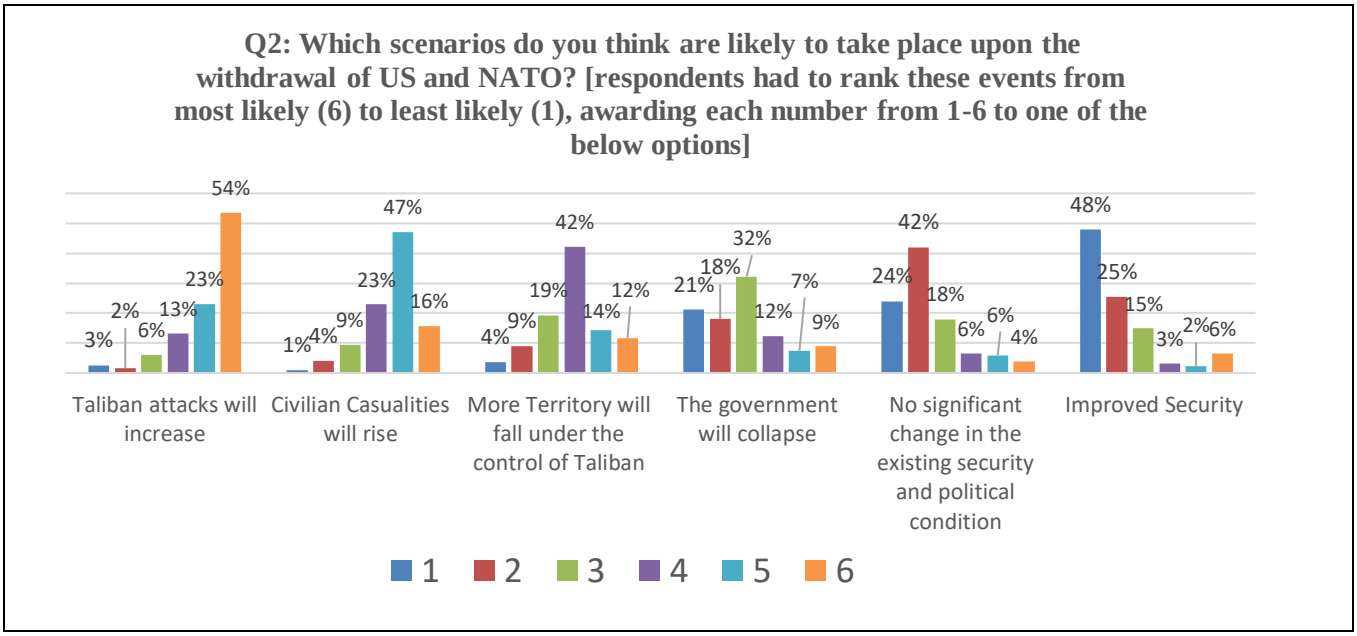
WOMEN'S PEACE BRIEF

Afghan Women's Opinion of the Unconditional Withdrawal of US and NATO Forces by 11 May 2021

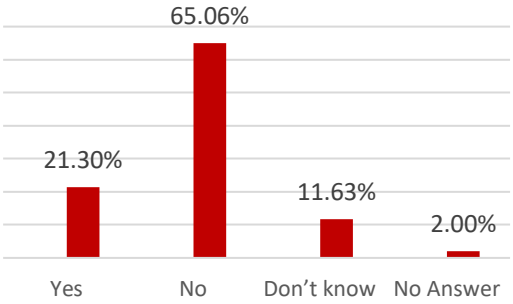
Summary:

- **2,845 women in the provinces of Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar, Bamiyan, Kandahar, Daikundi, Panjshir, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunar, and Paktia were polled on the unconditional withdrawal of the US and NATO forces for May 2021's edition of the Women's Peace Brief.**
- **65% of respondents said that the unconditional withdrawal of the US and NATO forces by 11 September 2021 is not a responsible approach.**
- **56% of respondents said an increase in Taliban attacks was the *most* plausible scenario following the withdrawal. A rise in civilian causalities (16%) was the second-most chosen scenario. 48% of respondents said "improved security" was the *least* likely scenario post-withdrawal with 24% choosing "no significant change."**
- **53% of respondents said that the US and NATO should prioritize supporting a ceasefire after their withdrawal. 16% said they should prioritize preserving the existing constitution.**
- **76% of respondents said that the Taliban's conditions to rejoin talks are unreasonable. 16% of respondents thought they are reasonable.**
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organized in 10 provinces. Participants largely aligned with the responses of the women polled in the survey. The majority showed a strong desire for continued NATO support for peace and the Afghan constitution. A minority displayed cynicism regarding NATO's role and intentions.**

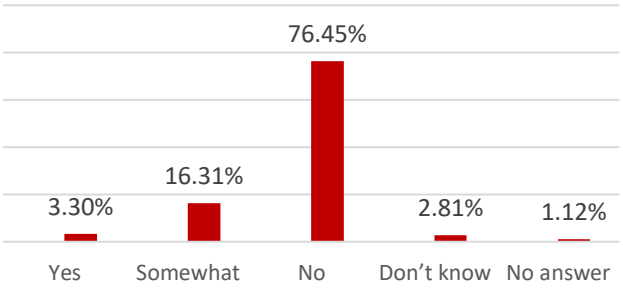
Background and Survey Questions: On April 14th, US President Joe Biden announced that US and NATO forces will withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11th, adding that this withdrawal will be complete and unconditional. The Taliban, while tacitly welcoming the announcement, added that the delay in the initial May 1st withdrawal date was a clear violation of the 2020 US-Taliban Agreement and stressed that they remain committed to finding a peaceful solution but only after withdrawal is completed in September. In the absence of significant progress towards a peace deal, a complete unconditional withdrawal has generated deep concerns among the public and civil society actors who worry that this step would remove international pressure on the Taliban to negotiate and compromise.



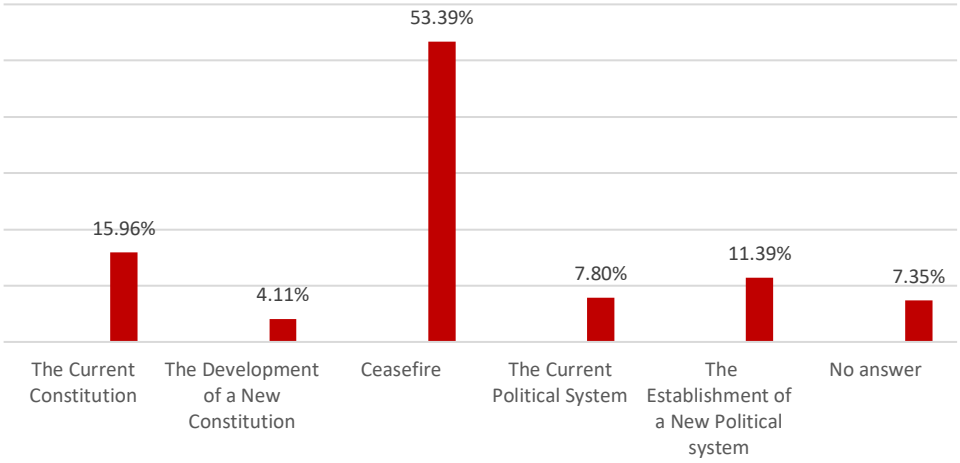
Q1: Would you deem the new approach by the US and NATO allies to withdraw forces without any "conditions" as responsible?



Q4: The Taliban have conditioned their return to peace talks to withdrawal of all foreign forces, release of all their remaining prisoners, and removal of their leaders from black lists. Do you think these are resonable conditions?



Q3: US and NATO Allies have said they will continue to play a role in supporting the Intra-Afghan Negotiations post-withdrawal. Which of the following issues do you feel is most important for US and NATO allies to support in the Afghan peace process?



