100.0%	23.3%
Kunduz	90.0%	86.7%	3.3%	90.0%	10.0%
Baghlan	96.7%	96.7%	3.3%	100.0%	0.0%
Badakhshan	76.2%	71.4%	0.0%	90.5%	19.0%
Herat	81.3%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%	18.8%
Rural schools	77.8%	46.8%	16.7%	76.2%	6.3%
Town schools	84.2%	56.2%	14.5%	84.6%	9.2%
City schools	82.0%	44.9%	44.9%	47.4%	19.2%
All schools	81.9%	51.4%	20.6%	75.4%	10.2%

Table 4: Liberal and progressive groups active in schools

	Rights and Justice Party	Afghanistan 1400	Afghan Awareness and Analysis	Afghanistan Forward	Republican Party	Green Trend (Amrullah Saleh)	Others
Zabul	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kandahar	5.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Helmand	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Ghazni	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Paktia	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul city	36.4%	22.7%	18.2%	0.0%	31.8%	9.1%	4.5%
Wardak	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Laghman	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%
Nangarhar	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Takhar	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	0.0%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Kunduz	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Baghlan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Badakhshan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.6%	0.0%	14.3%
Balkh	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Herat	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	6.3%	18.8%
Rural schools	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%

Town schools	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%	4%	2%
City schools	13%	6%	5%	0%	10%	4%	3%
All schools	3.9%	1.6%	1.8%	0.5%	3.7%	2.5%	1.4%

Table 5: Islamic groups active in schools

	Hizb-i Islami	Jamiat-i Islah (Salafis)	Hizb-ut Tahrir	Taliban	Jundullah	Others
Zabul	65.2%	43.5%	4.3%	87.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kandahar	60.0%	14.3%	0.0%	68.6%	0.0%	5.7%
Helmand	88.2%	5.9%	0.0%	47.1%	0.0%	11.8%
Ghazni	25.0%	31.3%	50.0%	43.8%	0.0%	25.0%
Paktia	66.7%	0.0%	8.3%	83.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Logar	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	10.0%	60.0%	55.0%	15.0%	0.0%	15.0%
Kabul city	9.1%	59.1%	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	81.8%
Wardak	80.0%	20.0%	15.0%	40.0%	0.0%	2.5%
Kapisa	100.0%	18.2%	45.5%	45.5%	0.0%	54.5%
Parwan	66.7%	55.6%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	43.8%	75.0%	6.3%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Laghman	56.3%	6.3%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Nangarhar	47.6%	19.0%	0.0%	47.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Takhar	83.3%	80.0%	93.3%	23.3%	73.3%	13.3%
Kunduz	50.0%	66.7%	53.3%	40.0%	80.0%	66.7%
Baghlan	96.7%	46.7%	96.7%	26.7%	96.7%	20.0%
Badakhshan	33.3%	14.3%	71.4%	0.0%	71.4%	19.1%
Balkh	67.9%	10.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	60.7%
Herat	12.5%	12.5%	62.5%	43.8%	0.0%	6.3%
Rural schools	53.2%	27.8%	20.6%	45.2%	11.1%	14.3%
Town schools	63.2%	35.5%	35.5%	43.0%	28.1%	13.6%
City schools	34.6%	33.3%	24.4%	28.2%	0.0%	51.3%
All schools	55.1%	32.9%	29.2%	41.0%	18.1%	20.6%

Table 6: Ethno-nationalist groups active in high schools

	Settam-i Milli (SAZA)	Tehrik-i Milli (Ismail Yun)	Afghan Millat	Kangar-i Milli	Others
Zabul	0.0%	4.8%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Kandahar	0.0%	0.0%	68.6%	0.0%	2.9%
Helmand	0.0%	5.9%	58.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Ghazni	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%
Paktia	0.0%	0.0%	41.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Logar	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	0.0%	2.5%
Kabul city	13.6%	4.5%	45.5%	22.7%	45.5%
Wardak	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	0.0%	37.5%	43.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Laghman	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Nangarhar	0.0%	38.1%	57.1%	4.8%	0.0%
Balkh	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Takhar	96.7%	10.0%	90.0%	10.0%	16.7%
Kunduz	80.0%	6.7%	76.7%	20.0%	50.0%
Baghlan	66.7%	0.0%	83.3%	0.0%	3.3%
Badakhshan	57.1%	0.0%	4.8%	33.3%	23.8%
Herat	6.3%	0.0%	6.3%	0.0%	12.5%
Rural schools	13.5%	4.8%	41.3%	2.4%	8.7%
Town schools	29.4%	6.7%	45.2%	8.0%	12.3%
City schools	3.8%	6.4%	38.5%	6.4%	16.7%
All schools	20.2%	60.9%	42.9%	60.8%	12.0%

