Jelena Bjelica

THE FATE OF VILLAGE COUNCILS:
The Emirate's effort to institute hegemony over rural Afghanistan

AFGHANISTAN ANALYSTS NETWORK

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Community Development Councils (CDCs), which were established under the Islamic Republic by the National Solidarity Programme and its successor Citizen's Charter, have been abolished by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and government bodies told to coordinate development projects with ulema councils instead. Afghanistan, however, has a longstanding tradition of grassroots, collective, decision-making and problem-solving bodies called shuras or village councils that long predated the CDCs. They have played an important role in village life throughout Afghanistan's modern history and even "carried the country safely over its post-1933 internal power crises," the late anthropologist Louis Dupree extolled. AAN's Jelena Bjelica and the AAN team interviewed villagers across Afghanistan between November 2022 and June 2024 to learn how their shuras had fared under IEA rule. Many interviewees reported that the new government preferred to work with village heads (often ones it had handpicked) and that, although most still had village councils, under pressure from the authorities, those councils had fewer members and were, in effect, symbolic. By spring 2024, even before the ban, most shuras were already ignored by the state.

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INTRODUCTION

Village councils, as grassroots, collective, decision-making and problem-solving bodies, have long played an important role in Afghanistan, including during turbulent periods.[1] Both *jirga* (Pashto) and *shura* (Dari)[2] are used to refer to these bodies, sometimes interchangeably. That the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably helps further the understanding of the variable nature of village councils, not as "some fixed Afghan institute," wrote Chris Johnson and Jolyon Leslie, but signifying that "there is not just one way of doing things in this country, but a complex array of alternatives, and the contradictory accounts given by different people reflect the different dimensions of that reality."[3] Moreover, regardless of what they are called, as Dupree puts it: "Most ethnic groups in Afghanistan have some kind of tribal, village, or regional council."[4] Shuras are part of the complex fabric that shapes not only how Afghan communities govern themselves but also the relationship between each community and state.[5] (In this paper, we use both shura and council to refer to these bodies.)

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[1] The "post-1933 internal power crises" which village councils "carried the country safely over," according to Louis Dupree, followed the assassination of the king, Muhammed Nadir Shah, on 8 November of that year. See Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton Legacy Library, 1973.

[2] Jirga is a Pashto word (of Mongolian origin) meaning 'circle' (symbolising equal voice), where men sit and make binding decisions. The word 'shura' is of Arabic origin and is usually translated as 'council'. It is used in many non-Pashtun villages to indicate a village council.

[3] See Johnson, Chris, and Jolyon Leslie. *Afghanistan: The Mirage of Peace*, London, Zed Books, 2004.

[4] Dupree wrote:

The dynamic, dogmatic, conservative Sir George Roos-Keppel ruled the North-West Frontier Province from 1908 to 1919 and convinced the British Raj that the Pushtun had no use for the formal legislative mechanisms provided in the Reforms. He insisted the Pashtun jirgah system was democracy in action (p 486). The jirgah is typically a Pushtun custom, but most ethnic groups in Afghanistan have some kind of tribal, village, or regional council (p 570). In the jirgah system all voting is open and participants raise their hands (or rifles) to vote on issues; but under the secret ballot, as many expressed it, "A man can talk one way in public and vote another in private" (p 589).

[5] See Christine Noelle-Karimi, 'Jirga, Shura and Community Development Councils: Village Institutions and State Interference', in Conrad Schetter (ed), *Local Politics in Afghanistan: A Century of Intervention in the Social Order*, 2013, online edition, Oxford Academic:

Afghan villages are akin to 'village republics',[6] argued former director of the Afghanistan Evaluation and Research Unit (AREU) Orzala Ashraf Nemat, with grassroots mechanisms for self-governance and the ability to "provide public goods, security, dispute resolution and other basic services to the population." In practice, these 'village republics' have been managed by a shura or a council of elders *(rish safidan* in Dari, *spinzheri* in Pashto, the white beards),[7] who meet on an ad-hoc basis and deal with all sorts of issues, from managing resources to resolving disputes.[8] The shuras, Nemat notes, are:

> *[W]here power lies, where the decisions on appointing powerful actors such as the malik, mullah, mirab* [the person responsible for organising the distribution of water], *etc, occur… [they] act to resolve internal disputes and conflicts and determine village responses to external interventions.*

These shuras have served as essential bridges in the complex networks that link the village to external powerbrokers. They may be representatives of state bodies, local commanders/warlords, international actors and national or international aid organisations. Councils typically have ties to further-reaching larger networks, primarily forged through kinship, ethnicity and shared religious affiliations, as well as, in the last almost half-century, battlefield comradery. Through these networks, council members hope to secure patronage, both in terms of resources and protection for the village from outsiders. Being seen as belonging to a larger network has typically increased the importance and power of an individual within a local community.

[The head of the British army in Afghanistan, 1840-42, Major-General William George Keith] Elphinstone's portrayal of the jirga conveys the difficulty of capturing the relationship between the seemingly irreconcilable and yet interdependent spheres of state and tribe. On the one hand, he describes the village council as the 'internal government' of the Pashtun tribes and stresses its egalitarian features. On the other hand, he projects a hierarchy of jirgas reflecting the various levels of tribal organisation and assumes a matching gradation of jurisdiction. While light transgressions are adjudicated on the village level, he assumes the judgement over more serious offences to rest with a high-ranking jirga consisting of the appointed chiefs of the tribal confederacies (khan), village headmen (malik) and mullahs.

[6] The term 'village republics' was coined by Robert Hunter Wade, author and Professor of Political Economy and Development at the London School of Economics in 1988 to explain village-based collective action in the context of intra-village conflict rooted in ecological conditions. See *Village Republics: Economic Conditions for collective action in South India*', Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[7] The term 'elders' encompasses village actors who hold an important economic and/or social status. It does not necessarily refer to the specific age group of elderly men.

[8] See Orzala Ashraf Nemat, 'Local Governance in the Age of Liberal Interventionism: Governance Relations in the Post-2001 Afghanistan'. Dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2015.

Members of the AAN team meet with a shura member in Qarqanatu village, Bamian province. Source: Jelena Bjelica, September 2019

Inevitably, the councils have been altered by time and events, including in the 1980s and 1990s by NGOs, and occasionally mujahedin factions, seeking local representatives to work with. Most systematically, after 2001, the Islamic Republic established Community Development Councils (*kaliwali parakhteyayi shura* in Pashto and *shura-ye inkishafi* in Dari) as a vehicle for integrating grassroots village governance structures into state architecture, especially in decisions over aid. Women were added as members (as detailed below). After the fall of the Republic in August 2021, the councils seemed to disappear from the public eye, although aid actors typically kept on working with them. Yet questions, such as how local communities were navigating the new political reality under the Islamic Emirate and how they moderate problems with the state and seek better conditions, have become more salient.

This report examines what kind of village-level, self-governing structures remain in place, based on more than 50 interviews conducted over two years with more than 40 men, representative of Afghanistan's ethnic and geographical spread.

They included tribal elders, respected members of communities, journalists, farmers, teachers and other villagers in 21 provinces. Notably, all used 'CDC' interchangeably with 'shura' and 'village shura'.

The report is structured into three main sections: the first section offers a short history of village councils based on a literature review and delves into how and why village governance has changed in the last half-century; the second section details the methodology and discussion of findings; the last section draws conclusions from the research findings.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Since the creation of the modern Afghan state in the mid-18th-century, village councils have survived and adapted to political and social upheavals, wars, modernisation, state-building efforts, the proliferation of Western ideas and concepts, and the aid industry.
- Evidence from the field research (more than 50 interviews conducted, in several rounds between November 2022 and June 2024, with more than 40 men in 21 provinces) indicated that village councils, as innate institutions with influence and legitimacy, had initially survived the August 2021 change of government and that, at least in some areas, some duties and systems of elections introduced during the Republic had been appropriated and endorsed. The shuras described by our interviewees resembled hybrids that combined older and newer 20th-century ways of community self-management. Interviewees used 'shura' and 'CDC' interchangeably.
- Our preliminary interviews, conducted in November 2022, a little year after the takeover, in 13 provinces suggested that, although many village councils were still active, almost all reported that their councils had been stripped of their previous responsibilities and downgraded. In some villages, council members had been replaced, while in others, the councils had become subordinate to the village head (*arbab* or *malek)*, who had been approved and, in some cases, appointed by the IEA.
- Two-thirds of the interviews conducted in 2023 in 16 provinces showed that, in most places, the councils which, in 2022, were in the same format as

under the Republic, ie having, at least, a head, deputy, treasurer and secretary, had been reduced to having only a symbolic role at the village level and were ignored by the government.

- In most of the villages surveyed, by 2023, the shura's role as a bridge between community and government had been transferred to an IEA-approved or, in some cases, IEA-appointed representative. In some cases, this IEA-approved representative was a former shura head or the most respected individual in the village.
- In 2023, newly established village 'ulema councils' were afforded a more prominent role in some villages.
- In follow-up interviews in 2024 with seven respondents who had said their shuras were at least somewhat active, one respondent said their shura had become completely inactive since 2023, four said they were less active or less able to act, and two said they were still active.
- In the three main rounds of our research, all interviewees, except one person from Yakawlang in Bamian province, said women were no longer members of their council. (In the concise survey of villagers in all of Afghanistan's provinces undertaken after the abolishment of CDCs, three out of the 34 interviewees said there were still women in their shuras.) It seems that women, overwhelmingly, have been shut out of shuras. However, many interviewees expressed disquiet about this, rueing their loss and the role they had played in raising women's issues and identifying needy women in the community.
- Many shuras/Community Development Councils did still exist when the Amir's order to abolish CDCs was promulgated on 23 May 2024, albeit they had mostly been downgraded, reduced in personnel, become largely symbolic, or rendered unserviceable by the Islamic Emirate's seeking new ways to engage with villages.
- The concise survey conducted at the end of May/beginning of June following the Amir's directive indicated that information about the abolition of CDCs had, at that time, yet to reach the village level.

Local representation in the cities

The situation of local representation is somewhat different in the cities but still follows a traditional model. In Kabul, for example, every street has an elder selected by the community. There is no mechanism to select street elders; usually, the men on the street sit together and decide who will represent them. The selected elder is tasked with representing the street's external affairs, such as liaising with aid organisations on beneficiary selection for the purpose of distributing aid.

However, more recently, street elders have also doubled as a community watch. They inform the authorities about any new household on the street (the street elder should inform the *wakil-e guzar,* the neighbourhood head, who informs the Police District *(hawza)*. The street elder also has to make sure new tenants in his area have filled out government forms distributed to the community. The new family should have two guarantors from the area. The IEA holds the street elder, estate agent and wakil-e guzar responsible if something happens in terms of security that is blamed on those newcomers to the street.

The IEA also requests street elders to inform them about returnees from Pakistan and provide them with assistance. The elders must also keep an eye on the returnees' activities and to whom they are connected in the community. The authorities have also told elders to give them a list of those people who have been evacuated from the country and list the location of their houses. They have also ordered that people whom the Republic imprisoned, whether Taleban or not, should be identified and their names shared. If there is an empty house in the area, the street elders should also inform the authorities of its location.

