



The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data

Author : Obaid Ali

Published: 17 November 2018

Downloaded: 16 November 2018

Download URL:

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-admin/post.php>



Organising elections in Nuristan, one of the most remote, under-served and unknown provinces, presents a severe challenge. Most villages are far from their nearest district centre and all of the districts are under some degree of Taleban control or influence. In two districts – Mandol and Du-Ab – people were fully deprived of their right to vote. Elections were held in the six others, but even then only in parts of the districts. Contradictions on the number of polling centres reported as having been opened on election day have also raised suspicions that some vote rigging may have taken place. AAN’s Obaid Ali, Jelena Bjelica and Thomas Ruttig scrutinise the context in Nuristan which makes holding free, fair and inclusive elections so very difficult and report on what was a troubling election day where few Nuristanis were able to exercise their franchise.

Holding elections in Nuristan in 2018 was difficult. Mountainous terrain plus insurgency made logistics, eg getting voting material in and out, tricky. It was then difficult or impossible for many people to get to polling centres, if they had managed to register and if the centres opened. Monitoring the poll was even more difficult. It seems that, in many places, the IEC ‘subcontracted’ security and administration of the elections to local elders. Meanwhile, discrepancies in some of the basic reporting about election day, for example how many polling centres actually opened, flag up concerns about vote-rigging. Before delving into how the 2018 parliamentary elections went in Nuristan, we wanted to give some background and context



about a province which is under-reported and seldom visited by outsiders.

The ethno-linguistic and administrative framework

Nuristan is one of the remotest provinces in Afghanistan. Its people, numbering an estimated 158,000 for 2018/19 by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) were, until their forceful conversion to Islam in the mid-1890s, non-Muslim. At that point, the province was renamed from Kafiristan (land of the infidels) to Nuristan (land of light) and the people re-named Nuristanis (read a good overview of this period [here](#)). However, locals have preserved elements of their pre-Islamic culture.

Livelihoods are based on subsistence farming, animal husbandry and forestry and people typically live in wooden houses on Nuristan's mountainous slopes in order not to use up scarce agricultural land. Individual settlements are often isolated both from each other and from those in other valleys, as well as from the often token government presence in the district centres. Mohebullah Hamdard, a local journalist, told AAN it still takes days to travel from one valley to another. Various local sources told AAN that most Nuristanis have no interaction even with their district centres. Most decisions are taken by community elders and police are only present in the district centres. (This pattern was the same during Taleban rule when the 'Islamic Emirate' also had only a token presence in the province.)

