

# THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF RELIGIOUS CIVIL SOCIETY IN AFGHANISTAN

## CASE STUDIES FROM SAYEDABAD & KUNDUZ



Final Version July 2007

Questions may be directed to Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)

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**Funded by:**

Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ANP	Afghan National Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
AKF	Agha Khan Foundation
CDC	Community Development Council
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CPAU	Cooperation for Peace and Unity
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
ECW	Education Centre for Women
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JEMB	Joint Electoral Management Body
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MP	Member of Parliament
NA	Northern Alliances
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PDC	Peace and Development Committee
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SNTV	Single None-Transferable Vote

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## **Thanks!**

The objective of this research is to explain the context and functions of the religious actors in Afghan civil society, a theme that to our knowledge has remained largely unexplored in Afghanistan.

This report was conducted over the course of more than four months and involved three full time researchers. The results of the study are presented in this report.

The analysis, findings and recommendations presented in this reports are the result of teamwork between CPAU researchers in Sayedabad, Kunduz and Kabul who despite the sensitivities of this research and the overall security problems in the field, managed to travel extensively in remote villages and collect the relevant data.

We would like to thank our colleagues, Kristian B. Harpviken and Kaja Borchgrevink at the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) and Arne Strand from Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) for methodology training; research design; comments on drafts of the report.

Any errors or omissions, however, are the sole responsibility of the authors. We are also grateful for the financial support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who have supported this study as part of a larger project on religious civil society in Afghanistan. We would also like to thank Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI) and the Ford Foundation for the additional financial support they provided.

Most importantly we want to thank all participants of the research for their valuable time. The generosity of the ulama for their time and experience for this process, as well as their willingness to share their knowledge with us, was brilliant experience. We believe this study will contribute to future research and in depth studies on the different aspects and dynamics of civil society in Afghanistan.

Sincerely Yours,

Mirwais Wardak  
Idrees Zaman  
Kanishka Nawabi

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES**

To what extent have Afghan religious leaders been involved in the post-2001 efforts to build a new state and foster development? What are their perspectives on the unfolding process, and on the various actors – Afghan or international – that are driving it? Are there ways in which to engage Afghan religious leaders more thoroughly in the work for stability and development? These questions are at the core of this report, which we explore in case studies from two distinctly different areas of the country, Sayedabad in Wardak province and Kunduz city in Kunduz province.

The study is rooted in the conviction that religion constitutes a major force in Afghan society, and that religious leaders hold considerable influence, with a potential to affect the peace process both negatively and positively. Since 2001, there has been considerable investment in Afghan civil society – frequently represented as a third force between the state on one hand and the market on the other – but civil society is often narrowly conceived to consist mainly of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Other types of networks and organizations that are much more deeply engrained in Afghan society, such as the religious ones, are rarely engaged as possible resources in civil society. But, just as religious actors have the potential to obstruct or even derail the efforts to build peace, they also hold the potential to strengthen it, depending on the way in which they are engaged.

The two case studies, from Sayedabad and Kunduz City, represent very different contexts for the engagement of religious actors.

Sayedabad district, merely 40 minutes drive south of Kabul, is relatively homogenous, the majority being Sunni and Pashtun, a rural population with a relatively traditional orientation. Kunduz is a significant city in the north-east of Afghanistan, with a very diverse population, both with different Islamic sects and different ethnic groups. Sayedabad is increasingly coming under Taliban influence, whereas in Kunduz, many are supportive of the government. These differences are also reflected in the involvement of religious leaders by the government and by international actors. In Kunduz, there is a functioning Shura-e-Ulama (council of religious scholars), and the majority of religious leaders express that they are constructively engaged in the effort to rebuild the country. In Sayedabad, the Shura-e-Ulama seem largely defunct, and the overwhelming majority of religious leaders express that their views are not listened to. They seem to be increasingly sympathizing with the armed opposition, openly expressing their sympathy for jihad against the 'foreign invaders'.

The report consists of 11 chapters. The next chapter presents the contexts for the case studies; before we move on to introduce the various types of religious groups and networks. In chapter 2 we discuss the impact of exile on the religious and political attitudes of Afghan religious leaders, while in chapter 3 we explore the interface between religion and politics more generally. Chapter 4 studies the role of religious leadership, while the following three chapters focus on, religious education, the Shura-e-ulama and religious actors vs. government. The 3 last substantive chapters - 8 to 10 – explore how religious actors work with law and its relevant frameworks; the NGOs; and the international military. We round off with a brief concluding chapter, where we also outline topics which are particularly important as focus for future research.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Afghanistan, relations between the government and religious actors and religious actors with other civil society players, are complex. Throughout the history, governments have sought its approval, and even existence, from religious authorities. In return religious actors function as advisors to the government. Given the often sparse presence of the Afghan government across the country, day-to-day interaction is often quite limited. Influence of local religious movement and political parties have further challenged this relationship.

This report draws on deeper analysis, debates and discussions shaping the emerging issues related to religious groups and their potential role as civil society actors in the current reconstruction and development drive in Afghanistan.

**Over stated self-perceptions of Influence:** the study finds that religious leaders - the ulama - in both Wardak and Kunduz seem to overstate their influence. The Wardak ulama seem to be threatening to destabilise the area if they are not happy - something which seems to be self defeating (Governments don't generally like being held to ransom and are less likely to listen to them). They have adapted very differently to the current situation, and the Wardak ulama seem overly restricted and unable to do anything.

**Vocabulary of Violence:** the violent vocabulary that much of the Wardak ulama use - they still want to be involved in the conflict - is alarming. What we find a slight paradox is that they are apparently 'too scared' to be involved because of reprisals by the Taliban - could they not just be waiting for a clear winner to be apparent to switch sides? Our understanding is that Mullahs have been, and can be, very courageous - and their statements about wanting to preach about development seem to indicate they are not scared, but waiting to back with the right side.

