

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# NGO Presence and Activity in Afghanistan, 2000–2014: A Provincial-Level Dataset

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This article introduces a new provincial-level dataset on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan. The data—which are freely available for download—provide information on the locations and sectors of activity of 891 international and local (Afghan) NGOs that operated in the country between 2000 and 2014. A summary and visualization of the data is presented in the article following a brief historical overview of NGOs in Afghanistan. Links to download the full dataset are provided in the conclusion.

The importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in conflict zones has expanded significantly in recent decades. However, information on the distribution of NGO activity in these regions has been scarce—an issue that both scholars and practitioners have highlighted in recent years (Galway, Corbett & Zeng 2012; Hammond 2008; Schreter & Harmer 2013; Sheik et al. 2000). The dataset introduced in this article helps resolve this issue in the context of Afghanistan by providing information on the sectors of activity and provinces of operation of 891 international and local (Afghan) NGOs between 2000 and 2014.

It is important to acknowledge that there is no agreed upon definition of an NGO. Taken literally, an NGO ‘could describe just about anything from social groups like Mensa to educational institutions like Harvard University to for-profit firms like Wal-Mart’ (Werker & Ahmed 2008: 74).

NGOs are defined here as independent, nonprofit organizations engaged in humanitarian, development, human rights, or advocacy work. These organizations are a subset of the broader nonprofit sector that engages specifically in international development. This definition of NGOs excludes professional associations, commercial entities, for-profit development companies, nonprofit research institutions (e.g. universities and think tanks), all United Nations personnel, governmental aid organizations (e.g. United States Agency for International Development and German Technical Cooperation Agency), inter-governmental aid organizations (e.g. International Organization for Migration), and hybrid organizations (e.g. the International Committee of the Red Cross).

This article is divided into two sections. The first is a brief historical overview of NGOs in Afghanistan and the second provides a summary and visualization of the data being introduced. Links to download the full dataset are provided in the conclusion.

## A Brief History of NGOs in Afghanistan

NGOs have played an important role in Afghan society since the Soviet invasion in December 1979 (ACBAR 2014: 31). During the initial stages of the Soviet-Afghan War, humanitarian workers provided food, medical care, and shelter to Afghan refugees who had fled to Pakistan. However, NGOs were required to register and coordinate their activities with the mujahedeen's seven party alliance based in Peshawar (Atmar & Goodhand 2002: 19). The refugee camps became a rear base for the Mujahedeen, and were viewed by many as the non-lethal component of aid to the Afghan resistance (Goodhand 2002: 842). Pakistan was home to 80,000 Afghan refugees in 1979—a figure that drastically increased to 750,000 the following year and to nearly 4 million by 1984 (Runion 2007: 111).

By the early 1980s, organizations had started to implement cross-border programs in Afghanistan to address the basic needs of the population, but these were limited to areas which were not under Soviet control (ACBAR 2014: 31). Although the government allowed a small number of local NGOs to operate in Kabul on a restricted basis, international NGOs were banned from the country (West 2001: 62). During the war, NGOs strictly focused on providing emergency assistance including food distribution, medical care, and shelter (ACBAR 2014: 31). However, many organizations expanded their activities after Soviet withdrawal in 1988 to include the sectors of education, infrastructure, vocational training, and mine clearance. NGOs also began working in regions of Afghanistan previously off-limits due to Soviet control. Eastern Afghanistan was the primary recipient of assistance at this time because of security concerns and the close proximity to Peshawar (Goodhand 2002: 842).

The Afghan government ratified a law in January 1990 that formally allowed NGOs to operate within the country (Rubin 1995: 167–168; West 2001: 62). NGOs soon received

substantial funding from international organizations and governments such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and World Food Program (WFP) (Oliker et al. 2004: 34). The growing number of organizations and activities resulted in the formation of multiple NGO coordination bodies to increase professionalism and accountability within the community (ACBAR 2014: 31; Atmar & Goodhand 2002: 24). The most noteworthy of these is the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), founded in 1988 and still active today.

Although NGOs enjoyed relative freedom of action between 1990 and 1995, this changed after the Taliban solidified control of the country. Several organizations were forced to retreat to Pakistan during the Taliban period (1996–2001), while those that remained had significant restrictions placed on their activities. Consistent with their broader constraints on women's rights, the Taliban government issued an edict banning all females from working for NGOs (McDonald 2000), a move that severely limited Afghan women's access to humanitarian relief. Organizations were also restricted from providing assistance to females, including a total ban on education for girls.