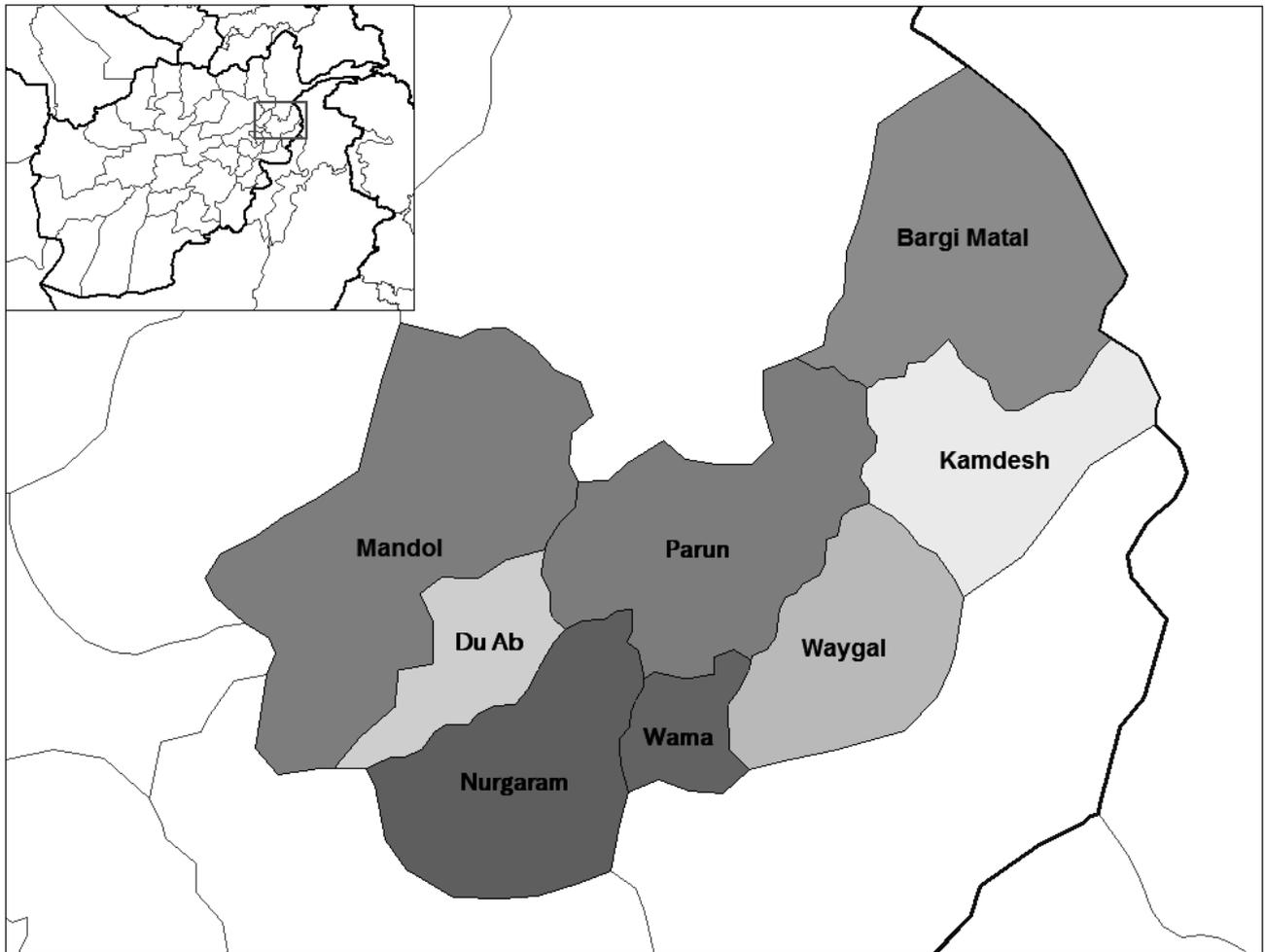
This mountainous province, which borders Laghman and Kunar to the south and the southeast, Panjshir to the west and Badakhshan to the north, consists of three thinly-populated valleys largely isolated from one another. (See a population distribution map [here](#), p 48).

In western Nuristan, in the upper reaches of the Alingar River valley (a tributary of the Kabul River), there are three districts, Mandol, Du-Ab, and Nurgram (also known as Nangarage).

In Central Nuristan, in the Pech River valley (a tributary of the Kunar River) there are two districts: Parun (also known as Prasun), with the eponymous provincial centre, bordering Badakhshan to the north, and Wama, bordering Kunar to the east.

Eastern Nuristan, which lies along the Durand line and has Pakistan's Chitral district to the east, has the Landay Sin River valley (also known as Bashgal River), another tributary of the Kunar River and of the Kunar River itself. There are three districts here: Waigal, Kamdesh, and Barg-e Matal (Bargromatal).

Both eastern and central Nuristan share a border with Badakhshan to the north and Kunar to the south. The province's eastern and central valleys are accessible through Kunar and the western valley through Laghman. The provincial capital, Parun, is hardly accessible from anywhere in the winter months due to heavy snowfall and poor roads. (1)



Districts of Nuristan, by Rarelibra, MTWT2012, CC BY-SA 3.0, Commons. Wikimedia.

Nuristanis are widely considered to be a single ethnic group and are mentioned as such in the Afghan national anthem. However, they, in fact, are comprised of various ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, many of them speaking distinct, Indo-European languages, sometimes summarily called Dardic (see a detailed description [here](#)). Even specialists disagree on how many there are, counting up to fifteen ethnicities and between five to ten languages. The main ethnic groups are the Kata (speaking Kati) in the mountainous north of both eastern and western Nuristan; the Vasi (also known as Paruni) and the Kalasha in central Nuristan; the Ashkun in the southern, lower part of western Nuristan; and the Kom (speaking Kamviri) in the southern, lower part of eastern Nuristan. There are also non-Nuristani minority populations, Pashai (around 15 per cent of the population), Pashtuns of the Safi tribe and Gujar (see [here](#)).