**Areas of Influence:** through findings of this report, we realized that the foundations of the mullahs influence is limited - they seem to be reduced to second class actors in some issues, but there is a latent danger that they may be able to rouse public support on a religious issues against the government. We think there are three 'issues' in particular that the religious actors still have control of, that they can use, 1) apostasy 2) women (particularly issues relating to honour) 3) the presence of the foreign troops. On any of these issues the religious leadership can rouse a significant amount of the population in to unrest - the question is can they coordinate their action, and can the government survive a coordinated threat?

**Religious Networks:** The research indicates that the Shura-e-Ulama, much like the corresponding government institutions, is not in full control of its membership, nor is it present everywhere it should be. Based on this and the information on alims, we think that the religious authorities are not strongly able to control events and their networks are too scattered. The question remains though, if they catch popular imagination could they organise a serious threat to the Government - We think the answer is yes, more because of the government's lack of ability, more than the religious leadership's ability to act as a unified polity.

**Social Security:** We are concerned about the weakness of the social security network - This may be because of the general level of poverty, but across many Muslim countries we do not see zakat being implemented very well, so we don't think this is specific to Afghanistan. We think there may be an opportunity for the government to include zakat within other taxes e.g. for income tax, we already pay 10% or more or less, so a small % of that would be set aside for zakat, or social security functions. The ministry of social welfare / public works is under-funded and this might be a way of avoiding corruption (because direct collection would be a disaster) whilst strengthening the religious credentials of the government.

**A New Generation of Religious Leaders:**

One of the findings of this report is that the older religious leaders are being sidelined and have limited impact on current political and developmental changes. The young mullahs are more effective at taking control of the developments in the political arena and persuade the younger generation to be more involved in religious processes. The new mullahs use the vocabulary of democracy and Human Rights and want to reconcile these issues with Islam. Common for these mullahs is their perceptions of their roles, which indicate that they want to encourage peace, provide education and serve the needs of their communities.

**Islamic Charity:** We found out that while many Afghans give charity individually, there is little organized Islamic charity (khairyat) in Afghanistan and it is not commonly organized or channelled through formally registered organizations. While some Islamic charities were there during the jihad and the Taliban, after the fall of the Taliban, the number of Islamic charities has dropped significantly across Afghanistan. Blacklisting of Islamic charities in fear of links to terrorism has stigmatized the Islamic charity sector in Afghanistan. The whole concept of Islamic charity organization, which could potentially have been a great resource, is undermined by its politicization.

**Religious Education:** The tension between the two dominant education systems in Afghanistan, religious and secular, has played a significant role in the way the country has developed. While developing the education sector has been a main priority, little attention has been given to religious education until very recently. A significant number of Afghan religious students study in Pakistan. At the height of the refugee crisis in the 1980's and 1990's tens of thousands of Afghan's may have been studying in Pakistani madrasas. While the numbers have gone down now, graduates from Pakistani madrasas are an important element in the development of religious civil society in Afghanistan. The current marginalisation of Islamic (madrasa) education politically,

socially and economically, may contribute to increase the tension/ destabilize the relationship between religious and secular education systems.<sup>1</sup>

**Mullahs and Development:** Both in Sayedabad and Kunduz there is a common will – and interest - among the mullahs to be involved in development activities. It seems to be seen as apolitical by many of the mullahs – though, with the assumption that development will not contravene Islamic principles. The mullahs believe that they can have a positive role in development, and see opportunities for their participation. Mullahs generally seem to view themselves as key to reaching the people; with one mullah saying: “ordinary people are listening to us. If we are given the opportunity and authority then we can preach to the people so (that) they (will) participate effectively in the process.”

**METHODOLOGY:**

The main part of this research was conducted between August and November 2006. This part was already supplemented by literature review during June 2006. The field research conducted within Afghanistan consisted of interviews in Kabul, Wardak and Kunduz.

The research was carried out through combined research tools, mainly structured interviews and key informant interviews for the case studies. *Structured interviews* were conducted with 40 ulama at district level. The respondents were selected on the basis of capturing diversity in terms of denomination, ethnicity, association with majority/minority, location (near/ far from district centre) and other relevant factors.

*Key Informant unstructured interview* was conducted with 20 key informants in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz City, Kunduz. These interviews supplemented the structured interview to provide additional knowledge and necessary insight in all the topics this research was

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<sup>1</sup> Based on interviews with key informants in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz city, Kunduz in August and November 2006

planned to cover. *Key Informants* were chosen by their experience, position, knowledge and information that would have helped us answer our research questions. Key Informants for studies were: Government officials, Heads/ members of shura (local/ district level), Local politicians, Member of ulama, District level judges, Headmaster of school, NSP program managers, NGO employees, Businessmen, ex-commanders etc.

When selecting the informants we made sure to seek a minimum of two independent sources on the same piece of information in order to strengthen the credibility of the finding.

These interviews were conducted in Dari and Pushto, Afghanistan's two main language, then translated into English.

## CONTEXT OF THE CASE STUDY AREAS

### Sayedabad

the case District	Ethnicity	Pushtoon Tribes
Sayedabad	70% Pushtoon, 20% Hazara, 10% other	Wardaks
Behsod Centre	Hazara	
Chak	Pushtoon	Wardaks
Jaghato	Pushtoon	Wardaks
Daimirdad	65% Pushtoon and 35% Hazaras	Wardaks
Narkh	Pushtoons	Andar, Sheenzi, Autmanzi
Jalriz	45% Pushtoons, 35% Tajiks, 20% Hazaras	Karooti
Behsod First Part	Hazaras	
Maidan Shahre	65% Pushtoons and 35% Tajiks	

Wardak province is located in the central east of Afghanistan, just south of the capital, Kabul. It is estimated that just over half a million people live in Wardak. In Sayedabad district the population is around 102,000.<sup>2</sup> Of these about 70% are Pushtoon, 20% Hazara and 10% of other ethnicities.<sup>3</sup>

Due to its proximity to Kabul, Wardak plays a major part in political and military developments in the capital. Several Wardaks currently hold a number of key government posts including the Ministry of Information and Culture, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, and several influential positions within the Office of the President.