The Taliban further prohibited NGOs from engaging in "political" activity, which they believed posed a threat to their strict Islamic vision of society. Although a few advocacy organizations attempted to work in the sectors of human rights and peacebuilding during this period, the vast majority of NGOs focused their efforts on relief programs. A report by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD 2002: 5) noted that the aid community during the Taliban period was 'stuck in the dilemma of a development crisis and a human rights crisis'.

Although several NGOs claimed to be committed to the promotion of human rights, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, this was rarely put into action under Taliban rule.

Rieff (2002: 249–250) believes these claims were ‘pure rhetoric, designed, it seemed, to make aid workers, their donors, and the general public feel better’. Writing shortly before the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Atmar and Goodhand (2002: 62–63) observed that the perception that aid had shifted toward greater political action was false. Rather, the vast majority of funding provided to Afghanistan went to life saving, relief programs.

The Taliban government was wary of advocacy NGOs engaged in political activity, but they were especially suspicious of international organizations because of their predominantly Western origin. In 1998, 38 international NGOs were expelled from the country, while many others withdrew because of the harsh restrictions imposed on their activities (Josselin & Wallace 2001: 10; Monshipouri 2003: 140; West 2001: 131). In 1997 Oxfam suspended a water-supply project in Logar Province to protest the Taliban’s policies toward women (Oxfam 1997). In addition to Taliban expulsions and voluntary withdrawals from the country, NGO financiers also called for disengagement during this period. Following US airstrikes in 1998 in retaliation for the East African embassy bombings, the European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) ceased assistance to NGOs in Afghanistan while the United Kingdom ruled that any international NGO sending expatriate staff to the country would automatically be disqualified from government funding (Atmar 2001: 2; Marsden 2009: 93).

The Taliban was particularly restrictive on international organizations adhering to the Christian faith. However, crackdowns did not become commonplace until 2001 (prior to the US-led invasion). For example, in August 2001, 16 national and 8 international employees of Shelter Now International were arrested by the Taliban for distributing ‘Christian propaganda’ (Guardian 2001). In a separate instance a month later, the Taliban raided the offices of two Christian organizations—International Assistance Mission

(IAM) and Serve International—and arrested several of their employees. These NGOs were then ordered to close their offices and leave the country (Salahuddin 2001).

Although a limited number of international workers continued to operate in Afghanistan in 2001, virtually all relocated to Pakistan following the 11 September 2001 attacks in anticipation of retaliatory military action (Oliker et al. 2004: 37). Most international organizations transferred their projects to local Afghan employees at this time. The flight of these organizations in September 2001, coupled with the mass exodus of NGOs from Afghanistan over the previous six years, meant that the primary distribution network for humanitarian assistance was essentially nonfunctional once Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commenced on 7 October (Oliker et al. 2004: 26). In response to the need for assistance, the US military began to build its own systems for aid delivery. Simultaneously engaging in relief and development operations during major combat operations was a unique endeavor for military forces, as civil affairs units typically did not enter the theater until the post-conflict phase (Oliker et al. 2004: 48). However, a shortage of NGOs in Afghanistan in late 2001 meant that the US military was one of the few entities capable of providing humanitarian relief to conflict-ridden areas of the country.

The US civil affairs mission began in December 2001 with the creation of the Combined Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF) in Kabul (Neumann, Munday & Mikolashek 2005: 32). Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells (CHLCs) and Joint Regional Teams (JRTs) were formed to provide relief to Afghan communities in need (Neumann, Munday & Mikolashek 2005; Stewart 2004; Wright et al. 2010). These were the precursors to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) initiative, which took the lead in military development operations in 2003.<sup>1</sup> NGOs began a piecemeal return to Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002 as the security situation allowed (Wright et al. 2010: 194).

However, many NGO activities during this period were constrained by the UN. UN-funded NGOs are often required to take guidance on security and movements from the Office of the UN Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) as a condition for acquiring insurance for their organizations, and several international NGOs that reentered Afghanistan were initially restricted by the UN to operating in less hostile regions of the country (Oliker et al. 2004: 54–55). Although their physical presence was largely restricted in 2001 and early 2002, several NGOs expanded the scope of their projects at this time. Multiple organizations began to couple their traditional relief activities with broader development initiatives and advocacy work (ACBAR 2014: 32). These included governance, conflict resolution, human rights, and peacebuilding—actions that many NGOs were restricted from engaging in during the Taliban era. As some have noted (Rieff 2002: 250–251), the NGO community would not have expanded into these sectors of activity if not for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and toppling of the Taliban regime.