Languages of Nuristan, from <https://nuristan.info>

Salafis and insurgents

The mass, forced conversion of Nuristanis in the nineteenth century went along with an influx of particularly conservative religious groups, with ‘Wahhabi’ groups reported at that time and later, Salafis (Ahl-e Hadith) proselytising in the 1960s. This led to the [emergence of indigenous Salafi groups](#) in parts of the province and they participated in the province’s uprising against the pro-Soviet PDPA regime after it tried to assert its authority there in 1978. In 1982, a Salafist statelet, mainly covering Barg-e Matal and parts of Kamdesh in upper eastern Nuristan, emerged, called Daulat-e Inqilabi-ye Islami-ye Nuristan (the Islamic Revolutionary State of Nuristan) and led by a religious scholar, Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal. (2) His state had rudimentary government structures and received money from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Pakistan. In the late 1980s, [reported Daan Van Der Schriek](#), “Saudi Arabia recognised [Afzal’s] government, helping it to establish independent consulates in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.” The statelet, he said “subsisted by raising revenue from mujahedin supply convoys,” whose entry was regulated through an office in neighbouring Chitral.

According to various sources, Afzal’s group was closely linked to the extremist group Lashkar-e



Taiba (LeT). According to one source (see [here](#)), LeT might have even been formed as an Afghan anti-government group in neighbouring Kunar in 1990 (another Salafist statelet had emerged there in the late 1980s). Only after the fall of the Afghan communist regime in 1992 did the LeT turn its attention to Kashmir and become known as a Pakistani group. (The Kunar Salafis had a leadership distinct from Afzal's and there are no reports about any possible collaboration.) (3)

When Afzal supported the expanding Taliban movement in the 1990s, it gave him a free hand to rule the province (see [here](#)). This incurred the hostility of Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami and Jamiat attacked Afzal's forces in 1997. He was wounded and fled and the *daulat* folded (see [this AAN analysis](#) and more background [here](#)).

Although Nuristan is extremely remote with roads mainly serviceable only by pack animals, it did become a key supply route from Pakistan both for the mujahedin who fought the Soviets in the 1980s, and remains so for the various insurgent groups currently active in the area. Onwards through Laghman and Kapisa, Nuristan also provides access to and from the central region around Kabul and to the Panjshir valley.

Hezb-e Islami had a strong presence in the lower areas of the province during the anti-Soviet war, and its insurgent 'wing' after 2001. This year, Zia al-Rahman Kashmir Khan, son of the most influential insurgent Hezb commander in Kunar and Nuristan, the late Kashmir Khan, was running in the election in Kunar province (see [here](#)). Hezb concluded a peace deal with the Afghan government in 2016, see AAN's analysis [here](#).

After 2001, insurgency

Given its strategic position as an infiltration route from Pakistan, Nuristan quickly came into the sights of the United States military in the years after it ousted the Taliban from power. In late 2003, 1,000 US troops were sent there in a limited operation, apparently trying to find Hezb leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was believed to be shuttling between Chitral and eastern Afghanistan, and Osama bin Laden.

Between 2003 and 2006, coalition forces based at [the Provincial Reconstruction Team \(PRT\) bases](#) in neighbouring Nangrahar, Kunar and Laghman were active in the province. They pushed forward road building and improvements, mainly to create access for a US PRT planned for Nuristan. According to a 2006 provincial survey by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), roads in Nuristan had already been improved by the mujahedin, although they were still not good enough for motorised vehicles. By 2005, the PRTs completed some 40 kilometres of road and some 30 kilometres more were under construction, all financed by USAID. They included those in Parun, Wama, Waigal and Du Ab districts. The construction of these roads remains incomplete.

The next attempt to stem the rising insurgency in the province came in February 2006, when the US's 10th Mountain Division pushed into Nuristan. Over three months, units spread out through



the narrow valleys and high altitudes of Kunar and Nuristan in '[Operation Mountain Lion](#)'. In August 2006, US forces established the first Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Kamdesh district and several other outposts, although they did not last very long. The New York Times reported that, in 2007 and 2008, two posts and a smaller satellite base were closed in the Waigal Valley and in 2009 two more were closed in Kamdesh (see [here](#) and [here](#)). American soldiers withdrew from Nuristan after around 300 insurgents [overran an isolated combat outpost](#) near Kamdesh village in October 2009, killing eight soldiers and wounding 22. This military defeat was preceded by another battle in Waigal district in July 2008 in which nine US troops were killed when insurgents breached the security perimeter of a US Combat Outpost in this remote mountainous area.