During the Taliban government, several Islamic radicals emerged from Wardak who helped to promote and implement

Taliban's conservative interpretation of Islam. There are several different tribes in Sayedabad district; these include all the major Wardak sub-tribes, the Mayar, Mirkhil and Noori. Sayedabad is overwhelmingly rural and most people maintain their livelihoods through farming.

### Kunduz

Kunduz City is in northern Afghanistan and the capital of Kunduz Province. It is linked by road to Mazar-e Sharif to the west, Kabul to the south and Tajikistan's border to the north. Kunduz has mixed economy dominated by farming in rural areas and large amount of transit trade. There is a thriving economy in cross border trade and trucks carry all manner of goods from Europe which are picked up at Sher Khan Bandar, the river port on the Oxus River, 60 km from Kunduz. Kunduz city has a population of around 117,000 people, while the whole province has an estimated population of 862,000.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of this century the Kunduz area was a swamp famed principally for its malarial mosquitoes, a popular proverb "If you want death, go to Kunduz" clearly expressed the status of this province. The assistance of the international community in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century encouraged reclamation projects, the spread of cotton plantations and has been responsible for an incredible transformation of the city. Kunduz was the last major city held by the Taliban before its fall to US-backed Northern Alliance forces on November 26, 2001. Kunduz has a varied economic base with a large amount of transit trade and farming in rural areas.

<sup>2</sup> Central Statistics Office, Afghanistan, 2006 Census data, access from <http://www.cso.gov.af/> Population data here and in the rest of the report is taken from the Central Statistics Office, Afghanistan.

<sup>3</sup> Estimates of the ethnic breakdown of populations are based on interviews with key informants, Sayedabad, Wardak, CPAU, August 2006

<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Office, Afghanistan, 2006 Census data, access from <http://www.cso.gov.af/>

## 1. RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND NETWORKS

### 1.1 Denominations and sects

The vast majority, probably 99%, of Afghans are Muslim. The majority, approximately 85% subscribe to the Sunni Hanafi School for interpreting the Quran and Hadith.<sup>5</sup> Hanafi Fiqh<sup>6</sup> is also the most widely used source of Islamic jurisprudence. The Shiites are about 15% and predominantly follow the Jafaria School and use Jafaria Fiqh as their source of jurisprudence. There is a minority of Ismaili Shiite (less than one percent) as well as non-Muslims including Jews, Hindus and Christians. The remainder of practicing Muslims adhere to other Sunni and Shia schools, mainly the Salafi/ Wahhabi sects. In addition to these schools many Afghan Muslims, both Sunni and Shia, subscribe to a variety of Sufi beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

#### Sayedabad

The population in Sayedabad district is highly heterogeneous; the overall majority is Sunni and Pushtoon. Though there are a number of returning refugees in Sayedabad district from other minorities, particularly Hazaras, they have converted to Sunni Islam. None of the religious leaders interviewed could identify any other Islamic school being practised in the area – all of the respondents believed that only Hanafi inspired Islam was practised in the district.

There are few places close to Kabul with a stronger religious zeal and identity than

what is found in Sayedabad. There is an Imam of a mosque for every 50 families in some parts of the district, compared to around 130 families per Imam in Kunduz.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps not strange then, that the Taliban would find one of their best areas for recruitment in Wardak. While several high ranking Taliban officials were drawn from Wardak during the Taliban rule, radical Islamic views nonetheless have a weaker political or ideological foundation than traditional forms of Islam in Sayedabad.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the large scale migration of people from Wardak to Pakistan during the war of the 1980s, there is a broad acquaintance with other Islamic sects and ideologies, including Wahabism. Sayedabad itself went through a radicalization process in the 1990's in the post-Communist era. Relations between sects and denominations in Sayedabad have undergone significant changes over the past 40 years and the potential for conflict along sectarian lines remains. There is a pervasive fear amongst the ulama about the power, influence and potential return of the Taliban. The Taliban's ability to influence the ulama's engagement with the government, development and their relationships with other sects is significant.<sup>10</sup>

The relations among pirs, sufis, mullas and Taliban have undergone significant changes in the last few years. Among mullas and particularly among the young students there is an apparent sympathy towards Taliban. However, there are

<sup>5</sup> Hadith are recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Today they are used as part of Muslims understanding of Islam together with the Quran and the *fiqh*.

<sup>6</sup> *Fiqh* means Jurisprudence, or the interpretation of Sharia law.

<sup>7</sup> Sufism is a mystical form of Islam where the path is the internal spiritual journey of the individual. The Sufi orders of brotherhoods, called 'tariqat' were first established in Afghanistan in the twelfth century. The growth of Sufism has been important in the history of Islam in Afghanistan. The country has fostered many world famous Sufi poets such as, Ansari (11th century), Sanayi of Ghazni (12th century) *Jami* (15th century) of Herat, and *Rumi* of Balkh (13th century), *Rumi's* collection of poems, the *Mathnawi*, is considered by many to be the greatest ever written in Dari.

<sup>8</sup> In addition a family may have more than one mosque to attend, in Wardak the median number of mosques a family may attend is only 1 or 2, but in Kunduz this is as high as 5. The difference is probably because of the urban nature of Kunduz and the ability of people to travel easily to many different mosques.

<sup>9</sup> *Esposito, John L. (editor in chief). The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. Oxford University Press, 2003. 359pp. ISBN 0195125584: Radical Islam: Radical Islam or Islamic fundamentalism is a religious ideology which advocates literalistic interpretations of the texts of Islam, Sharia law which are considered sacred by devotee Muslims and sometimes an Islamic State. It is often regarded as the older, less preferred term for Islamism, sometimes used interchangeably with that term, and sometimes attacked as fundamentally inaccurate.*

<sup>10</sup> Based on interviews with Ulama members in Sayedabad, Wardak, CPAU, in August 2006

question raised by the ulama about the approach, funding sources and the individuals with questionable reputation being recruited by the Taliban. These concerns of the ulama have never been publicly stated but have revealed in private meetings with those they trust. It does not mean that ulama in Wardak have rectified the government in Kabul, still call the foreign forces; invaders. Even such sentiments are not publicly stated fearing the consequence from the government and Coalition Forces.