The shift to greater political action and advocacy work by NGOs in Afghanistan was also donor-driven. In an effort to help rebuild the country, governments and international organizations increased funds for projects related to nation-building. In the early stages of the conflict, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and World Bank conducted a joint needs assessment in Afghanistan. In part, this report called for a ‘moderate scaling up of NGO programs, while achieving a phased change in the role of NGOs from implementing agencies to facilitators of participatory community development, clearly accountable to government and/or communities’ (ADB, UNDP & World Bank 2002: 19). Similarly, USAID claimed that it would ‘work with Afghan NGOs to help build a dynamic Afghan civil society that can hold policy makers accountable, promote democratic principles, and engage as full partners with the government and the private sector in the economic and political development of Afghanistan’ (USAID

2005: 10). Afghan President Hamid Karzai supported these initiatives, claiming in a January 2003 interview that he would ‘like to concentrate more on removing the causes of humanitarian difficulties rather than treating the symptoms’ (IRIN 2003).

Although the size and scope of NGO activity expanded during the years following the US-led invasion, Afghanistan soon became the most volatile country in the world for humanitarians to operate in following the resurgence of the Taliban (see Humanitarian Outcomes 2017). Nonetheless, as is detailed in the following section, the total number of NGOs active in Afghanistan continued to increase year-to-year in spite of the deteriorating security situation.

### Description and Summary of Data

The following section provides a visual overview and summary of the dataset. In an effort to enhance existing information on NGOs in Afghanistan, data on NGO activities and locations were collected and coded through research and correspondence with organizations operating in the field. Although the Afghan government publishes a registration list of organizations, the list includes only limited information. For example, only 315 organizations are listed in the most recent publicly-available registration list (Afghanistan Ministry of Economy 2015). Research also revealed that many of these organizations were local contractors or ‘for-profit’ firms that did not fit the definition presented in the introduction. Moreover, simply because an organization is registered with the government does not necessarily mean they are active in the field. Furthermore, directories such as ACBAR’s *NGO Profiles* and the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit’s (*AREU A to Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance*, while useful, also provide information for only a portion of NGOs in the country.

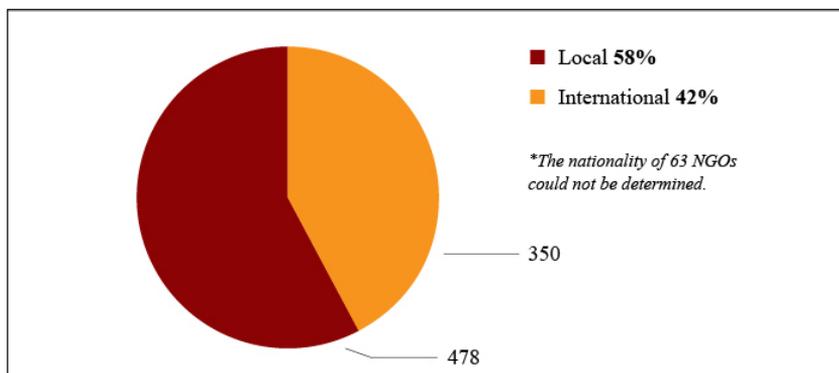
Using these publications as a starting point, an online search using Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and LexisNexis was then conducted to identify additional organizations. Information was collected on approximately 1,200 NGOs that operated in Afghanistan between 2000 and 2014, followed by a review

of each organization's website and social media pages to determine the years and provinces in which they worked, along with their sectors of activity. To enhance the reliability and validity of the data, e-mails were sent and phone calls were made to each organization for confirmation.<sup>2</sup> Data collection began in mid-2015 and took approximately six months to complete. A total of 891 international and local NGOs made the final list.