THE VILLAGE COUNCIL: AN ENDURING "BRICOLAGE"

Afghanistan's shuras have survived and adapted to political and social upheavals, wars, modernisation, state-building efforts, the aid industry and the proliferation of Western ideas and concepts. Their survival and the role they have played in different political situations have been the topic of several papers and book chapters. Rural development expert Adam Pain has described the changing nature of village governance as "an institutional bricolage," which is neither completely new nor completely traditional, but is rather a "dynamic hybrid" that combines elements of the introduced, customary, formal, and informal.[9] Among the complex village-level structures that have adapted and endured the test of time, he said, village councils stand prominently:

> *Many empirical studies in Afghanistan have also drawn attention to the durability of village-level organizations, their complexity, and their changing nature over time. Such organizations have been seen to include the shura (village council), the mullah (religious leader), the malik or arbab (village representative to the government), and elders, although the names and functions of these customary organizations vary considerably between regions and villages. There is also considerable evidence that these customary organizations play an important role in the provision of public goods within the village, particularly in relation to dispute resolution and basic welfare provision.*

The village shuras have changed with the times and, like everything else in Afghanistan, were subject to new pressures in the 1980s and 1990s. During the resistance to the Soviet occupation, the term 'shura' was coopted by Ahmad Shah Massud to highlight the Islamic orientation of his Shura-ye Nizar network, which emerged out of the Jamiat-e Islami mujahedin faction.[10] The term and its functions gained even more currency when the first Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was

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[9] See Adam Pain, 'Village Context and the National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan,' *Asian Survey* 58, no 6, November 2018, 1066–89, University of California Press, https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2018.58.6.1066.

[10] Shura-ye Nizar emerged as the foremost military organisation, with a well-developed shadow civilian administration, in northeastern Afghanistan, following its founding by commander Ahmad Shah Massud in 1984 with other Jamiat-e Islami commanders, also largely from Panjshir.

established in the 1990s, according to Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili in her seminal work, 'Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan':[11]

> *With the demise of the communist regime in 1992 and the rise of the mujahidin and Taliban, the institution of the shura was elevated to the state level.… The term shura again assumed centrality but was more strongly tinged with the religious connotations associated with jihad. The government institutions devised by the Taliban may be described as rudimentary and decentralised. From their supreme shura in Kandahar, Mullah Omar and his associates supervised a military shura and the Kabul shura consisting of a fluctuating number of ministers. On the local level, shuras elected by villagers were to provide contact between the government and the population.*

According to Johnson and Leslie, the need for aid organisations to have local organisations to engage with was also pivotal (see 'Afghanistan: The Mirage of Peace' p42).

> *In some places they [the shuras] are a genuine part of how society traditionally functioned; in some places a creation of the mujahedin in areas liberated from Soviet control, a genuine attempt at the time (even if subverted later) at community involvement; in some places they have been creations of the assistance community; and in yet others people still do not have anything they refer to as a jirga or shura but decisions are made by the village elders who if necessary will call a village meeting.*

Murtazashvili makes a similar point, highlighting that the mechanisms of aid delivery helped turn shuras into permanent fixtures in the aid landscape:

> *After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, a number of international aid agencies based in Peshawar moved across the border into Afghanistan. During the ascendancy of the mujahidin and Taliban in the 1990s, these organisations continued to perform vital services which would come within the responsibility of the government under ordinary circumstances. In order to reach the population, the agencies required local institutions through which they could funnel their assistance. Interestingly, this search for counterparts presupposed the existence of an operative administration based on shuras. From the perspective of the international actors, the shuras assumed fixed*

[11] Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili, 'The Architecture of Village Governance.' Chapter 3 in *Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, 65–108.

characteristics resembling those noted by Elphinstone for the jirga almost two centuries earlier.

Women arrive for a meeting of the women's shura in Bagram district, Parwan province.
Source: US Army Army Pfc Courtney Ropp via Resolute Support Media/Flickr, 27 April 2011

Local shuras established during the 1980s and 1990s to manage local development activities were "a new phenomenon that has frequently been conflated with more 'traditional' structures," wrote governance specialist Hamish Nixon in his 2008 paper published by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 'The changing face of local governance: Community development councils in Afghanistan'. However, it should be noted that it was not only international aid organisations that sought to influence or take advantage of existing village governance structures; the Peshawar-based mujahedin parties also introduced some changes that, according to Nixon, were "either along the lines of shuras or elsewhere through the imposition of more hierarchical party and commander-based structures."

These developments in the 1980s and 1990s prompted the creation of new elites and new power dynamics in villages. Inadvertently, these two factors enabled the change in shuras, as they continued to cater to both internal and external needs. To understand how village councils have changed over time would need an understanding of who gained and who lost power and status at the village level. Delving into this is beyond the scope of this research. However, it underscores the need to note that village shuras are neither fixed traditional structures nor solely structures promoted by development agencies in the 1980s and 1990s, as they have continued to evolve over time, as explained in the next section.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

An important step-change in the history of village governance was the launch of the government-led National Solidarity Programme (NSP) or *Hambastagi Mili/Mili Paiwastoon* (Dari/Pashto) in 2003 and its successor, the Citizens' Charter *(wolesi tarun* in Pashto and *misaq-e shahrwandi* in Dari). Inspired by the World Bank's Community Driven Development approach (CDD) and implemented by the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), the NSP aimed to establish a network of Community Development Councils (CDCs) across rural Afghanistan. The aim was to empower rural communities "to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects…. [and] lay the foundations for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation" (see the NSP Operational Manual, 2006). The CDCs were slated to serve as "the social and development foundation at the community level" and were, according to the Operational Manual:

> *[B]ased on the Afghan traditions of:*
> *"Ashar" – community members working together on a volunteer basis to improve community infrastructure;*
> *"Jirga" – councils comprised of respected members of the community; and Islamic values of unity, equity and justice.*

The councils, with male and female members, numbered 45,000 by August 2021 and functioned as a mechanism for delivering aid to villages, acted as liaisons between the communities and implementing NGOs and were responsible for

carrying out development projects. While the programme was lauded for its community-driven approach, Adam Pain and Simon Levine criticised NSP for its assumption that "there were no previously existing institutions and no unequal power relations in villages" (see Pain and Levine's ODI Policy Brief).[12] "The programme," they said, "prescribed a version of how village leadership should be chosen and what they should do, which did not fit with the reality of how leaders were selected, what they were doing or, more crucially, with what villagers expected their leaders to do". It is, however, important to note the scope and scale of the National Solidarity Programme – a nationwide programme aimed at delivering services to rural communities in a country that was recovering from nearly two decades of conflict. In this light, as Pain and Levine point out: "For all their faults, the CDCs probably offer the most effective route for service delivery at the village level."[13]

NSP set guidelines on how CDC members should be elected and required communities to "elect community members of their choosing to their Community Development Council, which may or may not include members of existing jirgas or shuras."[14] Nemat's PhD thesis offered an insight into the first (2004-05) and second

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[12] Pain made a similar point in the journal article 'Village Context and the National Solidarity Program in Afghanistan' (see footnote 9 for the full reference):

There has been a programmatic assumption that there is a landscape of identical villages with few legacies from the past and that new interventions to reorder village government simply displace what was there before.

[13] Pain and Simon Levine wrote:

To believe that CDCs could fulfil their expected role in Afghanistan, it was necessary to assume that there were no previously existing local institutions and no unequal power relations in villages. For one single institutional model to be appropriate for the whole country, one of two further assumptions were also necessary: either there were no significant social differences throughout the country; or any differences in the social structure and moral economy of a society are irrelevant to the institutions that emerge and can function in it.

They also pointed out that "the institutions and power relations that had existed before the creation of CDCs continued to operate," irrespective of huge social and political diversity in villages across the country:

Broadly speaking, where there are large areas of irrigated land, power tends to be concentrated in fewer hands and the elites have less interest in governing in the interests of all. Where land is less concentrated and village elites are only marginally better off than others, there is a greater interest in the collective good. Village governance is integrated into wider networks of power. Leaders are expected to use their networks to secure resources, protection or assistance for the villages from sources of power outside. The model for ensuring good governance, i.e., the threat of losing a future election, did not fit how such leaders emerge.

[14] See page vii in the NSP Operational Manual, 2006.

(2009) CDC elections in three villages — Qala-ye Janan Khan in Behsud district of Nangrahar and Katakhana and Akhundan in Yakawlang district of Bamian. She described how village elites managed to control the process and turn it to their own advantage. Of the 2004-05 election in Behsud, she wrote:

> *[I]n most cases, the CDC members stated that the malik had told them to stand for election, so it was obvious they would vote for the malik as chief.*

One of Nemat's key informants recounted how, in the 2009 election, the malek in Qala-ye Janan Khan was still playing an important role in village governance; his supporters in the village had blocked a local commander's bid to be a member of the shura with a view to using it as a stepping stone to becoming the head of the CDC.

Younger candidates also sought to play a more prominent role in the community by standing for seats on the councils, as noted by Christine Noelle-Karimi in 'Village Institutions in the Perception of National and International Actors in Afghanistan':

> *Given its orientation towards the planning and implementation of developmental projects, the CDC assumes a different profile in terms of composition and length of tenure.… In this context, younger candidates known for their formal education and their ability to interact with aid agencies enjoy a certain edge over the traditional opinion leaders.*

In some places, CDC elections prompted the propagation of a new and younger elite, but, in general, the elections primarily reaffirmed those already in positions of power locally.

The MRRD also sought to transform CDCs into a permanent local governance body that would "take on additional responsibilities beyond NSP as it matures" (see this journal article by Alessandro Monsutti 'Fuzzy Sovereignty: Rural Reconstruction in Afghanistan, between Democracy Promotion and Power Games'). These attempts by the centre to integrate village councils into the state structure only increased their importance at both the local and national levels. However, the belief that the centre was integrating the newly created councils – in terms of rolling out a nationwide programme of uniform bodies – could not be further from reality.

The more than 45,000 CDCs established across Afghanistan through the NSP and Citizen's Charter came in all shapes and forms. The CDC elections "were conducted in a variety of different ways" and contributed to "a great deal of variation" in how CDCs were formed, as Hamish Nixon noted in the paper cited above.

The NSP programme was succeeded in 2017 by the Citizens' Charter. This new World Bank programme took over the management of the CDCs, aiming to establish a new relationship between government and communities (see the programme document here and the Citizens' Charter here). Much like its predecessor, the Citizens' Charter presented itself as a programme through which the CDCs would be "democratically elected and trained to implement basic development projects."[15] While the programme ended in December 2022, the extent to which it actually managed to "democratically elect the CDCs" remains a question to this day. A 2020 report by the consulting firm ATR on community-driven development sheds some light on the election process during this period:[16]

> *Precise election modalities varied among the communities visited.… One point that most of the elections shared, however, was the fact that candidates had been pre-identified, allowing for a degree of campaigning in certain instances. In one community the pre-identified candidates each had their own box to accumulate votes, allowing for community members to vote without needing to write the names of their preferred candidate, but potentially undermining the secrecy of the vote and severely constraining opportunities to vote for alternative candidates (see the full report* here*).*

Nevertheless, the NSP and the Citizen's Charter did make significant inroads in improving village life in Afghanistan. Over their lifespan, they spent USD 2.28 billion (NSP 1.61 billion and Citizen's Charter 672 million) to fund some 80,000 community-driven projects (NSP 75,271 and Citizen's Charter 8,440) that improved the quality of life in thousands of Afghan villages (see UN-Habitat's Analytic Closure Report National Solidarity Programme (NSP) and the World Bank's

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[15] See this for detailed explanation of the electoral process that was intended to be set up under the Citizens' Charter and this 2020 AAN analysis of other activities planned under this programme.