The hostilities among the pirs and ulama do not seem to be very severe and there is still respect among ordinary mullas to the sufis and pirs. It was always the Hezbi-e Islami (Hikmatyar Group) that has tried to reduce later's influence and undermine their religious authority. The sufis and pirs lost some respect as they got involved in politics and were affiliated with different warring factions during the last 25 years. The young generation in the pirs, and sufi's families grew up in a different environment and very few followed their predecessors. Apart from joining warring factions, there are one or two cases where members of these families have been with communists as well.

### **Kunduz**

There are several religious denominations in Kunduz. The largest are the Sunni Hanafi, followed by Shiite Jafaris. There are a small number of Sunni Salafi / Wahhabi adherents. There are also some scattered Ismaili Shiite families in parts of Kunduz City and a few Sikhs and Hindus who generally live within Kunduz city for decades. In the absence of any clear census, it is difficult to state the size of each denomination, but it is estimated that 80% are Sunni, 15% Shiite, 5% Ismaili and less than a percent are Sikhs and Hindus. Interestingly despite the outward religious pluralism of the city only 35% of respondents could identify that both the Hanafi and Jafari schools were present in Kunduz – 65% believed that only Hanafi

was practiced indicating that religious practices are still conservative.<sup>11</sup>

Amongst Sunni Muslims, there are a good number of sufis. Prior to the communist regime several famous sufi pirs attracted large bodies of followers in Kunduz, and the sites of their brotherhoods were and are popular social and cultural community centres providing educational and spiritual services.

Significant Islamic radicalization first began after the Russian invasion. As the provinces in northern Afghanistan were further away from the centres of this process in Pakistan, there was more space for non-radical Islamic practices, including Sufism, which flourished in Kunduz. The years of civil war and subsequent Taliban take over affected Sufi practices and as a consequence there are now a limited number of sufi centres within the city. Instead some mosques also function as places for sufi gatherings and rituals.<sup>12</sup> The greater plurality in Kunduz and the distance from the centres of radical Islamic training and teaching also means that the area is generally more open with regard to interpretations of the Hadith, Qurran and the use of Sharia. Throughout the survey and interviews the ulama in Kunduz presents a more centrist position in Islamic teaching. Their world view is not solely dominated by the demand to implement Sharia law.

### **1.2 Religious Group's Interaction amongst Themselves**

Tracing the interactions in and between religious groups (including religious leaders and institutions) is important if we are to understand how the groups function. In reality there is no formalized interaction amongst and between most religious groups, on a regular basis. Despite popular belief of a unified Islamic polity, religious

<sup>11</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz city, Kunduz in August and November 2006

<sup>12</sup> Though it is hard to obtain accurate figures it is believed that there are around 1,000 people from several Tariqats in Kunduz City including the Chishtiya, Suhrwardiya Naqshbandiya, Bahaduriya and Qadiriya and an estimated 16,000 Sufi followers in Kunduz Province.

groups are highly self-centred, and limit their interactions with other religious groups. When there is interaction, it is not necessarily characterised by formal religious activities.<sup>13</sup> This is particularly true in Sunni Islam because there is no hierarchy within the clergy, unlike in Shia Islam. It is hard to find mullahs who submit to their seniors, and those they do submit to are either living outside their locale or are dead.

Internally the groups primarily interact through regular formal and informal ceremonies – though in Kunduz the focus is on the informal gatherings. Public gatherings are typically held in mosques or madrasas, and usually an invitation is not required. Different events such as death related ceremonies (the funeral or ‘khatm’) and also ‘dastar bandi’ ceremonies are the main public gatherings.

### Sayedabad

In Sayedabad, the influence of religion is ever present in people’s everyday lives and business transactions. There is hardly any political, economic or social interaction that is not validated by religion. In such a situation it is important not to underestimate the role of mosques and the people running these institutions. In Sayedabad there is a mosque for every 50 households, in some cases even groups as small as 30 households have established a mosque.<sup>14</sup> The high number of mosques is partially a result of the growing influence of Taliban orthodoxy which discourages people from going to shrines to venerate saints.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Respondents to the CPAU Survey in Kunduz indicate that only 10% of mullahs hold joint religious ceremonies, most contact is simply through the wider interactions with neighbouring communities. Data from CPAU survey carried out in Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

<sup>14</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August 2006

<sup>15</sup> The *Wahabis* generally oppose visiting shrines, because in their opinion, this perpetuates un-Islamic practices such as bowing to the grave of a saint and other acts of superstition.

During the *Taliban* Government an edict was issued banning the visiting of shrines and the veneration of saints. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Author Ahmad Rashid Yale University Press (March 2000) ISBN 0-300-08340-8

There are occasional informal meetings between religious individuals and groups; mostly during religious ceremonies. In comparison to Kunduz, interactions between religious actors generally are of formal nature and many hold joint religious ceremonies.<sup>16</sup> Even though almost all the Sayedabad mullahs come from Wardak they draw on a very wide and diffuse circle of inspirational alims<sup>17</sup> they named 19 different alims who were important to them, and only 1 Mullah was mentioned 10 times out of 20 interviewees. It is important to understand the lack of group collaboration under one umbrella as it limits their ability to organise as a significant political actor. The Taliban themselves ensured that the mullahs were prevented from forming any coalition and did not fully integrate them within their movement. They understood that while they wanted the mullahs to be involved, they did not want them to become independent and politically organized.<sup>18</sup> During the Taliban government meetings and gatherings were more coordinated between the religious groups, but these mainly involved Sunni groups. Many respondents noted, often lamented, the fact that when the Taliban were removed from power, the ulama lost authority. As a consequence, the government is not taking them seriously.