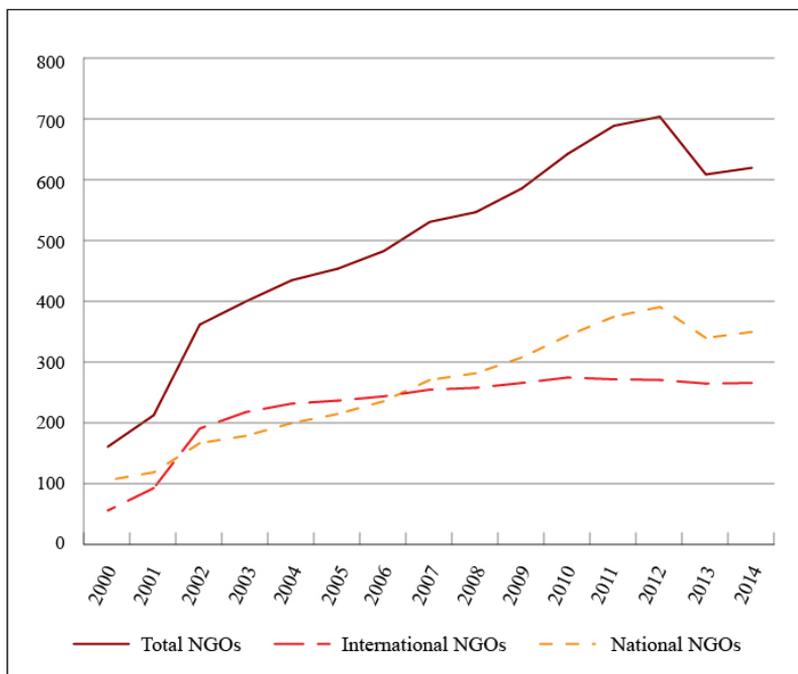
**Table 1** provides the number of NGOs operative in Afghanistan by year and nationality between 2000 and 2014. The lowest number of organizations active in a given year was 158 in 2000 and the highest was 701 in 2012. The nationality of 828 of the 891 NGOs in the dataset were identified. As **Figure 1** highlights, 478 of those 828 organizations were local (58 percent) and 350 were international (42 percent). **Figure 2** reveals

**Table 1:** NGOs Active by Year, 2000–2014.

	Total NGOs	International NGOs	Local NGOs	N/A
<b>2000</b>	158	53	103	2
<b>2001</b>	210	90	116	4
<b>2002</b>	359	188	164	7
<b>2003</b>	397	215	176	6
<b>2004</b>	432	229	197	6
<b>2005</b>	451	234	212	5
<b>2006</b>	480	241	233	6
<b>2007</b>	528	252	268	8
<b>2008</b>	544	255	279	10
<b>2009</b>	583	263	305	15
<b>2010</b>	640	272	341	27
<b>2011</b>	686	269	372	45
<b>2012</b>	701	268	388	45
<b>2013</b>	606	262	337	7
<b>2014</b>	617	263	347	7



**Figure 1:** NGOs by Nationality, 2000–2014\*.



**Figure 2:** NGOs Active by Year, 2000–2014.

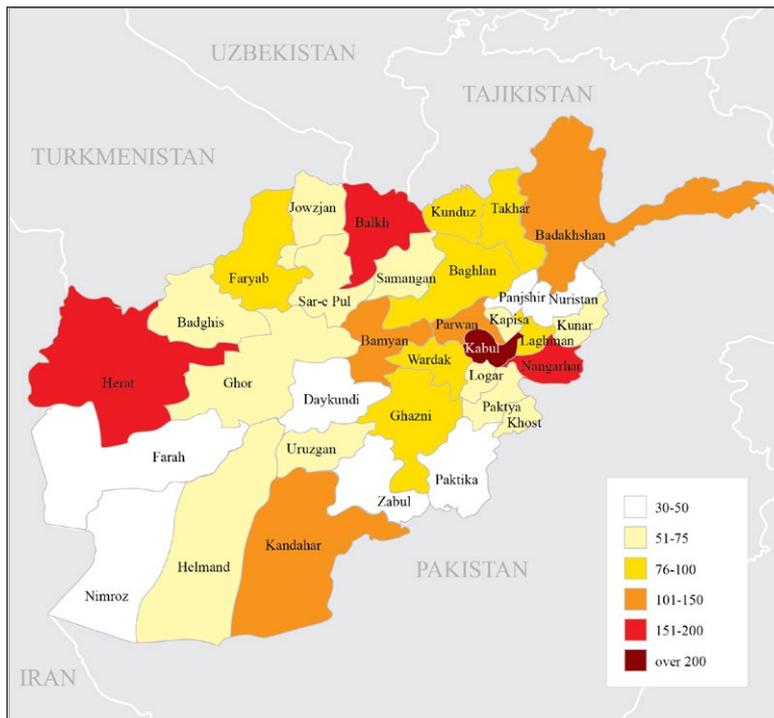
that international NGOs were the majority during the first five years after the invasion, but local NGOs made up the bulk of organizations in the pre-invasion period and after 2006. There was a consistent annual increase in NGOs until 2011–2012, after which the number slightly dropped. This coincides with the withdrawal of US troops from the country beginning in June 2011.