By 2011, [media](#) were reporting that the Taliban again controlled large swathes of Nuristan, with Waigal the first district to fall (temporarily) to the Taliban in the spring of 2011. [Pajhwok](#) quoted then-newly appointed governor Tamim Nuristani as saying the Taliban held sway in five districts, Barg-e Matal, Kamdesh, Waigal, Mandol, Du-Ab and some parts of Nurgram. In 2011, US forces tried to recapture Du-Ab district, where, [in the words of the US reservists](#) from the Iowa National Guard, the "most significant" firefight their unit had been in since World War II took place.

An [AAN dispatch in 2012](#) described how a Hezb-e Islami commander, Mawlawi Sadeq, himself a former insurgent, exercised control on behalf of the Afghan government in and around Kamdesh's district centre. AAN also reported that in Mandol district:

On paper everything is correct: 85 teachers work in the district under the vigilant eye of 240 security personnel. But the reality, the delegation describes, is that the district – which has a population of 60,000 (official estimates allow for 20,000) – do not receive the money for a single functioning school. Meanwhile, the security commander, who was appointed three months ago, has been the first to set foot in the district in years, even though he receives salaries for only 70 men.

This neglect of the province by the government and its handover of authority to a local, self-imposed ruler resulted, as [the BBC reported in 2013](#), in the province being "at mercy of the Taliban". In 2014, The New York Times reported that "the provincial capital, Parun, has a government presence, but is disconnected from six of its seven districts," while the district of Barg-e Matal "has remained under Taliban siege for years now." Furthermore, the newspaper reported, Lashkar-e-Taiba's flag "flew over buildings in districts here and dozens of men from Parun fought on its behalf in Kashmir."

The Taliban continued to launch frequent attacks and seize district centres, such as [Waigal in June 2015](#) and [June 2016](#) and [Du-Ab in March 2016](#), killing the local police chief. [In December 2015](#), the Taliban claimed that nearly 200 security personnel and 140 government officials – practically the entire government presence there – had defected to their side in Waigal district. [In October 2015](#), they attacked Barg-e Matal.



According to [SIGAR's latest quarterly report](#), not a single district in Nuristan is fully under the government's control. Barg-e Matal, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgram and Parun are labelled as being 'under government influence', while Du-Ab, Wama and Waigal are 'contested'. This is a surprisingly rosy picture of the situation, however. Mandol's district authorities, for example, have been working from the administration centre of neighbouring Du-Ab district for at least the last two years.

A new element on Nuristan's insurgency map is the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). In April 2016, after ISKP lost large parts of its territories in the eastern province of Nangrahar, there were reports that many of its fighters fled to Nuristan. In June 2017, provincial governor Hafiz Abdul Qayum and Nuristani MP, Maulawi Ahmadullah Muhid claimed there was an ISKP presence in five out of eight Nuristan districts, namely Mandol, Du-Ab, Nurgram, Waigal and Wama. They [also reported](#) fighting in Waigal between the Taleban and one of the movement's former commanders who had joined the ISKP. On 10 November 2018, [Afghan media reported](#) an airstrike against ISKP positions in Kamdesh district.

Socio-economic situation

The population of the province is extremely poor. Apart from subsistence agriculture and forestry it relies on wage labour outside the province, while, according to a [2006 provincial survey](#) by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, government figures, local strongmen and insurgents exploit the province's cedar, oak and pine forests, as well as marble (in Waigal) and precious stone mines (in Kantiwa and Wama districts). Much of the latter is smuggled directly out to Pakistan.

There has also been some opium poppy cultivation. Between 2006 and 2016 Nuristan was considered opium free, but in 2017 UNODC recorded a minor opium cultivation, some 120 hectares in total in Mandol and Nurgram districts (see [here](#)).

Services and social infrastructure are patchy and low-level. According to a [2014 government health profile](#), Nuristan had three district hospitals, which should more properly be called clinics, three 'comprehensive' and eight 'basic' health stations. Its adult literacy rate then stood at 21.1 per cent. Almost half of Nuristan's population was categorised as "people in need" in a [January 2015 humanitarian profile of the province](#). It said 13,700 children required treatment for malnutrition and categorised 11 per cent of under-fives as having "severe acute malnutrition" and 19 per cent with "global acute malnutrition."

