WOMEN'S PEACE BRIEF

August 2020 to April 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August, 539 women and girls aged 18-35 in Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar were polled on the topic of Reduction in Violence.

- Half (50.09%) of the respondents said they were informed that a reduction in violence had not been committed to by the Taliban before the start of intra-Afghan talks.
- Majority (80.33%) of the respondents felt that sustainable peace could not be achieved if the Taliban did not agree on a reduction in violence.
- A little over fifty percent (58.07%) of the respondents said they had not experienced a reduction in violence in their communities.
- In terms of which aspects of the process surrounding a possible reduction in violence was not clear to them, 29.49% said the agreement reached, 24.48% said implications at the sub-national level, and 19.48% said they did not have clarity on the actors involved in the process.

In September, 1,059 women and girls aged 18-35 in Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Helmand, Takhar, Bamiyan, and Kandahar were polled on Exchange of Prisoners between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

- Three fourth (75%) of the respondents said they were aware of the agreement between the Afghan government and the Taliban on the exchange of prisoners.
- Three fourth (76%) of the respondents agreed with the Afghan government's release of 5000 Taliban prisoners before the start of talks.
- Majority (63%) of the respondents felt that the exchange of prisoners will not lead to a reduction in violence.
- An absolute majority (97%) of the respondents said they were concerned about Taliban fighters returning to the battle-field after being released.

In November, 1,700 women and girls aged 18-60 in Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Helmand, Takhar, Bamiyan, and Kandahar were polled on Hanafi Jurisprudence Acting as the Basis for Settling Disagreements During Negotiations.

- Slightly more than half (55.90%) of the respondents said they were aware that Intra-Afghan Talks had slowed down during discussions on Hanafi Jurisprudence becoming a point of reference for settling disagreements in the negotiations.
- When asked if they agreed with the Republic Negotiation Team's suggestion that Hanafi Jurisprudence should be a point of reference to settle disagreements but only if the right of other religious communities were also recognized without any discrimination, a majority (57.4%) agreed.
- A significant number (64.5%) of the respondents expressed concerns about Hanafi Jurisprudence being agreed upon as a point of reference to settle disagreements, they felt this could potentially jeopardize women's fundamental rights as denoted in the Afghan Constitution.

- Over half (66.3%) of the respondent also said that the Taliban negotiation team should specify the areas and topics they think Hanafi jurisprudence can become a point of reference for and in where it cannot.

In January, 2,101 women and girls aged 18-35 in Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, Helmand, Takhar, Bamiyan, and Kandahar were polled on Disputes over Guiding Principles in Intra-Afghan Talks.

- 63.25% of respondents said they were aware of the Taliban's demand for the US-Taliban Agreement to serve as the principal framework for negotiations and felt this was a key impediment to the peace talks.
- Slightly less than half (48.1%) of the respondents said they were aware that four guiding principles were agreed upon by the negotiating teams on 2nd December 2020, which included the US-Taliban Agreement.
- Over half (69.9%) of the respondents said they were concerned that accepting the US-Taliban Agreement as a guiding document could jeopardize two decades of gains for Afghan women.
- Almost half (48.73%) of the respondents felt that the other three principles— demands of the Afghan people for sustainable peace, commitment of the negotiating parties to a sustainable peace, and demands of the UN to ensure a durable peace— were not sufficient enough to safeguard women's rights.

In March, 2,212 women and girls aged 18-60 in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar, Herat, Daikundi, Panjshir and Jawzjan were polled on a Comprehensive Ceasefire in Afghanistan.

- Among the respondents, 27.22% said they understood a ceasefire as being the stopping of armed violence, 15.78% defined it as a reduction in violence, 12.34% said it meant a temporary cessation of all hostilities and 41% felt it denoted a mixture of all of the above.
- In order to ensure that a ceasefire contributes to the broader peace process, almost all respondents (99.5%) said a formal commitment on a mechanism to help parties resolve disputes that could arise during its implementation should be included within the ceasefire agreement.
- A large majority (98.6%) of the respondents agreed that women and civil society should be involved in the monitoring of a ceasefire.
- 34.04% of respondents said that civil society organizations should be part of a ceasefire oversight commission, while 33.63% said provincial government institutions and only 2.62% said local Taliban figures.

In April, 2,500 women and girls aged 18-60 in Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar Bamiyan, Kandahar, Daikundi, Panjshir, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunar, and Paktia were polled on Transitional Government.

- Over half (69.4%) of the respondents felt a ceasefire agreement should be enforced before the establishment of a Transitional Government.
- Three fourths (73.44%) of the respondents said elections should take place to identify the president of a Transitional Government while 14.96% said the international community should select the president.
- Half (54.24%) of the respondents believed power should be centralized within a Transitional Government while 15.24% felt it should be decentralized.
- 76.4% of the respondents said that 40-50% of the Transitional Government should be occupied by women if it is to be considered inclusive.

BACKGROUND

DROPS, founded in 2014 in Kabul, is an interdisciplinary and independent research-oriented non-governmental organization. Committed to strengthening the values of inclusivity in Afghanistan, DROPS argues that indigenous research that is bottom-up, locally rooted and representative of all voices in society, particularly women and girls should be at the center of all developmental efforts. In early 2020, DROPS developed the idea for BISHNAW with the goal of increasing the number and diversity of women's voices feeding into the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks in Doha, Qatar. BISHNAW ensures that the process of listening to Afghan women is not seen as a one-off event, but an integral part of the peace dialogue and negotiations. The initial project used a community-based approach, led by BISHNAW staff, in collaboration with women leaders from all sectors, to regularly capture the views of women in the provinces using mixed methods research tools, including surveys and focus groups.