**Figure 3** maps the NGO presence throughout Afghanistan during the 2000 to 2014 period. The total number of NGOs operative in each province per year is detailed in **Table 2**.<sup>3</sup> On average, each individual NGO was active in five different provinces. The province of Kabul had the most organizations active within its borders during the period with a high of 492 in a given year, followed by Nangarhar with a high of 194 and Balkh with a high of 182. The provinces with the fewest NGOs were Nuristan with a high of 33 in a given year and Paktika and Zabul, both with highs of 37, and as expected, NGO presence was found to be significantly related to provincial population. Kabul (4.2

million people), Nangarhar (1.5 million people), and Balkh (1.3 million people) are three of the four most populated provinces in the country, while relatively few people live in Nuristan (146,000 people), Paktika (428,000 people), and Zabul (299,000 people) (ACSO 2015).

**Figure 4** and **Figure 5** map the local and international NGO presence respectively. The total number of local NGOs operative in each province per year is detailed in **Table 3** and the total number of international NGOs is detailed in **Table 4**.

A review of projects carried out by NGOs revealed 24 frequent sectors of activity. **Figure 6** provides the number of organizations active in each of these sectors. Education (primary and secondary) was the most popular with 424 NGOs active in the sector, followed by health and vocational training with 376 NGOs and 276 NGOs respectively. The sectors with the least engagement were energy with 9 NGOs active in the sector and animal health with 12 NGOs. Of the 891 NGOs identified in



**Figure 3:** Map of Total NGO Presence, 2000–2014.

the dataset, only 191 were single-mandate while 700 engaged in multi-sectoral activity. On average, an individual NGO operative in Afghanistan was found to be simultaneously active in three different sectors. NGO-specific information is available in the dataset.

As noted in the previous section, a shift toward more politically-oriented advocacy work by NGOs was observed following the US-led invasion. However, although several scholars and practitioners have attempted to categorize aid activity in recent years (Atmar & Goodhand 2002; Barnett 2011; Barnett & Snyder 2008; Calhoun 2008; Fast 2014; Goodhand 2006; Leader 2000; Weiss 1999) there is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes an “advocacy” or “political” NGO. For example, Atmar and Goodhand (2002: 11) distinguish between organizations *working in conflict* and *working on conflict*. While the former refers to NGOs engaged in a principled (independent, impartial, and neutral) approach to delivering aid, the latter refers to those with a conflict reduction

or peacebuilding agenda. Others have categorized organizations as *minimalists*—those seeking to alleviate suffering—and *consequentialists*—those wanting to improve the human condition through social transformation (Calhoun 2008: 73–74). Barnett and Snyder (2008: 145–146) differentiate humanitarian action into *apolitical* and *political* categories. They define apolitical humanitarian activities as those not intended to alter governance arrangements that are assumed to be the cause of suffering, and political activities as those that are intended to do so.

This article has divided the sectors of NGO activity presented in **Figure 6** into separate “apolitical” and “political” categories to further assess NGO action in Afghanistan. Guided by the aforementioned conceptualizations, *political NGOs* are operationalized here as those working in the sectors of conflict resolution, governance, human rights, peacebuilding, and women’s rights, while *apolitical NGOs* are operationalized as those not working in these sectors of activity.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 2:** Total NGOs by Province per Year, 2000–2014.