The current political uncertainty means religious groups and individuals are waiting and avoiding forming coalitions and holding gatherings. They are chiefly scared of retaliation at the hands of the Taliban and avoid joining religious gatherings and formal groups such as the Shura-e-ulama. They are concerned about the current situation and are very conservative in their relations.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Every respondent in Wardak noted that they regularly hold or attend each other’s religious ceremonies. Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak August 2006

<sup>17</sup> A person who has a religious inspiration – normally a mullah. It stems from the Arabic for knowledge. It is also used for people with good knowledge.

<sup>18</sup> Based on interviews with Ulama members in Sayedabad, Wardak, CPAU, in August 2006

<sup>19</sup> Based on interviews with Ulama members in Sayedabad, Wardak, CPAU, in August 2006

## Kunduz

In Kunduz the level of collaboration is more varied; mullahs<sup>20</sup> indicating not just the plurality within the ulama in Kunduz, but also that their networks are wider, reaching ulama in other provinces and abroad.<sup>21</sup> The sharp rise in population because of returning refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) is leading to an increase in the number of religious ceremonies. Informal gatherings of groups of up to 30 or 40 mullahs and students are taking place in 'khatm', death related ceremonies including for 'isqat',<sup>22</sup> wedding parties and other rituals. The only formal gathering amongst ulama is 'dastar bandi'. The ulama from a madrasa usually ask mullahs from outside the province to be present at this ceremony.

According to one mullah, the *dastar bandi* "is a traditional practice where the hand of respected ulama should touch the turbans ('*dastars*') of the newly graduated religious students ('*taliban*').<sup>23</sup> Like the Taliban government, the Mujahedin also convened shuras (councils) that involved religious leaders. These were often just ad-hoc coalitions in order to take a collective stand on any threats from sources like human rights groups, the international community or the government. The role of religious leaders in these meetings was often to give legitimacy to the proceedings and to issue edicts regarding a new action or way forward.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The mullahs in the survey gave 43 different alims as sources of inspiration and no single alim was mentioned more than 5 times. Many of the alims were not from Kunduz, and some were from other countries.

<sup>21</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

<sup>22</sup> '*isqat*' is an Arabic word which literally means waiving or relinquishing. According to Islamic teachings, once a dead person is buried, his/her relatives have to give some money to the poor and needy or mullah of that area as a waiver to worldly unpaid debts of the deceased person.

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<sup>23</sup> While this is an important ceremony, those invited from distant provinces are often financially unable to attend these ceremonies, so the effectiveness of this meeting in building relations is not clear.

<sup>24</sup> Currently there is a regular gathering, under the name of Shura-e-Islami in Kunduz, but it is not led by a Mullah but a commander and the role of the mullahs in the current Shura is less clear than before.

## 2. THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

This chapter will take a closer look at the effects of the Afghan refugee experience: how it has effected religious beliefs and practices in Afghanistan, contacts between religious leaders in Afghanistan and abroad, and the influence of Islamist ideologies.

Between 1979 and 1992, more than a quarter of Afghanistan's population - over six million people - were driven from the country in search of safety, mainly to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan. Although many returned in anticipation of peace following the collapse of the pro-Soviet government in 1992, the continuation of armed conflict and deteriorating law and order resulted in large numbers of Afghans choosing not to return. It was not until the fall of the Taliban that mass returns started again. Since 2001 nearly 4 million Afghans have returned.<sup>25</sup>

### Sayedabad

In Sayedabad proximity to Kabul was a key factor to the impact of the conflict on the area as was its rural nature. Most of the fighting of the 1980s took place in rural areas which normally involved Soviet and Afghan troops trying to suppress the actions of armed opposition groups who operated in the countryside. The major refugee movements from Wardak occurred after the Soviet invasion. Most of the refugees fled to Pakistan, which was relatively close, which many had visited in the past, and which was culturally familiar.<sup>26</sup> Refugees from rural areas such as Sayedabad would almost always end up in refugee camps in Pakistan. Once settled in refugee camps, the refugees tended to be part of the jihad and send their children to schools and religious madrasas.

The general pattern of displacement also affected the mullahs in Sayedabad. About a third of our respondents had been refugees, and all but one of these was in Pakistan, in specific camps related to their jihadist party.<sup>27</sup> It was in refugee camps in Pakistan and other countries that new ties were formed and new and radical ideologies were cultivated. The refugees who lived outside refugee camps had a very different experience and were able to access other forms of cultural activities and education.

After the fall of the pro-Soviet government in April 1992, many of refugees returned home. However, during this time the nature of the Afghan civil war had changed. Parts of the country plunged into lawlessness. Banditry became rampant, including in much of Wardak. The province changed hands several times because of violent clashes between armed groups organized along political-religious lines. However, Sayedabad was spared from ethno-religious infighting because the vast majority of the population are Pushtoon. The emergence of Taliban in 1994 and subsequent capture of Wardak in February 2005 was a unifying moment. The Taliban succeeded in disarming the local commanders of opposition groups such as Hizb-e Islami, Jamiat-e Islami and Mahaz-e Milli, and this resulted in a reduction in acts of banditry and extortion in the province.

### Kunduz

The flight pattern of people from Kunduz during the Jihad, the consequent civil war and the Taliban takeover of the province was slightly different. Many were internally displaced. Most people fled to Pakistan and Iran (sometimes to both). Some moved on to Europe and the US. Therefore the migrants experiences varied considerably.<sup>28</sup> City-born refugees often settled in other cities, continued in modern secular education and did not generally

<sup>25</sup> Reports of the Secretary-General to the UN Security Council on the Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security on 15<sup>th</sup> march 2007, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2006 and 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005, all available from <http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/UN-Docs.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August and November 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August 2006

<sup>28</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

become part of the jihadi groups.<sup>29</sup> In addition, population movements were not solely caused by insecurity but also by economic difficulties. Kunduz was attacked 9 times during the infighting of the Mujahedin factions in the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> During this period, many residents were displaced. As in other parts of the country, political and ethnic associations were key factors in deciding to which country and in which camps people would be a refugee.