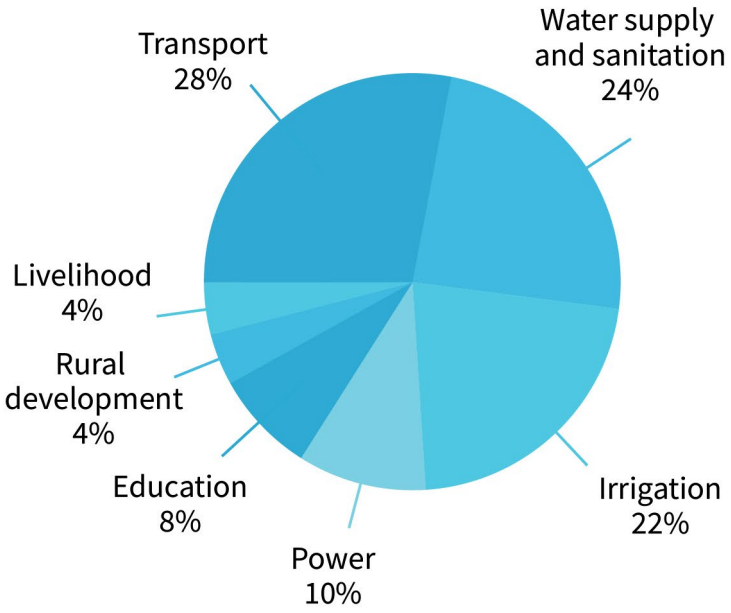
[16] 'Experiences and Expectations in Community-Driven Development: Monitoring Research on Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project' was produced by ATR for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA) and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA). The report also raised concerns over the reported turnout, particularly of female voters:

[C]ommunity perceptions seem to validate concerns that the reported election turnout percentages have at times been inflated in reports from FPs [Facilitating Partners]—particularly with regard to women's participation.… When asked why community members did not participate in the election or social mobilisation exercises, the most common reason for not participating (especially in elections) was poverty, since poor community members could not afford to give up the day of work. While elections were supposed to be held on Fridays, some respondents reported that elections in their community were held on Saturday or Sunday, which would explain lower participation rates in some communities.

Citizen's Charter Implementation Completion Report). The programmes supported projects that had been identified by the community as priorities in the fields of transportation, water and sanitation, hydropower, irrigation, agriculture, and education (see the diagram below for an indication of the scale and scope of the projects supported by the NSP).[17]

Figure 1: Projects implemented by CDCs in rural areas, by sector

Sectors	Number of implemented projects by communities (2004-2015)
Agriculture	17
Education	6,175
Emergency response	9
Health	145
Irrigation	16,516
Livelihood	2,517
Power	7,619
Public building	26
Rural development	3,134
Transport	21,265
Water supply and sanitation	17,848
Total projects	**75,271**



Source: The Performance Review of the Community Development Councils, using data from the NSP's Management Information Systems Department.

After the Citizens' Charter ceased operating in 2022,[18] village councils, particularly Community Development Councils, continued to feature in discussions on Afghanistan, including with regard to the delivery of aid to Afghans in need of

[17] The paper cited is: Mohammad Asif Akbari and Obaidullah Rahmani. 'The Performance Review of the Community Development Councils from Prospective of Local Governance in Afghanistan' in *International Journal of Education and Research* vol 8, no 1, January 2020.

[18] According to the World Bank, "Due to the collapse of the government in August 2021 and the following political turmoil, the [World Bank Group's] country portfolio, including the project, was suspended on February 17, 2022 and then phased out. Actual closing was on December 31, 2022" (see here).

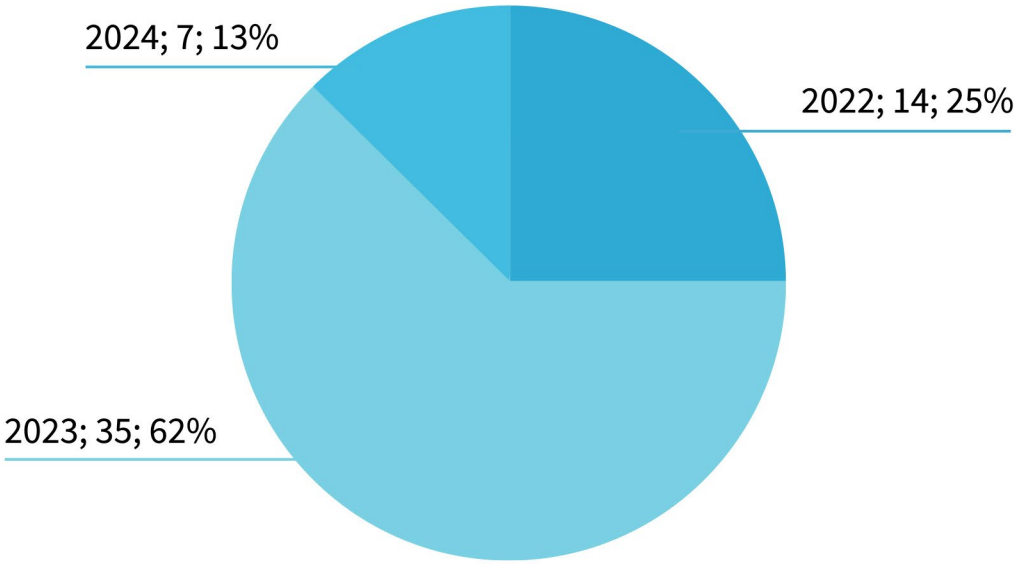
humanitarian assistance. For example in April 2022, the World Bank began working with the councils to deliver emergency support, including short-term livelihoods opportunities, such as cash-for-work as part of its USD 365 million Community Resilience and Livelihoods Project (CRL) project.

This AAN research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion by bringing evidence from the field as to how village councils have fared under the IEA rule.

EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD: WHAT HAS SURVIVED?

Our findings are based on 56 interviews with more than 40 key informants, conducted between November 2022 and May 2024. We interviewed tribal elders, respected community members, journalists, farmers, teachers and other villagers. The interviewees were representative of Afghanistan's ethnic and geographical spread, but were all men.

Figure 2: Interviews conducted between 2022 and 2024 (shown as a number and a percentage of the total)



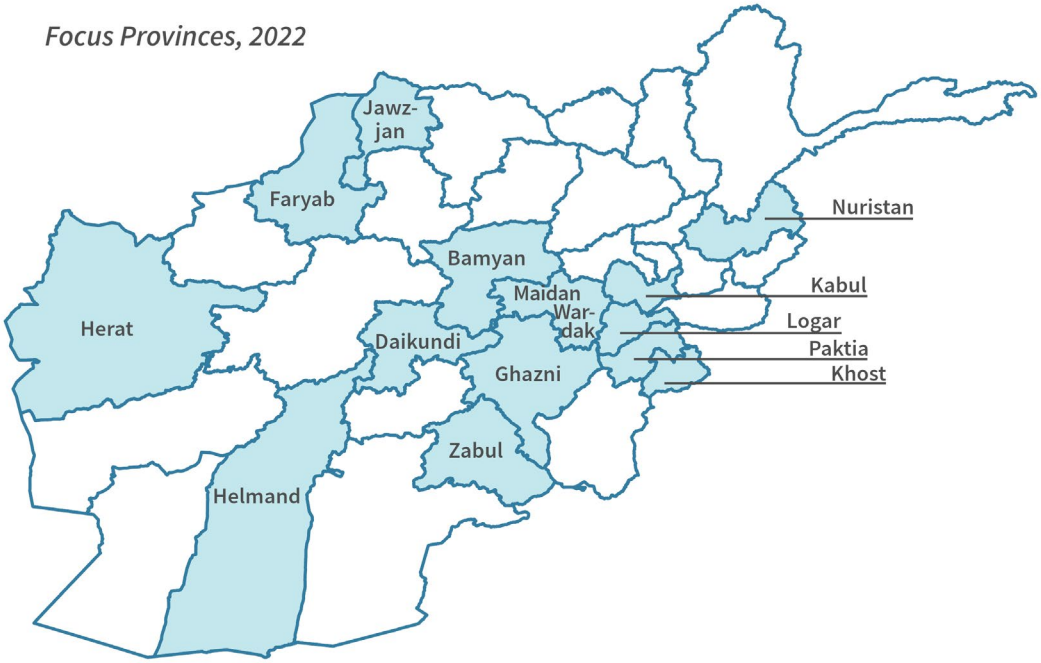
As part of the preliminary research to scope this exercise in November 2022, we used a simple questionnaire to interview 14 people in 13 provinces. Between March and June 2023, we conducted 35 additional interviews in 16 provinces

(see Annex 1 for the list of interviews) using a more substantial questionnaire that was divided into five sections (more on this below). We also went back to some of the interviewees from 2022 and heard from new key informants. In April/May 2024, we re-interviewed seven randomly selected interviewees from the pool of 35 interviewees (more details below), who lived in five provinces. Finally, in late May/early June, we conducted a concise survey of villagers in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, and interviewed 34 people (one per province), to take a snapshot of the situation following the Amir's order to abolish CDCs.

The findings are presented chronologically. The first section draws on what interviewees said about councils in 2022, followed by the findings from the 2023 interviews and finally, new trends highlighted by the 2024 re-interviews.

VILLAGE COUNCILS IN 2022

Figure 3: Location of village council interviews in 2022



Map by Roger Helms for AAN, 2024.

About a year after the change of power in Kabul, in November 2022, we found indications, based on 14 interviews conducted in 13 districts (see the table below),

that many village councils around the country were still active. We asked our interviewees five questions:

- Is there a community/village (shura) council in your area?
- Is it the same council as during the Republic?
- How is it different? Are there women on the council?
- What is the council's primary job now? What do they do?
- How do they help the community?

Province/District	Is there a shura?	Is it the same as before?
Bamian/Yakawlang	Yes	Yes
Daikundi/Nili	Yes	Yes, but with some changes
Faryab/Pashtunkot	Yes	No
Ghazni/Jaghatu	Yes	No
Helmand/Nad Ali (1)	No	N/A
Helmand/Nad Ali (2)	No	N/A
Jawzajn/Khawaja Du Koh	Yes	No
Kabul/Shakardara	Yes	Yes, but with some changes
Khost/Jaji Maidan	Yes	Yes, but with some changes
Logar/Baraki Barak	Yes	Yes
Maidan Wardak/Sayedabad	Yes.	Yes, but with some changes
Nuristan/Wama	Yes	Yes
Paktia/Zurmat	No	N/A
Zabul/Qalat	No	N/A

In most of the villages, the councils were still active. A majority even had the same members. They included Yakawlang district in Bamian province where the interviewee reported:

> *There's been no change in our council. The council members are the same as in the past. We have 14 male and 14 female members, that represent 14 villages. The head of the council is a man and the deputy head is a woman.*

In other locations, however, changes were already noticeable. In some villages, council members had changed or been removed, while in others, the councils had become subordinate to the village head, who had been approved and, in some cases, even appointed by the IEA. In almost all the villages surveyed, councils had been stripped of their previous responsibilities and downgraded to playing only a symbolic role.