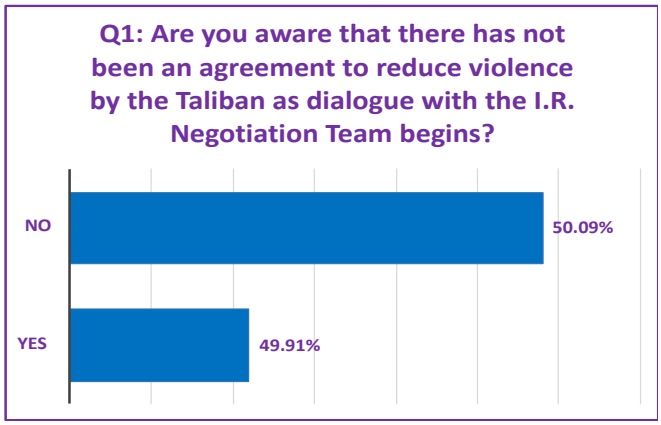
In August 2020, the first BISHNAW study was carried out in Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar provinces on the potential to commit to a Reduction in Violence by the Taliban before the start of Intra-Afghan talks. Since then, nine rounds of research have been carried out from August 2020 to July 2021, with six of the initial survey included in this report covering an additional 13 provinces.

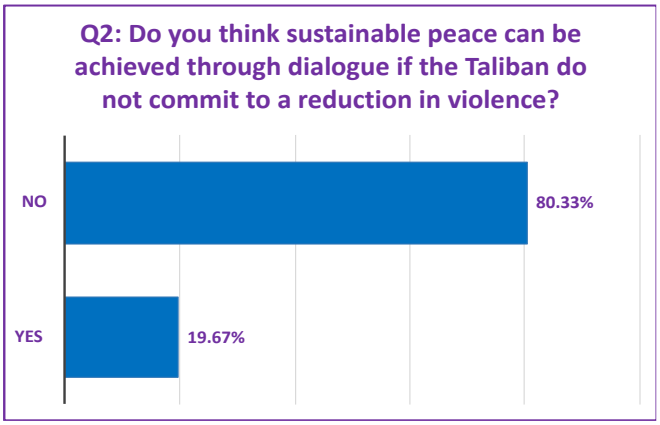
METHODOLOGY

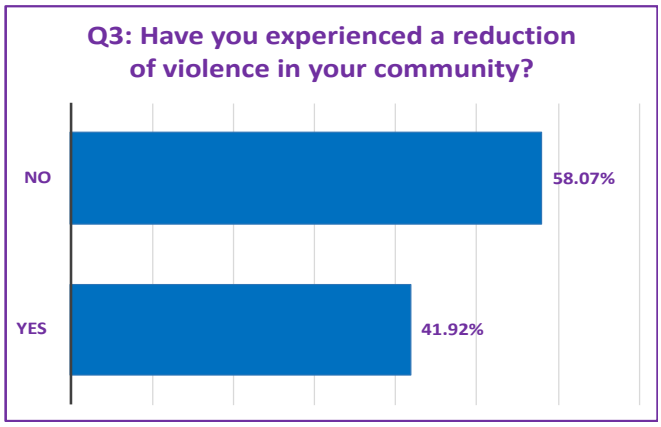
BISHNAW is a digital initiative that operates in 16 provinces in Afghanistan. The project combines a community-based approach with digital survey tools to capture the experiences and opinions of women at the sub-national level in Afghanistan in 'real-time.' The methodology takes into consideration the Afghan context and was designed to allow for a more diverse range of women to participate in the research than in traditional research undertaken in Afghanistan. Women who are not able to travel or face mobility restrictions tend to be left out of community feedback processes. As a result, their experiences are often not considered in the policy discussions. BISHNAW's digital research tools were created to facilitate the participation of excluded and vulnerable women and to bring these voices to the forefront of policy processes. The findings from the data collected are made available in a timely, systematic, and standardized manner to a range of official stakeholders and the public in an endeavor to ensure women's views can inform international policy processes and decisions. The project employs three research tools: a tele-survey system, face-to-face shorthand surveys and focus groups.

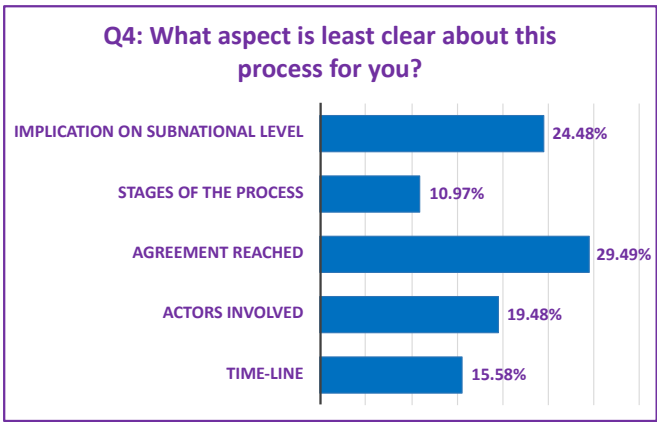
ANALYSIS OF PROVINCIAL FINDINGS

1. Reduction in Violence









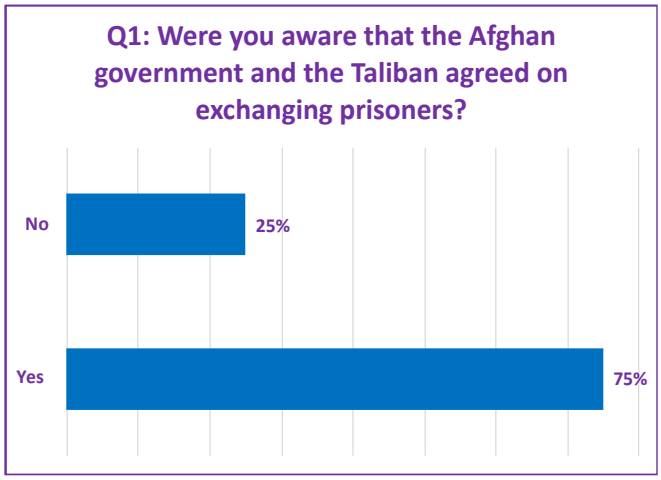
It was envisioned that soon after the US-Taliban Agreement was signed (28th February 2020), the Taliban would sit down with the Afghan government to start negotiations while keeping violence low. The deal stipulated that the Taliban would not conduct terrorist attacks against the U.S. homeland or assets, nor allow territory it controls to be used for external terrorism against the US and its allies. In return, the US would withdraw all its forces from the country by May 2021, starting with the withdrawal of 5,600 troops by July 2020. Unwritten in this deal was the hope that the Taliban would maintain a significant reduction in violence during the withdrawal period and as it starts negotiations with the government. However, the Taliban claim they made no such 'oral' deal and in fact said they had stipulated before the signing of the Agreement that it had no intensions of reducing violence while negotiating.