Any improvement of basic health and education services has mainly been carried out by a few international NGOs and Nuristanis residing outside the country, for example in the US and Sweden. However, as the insurgency picked up again, this province, which had never appeared on any government's agenda, lost most of the NGOs working there. Already in early 2005, UN news agency IRIN reported:

When you finally reach the tiny provincial capital [then Barg-e Matal], close to the Pakistani



frontier, the vista is bleak. Local authority offices are closed and there is no sign of any aid agencies. There are gutted houses and bombed bridges everywhere. An empty health clinic is serving as winter quarters for someone's private militia. The people look exhausted with thin, colourless faces.

In Barg-e-Matal and Kamdish, the two most troubled eastern districts of Nurestan, there is no sign of any government activity anywhere. In central Barg-e-Matal, Karim, a 40-year-old aid worker, stood behind the closed door of the Afghan Aid NGO's office that was recently burned down by insurgents.

There is currently some new activity by Afghan and international NGOs, including under the Citizen's Charter, the government development framework (more info [here](#)). The UN has no permanent presence in the province, but several of its agencies carry out ad hoc projects.

Nuristan is mainly covered by media outlets in Nangrahar and Kunar. There is no television station in the province. The state broadcaster Radio & Television Afghanistan (RTA) installed a special transmitter, which is switched on only for two hours every evening and broadcasts only to Parun, the provincial capital. In many districts, where they can afford it, people rely on satellite antennas. There are three radio stations: state-run RTA in Parun and two private radio stations run by local journalists, Radio Kalagush and Radio Alina in Nurgram. There are no local newspapers and one of the province's two magazines, "The Nur," has been discontinued due to lack of funding, while "Nuristan Hendara" is irregularly published from Jalalabad.

Election day in Nuristan, past and present

As can be expected from these circumstances, elections in remote and isolated Nuristan is a big challenge. Due to the strained security situation and the lack of infrastructure, the Afghan government faced enormous challenges in even supplying election material to Nuristan. The journalist, Hamdard, said election material was sent either by helicopter or transported via road from neighbouring Nangrahar, Laghman and Kunar provinces.

During previous elections, Nuristan's remoteness and limited access to the province provided opportunities for electoral fraud. In the first presidential election of October 2004, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan survey quoted above reported suspicious data. The total population – men, women and children – was estimated then at 125,700. Yet, there were 124,500 registered voters. Almost 40 per cent of the registered voters (46,857), half of them reportedly women, were deemed to have case 'valid votes'. One year later at the Wolesi Jirga elections, with the same number of registered voters, a female turnout of 52.8 per cent and a male turnout of 47.2 per cent was reported, even though election authorities had "found it troublesome to recruit adequate numbers of female election workers in Nuristan to staff women's polling sites."

In the 2010 Wolesi Jirga elections, of 130 polling stations scheduled to open, only 99 did so and, of these, the votes from 44 were later disqualified by the IEC and 17 more by the ECC. This finally left 14,449 votes rendered valid, 63 per cent of the 23,981 votes originally counted in



the preliminary result. One polling station in Barg-e Matal had returned a total of 751 votes – a clear sign of ballot stuffing, as only 600 ballot papers had been delivered to each polling station (see [this AAN analysis](#)).

In 2018, according to Hamdard, the IEC was unable to hold the election itself in a number of districts but outsourced it to local elders who also took care of election security. The police only secured polling sites in certain district centres. In two districts, Wama and Waigal, Hamdard said local elders provided security for IEC workers against possible Taleban attack and to ensure the delivery of election material. The elders took the materials to their villages, looked after them on election day and facilitated their return back to the district centre. Local journalists told AAN that in Waigal, some ballot boxes were taken away by a parliamentary candidate's agents. They added it is still unclear where the boxes are, but if true, it must be assumed that there was ballot stuffing.

In three other districts, Nurgram, Barg-e Matal and Kamdesh, IEC workers handed over ballot papers and boxes to elders who held the elections and returned the ballot boxes within 24 hours, according to Hamdard. He said that only in Parun, the provincial capital, where almost all polling centres were located in villages close to the provincial centre, did IEC personnel carry out the election.

Sadullah Payendazai, speaker for the provincial council, told AAN he had not heard of such proceedings. He did though indirectly confirm that turnout had been limited to the district centres.

As for women voters, there was, as in previous elections, according to Muhammad Shah Rahimi, a school teacher in Nurgram district, a shortage of female agents for parliamentary candidates. "There were very limited numbers of female agents in a few polling centres." Payendazai also said it was difficult for women actually to get to polling stations to cast their votes. "It was almost impossible for families to walk for an hour and half along with their female to get to a polling centre," he said. "Therefore, most women who live far away from the polling centres remained without casting votes."