The Community Development Council of Danishmand village in Shakardara district, Kabul province, meets at the health clinic to discuss their community's needs.
Source: DFID - UK Department for International Development/Flickr, 19 November 2009

The head of a village council from Shakardara district in Kabul province said that while most of the power now rested with the malek, he did, nevertheless, consult the village elders:

> *It's the same council that was active during the Republic, but after the Taleban came back, the council's authority decreased. Now, the head of the village is more powerful. The council doesn't have an official job because the Taleban only gives importance to the head of the village. So, we cooperate with the head of the village, especially when there's aid from international institutions. He's responsible for the village, but he consults the elders on every matter.*

The head of a village in Baraki Barak district in Logar province had a similar story:

> *The same councils that were active during the Republic are also active now. The village's [Community] Development Council was active in the Citizens' Charter programme, but we haven't had any programmes or projects in our*

> *village for the past four years.… The Emirate doesn't give importance to the council. Currently, the head of the village has all the responsibilities for the village.*

A resident of Jirmatu Valley in the Jeghatu district of Ghazni province said that, while the council still existed, it had changed:

> *Our area has a council, but it isn't the same as before. It doesn't have any authority. They can't even express their ideas to the Emirate. They must respect the Emirate's policies and can't say anything against them or object to them. This council's main task is to receive and distribute the aid that the Emirate gets from the UN or other countries among the people. If there's a problem between the Taleban and the people, this shura tries to solve it. For example, if the Taleban arrest a former policeman or soldier from the Valley, the shura collects money from the people and pays the Taleban to get him released.*

A member of a council from Nili district in Daikundi province told us that not only had the members changed, but the number of members had, in fact, increased, but were now all men:

> *This council used to have only five members, but now it has more than 20. The provincial office [unclear what this is] appointed the council members because people complained about the previous members because they were distributing aid to their own relatives. It's been four months now since the new members were selected. There had been a few women on the council before, but now there is not even a single woman.*

In other places, the number of council members had decreased, as described by a villager from Pashtunkot district of Faryab province:

> *Our village has a shura, but there's a big difference between this one and the shura under the Republic. It had many more members. It had a head, a deputy, a secretary, a cashier and many other members. But under the Taleban it only has four members. The malek is the head and there's also the imam of the mosque and two other members…. There are no women members of this shura. For now, they're just resolving disputes and selecting beneficiaries for NGO aid. They also verify applications [for official documents] such as tazkiras [national ID cards]. The malek does this as he did during the Republic.*

A civil society activist from Jaji Maidan district of Khost province said that provincial-level government offices were now responsible for most duties:

> *It's the same shura as before, but it's a bit different now. During the Republic, they had the authority to solve issues, but now they have less authority. The Emirate carries out most duties through its offices. For example, when there's aid, the province's Economy Department distributes it. If there's development work, the Rural Development Department does it and so on…. During the Republic, development projects were carried out in consultation with the shura… although, actually, there is no development project now.*

In a few places, interviewees reported that Community Development Councils had been dissolved entirely. A teacher from Nad Ali district in Helmand province told us the Emirate had abolished all village-level organisations:

> *There is no shura in our district. The Taleban dissolved all the former shuras.… They even removed the maleks. They said the chiefs of police would handle all issues in the future. There are 15 police districts in our district.*

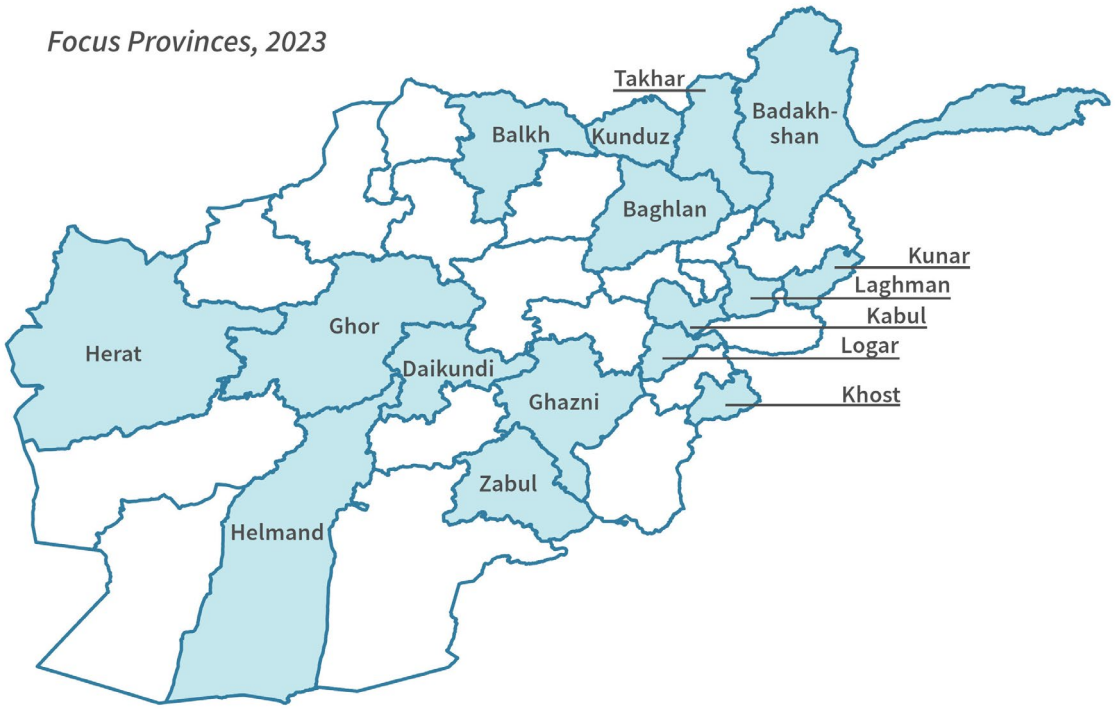
An NGO employee in Qalat district of Zabul province described the same experience:

> *There are no councils in our area. The Taleban dissolved the shuras in our province as soon as they took power. They don't like the people who were linked with the former government. The Taleban selected the community elder and the village malek…. During the Republic, there was a huge shura with a head, a deputy, a cashier, a secretary and other members. They made decisions together. They even participated in bids to get projects, but [now] only the village malek represents the area.*

The inconsistent picture that emerged in our preliminary research suggested that a more detailed study would be useful in gaining a more granular view of village councils with a wider geographic spread in order to understand how they have fared since the fall of the Republic.

VILLAGE COUNCILS IN 2023

Figure 4: Location of village council interviews in 2023



Map by Roger Helms for AAN, 2024.

The follow-up research was conducted between March and June 2023 in 16 provinces. It included re-interviews with five of the respondents from November 2022 and 30 new interviewees from new districts. We interviewed some respondents twice in 2023.

Most interviewees in 2023 – 23 out of 35 – were from northern and northeastern provinces where we had the greatest access – namely, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh, Kunduz and Takhar. Even so, we made efforts to ensure a balance of ethnic representation. Some of these provinces have a sizeable majority of Uzbeks (Balkh) or Uzbeks and Tajiks (Takhar and parts of Badakhshan) or Tajiks (most of Badakhshan), whereas Baghlan and Kunduz are more ethnically mixed. Our interviews showed that in most villages in this part of the country, the councils were still actively involved in managing day-to-day village affairs:

This second round of interviews was more expansive than the preliminary round and used a semi-structured questionnaire (see Annex 2). The first two sections

asked about councils in general, including what the respondents thought was the council's 'job description'. The third section asked about the representativeness of the council, while the fourth and fifth sections asked about its legitimacy and influence in IEA-ruled Afghanistan. The findings in this section are presented in three sections and reflect the sections of the questionnaire.

It should be noted that in our questionnaire we asked about village councils, without referring to them as CDCs. All our respondents used CDCs interchangeably with shura and village council.

About two-thirds of the interviews conducted in 2023 found that the councils that had survived in the format set up during the Republic had been either reduced to a symbolic role or completely discarded by the Emirate.

However, and this seemed remarkable, in some provinces, the shura members were still elected by a vote, usually held in the mosque. An interviewee from Kunduz, who was the head of the village council, told us that the shura in his village was still elected in the same manner as during the previous government, except now there were no longer any female council members:

> *It's the same shura as during the Republic and the members are still elected by the people. There are five mosques and each mosque elects three shura members…. a government programme established our council called the Citizens' Charter, which was run by the Ministry of Development and Rural Affairs…. and our council members haven't changed since then. During the Republic, the shura had 30 members, 15 men and 15 women, but when the Taleban took over, the women were suspended. During the Republic, each village council had a bank account and money from the government and NGOs was deposited in this account, but there's no such thing now. Only a tiny amount of humanitarian help is left and that's delivered directly [to the people] in collaboration with the council.*

An interviewee from Balkh, who was unemployed, conveyed a similar story:

> *It's the same shura that was formed during the Republic, except for one member who died of corona and a new member who was elected in his place by the people in the mosque.*

In some villages, the shuras had been carefully set up to reflect the ethnic composition of the area and had remained that way. The head of a shura in Takhar said they still provided for and looked after their community:

> *There's a shura in my village and it encompasses nine mosques. The shura's composed of six members. I'm the shura's head [he is Pashtun], the secretary's a Tajik, two other members are Uzbek and the other two are Pashtun and Tajik. We assist the village in various situations, such as the distribution of humanitarian aid and social services, like helping with weddings by providing dishes and funeral services. In layman's terms, we help and stand alongside the community in their happiness and grief. We were able to maintain some of our social programmes when the Republic was defeated.*

However, in other places, as a retired police officer from Baghlan said, the same elected shura was still in place but was now completely ignored by the IEA:

> *The same shura existed during the Republic and the head of the shura's also the same. Every three years, there's a vote and some of the same members are re-elected or new members are elected to replace them… But they have a smaller role and are weaker. In the past, they were a communication bridge with the government…. they helped to select projects and prioritise the village's needs, such as rural development projects…. All these tasks are now carried out directly by the Taleban, without the supervision of the shura.*

In some villages, for example, in Ghor province, the shuras established under the National Solidarity Programme remained in existence, but had been subordinated to a newly established village ulema council.[19] Our interviewee said:

> *The NSP councils that operated during the Republic are still active… they meet among themselves or with the government once a month or once every two months. Currently, there's a council in every mosque and the imam of the mosque is the head of the council and other elders are its members. There are 12 council members in each mosque. This [mosque] council's in touch with the village council and they share the problems of the mosque and the village with the village councils.*

[19] On 25 September 2023, Emirate spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid announced that ulema councils had now been established in all provinces, with the aim of "increase[ing] coordination between the people and the interim government" (see ToloNews). Our interviewees reported that village-level ulema councils had also been established, at least in some localities.

In most shuras, however, membership had changed. For one thing, women were not members of the shuras in any of the localities we interviewed. A member of a shura in Badakhshan said:

> *Our village has 180 families – about 570 residents – and there's a shura with a head, a deputy as well as a few other members. It's the same shura as during the Republic, except that we lost a female member.*

Women Community Development Council (CDC) members meet in Kapisa province.
Source: Afghanistan Press Kit Uploads/Flickr, 17 June 2010

He elaborated on the consequences of losing that one woman from the council:

> *She used to help with services for women, particularly those without guardians [father, husband, grown-up brother or son, ie a close male relative]. It was a really effective way to deliver services, but because of the Emirates' restrictions, we no longer have a female member. Now, we have problems when providing assistance, such as distributing aid, because we can't find out what problems the women are experiencing. However, the council, including me who supports it, makes every effort to help all the families in need.*

In other provinces, new shuras have been created to accommodate new situations; one member of a shura with four active members from Takhar described such a case:

> *There've been small changes … before, there was one shura for two villages … but after the Taleban took control, the population in the villages increased, so we divided into two shuras. There used to be only 165 families living here.… But 100 Kuchi families came back from Pakistan after the Taleban returned to live on their stolen lands, which had been usurped by non-Pashtun tribes.*

In another village in Takhar province, the IEA authorities had requested a reduced council, as a local farmer explained:

> *It's the same shura as during the Republic with slight changes. We have a new head. Previously, there were six members, but now there are only two, a head and a deputy. One year after the Taleban took control, they asked us to reduce the number of members because they felt the council was unnecessary and two people could handle all the work. We decided that the head and deputy could handle most things. There are no regular meetings anymore. They meet when and as needed.*

A university professor from Takhar also told us that in his village, the shura had elected a new arbab (village head), who was acceptable to the IEA authorities:

> *Around the middle of last year [2022], the Taleban demanded we name a new arbab. The council members chose [NAME WITHHELD] because, in the past, he'd helped the shura and he's influential. And the Taleban approved this choice. The shura's different from the one during the Republic. The Taleban don't like the way the Republic did things, or democracy, or the idea that people should get involved in shura matters. I believe the Taleban would prefer to have only the one arbab in the village instead of the shura because they want complete control.*