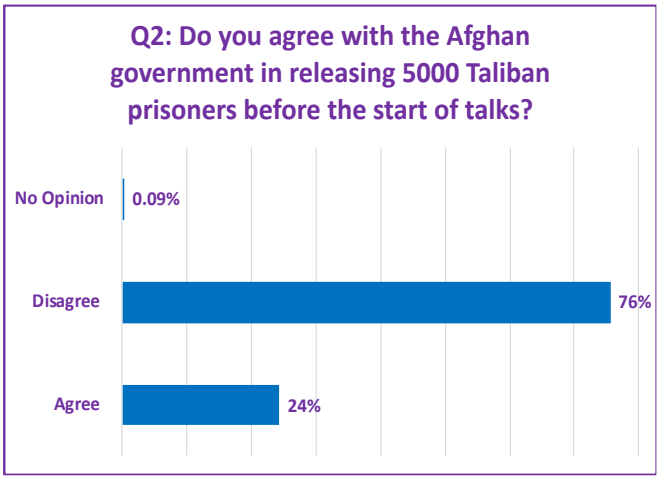
According to the majority (80.33%) of the 539[1] respondents surveyed in Herat, Balkh and Nangarhar, sustainable peace cannot not be achieved through dialogue if the Taliban do not commit to a reduction in violence. Half (50.09%) of the respondents said they were aware that the Taliban had not committed to reducing violence before joining the Intra-Afghan

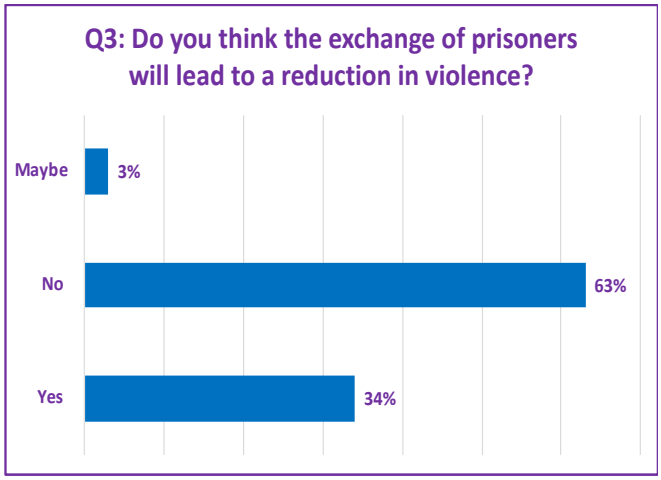
[1] Between 15 to 31 August (2020), BISHNAW surveyed 539 respondents in Herat, Kandahar and Nangarhar. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.

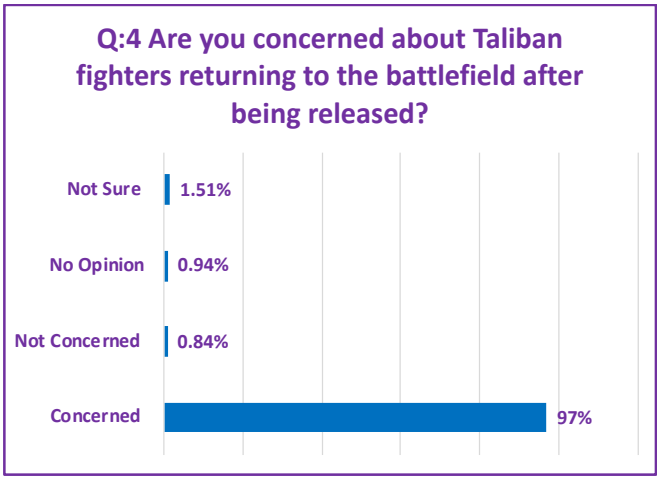
Talks. But when asked if they had experienced a reduction in violence in their communities post the US-Taliban Agreement, a significant number 41.92% said yes while a little over fifty percent (58.07%) said no. Additionally, when asked what aspects were not clear to them surrounding a possible process reduction 29.49% said its implications at the sub-national level, 19.48% said the actors that would be involved in this process and 15.58% said the time-line that would be proposed.

2. Exchange of Prisoners









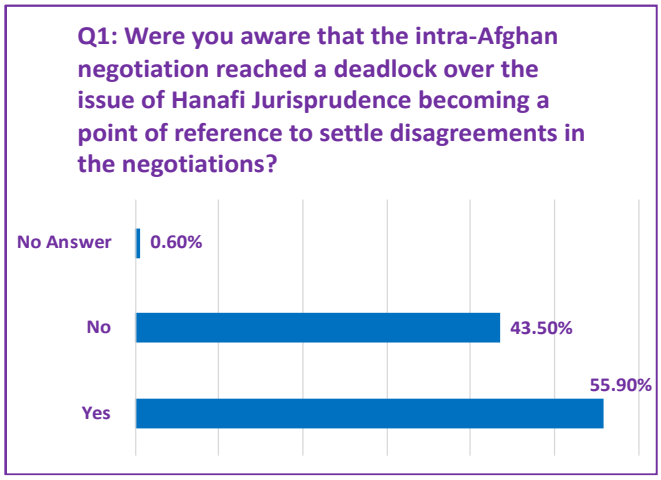
Between May and June 2020, the Afghan government and the Taliban began an exchange of prisoners. The Afghan government agreed to release 5000 Taliban prisoners in exchange for 1000 Afghan forces and civilian government personnel held by the Taliban.[2] After the US-Taliban Agreement (29th February 2020), the exchange of prisoners was considered the second most important step to kick-start direct negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. By early August (2020), the Afghan governed had released 4600 Taliban prisoners, but withheld releasing the remaining 400 as they were accused of involvement in deadly and high-profiled attacks. To settle the dispute over the