Taleban violence

Like many other parts of the country, the Taleban attempted to disrupt the elections by attacking polling centres. According to local sources, including local journalists and the acting provincial police chief, the Taleban fired mortars at polling centres in order to scare people away from taking part in the elections. Ghulam Rabbani, the acting police chief for Nuristan, confirmed that there had been Taleban mortar attacks against the polling centres in Wama, Barg-e Matal, Kamdesh and Nurgram districts. He said four civilians including two IEC workers were wounded in an attack on a polling centre in Barg-e Matal. According to journalist Hamdard, the head of the IEC for Barg-e Matal district, Elyas Khan, was among those wounded. Payendazai, the speaker for Nuristan's provincial council, said that, because of the insecurity in these four districts, local observers had not been able to get to polling centres.



Rabbani also said that five Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers were killed a day after the election. Their convoy, which had been carrying ballot boxes from Nurgram district to the provincial centre, was hit by a roadside mine. The ballot boxes were also reportedly destroyed in this incident. He said air support was called in and 13 Taliban killed.

In Kamdesh, local journalists told AAN that two out of the four planned polling centres remained closed as a result of Taliban attacks against the district centre. They also said that in Parun and Nurgram the polling “largely took place in the district centres only.” Saadullah, the speaker of the provincial council, confirmed that polling centres were only open in the district centres. He said, “Most of the PCs outside of Kamdesh, Barg-e Matal, Waigal, and Nurgram’s district centres either remained close or operated for a couple of hours in the morning of polling day.”

Who voted and where? Contradictory figures

The first unexplained contradictions in election data in Nuristan was between IEC records and Central Statistics Organisation’s (CSO) figures. In some districts, the number of registered voters was close to or even higher than that of the total population estimated by the CSO. Wama district, for example has an estimated total population of 12,061, while the IEC data showed that 12,578 people had registered to vote. Similarly, Parun and Du-Ab registered voters in numbers close to the total population figures: 10,838 voters among a population of 14,755 and 6,612 voters among 8,598 people, respectively. No voter registration took place in Mandol district. All the other seven saw some registration.

As to polling centres, during the voter registration period, the IEC had foreseen 73 polling centres opening on election day. (See IEC details on voter registration in Nuristan [here](#)). 32 centres (44 per cent) had already been dropped from the list before 20 October for security reasons (see AAN reporting [here](#)). That left a potential 41 to open.

However, the exact number of polling centres that did open on 20 October remains unclear due to contradictory information from various sources. That voting only happened in six districts is agreed upon. Along with the potential, but unregistered voters in Mandol, those living in the other district almost entirely controlled by the Taliban, Du-Ab, were also unable to vote (although 6,612 people had registered) because no polling centre opened there on election day.

In the remaining six districts, some form of election did happen. According to IEC figures published on its website, 41 polling centres opened: nine in Nurgram; seven in Parun, the provincial centre; four in each Barg-e Matal and Wama; four each in Kamdesh and Du-Ab and; three in Waigal (see IEC details [here](#)). (That of course only adds up to 35 and also includes the four in Du-Ab which definitely did not open.)

According to Bashir Omar, the provincial head of the IEC for Nuristan, 37 centres opened.

However, journalist Hamdard told AAN that on the morning of election day, the local IEC had said that 20 polling centres were open and 21 closed. Later that day, he said, the commission



claimed 26 centres were open, while 15 remained close due to high security threats. This proportion corresponds roughly with information from the spring 2018 voter registration campaign when 20 voter registration centres in Nuristan were reported as facing “high security threats” (see AAN reporting [here](#)).

Provincial IEC director Omar also said that in total, around 22,000 people voted in Nuristan. This would still be much lower than the IEC’s number of registered voters of 67,068 people (see [here](#)). It would show that only 32.8 per cent of all registered voters had taken part in the election.

However, the discrepancy between the number of polling centres open according to the IEC leadership and that provided by local IEC officials raises suspicions, that votes may have been ‘counted’ in centres that never actually opened. This will be something to watch as more information comes in.