From the mullahs interviewed, 6 out of 20 sought refuge outside Afghanistan. Most of these went to Pakistan but had also spent at least some time in Iran. They engaged themselves mainly in education, and while many were members of an Islamic Jihadist party, most did not fight directly in the jihad.<sup>31</sup>

The impact of life in exile is visible in the city. Much of the exiled population has been able to access education, also the women. English language and computer studies abroad have enabled many younger Kunduzis to gain good jobs with NGOs or the UN. In addition exposure to other cultures has also impacted on the refugees.

This includes some negative impact of Pakistani and Iranian Islamic education which radicalized young students in some madrasas. Despite a vast number of refugees returning home to Kunduz, there are still significant population movements to Pakistan, Iran, the Gulf States, Europe and USA for economic opportunities. This pattern is increasing as the people in Kunduz become economically better-off and can afford to go to those countries for work.<sup>32</sup> The refugee experience has had profound effects on the religious beliefs and practices in Afghanistan; new ties were formed between and new and radical ideologies were cultivated. It has also contributed to further politicization of religion, which we will turn to in the next chapter when we take a closer look at politics and religion.

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<sup>29</sup> *Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh* by Mumtaz Ahmed  
<http://www.apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/ReligiousRadicalism/PagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsiach5.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Barnett, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 2nd Ed 2002, p276 and Rashid, Ahmad, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, Author Ahmad Rashid Yale University Press (March 2000) ISBN 0-300-08340-8

<sup>31</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

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<sup>32</sup> Based on interviews with Ulama members in Kunduz city, Kunduz, CPAU, in November 2006

### 3. RELIGION AND POLITICS

Religion and politics has been intertwined through Afghan history. This chapter will look at the rise and influence of the religious (Islamist) parties during the jihad, the legacy of the Taliban and the role of religion in politics today.

#### 3.1 Islamist Political Parties and Alliances

The history of religiously inspired political-military parties goes back to the Soviet invasion and consequent jihad. People driven by religious zeal were drawn to one of the many political parties, whether indigenous or created by Pakistan and Iran. The choice of party was often influenced by the accessibility to the channel of arms and resources from the Western and Arab allies of the jihad through particular parties.<sup>33</sup>

##### Sayedabad

The presence of the parties is mixed in Sayedabad. The rural population in the villages is not as politically active as those living in the district or provincial centres. Conditions with the aid by Western and Arab supporters to the Mujahedin forced many to join Harakat-e Islami, Itihad-e Islami, Mahaz-e Milli, Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) and Jamiat-e Islami. Since the majority of people in Sayedabad are Pushtoos, the dominant parties are Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar), Itihad-e Islami and Mahaz-e Milli. Hizb-e Islami was the largest party in Sayedabad due to its predominantly Ikhwanī nature. As one interviewee stated “during jihad, you were not a good Muslim unless you were with Hizb-e Islami.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Pakistan effectively legalised the operations of 7 Islamic parties and ensured that they had the material to fight the conflict. Pakistan’s preference for supporting the Islamic parties effectively nullified the effectiveness of Nationalist and Royalist parties. Iran, looking for its own proxies in the conflict, encouraged the Shia parties to unite in to Hizb-e Wahdat. This is outlined in Rubin, Barnett, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed 2002, p184 & p221-5

<sup>34</sup> Based on interviews with key informants and survey of mullahs in Sayedabad, CPAU, August 2006

Hizb-e Islami was the first party to come in to conflict with the Taliban in Wardak. This was primarily because the Taliban competed with Hizb-e Islami as the primary Pushtoon force, and the Taliban initially captured provinces which were mainly Pushtoon dominated. The conflict over control of geographical areas was worsened by the tension between the traditional Taliban and the Ikhwanī Hizb-e Islami supporters. The Ikhwanī call Taliban ignorant mullahs (similarly to the way they treated other local religious leaders) and blamed them for the lack of political Islamic ideologues in Afghanistan.

Nine of the twenty mullahs surveyed said they were members of either Harakat-e Islami or Hizb-e Islami. Hizb-e Islami has a complex relationship with religion and its leadership are generally not religious figures. Even at a local level, most members of Hizb-e Islami are not mullahs (only 3 surveyed mullahs were members of Hizb-e Islami). Hizb-e-Islami members have tended to look down on the activities of local mullahs and decried some of their practices as un-Islamic, therefore in some cases perceived to be Wahhabi by local people.

There has been a steady re-emergence of Hizb-e Islami in Sayedabad after the Coalition Forces backed Northern Alliance (NA) defeated the Taliban in 2001. Other Ikhwanī<sup>35</sup> groups have also re-emerged, such as Jamiat-e Islami and Itihad-e Islami. A permanent alliance or coalition between the groups is not possible due to their personal grievances from the conflict but there are gatherings and meetings between these groups and individual members in this district.

##### Kunduz

Kunduz has a large number of Pushtoon settlers who were given land across the

<sup>35</sup> In the early days of the Soviet-Afghan war, the Muslim Brotherhood was seen as a constituent part of the Afghan anti-Communist opposition, hence the Soviet installed government called its opponents who had connections to the freshly formed Islamic resistance parties as Ikhwanis or members of Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan ul Muslimeen* in Arabic). Ikhwanī was then used to as an adjective to describe any Islamist party.

Northern provinces in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were vulnerable to the infighting between different non-Pushtoon Mujahedin (Uzbeks and Tajiks, who dominate the province) during the civil war in the 1990s. Disappointed and abused by the infighting, many saw the Taliban takeover of the province as an opportunity for the Pushtoons to live in peace. A number of them either joined the Taliban movement or were sympathizers. The Pushtoon support for the Taliban in the province was related to nationalist sympathy rather than religious compassion and zeal.<sup>36</sup> When the Taliban were defeated, the Pushtoons were again left vulnerable to the same groups of Mujahedin and they still face discrimination; as an example there are hardly any key government positions held by a Pushtoon in Kunduz.