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) from ten provinces (Herat, Bamiyan, Kandahar, Balkh, Helmand, Takhar, Nangarhar, Panjshir, Daikundi, and Jawzjan):

Participants were asked their thoughts about the survey results and how they themselves would respond. For the FGD participants, responses to Q1 by the women polled in the survey made sense. The unconditional withdrawal of the US and NATO forces in their view is irresponsible because of its negative consequences for the Afghan people, particularly women: increased violence, rise in civilian casualties, loss of more territory to the Taliban, and women's accomplishments in jeopardy. The reasoning of the FGD participants also aligns with the results of survey Q2 though the FGD participants put those negative scenarios on equal footing in terms of likelihood while the Q2 respondents needed to give a ranking to the likelihood of those scenarios.

In the view of the participants, the need for US and NATO forces is greater than ever in light of the escalating war and glacial negotiations. Like the respondents to survey Q3, FGD participants believed that NATO

members' main role post-withdrawal should be to apply pressure in favor of a ceasefire and preservation of the current constitution (although here in equal measure while survey respondents emphasized the ceasefire). It was further emphasized that pressure could be applied not just on the Taliban but on their regional supporters as well.

However, there were participants who felt that the withdrawal proves that the US and NATO were not honest in their promises of defeating terrorism, supporting women's rights, and promoting democracy. Participants also thought their withdrawal lifts the pressure on the Taliban to engage in peace talks. A minority of the participants were skeptical about the promises of the US and NATO allies in fighting terrorism and emphasized that it was just a game and that the US and NATO forces were seeking their own self interests.

Finally, alluding to the recent experience of the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners, the FGD participants unanimously agreed on the Q4 option that the Taliban's conditions are unreasonable because in their view the group is untrustworthy. Survey respondents already displayed deep disapproval of Taliban conditions (76.45% said they were not reasonable) but the FGD participants show this to an even greater degree. In the view of participants, it is likely that the released prisoners will rejoin the battlefield, causing a rise in the level of violence and rate of civilian casualties. They also insisted that accepting these conditions can potentially compromise women's rights. The participants also noted that such preconditions are only being proposed by the Taliban while the Afghan government committed to engage in talks without any preconditions.

There were some regional variations in FGD participant responses. Unlike other participants, women in Panjshir were exceptionally confident and unanimously expressed that the situation will not change much in this province, but agreed that in other provinces, especially in the south, more territories will fall to the Taliban. In the tele-survey, responses from Panjshir province were more in line with other provinces: an increase in Taliban attacks and a rise in civilian casualties were the most possible scenarios (38.02% and 23.97% respectively).

The majority of women in Helmand, meanwhile, displayed greater distrust towards the value of the US and NATO's promises and motives. There is even a sense that NATO members were dishonest about their desire to protect women's rights and democratic institutions.

Methodology: Bishnaw's survey questions are based on discussions taking place at the negotiation table in real-time. Each month, researchers develop four closed-ended questions using a Likert methodological approach and one open-ended question which surveyors use in their telephonic surveys after having attained the consent of the participants. Peace Facilitators conduct short-hand face-to-face surveys in the provinces using the same questions. Findings collected from the tele-surveys and short-hand face-to-face surveys are then collated and key findings are drawn to inform the Focus Group Discussions that are subsequently held with women community leaders (members of Bishnaw's Women Peace Circles). By triangulating the voices collected, Bishnaw ensures that it checks its findings against several methodological approaches to best reflect on-the-ground realities. They are then consolidated into a Women's Peace Brief which Bishnaw not only transfers to the negotiating parties and stakeholders involved in the peace process but also (through a feedback loop) back to the respondents surveyed so that they may gain an understanding of the opinions of women across the country.

About Bishnaw: Bishnaw is an initiative that collects the opinions of women from a wide-sector of Afghan society on key issues related to the ongoing peace negotiations and shares those opinions with the negotiation table, stakeholders involved in the peace process, civil society organizations and the public. Additionally, by sharing its findings with women in the Track I, Bishnaw enables this Track to table the views put forward by women at the grassroots level. Alternatively, a key activity of Bishnaw is to also share its survey findings back with those surveyed via SMS technology, thereby treating them as stakeholders in this process.