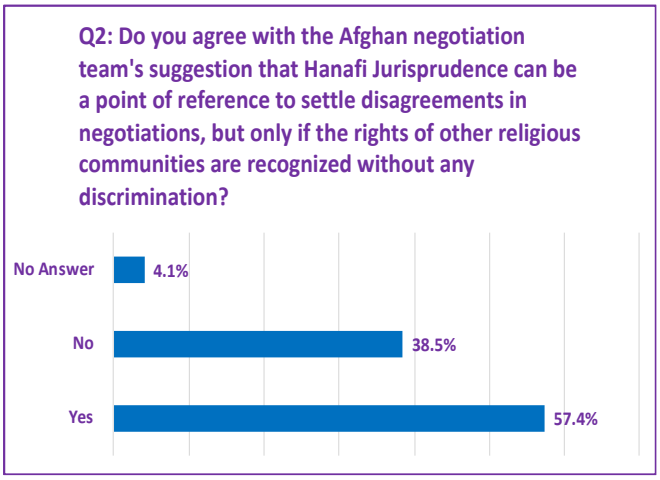
[2] "Ghani Signs Decree to Release Taliban Prisoners," Tolonews. 11 March 2020. https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-signs-decree-release-taliban-prisoners

remaining 400 Taliban prisoners, President Ghani invoked the Constitution and convened a Loya Jirga which could give him the mandate to release the remaining prisoners if attendees reached consensus. Viewing it as the last obstacle in commencing direct negotiations between the Taliban[3] and the Afghan government, the Jirga in its 9th August Resolution approved release of the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners.

A majority (97%) of the 1059[4] respondents surveyed in Herat, Balkh and Nangarhar, Helmand, Takhar, Bamiyan, Kandahar were concerned that Taliban fighters would return to the battlefield upon their release. Three fourths (75%) of the respondents also mentioned that they were of the agreement to exchange of prisoners. Furthermore, when asked if they felt the exchange could lead to a reduction in violence, 63% said no while only (34%) said yes. These views were further reinforced by 76% of the respondents who said they did not agree with the Afghan government's decision to release the 5000 Taliban prisoners before the start of Intra-Afghan Talks. This suggested that respondents felt that the exchange of prisoners should only have been discussed once Intra-Afghan Talks had started and not treated as a condition to kick-start talks.

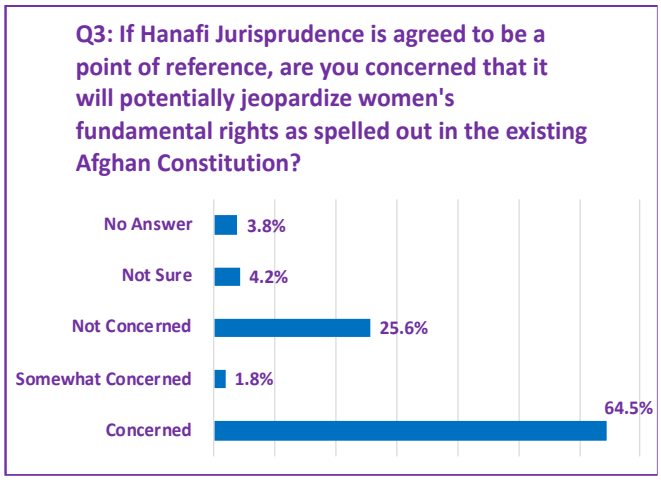
3. Hanafi Jurisprudence as Basis for Settling Disagreements During Negotiations

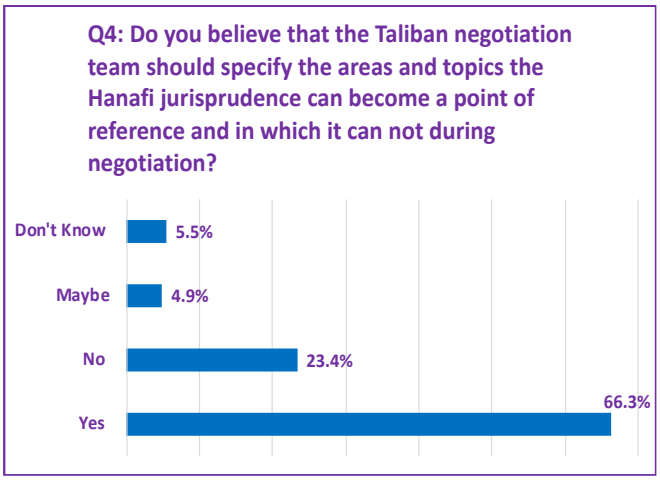




[3] Thomas Ruttig, Obaid Ali, and Ali Yawar Adili, "Doors Opened for Direct Talks with the Taleban: The results of the Loya Jirga on prisoners and peace." 12 August 2020. Afghanistan Analysts Network. https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/kabul-opens-door-for-peace-talks-the-results-of-the-loya-jirga-on-prisoners-and-peace/

[4] Between 03 to 24 September (2020), BISHNAW surveyed 1059 respondents in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar and Herat. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.



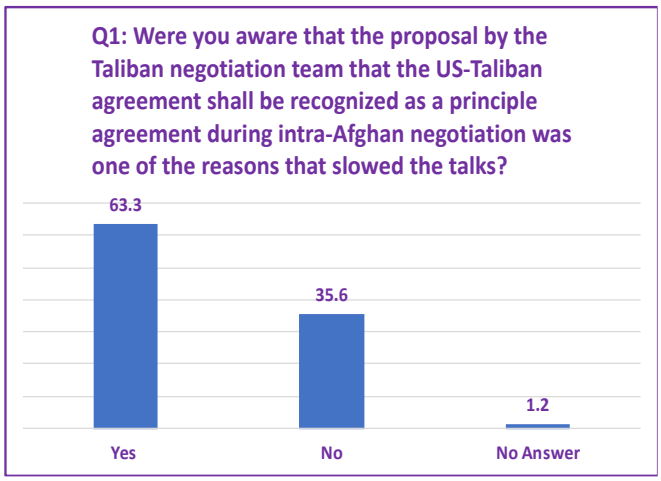


In the first round of Intra-Afghan Talks in Doha, discussions over the rules of procedures were held and one point of contention that sparked intense disagreement was a proposal by the Taliban that Hanafi Jurisprudence should be made a point of reference to settle disagreements that arises during talks. The Republic Negotiation Team opposed the idea stating it was discriminatory toward followers of other sects, and proposed that Hanafi Jurisprudence could be a source of reference but that the rights, religious principles, and private affairs of other religious minorities should also be recognized without any discriminations. In response, the Taliban told media outlets that the religious rights of other minorities, particularly those of the Shia community, will be respected in their proposition. However, this failed to calm rising concerns among the public and civil society actors who contemplated the implications such a decision could have on the existing Constitution which in its second chapter covers the fundamental rights and duties of all citizens.