There were other problems with the ballot aside from the contradictory election data. Local journalists, observers and voters told AAN that IEC staff lacked training. Muhammad Shah Rahimi, a school teacher from Nurgram, for example, told AAN that in most of the centres in his district the IEC workers had not been familiar with the biometric voter verification system. The local sources also said that some polling centres in Kamdesh, Wama and Parun districts did not get voter lists at all and others appeared to have received incomplete lists, further reducing the number of people who could vote. Saadullah, the provincial council speaker, told AAN that people were searching at different centres but could not find their names on the voter registration list. “Therefore, many people returned home without casting their votes.”

Provincial council speaker Payendazai told AAN that female participation in the provincial capital Parun had been “good.” He said he had seen queues of female voters at some local polling centres. However, he added that a lack of voter lists in some polling centres in Parun made many female voters leave without being able to cast their vote.

Hamdard and Rahimi said that in Nurgram, female participation had been good at the start of the day. Hamdard told AAN that there were queues of 20 to 30 women at three centres he visited. Later in the morning, he said, after reports emerged about Taleban shelling, only a few more women turned out to vote. He also reported that people in Barg-e Matal district stopped voting after the Taleban began shelling.

Rahimi confirmed Payendazai’s report, that female participation was limited to those living near polling centres. The other issue of concern for women, he said, was the use of biometric devices and the need to have photos taken for voter verification. This further dampened female participation, he thought.

Conclusion: how much of an election was there in Nuristan?

It is hard to judge the credibility of the parliamentary election in Nuristan. However, what can be



said is that, because of widespread insecurity and Taliban territorial control, elections outside the immediate district centres were difficult, if not impossible to hold. Electoral observers also found access difficult because of the Taliban presence in most of the districts. It is clear that, in some areas, the election in Nuristan was out of the IEC's control and it is likely that even the modest IEC figures on open polling centres and turnout have been exaggerated and possibly mask an unknown degree of ballot stuffing outside the district centres. In at least some of the district centres, local sources concur that there was a fair voter turnout, including some female voters. However, it remains unclear how many of the total 22,000 votes supposedly cast were real. That number is already far lower than ballots cast, even before disqualifications, in previous elections. Whatever else can be said, whoever is sent to Kabul to represent Nuristan will not have been sent there by the bulk of the population; most people were simply unable to get out to vote, even if they had wished to do so.

Edited by Kate Clark

(1) Nuristan province was created in 1986/7 and then consisted only what is now its northwestern part, ie Mandol and possibly Du-Ab district. The provincial centre was the village of Gadruk, the birthplace of Muhammad Sarwar, an army officer before the 1978 *coup d'état* who was defence minister of the Salafist *daulat* but changed sides and reconciled with the government of President Babrak Karmal. In 1993, when the mujahedin were in power, Sarwar had joined them, and a larger Nuristan province was created. A new capital was gradually built in Pashki (Parun valley), but the Taliban's arrival in 1996 stopped this work. The province has continued to exist in this form, first under the Taliban and then in the post-2001 order.

(2) According to Daan Van Der Schriek writing for the [Jamestown Foundation](#) in 2006:

Afzal was an accomplished Islamic guerrilla as early as the 1970s, fighting the regimes of King Zahir Shah (1933-1973) and President Daoud Khan (1973-78). Afzal's grandfather was a key figure in the Islamization of Nuristan following the Afghan conquest of the area at the end of the 19th century (for which he was killed by anti-Afghan Nuristanis). (...)

During the regime of President Burhanuddin Rabbani [1992-96] Maulvi Afzal went to Kabul as assistant to the minister for Haj and charity. With the advent of the Taliban he returned to Nuristan (...). A civil war erupted between Maulvi Afzal's men on one side and (...) supporters of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar on the other. Initially the odds were against Afzal, leading him to enlist the support of the Taliban who sent him soldiers. Taliban assistance proved crucial in Afzal's victory over (...) Hekmatyar loyalists. However the introduction of Taliban influence in the area inadvertently curtailed Afzal's influence (...). In fact a combination of Taliban pressure and the worsening of the national civil war forced Afzal to abandon Nuristan and settle in Pakistan where he lived under the protection of the Lashkar-e-Toiba organization.

The 2006 SCA provincial survey mentioned in the text reported Afzal living in Nuristan again,



under house arrest in his home village of Nekmok (AAN holds a digitalised version of the survey in its archives).

(3) This group was distinct, including in its leadership, from the Nuristani Salafis, and reportedly joined the Taleban in 2010 (AAN reporting [here](#)).