Another interviewee from Kunduz, a village elder, said the shura in his village had been abolished, but the head of the old shura had been appointed arbab by the IEA:

> *Our shura was known as the Hambastagi Mili Shura (NSP Shura). We don't have an official standing anymore. The Taleban told us not to mention the Hambastagi Shura… because they dislike the Republic's approach, framework and even titles. The shura's been abolished and an arbab has been appointed to replace it. The person who was the head of the shura is now the arbab.*

Similarly, village councils are no longer active in Kunar province. Instead, the IEA has appointed representatives to act as a link between the government and villages, as a journalist in the province explained:

> *After the Taleban came to power, the village councils in Kunar province were suspended and there's no longer an entity working under the name of 'shura' or 'association' in the province. The Taleban don't allow such activities and they don't allow people to form shuras. Currently, the maleks are active in the villages and the provincial centre and the Taleban-appointed representatives work with them. These representatives act as liaisons between the government and the villages.*

While the old shuras still existed in Logar province in November 2022, they were no longer active by March 2023 when we re-interviewed one malek from the province. He said they now exist in name only.[20]

> *Since the Taleban came to power, the shuras have lost their authority and no one pays attention to them. Now, the imams and maleks do what the shuras used to do. Also, the Taleban have appointed their own village representatives and they have the authority.*
>
> *The shuras that existed during the Republic do still exist, but they don't do what they used to do before. For example, they were active in development, agriculture projects and other things, but now the government works through its representatives in the villages. During the Republic, the shuras met once a month, but now they don't meet.*
>
> *They cooperate with the malek of the village, but there are no official meetings anymore. When someone has a problem, he goes to the head of the village or the Taleban's representative in the village. Then, they go together to the district governor to solve their problems. Sometimes, someone from the district governor's office comes to the village and meets the community. Everyone can participate [in the meeting] – there's no problem with that.*

[20] According to an RTA report from 14 November 2023, the IEA formed nine village councils in Logar province. The RTA reported that these councils had been formed on the basis of a decree from the Supreme Leader and according to instructions from the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the security command of Logar province. RTA said that village councils would be formed in all the villages and districts of Logar province.

Almost all the interviewees in 2023 reported that their shuras, where they did still exist, met less frequently than during the previous government. However, those that were still active generally met at least once a month. For example, a malek from Zabul said:

> *The community development council is active in our area, but not so much because there aren't any development projects now. These are the same shuras as the ones during the Republic. They meet twice a month and also when it's required. The meetings are mostly about the distribution of humanitarian aid. Sometimes, they meet the government and if the government wants the people to do anything, the shura conveys its message [to them].*

An interviewee from Ghazni, himself a shura member, said:

> *We hold meetings whenever the Taleban asks us to. There have been three or four meetings since they came [to power]. They suggest holding meetings when they're collecting ushr.*[21] *Then, they collect ushr on the wheat, potato and apple harvests.*

Perceptions of village councils' powers after the August 2021 takeover

Almost all our interviewees reported that the shuras in their localities had been stripped of their powers and duties. Many said this happened because less financial support was available under the IEA. An interviewee, the shura member in Kunar, said:

> *It's the same shura as during the Republic, but our activities have reduced because, unlike the Republic, there are no financial services or support available. The Rural Development Department once supported the council, but they currently have no funds and don't offer any help. Some of the staff there have changed and been replaced by the Taleban.*

[21] Ushr, a tax on the harvest, which was not collected by the Republic. The Taleban collected it in areas under their control or influence during the insurgency, and nationwide since re-establishing the Emirate. It is collected by the Ministry of Agriculture and sent to the office of the Amir. For more on ushr, see the AAN's September 2022 special report, 'Taxing the Afghan Nation: What the Taleban's pursuit of domestic revenues means for citizens, the economy and the state' especially pages 18, 22, 23, and 36-38.

Village elders meet Afghan National Army and British Gurkha officers during a shura at Helmand province's Nahr-e Saraj patrol base.
Source: David Furst/AFP, 20 June 2010

However, in some places, the shura was still acting as a liaison and negotiator between the government and the village, resembling, to an extent, its traditional role. An interviewee from Ghazni said:

> *At the meetings, they [Taleban] asked us to identify those who were in the police during the Republic. The shura asked the Taleban not to disturb those people. If the Taleban arrested someone who'd been in the police, [the shura] paid to get him released.*
>
> *The Taleban also asked the shura to report anyone who had left the village and moved to the city because they wanted to convert their houses into military posts. They also wanted to do the same with [disused] schools. The shura solved the problem for the people who'd moved to Ghazni city. They spoke to the Taleban and told them not to convert these houses into military posts. For example, they wanted to convert the home of [name redacted] in Kosha village to an army post, but, with a lot of effort, the shura were able to stop it. However, they'll convert the old al-Biruni school into a military post. I think they're waiting for the toilet to be built.*

A similar story was told by a shura member from Takhar.

> *I've worked to support the villagers. For instance, a few days ago, a nine-year-old boy damaged a solar panel that belonged to a mullah – a Taleb and a member of the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice – with a slingshot. The mullah wanted to file a formal complaint and get compensation because he had the backing of the Taleban. We objected to this because the boy was young. He said the boy's parents shouldn't have given him a slingshot…. We were able to convince him to reduce the compensation from 12,000 to 5,000 Afghani, [USD 165 to 65] because the family couldn't afford to pay him.*

A university teacher from Takhar told us how his local shura and arbab worked together to help the community:

> *The Taleban recently detained a resident of our village because he was selling marijuana. We asked the arbab and the leader of the shura for help. [The resident] was granted bail after they went to talk to the Taleban. Our problem with electricity is another example. Our village has electricity, but the meter was torched, leaving us without power. We asked the shura [for help], and together with help from the arbab and the people, we collected [enough] money to fix the meter.*

The representativeness of the councils

In relation to the interviewees who reported that the IEA district authorities had stripped the membership of their village council down to a bare minimum, most said they had become less representative. A farmer from Takhar said:

> *Since there are now only two members, it's not as representative as it could be. It used to have more members and people who could readily contact their local elected representatives about their concerns. We trust the new head, [NAME WITHHELD] and the deputy. We chose him as the new head because we believed he could assist us in solving some of our problems. He has a good relationship with the Taleban.*

A former member of the shura from a village in Badakhshan province felt the same: "The councils used to represent the villages, but not anymore because they only have two members, as opposed to previously when there were between five

and ten members, depending on the size of the village." Another interviewee from Badakhshan was still positive about the new government-appointed shura, even if it was no longer entirely representative:

> *The current shura and its members are beneficial for me and our village. Even though the people didn't choose them, they still do a good job. People are satisfied with them and trust them. In the current situation, they're the best people to represent us and I trust them because they can build a good relationship with the Taleban and are respected because they are mullahs. People have nowhere to complain because they're afraid. Previously, the council's members were people of influence in their ethnic communities. Now, they're mullahs. The little humanitarian aid that's offered is given to the people who are in need and entitled to it. People have no complaints and are satisfied with the distribution of humanitarian aid by the council.*

Several other interviewees pointed out that their shura is not representative because it no longer has women serving on it, for example, another shura member from Badakhshan province said:

> *I believe the shura can represent the community, but no longer in the best way because there's no representative to speak for the women…. Due to the difficulties they now have, women are unable to participate in the meetings. The presence of one or two female members in the shura would be great because it's possible that the shura doesn't always represent the community. Female representatives can better assist women because they're more familiar with their issues. But the villagers trust the shura's current members. They're the only hope for raising their concerns.*

An interviewee from Balkh province felt the Emirate now disregarded the shuras because it wanted to establish direct ties with the people*:* "The Taleban government doesn't show any interest in the shura or value it all because it prefers direct contact with the people over [dealing with] representatives or shura members…. because the Taleban were not in our region during the conflict and had no influence on the people of our area." He said the old shura was representative because the community had elected members from their own ranks:

> *They were experienced, professional and knowledgeable people who'd been trained during the Republic. It was representative because the members were elected from [among] the people; they have family, relatives and friends in the*

> *village and they had to represent the community to the best of their abilities so their people could benefit. The shura members were good representatives because they were honest, influential and elected by the people. Each member represented 30 to 40 families compared to [the situation now where] only one or two members represent around 250 families.*

Several other interviewees praised their shura as representative because the people had elected its members and for being a bridge between village, government and aid organisations. An interviewee from Balkh explained:

> *I believe our shura represents the village because the people choose its members. They're trustworthy and knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of the government and aid institutions. They were trained by the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development during the Republic and are experienced. In our village, I believe the shura is a good representative of the people and that currently, there's no better option.*

An interviewee from Zabul explained how his shura works as a link between the village and the outside world, although he avoided answering whether his current shura was representative of his village:

> *The locals couldn't tell the government about their problems if the shuras weren't active in the area. It's the shura that takes the community's problems and demands to the government [and asks it] to address their problems. They're like the official reference point for anyone who comes from the outside, for example, NGOs or the government, who make contact with the members of the shura.*

An interviewee from Kabul province said that an elected shura was better than an appointed malek because, to many people, having a shura meant less corruption:

> *The malek is only one person; he can't attend to all the problems people have. [Our] shura has prevented corruption in the distribution of aid. If there was no shura, the malek might distribute it to his own tribe and relatives. This shura has distributed aid equally to everyone in each village. I believe that any honest person who's been chosen by the people and deals with people's problems without discrimination is acceptable to everyone and is the best representative.*

An interviewee from Takhar said that in his village, the community-elected shura had been overshadowed by an IEA-appointed ulema shura:

> *Although we trust the members of our shura and know they're doing their best, the current administration doesn't respect it. They dislike it and its members who were elected by the people for the people. The people and the shura are discouraged [by this approach]. The village council does a good job of representing us, but because the current government supports the ulema shura, [whose members] it selected, it pays more attention to their complaints, rather than to the shura. The shura does have effective representatives and we trust and prefer them to the ulema shura.*

He explained the difference between two shuras:

> *The village council provides services such as the distribution of humanitarian aid, identifying those in need and assisting in the resolution of disputes and some legal matters, such as the distribution of water for agriculture…. or the damage to agricultural land caused by livestock, which is resolved either by mutual agreement or a fine. The ulema shura aids in the resolution of legal issues according to sharia law, such as family disputes, marital disputes between husband and wife, inheritance disputes, sexual offences [without specifying what type] and robberies. The village council [members] are from the community and when we ask, they're happy to accompany us and provide assistance. We can share our opinions with them freely and openly. But the ulema shura are respected individuals and we cannot express our opinions and worries freely [to them].*

An interviewee from Laghman province pointed to the role of an influential person in the village and how such a person can be a bridge between different interests instead of a shura:

> *The shuras I am a member of represent the people well. The most influential person in our area is [NAME WITHHELD], who has good relations with the current government and also had good relations with the previous one. He consults the people in every matter. He meets members of all the active shuras in the district and conveys the government's messages to them. He represents the people well. Our people trust him, as do I – and I also trust the elders and the ulema. [The influential person] always solves people's problems impartially.*

The influence and legitimacy of the councils

When asked if they feel able to voice their complaints about the shura or anything else they deem relevant to the shura, most of our 2023 interviewees said they could easily speak about any concerns about any village problem to the shura. Some suggested that, if there were problems with the shura, it would not be wise to address complaints to the government. For example, an interviewee from Kunduz, who is a shura member, said:

> *The people are satisfied with the current shura members, but … if the members were unable to represent our [the community's] interests, we'd talk over what to do with the people of the village. If there was a better representative than [one of] the current members, we'd also debate that. [We could] call a re-election and introduce a new member, but since we haven't done this, I'm not sure how effective it would be, particularly under the current administration. I'm not sure how the Taleban would react and if we complained about the shura, they might dissolve it entirely.*

He said that although the council is influential with the people, actual power resides with the Emirate.