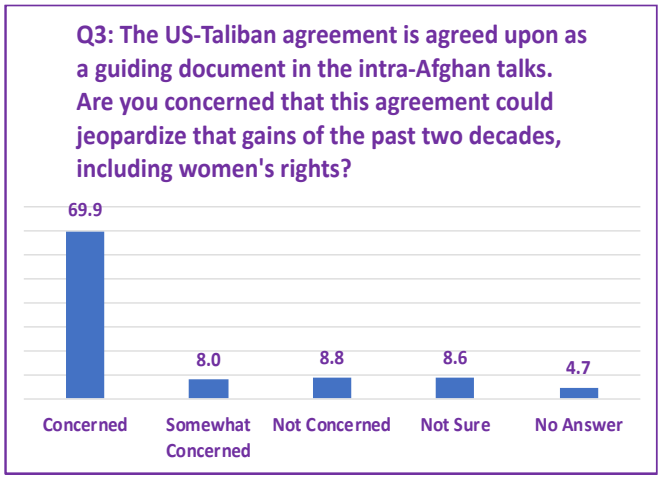
Over half (64.5%) of the 1700[5] respondents surveyed in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar and Herat felt that this decision, if agreed upon, could potentially jeopardize the fundamental rights of women protected in the Constitution. Only one fourth (25.6%) said they were not concerned and even a small portion (4.2%) said they were not sure. Additionally, when asked if they agreed with the Republic Negotiation Team's proposal to have Hanafi Jurisprudence as a point of reference to settle disagreements in negotiations provided that the rights of other religious communities were also recognized without any discrimination, a majority (57.4%) agreed with this proposal while 38.5% did not. When asked if the Taliban should make clear the areas and topics where they feel Hanafi Jurisprudence could be applied and where it could not, a majority (66.3%) said yes such clarity should be provided while one fifth (23.4%) felt this was not required. Interestingly, unlike other issues that were discussed, or had created contention among the negotiating parties in Doha, this issue and the deadlock it had created was one that a significant number of (43.50%) respondents said they had little awareness about.

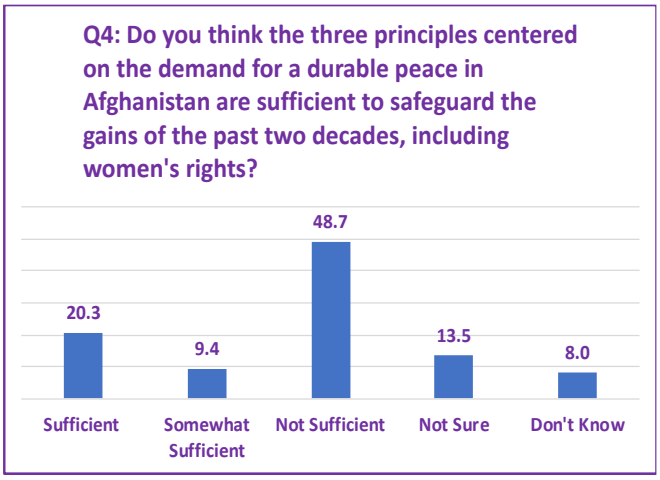
[5] Between 03 to 25 November (2020), BISHNAW surveyed 1700 respondents in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar and Herat. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.