In Kunduz, the majority of political allegiances and affiliations have an ethnic dimension. Jamiat is Tajik dominated, Junbish is Uzbek, Hizb-e Islami, Itihad-e Islami and Afghan Millat are Pushtoon dominated. The mullahs surveyed showed the typical pattern of ethnic allegiances, 35% of the mullahs were members of one of the parties, including Hizb, Wahdat, Jamiat and Itihad.<sup>37</sup>

Jamiat is the most influential political party. Operating rather discretely is Hizb-e Islami, which is considered an influential party with large number of supporters partly because Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hizb-e Islami, is from a Kharoti Pushtoon settler family in Kunduz. Jamiat-e Islami and Junbish have their offices in Kunduz, but people are not generally receptive to the ideas of these parties because of their involvement in the infighting throughout the 1990s. However, when Jamiat is thought to be the strongest political party in Kunduz, it does not mean that it has a wide support among the public in Kunduz. Jamiat can be called a party that holds the most important government

posts and its commanders are more visible and active compared to the others. After Jamiat, it is the Junbish that is more organized and is very much involved in mobilizing Uzbeks. Political parties in Afghanistan are mostly divided on ethnic lines and Kunduz can be a microcosm of the general political environment in Afghanistan. There are Hezbi-e Islami and Taliban sympathizers who are suppressed by the local influential Jamiat commanders. Still Kunduz can be called a potential base for Taliban in the north. Many people are sceptical about President Karzai's lenient policies which have provided the space and opportunity for these parties to re-group and resurface with the same leaders who were involved in killing thousands of civilians throughout the civil war.

The Afghan Millat party<sup>38</sup> is emerging as a significant political party that seems to be gaining increasing support within the Pushtoon population in Kunduz. The party has taken advantage of current political developments and has played up the fact that it didn't take an active part in the civil war in the 1990s. It is also probably the only major political party without a military wing. Political parties in Kunduz are otherwise not experienced in trying to win the support of the public by political means; as such they resort to force and keep large military wings to ensure their support remains. The parties also encouraged female political activism, most effectively done by Jamiat-e Islami, in order to increase their share of the vote. During the presidential and parliamentary elections each party approached their ethnic groups and pressured them for votes. But when the elections were over respondents noted their contacts with their supporters diminished.

The parties managed to gain some members of parliament and provincial council members. Similarly to Sayedabad the parties seem to be at odds with one another and there is no particular coalition of parties. It was not common for Kunduz commanders to be religious figures. The

<sup>36</sup> <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/afghan2/afghan0402-03.htm>  
HRW Article: [Paying for the Taliban's Crimes:](#)

<sup>37</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz city, Kunduz in August and November 2006

<sup>38</sup> *Afghan Millat* is a Pashtoon Nationalist Party established in 8<sup>th</sup> March 1966. [www.afghanmellat.org](http://www.afghanmellat.org)

active commanders in the Kunduz city are mainly khans, maliks or teachers, though some studied religion during the years of Jihad. There have been a number of religious commanders during the jihad, but the majority either died, are no longer commanders or are have lost their influence in the province. Though in order to survive in the current volatile power struggle, being a member of the ulama has proved useful for some. But more importantly they need to be dynamic and 'yaghi'.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2 The Taliban in the past and the Taliban today

The rise of the Taliban in 1994, their rapid ascent to power in 1996, sudden removal in 2001 and ongoing insurgent activities have impacted on both Sayedabad and Kunduz differently (some of which has been outlined above). One the greatest concern is the Taliban's ability to impact the ongoing state building activities of the government and engagement with religious actors.

#### Sayedabad

The Taliban captured Wardak on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1995. This was generally welcomed by the pre-dominantly Pushtoon residents but people still have mixed views about their rule. The infamous restrictions associated with Taliban such as banning women from public life and education, banning music or TV had little effect on the lives of people in Sayedabad since they didn't enjoy these freedoms prior to the Taliban. The mullahs were also initially pleased that their social standing had improved as they were now being invited by the Taliban to consult on the implementation of Sharia, the role of the government and other prestigious issues. However as the Taliban's rule progressed many mullahs were concerned that the Taliban themselves knew very little about Islam, and they would disregard the advice of the religious authorities. Along with this conflict over the direction of the government, the local populations did

begin to bear the brunt of the increasingly brutal punishments by the Taliban. The religious disagreements and popular discontent had a devastating impact on the public image of Taliban. In spite of this there are still many people who still see the Taliban as a good alternative to the current government.

In Sayedabad some commanders associated with Harakat-e Islami, Hizb-e Islami (Mawlawi Khalis) and Itihad-e Islami joined the Taliban when they first captured the district in February 1995. There are two main reasons for these commanders joining Taliban. First of all Harakat-e Islami (led by Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi) and Hizb-e Islami (Khalis) were traditional supporters and associates of the Taliban. Secondly these hardliner commanders ideologically supported the Taliban in the creation of a pure Islamic state.<sup>40</sup> The rest of the commanders who did not join the Taliban or who were rejected by the Taliban, escaped the area, started businesses or taught religious studies in different mosques and madrasas. After the fall of the Taliban there was an opportunity for those commanders to come back to the political and military arena. Some did, but others, some due to their association with Taliban in the past, preferred to stay away from these developments. The majority of mullah commanders are afraid of both the Government and the Taliban. If they join Taliban, obviously they will be targeted by the Government and if they join the Government the same will happen at the hands of the Taliban. There are a number of mullahs who are genuinely tired of the infighting and war and simply chose not to participate in it anymore. Sayedabad is one of the districts where prominent jihadi commanders were mullahs. A majority, if not all of them, withdrew from politics after the collapse of the communist regime and stayed away in Taliban time. That was one link that kept the relationship of the mullah and commanders. People did respect their

<sup>39</sup> Yaghi means *Sarkash*, a bully, independent but has negative connotations

<sup>40</sup> The CPAU survey indicated that nearly half of the mullahs were members of either Hizb-e Islami or Harakat-e Islami and nearly all the respondents support the principle of an Islamic state based on Sharia law. Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz city, Kunduz in August and November 2006

stance and particularly their decisions to return to the madrasas. Apart from a mullah being himself a commander, the relation between a mullah and a local commander has always been cold and the mullahs have kept with its traditional role.