> *The council has influence within the community. People trust and believe in them because they've been working for the people since the Republic. They assisted them with their problems, settled their disputes and contacted the appropriate authorities about problems they were having with things like water and electricity. They still have influence with the people, but generally they lack the authority to act or resist the Taleban's orders. For instance, they're powerless to change the prohibition on women shura members, or when the Taleban orders them to deal with [what are actually government] problems – such as fixing the power – by collecting money from the people. The council lacks the authority to object to any of these decisions. So, I think the real power is with the Taleban because the shura can't object to any order from the Taleban and must abide by it.*

An interviewee from Balkh had a similar perception. He said shura members in his village had been more influential during the Republic:

> *[B]ut now they have less power. They're unable to deliver services now because those services are unavailable. The Taleban government doesn't provide any*

> *services as part of a rural development project and international aid has decreased.*

Nevertheless, he saw the council members as influential and knowledgeable individuals with external links who could resolve people's problems:

> *In our village, the council members, including the head and deputy, are influential. They've worked in the shura for a long time and gained expertise and abilities. They know how to engage with foreign groups and charities and they've worked with people to resolve their problems.*

Muhammed Sadiq, then District Governor of the Shah Joi district in Zabul province, meets local villagers after a shura meeting.
Source: US Navy via Resolute Support Media/Flickr, 17 August 2011

Others, like an interviewee from Badakhshan, thought that shuras were generally perceived to be as influential as before and were legitimate authorities who could solve problems because they were able to negotiate support for the community:

> *People report all their issues or complaints to the shura so that they may get help. For instance, there was a wedding in the village, so I asked the shura for a generator because the ceremony was at night. Nowadays, the economy's so bad that providing the family with a generator was out of the question, so the council decided to rent one instead and help the family with the wedding.*

Another interviewee from Badakhshan shared a similar account, saying that people prefer the village council solving issues over the government:

> *Our people believe that the village council should resolve every problem because they don't want any issue to be referred to the government. They are afraid of the Taleban, who will humiliate, torture and fine both parties in any dispute. In our village, disputes are settled by the council rather than being referred to the Taleban.*

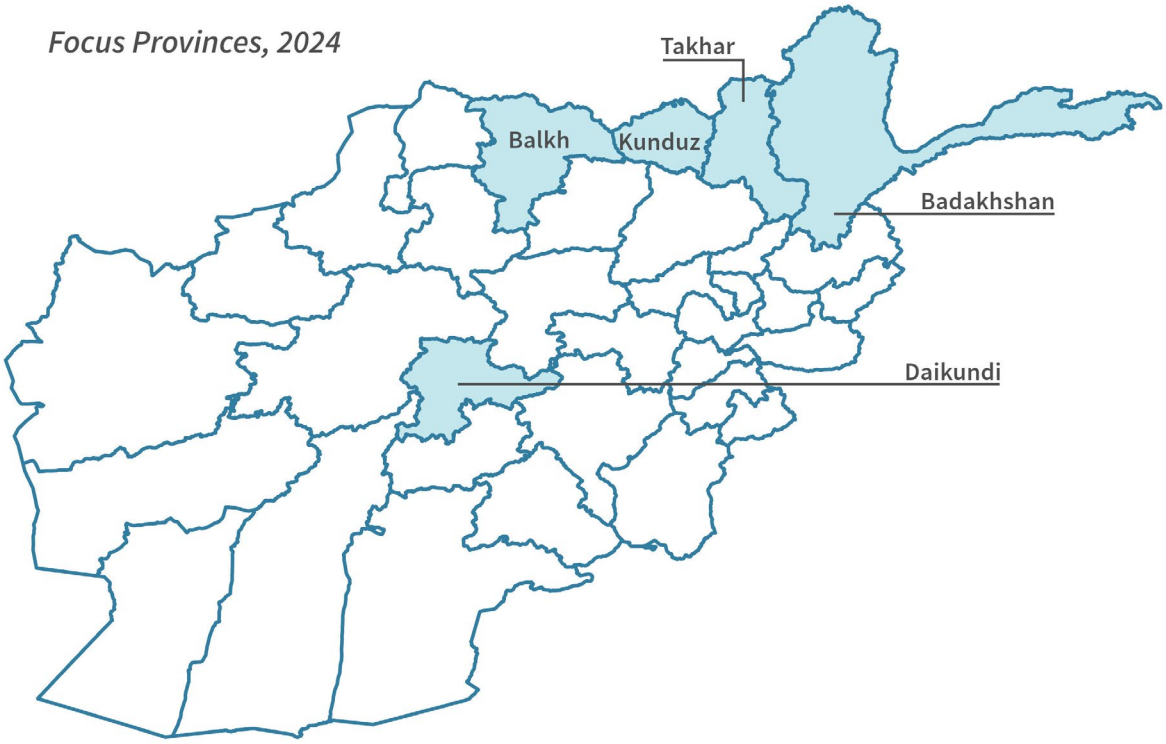
He also shared a story about the village council mediating an issue between a villager and the IEA representatives:

> *The Taleban ordered certain individuals who had weapons under the Republic to surrender them. The council mediated the handover and urged the Taleban not to mistreat them. The [former] head of the Republic's local police [ALP] handed over his weapons, but the Taleban, suspecting him of having a hidden [weapons] stash, arrested him. He was released from prison after the council provided guarantees for him.*

Indisputably, the councils that are still active, as well as their members, are seen as influential and legitimate institutions, especially in areas where the Taleban did not have a presence and/or strong support base before 2021. In places where the councils have been curtailed and diluted, former shura members are often still seen as influential individuals and often tasked with mediating with the government and external entities.

VILLAGE COUNCILS IN 2024

Figure 5: Location of village council interviews in 2024



Map by Roger Helms for AAN, 2024.

In late April/early May 2024, we re-interviewed seven of the key informants we had spoken to in 2023. They were randomly chosen and were from five provinces (Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh and Daikundi). These seven were randomly selected from among the two-thirds of interviewees who said in 2023 that their village councils had remained unchanged despite the change of government, ie they were either set up under the Citizens' Charter or NSP. We asked them what had changed in their village since we last spoke and why.

One interviewee, a Badakhshi, had told us in May 2023 that the same shura existed in his village, although it was "less active than before," said the IEA had made no changes to the shura, nor offered any kind of assistance, but "nor have they intervened in shura matters." He felt this was because:

> *Before the Taleban took control, there were no Talebs in our area and they had no supporters or influence among the people in our village. I think the Taleban*

> *don't want to have an unfavourable image among the people and lose the ability to influence them, so they don't interfere with the shura because it has sway among the people and its members are influential.*

However, a year later, in May 2024, he said that although shura members were still around, the shura had become completely inactive.

> *The Taleban said the council has no official status under Badakhshan's Rural Development Department. The Citizens' Charter shura's not legitimate to them. Nowadays, council members are preoccupied with their daily lives and jobs. However, despite the council's inactivity, certain members who have influence and respect among the people continue to offer limited social services, counselling and assistance, according to the village's cultural norms. Services are not like before: [there are no] formal meetings or shura gatherings. If people need help, they go to them for advice or assistance individually as fellow villagers with influence and experience. They don't have the ability or capacity to assist in any matter other than social issues because they don't have an official status…. I don't know why the Taleban said they don't recognise the shura. Maybe they think it's a remnant of the Republic or of democracy.*

The head of a shura from a village in Takhar province had told us in 2023 that his shura, although still influential among the people, had been reduced to a bare minimum in terms of what it could do.

> *The Taleban have not interfered with the shura's decisions so far but they have asked it to collect money from the public, such as for madrasa students.… Compared to the Republic, our ability [to act] has been reduced by about 90 per cent because we now only help with social issues that the people of the village face, such as disputes, village cleanliness and aid distribution, but [there are] no projects or funds for rural development, as there were during the Republic.… Nonetheless, the shura has more influence among the people than the mullahs because it has more members and its [members] were chosen by the people, unlike the mullahs.*

A year later, he said a council did still exist in his village, but "apart from assisting in providing the list of people entitled to humanitarian aid, all our previous activities have been entrusted to the arbab." He went on to say:

> *Arbabs are identified and appointed by Taleban intelligence and tasked with overseeing all activities that assist the community that were previously carried*

> *out by the council, including handling legal matters. They also report security-related information in the region, weekly or monthly, to Taleban intelligence.*

In another village in Takhar province, a resident had told us that the five-member shura in 2023 was intact and somewhat active, working "on limited issues, such as mending roads or power outages by collecting money from the people, assisting in the delivery of aid, resolving disputes and other such things." In May 2024, their list of activities, he said, had shrunk to only "helping provide the list of people entitled to humanitarian aid when requested."

> *The number of council members has been reduced. The Taleban have dismissed several shura members for various reasons, including allegations of adding their relatives to the list of individuals eligible for humanitarian aid. But they haven't replaced those dismissed members…. Instead, they've appointed an arbab to do the council's job. They've replaced almost all our council members with him.*

A member of a shura from a village in Kunduz province had said in 2023 that his council was proactively seeking support from the new government to help them with issues like repairing flood damage, clearing sewage water, and repairing electricity transformers, but was told the IEA lacked the funds and advised that they had better raise the money from the people and handle it themselves. In 2024, the shura member was still in pursuit of backing from the new government on these issues:

> *A month ago, all the heads of the councils went to the Rural Development Department in the provincial centre and met with officials about the fate of these councils. We asked if the councils still had an official status. In response, they said they had not yet received an official letter from the ministry and the Taleban leadership to scrap the Citizens' Charter councils in Kunduz province. [The officials told us]: For now, council activities are suspended until the ministry decides on this and for the sake of the people, we are currently utilising the arbab. The head of Kunduz's Rural Development Department said the councils hadn't been officially scrapped from the books because they're still registered and are recognised officially by foreign donor institutions. [They said]: We'll have to keep things the same until donor institutions agree to the changes.*

According to the interviewee, approximately 90 per cent of the councils in Kunduz province exist in name only and are "in practice paralysed and inactive":

> *In larger villages, the shura's been replaced by an arbab. In smaller villages, some former shura members have either been appointed as arbabs or collaborate with the new Taleban-appointed arbab.*

A Community Development Council (CDC) meeting in Herat province.
Source: National Solidarity Programme/Flickr, 15 November 2010

The three other interviewees who, in 2023, had said their shuras were unchanged since the days of the Republic and whom we re-interviewed, were from Balkh, Badakhshan and Daikundi and all said that the councils were still active. However, the interviewee from Daikundi said his council was now less active than during the Republic, and had also been neglected by those now locally in power:

> *Local authorities pay less attention to the role of local councils. Their position has been weakened and their powers decreased. Although the council is composed of elders, youth and ulema, the local authorities ignore the councils and in some cases, most of their powers have been transferred to the ulema council.*

Dissolution of the CDCs by order of the Amir

On 23 May 2024, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, citing a verbal directive from the Supreme leader of the IEA, Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, announced that the Amir had dissolved the community development councils. Letter Number 14869, dated 14/11/1445 AH (23 May 2024), from the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development to the Ministry of Economy said:

> *[B]ased on the verbal advice of the Amir-al M'uminin – may God preserve him – all Community Development Councils are hereby dissolved. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development will hold the councils accountable for winding up and putting an end to all projects, no matter whether these projects remain half-completed, or have been completed.*

The letter also said that the following would be added to the guidelines for the improvement of coordination of national and international organisations and NGOs:

> *The economic administration of a sector in which a project is being carried out should take into consideration the opinion of the respected ulema councils when deciding on projects to be implemented in their area.*

In light of this order, an unofficial translation of which can be read in Annex 3, we conducted a concise survey between 26 May and 2 June 2024 in all 34 provinces, and interviewed 34 people (one per province), in randomly selected villages to which we had access. We asked the following Yes or No questions:

1. Does your village have a shura? Yes or No
2. Are there women in the shura? Yes or No
3. Does your village have an IEA-approved/appointed headman? Yes or No
4. Does your village have an IEA-established village ulema council? Yes or No

Our findings indicated that the decree abolishing the CDCs had not yet reached the village level by the time we finished the survey; in all 34 villages, there was still a village council at the time of the interview. In fact, we purposely conducted several interviews on 2 June and asked our interviewees whether they knew about the decree; all said that they had yet to be officially informed.