4. Disputes over Guiding Principles in Intra-Afghan Talks









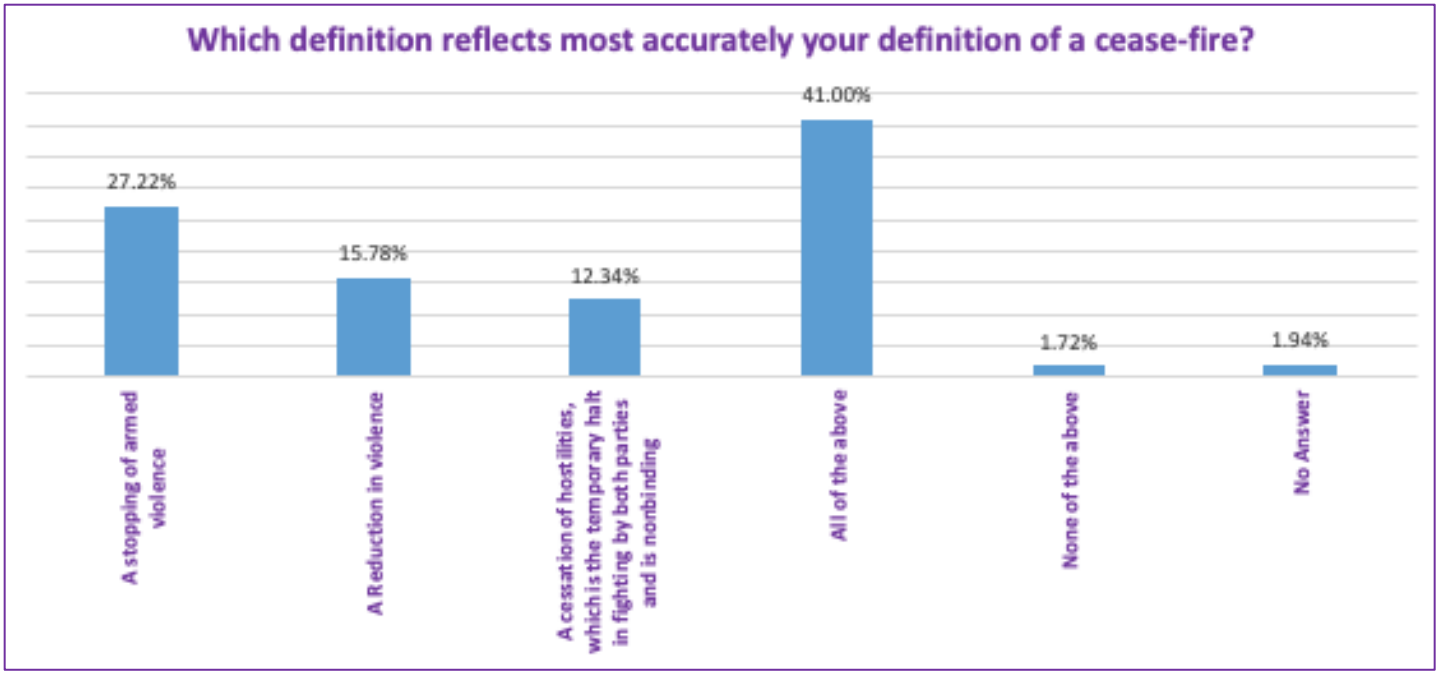
Disputes over guiding principles in Intra-Afghan Talks was a key issue that slowed down the pace of talks in the first phase of negotiations. The Taliban Negotiating team wanted the US-Taliban Agreement to be recognized as a principle document during talks, while the Republic Negotiating Team proposed four alternatives as guiding principles: (1) if the US-Taliban Agreement is recognized as a principal agreement, so should the tripartite declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and NATO, (2) neither the US-Taliban Agreement nor the Tripartite Declaration should be the basis for negotiations, rather the negotiations should be furthered on the basis of the Consultative Loya Jirga Declaration, (3) the national interests of Afghanistan should be the basis for negotiations, and (4) reference to Quran and Hadith to resolve disagreements during negotiations.[6] Eventually, the prolonged discussions culminated in four guiding

[6] The proposals by The Republic Negotiating Team was: (1) if the US-Taliban agreement is recognized as a principal agreement, so should the tripartite declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the United States, and NATO, (2) neither the US-Taliban agreement nor the Tripartite Declaration should be the basis for negotiations, rather the negotiations should be furthered on the basis of the Consultative Loya Jirga declaration, (3) national interests of Afghanistan should be the basis for negotiations, and (4) reference to Quran and Hadith to resolve disagreements during negotiations.

principles that were agreed upon on 02 December 2020[7]: (1) the US-Taliban Agreement signed on February 29, 2020; (2) the demand of the Afghan people for a sustainable peace; (3) commitment of the negotiating parties to a sustainable peace; (4) demands of the United Nations for a durable peace in Afghanistan.

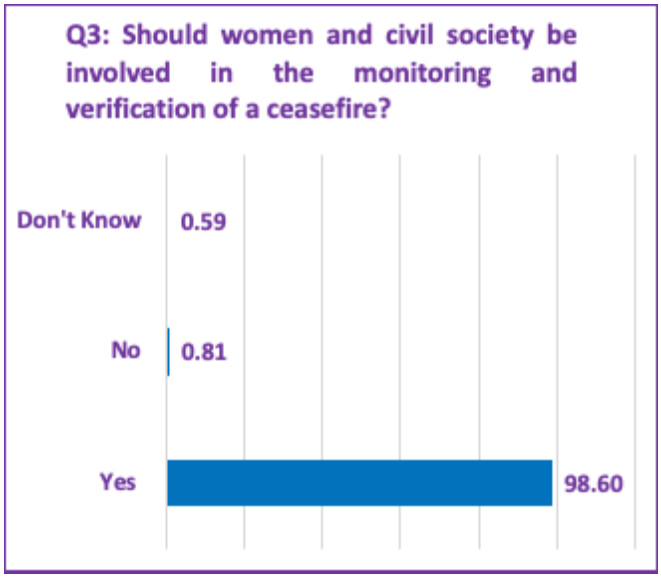
Close to half (48.1%) of the 2101[8] respondents in Herat, Takhar, Balkh, Bamiyan, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Helmand, said they were aware that the negotiating parties had agreed on these four principles while an almost equal number (48.4%) said they were not. But when asked if they were aware that discussions on these principles were the reason that slowed the pace of talks, a majority (63.25%) said yes while 35.6% said no. A majority (69.9%) said they were concerned that the US-Taliban Agreement was made as one of the guiding principles and felt this could jeopardize the gains of the past two decades. Furthermore, when asked if the three principles namely demand of the Afghan people for a sustainable peace, commitment of the negotiating parties to a sustainable peace, and demands of the United Nations for a durable peace in Afghanistan were sufficient enough to safeguard the gains of the last two decades, close to half (48.73%) said they were not while one fifth (20.3%) said they were sufficient.

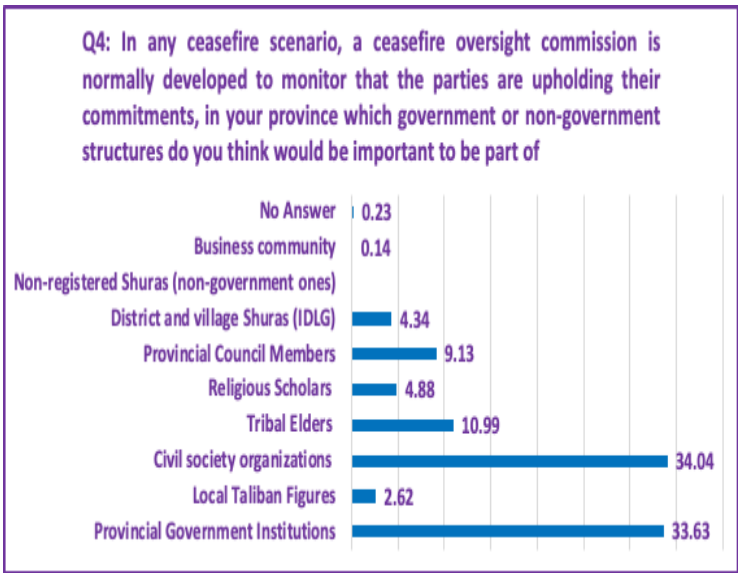
5. A Comprehensive Ceasefire in Afghanistan