The current lack of capacity in local security forces, i.e. the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the endemic corrupt government offices is leaving the ground open for Taliban to operate easily in many villages of Sayedabad.

### Kunduz

The Taliban took over Kunduz City in 1999. The Taliban defeat of the Northern Alliance in Kunduz empowered Pushtoon residents. Most Pushtoon residents, tired of Uzbek and Tajik commander's conflict and atrocities, sympathized with the Taliban and with their victory, a share of the Kunduzi Pushtoons associated themselves with the Taliban. However, Taliban hardliners did not support the nationalist agendas which were of most concern to Kunduzi Pushtoons. The Taliban ideology was based on strict Islamic values and anyone in the way of its implementation was met with fierce resistance, also among Pushtoons. And even despite restoring security in the provinces, Pushtoons were still mostly sidelined from political and government jobs in the province.<sup>41</sup> As a result, views on the Taliban's rule are mixed. While most of the population don't wish to see the Taliban back in power, there are also many that admire the courage with which the Taliban fought the warlords.

### 3.3 Religious Engagement in the Current Political Process

The religious establishment was first engaged in the Bonn process when the Shura-e ulama was re-organized in 2002 by President Karzai to issue a religious edict that nullified the Taliban's call for holy war against foreign forces and the Afghan

government.<sup>42</sup> However, the engagement of religious figures in elections and constitutional arrangements has been considerably mixed.

### Sayedabad

Sayedabad's religious community has not significantly engaged in the political processes of the past 5 years. Sayedabad has no mullah represented in the Parliament or Provincial Councils. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, many of the ulama did not stand in the elections fearing Taliban reprisals and the overwhelming reliance of the government on foreign troops. Secondly those mullahs that stood for the elections had very little chance of being elected because of the high number of candidates standing in the election and the use of the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system. The use of this system, and the lack of party structure,<sup>43</sup> meant that votes were distributed between many candidates. Despite being only 20% of population 3 of the 5 Members of Parliament (MPs) from Wardak are Hazaras.<sup>44</sup> Thirdly, most of the ulama did not vote in the parliamentary and provincial council elections because they believe that the government is ineffective and that the presence of international forces in Afghanistan is un-Islamic (see below).<sup>45</sup> The fact that many of the mullahs feared Taliban reprisals if they participated in the elections also affected their participation in other ways: only two of twenty respondents stated that they either worked for the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) or they preached support for election in their mosques.<sup>46</sup> Since the election the views of the mullahs about the Parliament and the Provincial Councils have deteriorated. Only 20% of respondents had a positive view about the Parliament, which echoes the

<sup>42</sup> Dari article by Wahid Muzhda: *Why Taliban Resorted to Killing Mullahs?*

[http://www.zendagi.com/new\\_page\\_473.htm](http://www.zendagi.com/new_page_473.htm)

<sup>43</sup> *Advantages & Disadvantages of SNTV*

<http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd04/esd04a/esd04a01>

<sup>44</sup> Please see [www.jemb.org](http://www.jemb.org) for details of the certified results. A total of 69 candidates stood for 5 places only the top 3 candidates received more than 5% of the vote each.

<sup>45</sup> Only 40% of respondents voted in the election

<sup>46</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August 2006

<sup>41</sup> Pashtu article by Maiwand Patang, درحمت فرشتی یاد عذاب ریشی  
<http://www.tolafghan.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=15944&sid=13dc2beb647fd1dbe930fa6457114424>

sentiment expressed by one respondent: *“I think the Parliament is not good for any use (...) they are interested in getting (their) salaries and not (the) people.”*<sup>47</sup> It should be noted that most mullahs do not see the parliamentary system as problematic as such. It is seen as a shura, which is a traditional Islamic institution. It is whether the current parliament is Islamic and follows the Sharia that is of concern: *“Shura is what the Quran wants; if it is based on Sharia and works for Sharia (then it is good).”*<sup>48</sup>

### **Kunduz**

The MPs who represent Kunduz are commanders, khans, and businessmen but there is no representation from the ulama. There are currently two female MPs representing Kunduz in the Parliament and four female Provincial Council Members. Mullahs from Kunduz did take part in the election process, but failed to secure any seats in the Parliament. However, several mullahs were elected to the 15 member Provincial Council.

The head of the Provincial Council (who used to be an active member of the Taliban) is a mullah along with three other council members. This gives some clue as to what happened to non-Pushtoon Taliban, who fought along with their Pushtoon Talibs during their rule.

Participation in the election in general was much higher in Kunduz than in Sayedabad. 80% of respondents were involved in some way, half of which did more than just vote.<sup>49</sup> Despite the widespread participation of the ulama in the elections many mullahs express disappointment with the parliament now. Only 2 out of 20 respondents had positive views about the Parliament, and while none of the mullahs see the Parliament as illegal or un-Islamic, as they do in Wardak. Their feeling was summed up by one respondent who said *“Initially I was very optimistic, but now not only me, but all the people of Afghanistan have not seen what they expected from the Parliament.”*<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August 2006

<sup>48</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak in August 2006

<sup>49</sup> Several mullahs worked for JEMB or UNAMA, were candidates or campaigners for candidates. Data from CPAU survey carried out in Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

<sup>50</sup> Data from CPAU survey carried out in Sayedabad, Wardak and Kunduz city, Kunduz in November 2006

































