Province/District	Village Councils	Women in shura	IEA-approved malek	IEA-established village ulema council
1. Badakhshan/Jurm	Yes	No	Yes	No
2. Badghis/Muqur	Yes	No	Yes	No
3. Baghlan/Andarab	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
4. Balkh/Dehdadi	Yes	No	Yes	No
5. Bamian/Punjab	Yes	Yes	No	No
6. Daikundi/Nili	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
7. Farah/Balabulok	Yes	No	No	No
8. Faryab/Almar	Yes	No	Yes	No
9. Ghazni/Jeghatu	Yes	No	No	No
10. Ghor/Tulak	Yes	Yes	No	No
11. Helmand/Nad Ali	Yes	No	Yes	No
12. Herat/Injil	Yes	No	Yes	No
13. Jawzjan Aqcha	Yes	No	Yes	No
14. Kabul/Shakardara	Yes	No	Yes	No
15. Kandahar/Arghandab	Yes	No	Yes	No
16. Kapisa/ Hisa-ye Awal-e Kohistan	Yes	No	Yes	No
17. Khost/Jaji Maidan	Yes	No	Yes	No
18. Kunar/Narang	Yes	No	Yes	No
19. Kunduz/Khanabad	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
20. Laghman/Qarghahi	Yes	No	Yes	No
21. Logar/Baraki Barak	Yes	No	Yes	No
22. Nangrahar/Achin	Yes	No	Yes	No
23. Nimurz/Chaharburjak	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
24. Nuristan/Nurgeram	Yes	No	Yes	No
25. Paktia/Zurmat	Yes	No	Yes	No
26. Paktika/Urgun	Yes	No	No	No
27. Panjshir/Rukha	Yes	No	No	No
28. Parwan/Jabalussaraj	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
29. Samangan/Khuram wa Sarbagh	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
30. Sar-e Pul/Balkhab	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
31. Takhar/Rustaq	Yes	No	Yes	No
32. Uruzgan/Dehrawud	Yes	No	Yes	No
33. Wardak/Sayedabad	Yes	No	No	No
34. Zabul/Shah Joi	Yes	No	Yes	No

Seven had an IEA-established village ulema council; 27 had an IEA approved or appointed headman at the time of the interview and three still had women in their shuras.

A doctor listens to a patient in a community health clinic in Danishmand village, Shakardara district, Kabul province, which was built with support from the National Solidarity Programme.
Source: DFID - UK Department for International Development/Flickr, 3 February 2010

It is too early to draw any conclusion as to how the new decree will affect villages, in terms of who has power and influence, or how and whether aid is delivered. For now, at least, our findings indicate that the new instructions have not been absorbed at the local level.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from our field research suggests that village councils, as innate institutions with influence and legitimacy, survived into the new era and that some methods and systems of elections introduced during the Republic had been appropriated and endorsed. The bodies described by our interviewees resembled hybrids that combined 'old' and contemporary community self-management instruments. The shuras that have survived – and not been reduced to/replaced by the head of the village – were still seen and used as liaisons between the community and external stakeholders, be they the government or an NGO providing aid or helping in other ways.

Children collect water from a well, constructed by the community with support from the National Solidarity Project (NSP), location unspecified.
Source: National Solidarity Programme/Flickr, 2 April 2013

However, the general picture that emerged was of the slow demise of village councils, in favour of individuals or groups, such as head men (maleks or arbabs) and ulema councils, who are appointed by and, therefore, liable to answer to the

state rather than the community. Even before the decree abolishing the councils, the Emirate's intentions were discernible in the way it had, over time, diminished and marginalised councils and in many cases, rendered them largely inactive. This was the case even before the Emirate's Supreme Leader banned Community Development Councils on 23 May 2024.

Very few shuras have kept their female members. More than half of our interviewees, however, felt the absence of women in their shuras strongly, if only for practical reasons such as the shura's inability to ascertain and address issues concerning women. As with previous research, assuming that rural Afghans are as conservative as the Taleban when it comes to women's affairs may be mistaken or the experience of having to have women on the CDCs has had a lasting effect.[22]

Some interviewees reported that IED-appointed or endorsed heads of villages are perceived as an extension of the state, rather than a representative of the community. This could open the door for communities, who in the past felt protected by their representatives, to feel imperilled by external actors, which had traditionally not been able to meddle in the community's affairs. Notably, many of our interviewees found the newly appointed village heads unrepresentative and most viewed representativeness as being synonymous with trustworthiness, knowledge and experience.

Over the past century, shuras have undergone many changes, but one thing has remained a constant feature – they have always shielded their communities from external influences. Now, under a government, that sees itself as a protector of traditional values, but is nevertheless authoritarian, the last local lines of community defence are under threat. The trend to reduce the importance of the shuras – in terms of how the government deals with villages – was already clear, but the state's hostility to the councils has crystalised in the order banning CDCs. It is very likely that we are witnessing another reinvention in power relations, as they intersect with village self-governance, one that will see the village headman and local ulema council holding greater sway.

Whether the Amir's directive is a final nail in the coffin of Afghanistan's village councils does however, seem unlikely. In rural Afghanistan, shuras have survived

[22] See our July 2021 report '[Between Hope and Fear: Rural Afghan women talk about peace and war]', which heard from women living in the Afghan countryside, which concluded that "dreams of greater agency for Afghan women are not the exclusive domain of those who can speak up publicly."

the test of time because of their centrality to village life. They did not begin with the Soviet occupation or the Islamic Republic and it is highly questionable whether they will cease to exist with the IEA's order to abolish them. How Afghan villages eventually respond to the new circumstances and how local-level structures that serve and protect communities can be reshaped cannot be foreseen.

A micropower facility in Qarghayi district, Laghman province, which was built with support from the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).
Source: National Solidarity Programme/Flickr, 17 June 2010

Although the letter relaying Amir Hibatullah's instructions about CDCs was brief, its intent was clear, an attempt to coordinate aid delivery with ulema councils and completely sideline the role of village councils. NGOs, the World Bank and UN agencies which have premised their work on coordinating the delivery of aid with CDCs, may face problems. The village councils have been a mechanism for working directly with the people, especially important now given the reluctance of Western donors to work with the Emirate. Although little development work

of the sort carried out in coordination with CDCs under the NSP and Citizens' Charter takes place at all now, many interviewees did report that humanitarian aid was coordinated with the village shuras, especially in the establishment of lists of beneficiaries to prioritise local people in need. The relationship between the Emirate and the aid industry was already fraught. (See our July 2023 report by Sabawoon Samim and Ashley Jackson, 'Taleban Perceptions of Aid: Conspiracy, corruption and miscommunication' for more on this.) Navigating this latest blow to what many aid actors had considered a mechanism for ensuring equitable, local aid distribution will take some careful footwork.

Whatever the future brings, if history is any indication, shuras will re-emerge as an integral part of Afghanistan's social fabric as key local self-organised and self-governing structures. Once the initial jolt of the Amir's ban has faded, we may see village shuras, as before, reinventing themselves under a new banner and perhaps with redefined horizons.

Edited by Roxanna Shapour and Kate Clark
Design and layout by Žolt Kovač

Cover photo: Afghan elders speak to the US Marines and Afghan National Army during a local shura in Bhuji Bhast Pass in Farah Province.
Source: David Furst/AFP, 10 October 2009

This research has been funded by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

ANNEX 1 – TABLE OF INTERVIEWS, 2023

-	Province	District	Occupation	Ethnicity	Date of Interview
1.	Badakhshan	Jurm	Head of village council	Tajik	18.5.23
2.	Badakhshan	Keshm	Villager	Tajik	23.5.23
3.	Badakhshan	Keshm	Member of shura	Tajik	23.5.23
4.	Badakhshan	Shighnan	Former member of shura	Tajik-Ismailia	20.5.23
5.	Badakhshan	Yawan	Ex-military officer	Tajik	26.6.23
6.	Baghlan	Pul-e Khumri	Retired police officer	Tajik	4.6.23
7.	Balkh	Dehdadi	Tribal elder and malek	Pashtun	17.5.23
8.	Balkh	Dehdadi	Hotelier	Tajik	25.5.23
9.	Balkh	Mazar-e Sharif	Member of shura	Uzbek	17.6.23
10.	Balkh	Mazar-e Sharif	Unemployed	Arab-Tajik	16.6.23
11.	Daikundi	Nili	Head of shura	Hazara	5.4.23
12.	Ghazni	Rashidan	Member of shura	Sadat	13.3.23
13.	Ghor	Feruz Koh	Civil activist	Tajik	18.5.23
14.	Helmand	Nawamish	Trible elder	Hazara	11.5.23
15.	Herat	Injil	Trible elder	Tajik	25.5.23
16.	Kabul	Shakardara	Teacher	Tajik	29.3.23
17.	Khost	JaJi Maidan	Civil activist	Pashtun	28.3.23
18.	Kunar	Narang au Badel	Tribal elder	Pashtun	28.5.23
19.	Kunar	Watapur	Journalist	Pashtun	16.5.23
20.	Kunduz	Khanabad	Head of village council and malek	Tajik	13.6.23
21.	Kunduz	Khanabad	Village elder	Pashtun	27.6.23
22.	Kunduz	Kunduz city	Member of shura	Tajik	20.5.23
23.	Laghman	Qarghayi	Head of shura	Pashtun	12.5.23
24.	Logar	Barki Barak	Malek	Pashtun	30.3.23
25.	Takhar	Khwaja Bahauddin	Member of shura	Pashtun	20.5.23
26.	Takhar	Khwaja Bahauddin	Farmer	Pashtun	20.5.23
27.	Takhar	Rustaq	Influential villager	Uzbek	20.5.23
28.	Takhar	Rustaq	Retiree	Tajik	21.5.23
29.	Takhar	Rustaq	University professor	Uzbek	21.5.23
30.	Takhar	Rustaq	Head of shura	Pashtun	21.5.23
31.	Takhar	Rustaq	Villager	Tajik	21.5.23
32.	Takhar	Rustaq	Head of shura	Tajik	22.5.23
33.	Takhar	Rustaq	School teacher	Uzbek	20.5.23
34.	Takhar	Yangi Qala	Farmer	Pashtun	20.5.23
35.	Zabul	Qalat	Malek	Pashtun	20.5.23

ANNEX 2 – THE QUESTIONNAIRE, 2023

Interviewer:
Date of interview:
By phone or in person:
Interviewee's name and age:
Ethnicity:
Province, district:
Job:

Instruction for the interviewers: These are the open-ended questions, which allow you to ask as many follow-up questions, as you deem necessary. Please try to get as complete answers as possible and try get as much details as possible on each question.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL:

1. Is there a community/village (shura) council in your area?
2. Is it the same council as during the Republic?
3. Is it the same council as before the Republic, if you can remember?
4. How often do they meet?
5. Are the other villagers allowed to attend their meetings?