Table 7: Leftist groups active in schools

	Maoist (Shula-i Jawid and derived groups)	Groups derived from Khalq and Parcham
Zabul	0.0%	9.5%
Kandahar	5.7%	34.3%
Helmand	11.8%	41.1%
Ghazni	0.0%	0.0%
Paktia	0.0%	0.0%
Logar	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul city	40.9%	63.6%
Wardak	0.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	0.0%	0.0%
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	0.0%	18.8%
Laghman	0.0%	0.0%
Nangarhar	0.0%	19.0%
Takhar	0.0%	10.0%
Kunduz	0.0%	3.3%
Baghlan	0.0%	3.3%
Badakhshan	0.0%	0.0%
Balkh	0.0%	32.1%
Herat	12.5%	0.0%
Rural schools	0.8%	15.9%
Town schools	2.3%	13.6%
City schools	14.1%	39.7%
All schools	37.5%	19.0%

Table 8: Groups derived from the civil wars that are active in schools

	Jamiat-i islami	Hizb-i Islami	Hizb-i Wahdat	Junbush-i Milli	Harakat-i Islami (Mohseni, Anwari)
Zabul	61.9%	19.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%
Kandahar	60.0%	71.4%	0.0%	2.9%	22.9%
Helmand	70.6%	88.2%	17.6%	11.8%	5.9%
Ghazni	68.8%	56.3%	56.3%	0.0%	62.5%
Paktia	25.0%	58.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Logar	31.3%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	82.5%	7.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul city	27.3%	9.1%	18.2%	0.0%	22.7%
Wardak	2.5%	95.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	81.8%	54.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Parwan	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	6.3%	43.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Laghman	18.8%	81.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Nangarhar	19.0%	47.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Takhar	90.0%	70.0%	40.0%	96.7%	0.0%
Kunduz	83.3%	33.3%	20.0%	83.3%	0.0%
Baghlan	60.0%	96.7%	20.0%	6.7%	0.0%
Badakhshan	66.7%	42.9%	4.8%	38.1%	0.0%
Balkh	75.0%	67.9%	57.1%	75.0%	35.7%
Herat	93.8%	25.0%	75.0%	12.5%	18.8%
Rural schools	50.0%	64.3%	11.1%	20.6%	15.0%
Town schools	64.0%	64.9%	14.0%	27.6%	10.1%
City schools	55.1%	48.7%	30.8%	23.1%	33.3%
All schools	58.3%	61.8%	16.2%	24.7%	15.7%

Table 9: Presence of civil society organisations

	NGOs	Women's rights groups	Religious Associations (Tablighi Jamaat)	Others
Zabul	81.0%	0.0%	57.1%	0.0%
Kandahar	97.1%	54.3%	34.3%	2.9%
Helmand	100.0%	82.4%	52.9%	0.0%
Ghazni	100.0%	62.5%	43.8%	0.0%
Paktia	83.3%	83.3%	8.3%	0.0%
Logar	37.5%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kabul city	27.3%	22.7%	40.1%	22.7%
Wardak	55.0%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	90.9%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%
Parwan	77.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kunar	43.8%	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%
Laghman	81.3%	43.8%	31.3%	0.0%
Nangarhar	95.2%	81.0%	14.3%	4.8%
Takhar	3.3%	3.3%	93.3%	3.3%
Kunduz	3.3%	0.0%	86.7%	3.3%
Baghlan	0.0%	0.0%	76.7%	10.0%
Badakhshan	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	4.8%
Balkh	71.4%	0.0%	21.4%	0.0%
Herat	100.0%	68.8%	81.3%	100.0%
Rural schools	56.3%	25.4%	32.5%	1.6%
Town schools	51.8%	27.6%	52.2%	2.6%
City schools	73.1%	39.7%	38.5%	6.4%
All schools	57.0%	29.1%	44.0%	29.9%

Table 10: Teaching staff and political proselytising

	Religious teachers	Dari and Pashto teachers	History teachers	Science teachers	Others	Number of answers
Zabul	28.6%	14.3%	19.0%	4.8%	0.0%	23
Kandahar	31.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	5.8%	35
Helmand	52.9%	23.5%	11.8%	11.8%	5.9%	17
Ghazni	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16
Paktia	8.3%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	22
Logar	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16
Kabul districts	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20
Kabul city	50.0%	13.6%	18.2%	0.0%	22.7%	40
Wardak	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	22
Kapisa	45.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16
Kunar	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30
Laghman	31.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30
Nangarhar	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	30
Takhar	90.0%	33.3%	30.0%	0.0%	6.7%	21
Kunduz	53.3%	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	22
Baghlan	60.0%	36.7%	0.0%	13.3%	0.0%	16
Badakhshan	90.5%	4.8%	4.8%	14.3%	4.8%	16
Balkh	14.3%	14.3%	7.1%	0.0%	3.6%	26
Herat	87.5%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	75.0%	21
Rural schools	34.9%	13.5%	6.3%	0.8%	2.4%	126
Town schools	43.4%	12.7%	9.2%	1.8%	3.5%	227
City schools	33.3%	9.0%	9.0%	1.3%	12.8%	78
All schools	39.1%	12.3%	8.3%	14.2%	45.6%	431