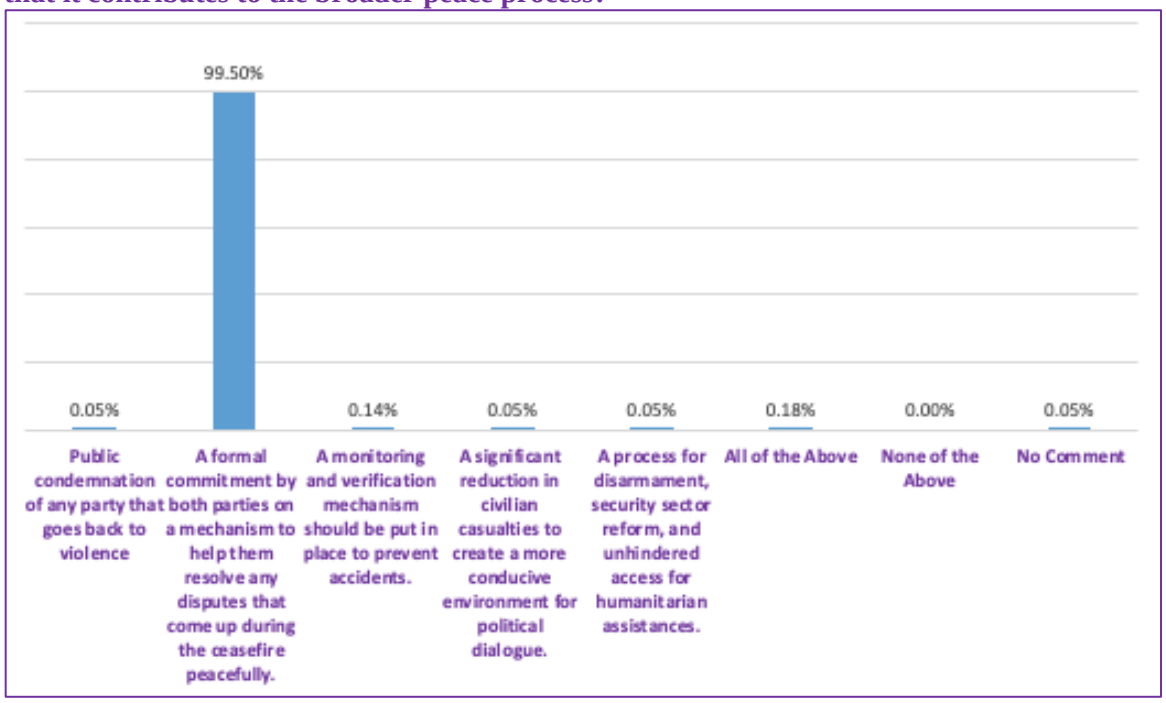
[7] Ali Yawar Adili, "Intra-Afghan Talks (1): Rules of procedure agreed, but still no agenda as talks resume." Afghanistan Analysts Network, 03 January 2021. https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/intra-afghan-talks-1-rules-of-procedure-agreed-but-still-no-agenda-as-talks-resume/

[8] Between 06 to 28 January (2021), BISHNAW surveyed 2101 respondents in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar and Herat. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.





Q2: In your opinion, which provisions should be included in a ceasefire agreement between the parties to ensure that it contributes to the broader peace process?



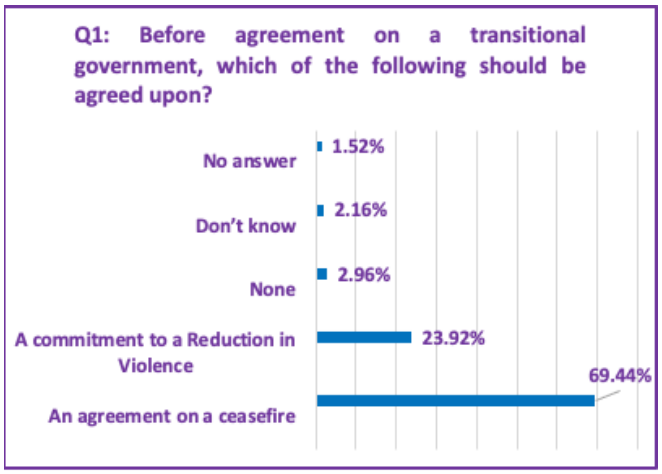
Since the start of Intra-Afghan Talks in Doha, the issue of a comprehensive ceasefire had been a key topic of discussion. The Republic Negotiating Team has long insisted that a ceasefire should be enforced as a prelude to talks while the Taliban stated that a ceasefire should be treated as an item on the agenda for talks. Moreover, there is no official definition provided by either of the parties on what could constitute a reduction in violence or a comprehensive ceasefire. Therefore, with no discussion or commitment made by either party towards a ceasefire and no clear definition of what it could constitute, civil

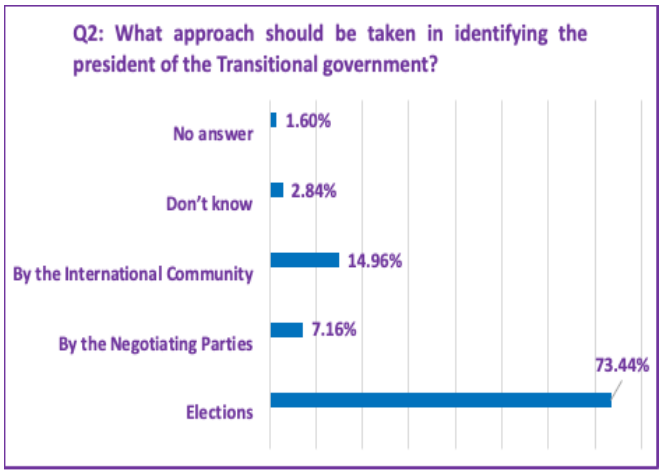
society actors are deeply concerned about what this could mean for civilian casualties, how a ceasefire or reduction in violence could be treated, implemented or monitored if, and when, it was agreed upon.