THE COUNCIL'S JOB DESCRIPTION:

6. What is the council's primary job now? What do they do?
7. How much they can help the community?
8. Would you personally ask your council for help? What kind of help would you ask them for?

REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE COUNCIL:

9. In your opinion, is the council representative of your village? Why no/yes?
10. In your opinion or to your knowledge who really represents your village?
11. Who do you trust to represent you best?

SOCIAL POSITION OF THE COUNCIL:

12. In your opinion, how influential is this council?
13. Who is really influential in your village?
14. Could they help you improve your quality of life? How?

LEGITIMACY OF THE COUNCIL:

15. What can you do when your interests are not represented?
16. Is the council the mechanism or opportunity to tell what you need or to complain?
17. Have you ever done it?
18. Do you know anyone who has?

ANNEX 3 – LETTERS FROM THE MINISTRY OF RURAL REHABILITATION AND DEVELOPMENT ABOLISHING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

Below are copies of two letters, virtually identical, from the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development conveying the Supreme Leader's verbal instructions to dissolve all Community Development Councils, dated 23 May 2024, in Pashto, with AAN's unofficial translation following.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

د افغانستان اسلامي امارت
د کلیو بیارغوني او پراختیا وزارت

امارت اسلامی افغانستان
وزارت احیاء و انکشاف دهات

شماره: (۱۴۸۷۸)
تاریخ: ۱۴۴۵/ ۱۱ /۱۴

د مقام د دفتر ریاست

ضمیمه: دوه جلده لهرز العمل -

هدایت نامه!

د کلیو د بیا رغونې او پراختیا وزارت ټولو مرکزي او ولایتي ریاستونو ته !

السلام علیکم ورحمة الله وبرکاته !

الله تعالی مو په ټولو شرعی امورو کی موفق وګرځه .

موضوع : د کلیوالي پراختیایي شوراګانو منحل کیدل:

وبعد: د عالیقدر امیرالمؤمنین حفظه الله د شفاهي هدایت په اساس دهیواد په ۳۴ ولایتونو کي تولي کلیوالي پراختیاني شوراګاني منحل شوي دي، او دکلیو دیارغوني او پراختیا وزارت له لوري به له نومورو شوراګانو سره د ټرلو پروژو که هغه تیمه کاره یا تکمیل وي محسوبی او تصفیه حساب کیږي، همدغه راز د کلیو دیارغوني او پراختیا وزارت په وړاندیز او د رئیس الوزراء عالي مقام په منظوري،د داخلي او خارجي مؤسساتو او انجوګانو د فعالیت د انسجام او چارو د سمون طرزالعمل په ځلورمه ماده کي اوومه فقره اضافه شوي ده.

« اقتصادي (سکتوري) اداره دي په سیمه کي د کار د نقشي (پروژې) په انتخاب کي دعلماء کرامو د شورا نظر له خانه سره ولري.»

بنا: یاد طرزالعمل د دې لیک سره مل تاسوته درلیږل شوه، خپل اجراآت مو له نوموري طرزالعمل سره سم عیار کړئ.

والسلام

الحاج ملا محمد یونس اخوندزاده
د کلیو دیارغوني او پراختیا وزارت

Unofficial AAN translation

Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
From the office of the Minister
Letter No 14878
Date: 14/11/1445 [Islamic lunar date corresponding to 23 May 2024]

Instruction Letter

To all central and provincial offices of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuhu!
May God keep us united in all matters pertaining to sharia.

Topic: Dissolution of the Community Development Councils

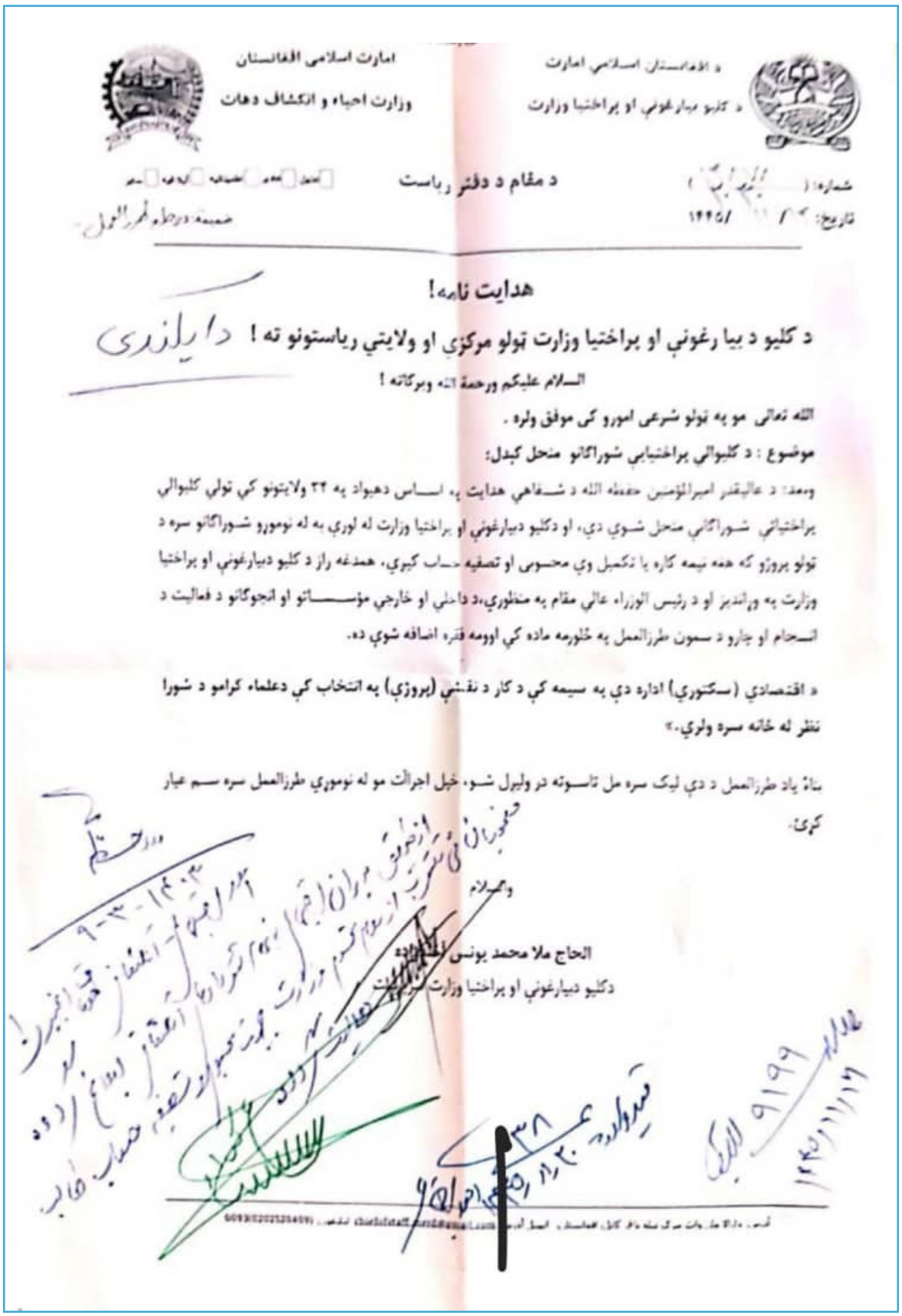
To proceed, based on the verbal advice of the Amir-al M'uminin – may God preserve him – all Community Development Councils are hereby dissolved. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development will hold the councils accountable for winding up and putting an end to all projects, no matter whether these projects remain half-completed, or have been completed. Likewise, at the suggestion of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and with the approval of the Honourable Prime Minister, the following will be added in the fourth article and seventh line of the guidelines for improvement of coordination of the activities of national and international organisations and NGOs:

"The economic administration of a sector in which a project is being carried out should take into consideration the opinion of the respected ulema councils in deciding on projects to be implemented in their area."

The guidelines are being sent to you, along with this letter. Kindly ensure that your activities accord with these guidelines.

Wa al-salam

Al-Hajj Muhammad Yunus Akhundzada, acting Minister of Rehabilitation and Rural Development



د افغانستان اسلامي امارت
د کلیو دیارغوني او براختیا وزارت

امارت اسلامی افغانستان
وزارت احیاء و انکشاف دهات

د مقام د دفتر ریاست

شماره: (...)
تاریخ: ۱۴۴۵/...

ضمیمه: درجه اول

هدایت نامه!

د کلیو د بیا رغونې او براختیا وزارت ټولو مرکزي او ولایتي ریاستونو ته !

السلام علیکم ورحمة الله وبرکاته !

الله تعالی مو په ټولو شرعی امورو کی موفق وګړه .

موضوع : د کلیوالي براختیایي شوراګانو منحل کېدل:

ومعه: د عالیقدر امیرالمؤمنین حفظه الله د شفاهي هدایت په اساس دهیواد په ۳۴ ولایتونو کې ټولې کلیوالي براختیاتي شوراګانې منحل شوې دي، او د کلیو دیارغوني او براختیا وزارت له لورې په له نوموړو شوراګانو سره د ټولو پروژو که همه نیمه کاره یا تکمیل وي محسوبي او تصفیه حساب کیږي، همدغه راز د کلیو دیارغوني او براختیا وزارت په وړاندیز او د رئیس الوزراء عالي مقام په منظوري، د داخلي او خارجي مؤسساتو او انجوګانو د فعالیت د انسجام او چارو د سمون طرزالعمل په خلورمه ماده کې اوومه فقره اضافه شوې ده.

« اقتصادي (سکتوري) اداره دې په سیمه کې د کار د نقشې (پروژې) په انتخاب کې دعلماء کرامو د شورا نظر له خانه سره ولري.»

بناءً یاد طرزالعمل د دې لیک سره مل تاسوته در ولیږل شو، خپل اجرائت مو له نوموړي طرزالعمل سره سم عیار کړئ.

والسلام

الحاج ملا محمد یونس [illegible]
د کلیو دیارغوني او براختیا وزارت [illegible]

Unofficial AAN translation

Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
From the office of the Minister
Letter No [not legible]
Date: 14/11/1445 [Islamic lunar date corresponding to 23 May 2024]

Instruction Letter

To all the central and provincial departments of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development [Daikundi is written in longhand, suggesting this copy would be sent to Daikundi province]

Peace be upon you and God's mercy and blessings!
May Allah keep us united in all matters pertaining to sharia.

Topic: Dissolution of the Community Development Councils

To proceed, based on the verbal advice of the Amir-al M'uminin – may God preserve him – all Community Development Councils are hereby dissolved. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development will hold the councils accountable for winding up and putting an end to all projects, no matter whether these projects remain half-completed, or have been completed. Likewise, on the suggestion of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and with the approval of the Honourable Prime Minister, the following will be added in the fourth article and seventh line of the guidelines for improvement of coordination of the activities of national and international organisations and NGOs:

"The economic administration of a sector in which a project is being carried out should take into consideration the opinion of the respected ulema councils in deciding on projects to be implemented in their area."

The mentioned guidelines are being sent to you, along with this letter. Kindly ensure that your activities accord with these guidelines.

Wa al-salam

Al-Hajj Muhammad Yunus Akhundzada, acting Minister of Rehabilitation and Rural Development

Signed

The following is written in longhand below the letter:

Date: 09.03.1403 [This is the solar hijri date, corresponding to 29 May 2024[23]]
Social affairs, development

Communicate through the directors of social coordination of the development councils. Also, through a letter, ask the honourable ministry for instructions regarding clearing up any outstanding issues from the development councils.

[23] Afghans commonly use a calendar which counts solar years since the hijra (in CE 622). The IEA prefers to use the Islamic calendar which counts lunar years since the hijra.