Table 11: Types of political activity reported

	Distributing leaflets and political literature	Political meetings	Protest	Debates	Physical clashes	Recruitment	Graffiti	Students challenging teachers	Verbal arguments
Zabul	13.0%	34.8%	0.0%	87.0%	13.0%	69.6%	13.0%	4.3%	65.2%
Kandahar	8.6%	48.6%	0.0%	100.0%	8.6%	94.3%	0.0%	0.0%	94.3%
Helmand	17.6%	29.4%	5.9%	100.0%	5.9%	52.9%	0.0%	0.0%	84.2%
Ghazni	18.8%	18.8%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	37.5%
Paktia	25.0%	8.3%	0.0%	100.0%	8.3%	66.7%	8.3%	0.0%	66.7%
Logar	12.5%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	6.3%	12.6%	0.0%	43.8%
Kabul districts	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	42.5%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Kabul city	13.6%	22.7%	18.2%	100.0%	13.6%	77.3%	9.1%	11.0%	72.7%
Wardak	10.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	30.0%	5.0%	0.0%	80.0%
Kapisa	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	90.9%	0.0%	36.4%	90.9%	27.3%	90.9%
Parwan	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	22.2%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Kunar	37.5%	31.3%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	18.8%	0.0%	6.3%	75.0%
Laghman	38.5%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	56.3%
Nangarhar	33.3%	28.6%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	81.0%
Takhar	33.3%	13.3%	0.0%	96.7%	26.7%	90.0%	96.7%	20.0%	93.3%
Kunduz	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	90.0%	6.7%	56.7%	3.3%	10.0%	96.7%
Baghlan	46.7%	0.0%	10.0%	100.0%	0.0%	56.7%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Badakhshan	19.0%	4.8%	0.0%	100.0%	14.3%	76.2%	81.0%	14.3%	100.0%
Balkh	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	82.1%	14.3%	3.6%	60.7%	28.6%	85.7%
Herat	12.5%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0%	25.0%	100.0%	25.0%	62.5%	100.0%
Rural schools	19.8%	28.6%	0.0%	96.8%	6.3%	46.8%	30.2%	6.3%	19.8%
Town schools	23.2%	19.3%	1.3%	96.9%	7.9%	56.1%	47.8%	6.6%	85.5%
City schools	25.6%	25.6%	9.0%	96.2%	12.8%	50.0%	23.1%	30.8%	74.4%
All schools	22.6	23.2	2.3	96.7	8.3	52.3	38.2	10.9	64.3

Table 12: Topics of political debates

	Political debates about elections	Women's rights	Islam versus westernisation	Foreign presence in Afghanistan	Language issues (e.g., Pashto vs Dari)	Political corruption	Other
Zabul	82.6%	43.5%	65.2%	91.3%	4.3%	26.1%	0.0%
Kandahar	94.3%	45.7%	48.6%	91.4%	5.7%	31.4%	0.0%
Helmand	100.0%	70.6%	47.1%	100.0%	23.5%	23.5%	0.0%
Ghazni	100.0%	62.5%	12.5%	75.0%	18.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Paktia	100.0%	8.3%	25.0%	100.0%	16.7%	16.7%	25.0%
Logar	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	93.8%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%
Kabul districts	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	42.5%	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Kabul city	100%	23%	68%	82%	59%	77%	100%
Wardak	100.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Kapisa	81.8%	36.4%	0.0%	18.2%	0.0%	90.9%	0.0%
Parwan	100.0%	0.0%	11.1%	100.0%	33.3%	88.9%	0.0%
Kunar	100.0%	31.3%	6.3%	100.0%	6.3%	12.5%	0.0%
Laghman	100.0%	25.0%	6.3%	100.0%	6.3%	12.5%	0.0%
Nangarhar	100.0%	38.1%	0.0%	95.2%	14.3%	14.3%	9.5%
Takhar	100.0%	23.3%	100.0%	93.3%	90.0%	70.0%	3.3%
Kunduz	100.0%	26.7%	63.3%	70.0%	70.0%	83.3%	3.3%
Baghlan	100.0%	6.7%	96.7%	100.0%	90.0%	96.7%	0.0%
Badakhshan	100.0%	14.3%	85.7%	90.5%	38.1%	90.5%	0.0%
Balkh	100.0%	35.7%	0.0%	3.6%	75.0%	71.4%	0.0%
Herat	100.0%	67.8%	87.5%	93.8%	50.0%	93.8%	87.5%
Rural schools	96.0%	28.6%	30.2%	79.4%	29.4%	41.3%	1.6%
Town schools	96.9%	26.8%	50.0%	88.5%	37.1%	53.1%	3.1%
City schools	97.4%	41.0%	37.1%	60.3%	46.2%	57.7%	38.5%
All schools	96.7	29.9	41.9	80.8	36.5	50.5	9.1

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