In the absence of a definition of a ceasefire by the parties, BISHNAW asked 2212[9] respondents in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar, Herat, Daikundi, Panjshir, Farah, Faryab, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunar, Paktia and Jawzjan which definition of a ceasefire most accurately reflected their understanding of it and a quarter (27.22%) of the respondents said they believed it meant a stopping of armed violence, 15.78% said it was a reduction in violence, 12.34% said it was a temporary cessation of all hostilities, and 41% felt it was a mix of all of the above.

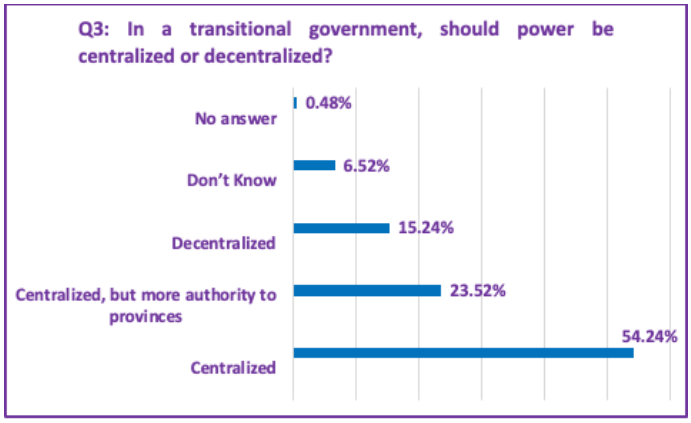
When asked which provisions should be included in a ceasefire agreement to ensure that it contributed to a broader peace process, almost all of the respondents (99.5%) said a formal commitment on a mechanism to help parties peacefully resolve disputes that arise during the implementation of the ceasefire. Furthermore, when asked which government or non-government institutions should be part of an oversight commission, 34.04% said civil society organizations, 33.63% said provincial government institutions, 10.99% said tribal elders, 9.13% said members of Provincial Councils, 4.88% said religious scholars, 4.34% said district and village Shuras, and only 2.62% said local Taliban figures. In line with earlier responses, when asked if women and civil society should be involved in monitoring of a ceasefire, almost all of the respondents (98.6%) said yes.

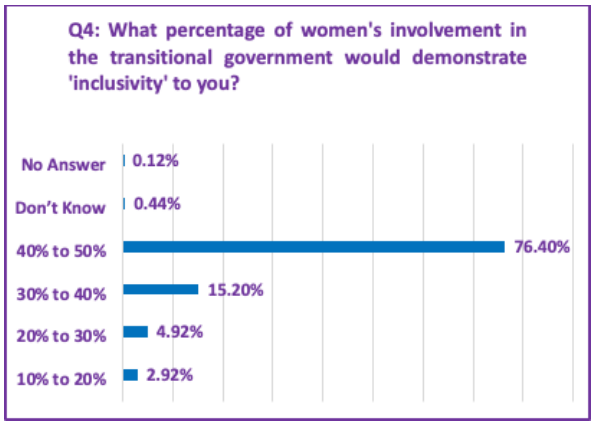
6. Transitional Peace Government





[9] Between 11 March to 07 April (2021), BISHNAW surveyed 2212 respondents in Kandahar, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar, Herat, Daikundi, Panjshir and Jawzjan. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.





On 28 February[10] the US delivered a draft peace agreement to the Afghan government and national political leaders in the hopes that it could be discussed at the proposed Turkey Summit in April (2021). The draft agreement had three parts: (1) guiding principles for a new Constitution and a future Afghan State, (2) a Transitional Peace Government, terms for its security and governance, and roadmap for constitutional changes, and (3) agreed terms for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. In reaction to this draft, the Taliban said[11] they were reviewing the agreement while President Ghani reacted[12] by issuing his own three-phase plan which included (1) consensus on a political settlement and an internationally monitored ceasefire, (2) presidential election and establishment of peace government, and (3) building a constitutional framework, reintegration of refugees, and development. The Taliban did not officially react to President Ghani's plan, but said they shared proposals for a three-month reduction in violence with the US in December 2020.

Over half (69.44.1%) of the 2500[13] respondents surveyed in Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Takhar, Panjshir, Daikundi, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Badghis, Baghlan, Paktia and Kunar felt that the parties should first agree on a ceasefire before agreeing on a Transitional Government. 23.92% said they should first agree on a reduction in violence before agreeing on a Transitional Government. Furthermore, when asked what percentage of women's involvement in a Transitional Government could be deemed inclusive, 76.40% said 40%-50% inclusion of women while 15.20% said 30% - 40%, both responses illustrates that nothing less than 40% would be considered inclusive by women. Additionally, when asked what approach should be taken to identify the president of a Transitional Government, a large majority (73.44%) said elections should be the approach used. Also, in terms of whether the Transitional Government should be centralized or decentralized, half (54.24%) of the respondents said centralized while 23.52% said centralized with more authority given to the provinces. Only a small 15.24% of respondents said decentralized.

[10] Tolonews. 28 February 2021, "Afghanistan Peace Agreement." https://tolonews.com/pdf/pdf.pdf
[11] Gannon, Kathy. 8 March 2021, "US presents warring Afghan sides with draft peace agreement," Military Times. https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/03/08/us-presents-warring-afghan-sides-with-draft-peace-agreement/
[12] Al-Jazeera. 5 April 2021, "Afghan president proposes three-phase peace roadmap: Report." https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/5/afghan-leader-proposes-peace-road-map-in-three-phases-document
[13] Between 01 to 30 April (2021), BISHNAW surveyed 2500 respondents in Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar, Bamiyan, Balkh, Takhar, Panjshir, Daikundi, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Badghis, Baghlan, Paktia and Kunar. The respondents were between the age of 18 to 60 years of age and represented members of civil society organizations, civil servants, educators, students, religious scholars, entrepreneurs, and healthcare workers.