<b>Badakhshan</b>	12	15	27	32	43	42	51	61	62	74	81	91	106	95	100
<b>Badghis</b>	8	12	25	19	25	24	27	30	30	33	41	49	52	51	46
<b>Baghlan</b>	8	13	27	26	32	38	43	48	50	61	67	78	80	67	70
<b>Balkh</b>	25	36	69	74	86	74	95	118	117	133	151	173	182	148	154
<b>Bamyan</b>	13	18	40	33	43	45	54	66	68	74	85	102	105	96	96
<b>Daykundi</b>	–	–	–	–	10	15	17	27	25	32	35	40	46	44	47
<b>Farah</b>	13	12	27	24	28	27	30	34	34	40	43	49	47	46	48
<b>Faryab</b>	11	13	23	22	28	30	37	41	44	51	61	74	81	71	73
<b>Ghazni</b>	27	30	45	44	48	52	54	71	63	66	80	89	88	71	69
<b>Ghor</b>	12	17	27	25	28	30	33	30	39	46	54	67	60	59	58
<b>Helmand</b>	12	13	23	20	24	25	26	29	34	40	50	60	62	59	58
<b>Herat</b>	29	37	70	69	79	81	92	106	106	114	130	151	166	152	156
<b>Jowzjan</b>	9	13	26	23	27	30	32	42	44	52	58	67	70	70	75
<b>Kabul</b>	106	141	263	300	331	357	376	420	422	445	472	492	488	444	455
<b>Kandahar</b>	30	35	57	60	65	68	76	83	85	81	94	100	101	96	103
<b>Kapisa</b>	12	12	27	20	31	33	36	47	49	54	67	72	73	66	64
<b>Khost</b>	13	16	23	19	25	28	31	45	40	44	46	51	54	49	56
<b>Kunar</b>	15	15	23	23	31	36	41	48	43	47	52	70	73	62	71
<b>Kunduz</b>	10	17	29	32	36	40	47	59	57	73	84	94	99	98	94
<b>Laghman</b>	19	21	35	29	35	39	43	57	50	57	61	70	77	77	86

(Contd.)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Logar</b>	17	21	39	27	34	36	41	51	51	51	62	72	73	57	63
<b>Nangarhar</b>	47	57	102	97	115	114	120	150	147	151	162	187	194	168	172
<b>Nimroz</b>	7	9	16	15	18	20	20	23	25	31	36	42	42	42	40
<b>Nuristan</b>	8	8	13	9	16	18	19	22	21	25	26	32	33	27	32
<b>Paktika</b>	7	9	19	12	16	23	23	32	25	31	33	37	37	33	37
<b>Paktya</b>	14	15	29	26	26	30	29	47	39	43	49	53	54	57	66
<b>Panjshir</b>	-	-	-	-	17	20	22	25	32	38	41	48	50	44	49
<b>Parwan</b>	19	26	47	38	46	50	53	65	62	71	82	101	102	91	93
<b>Samangan</b>	9	11	26	20	22	29	34	38	40	50	60	70	72	68	70
<b>Sar-e Pul</b>	8	12	14	13	17	19	21	25	26	31	38	49	55	54	51
<b>Takhar</b>	8	15	29	32	37	41	45	51	50	60	69	76	82	72	70
<b>Uruzgan</b>	7	9	14	11	13	17	17	20	24	35	42	52	49	46	47
<b>Wardak</b>	25	30	42	36	44	46	51	58	55	56	68	77	81	69	68
<b>Zabul</b>	9	10	17	13	15	18	17	20	24	26	31	35	36	34	37

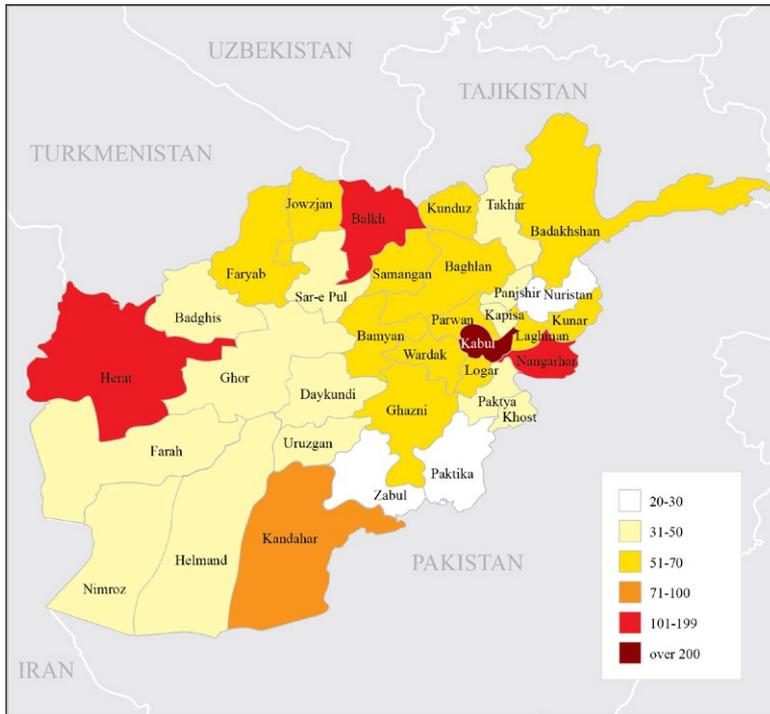


Figure 4: Map of Local NGO Presence, 2000–2014.

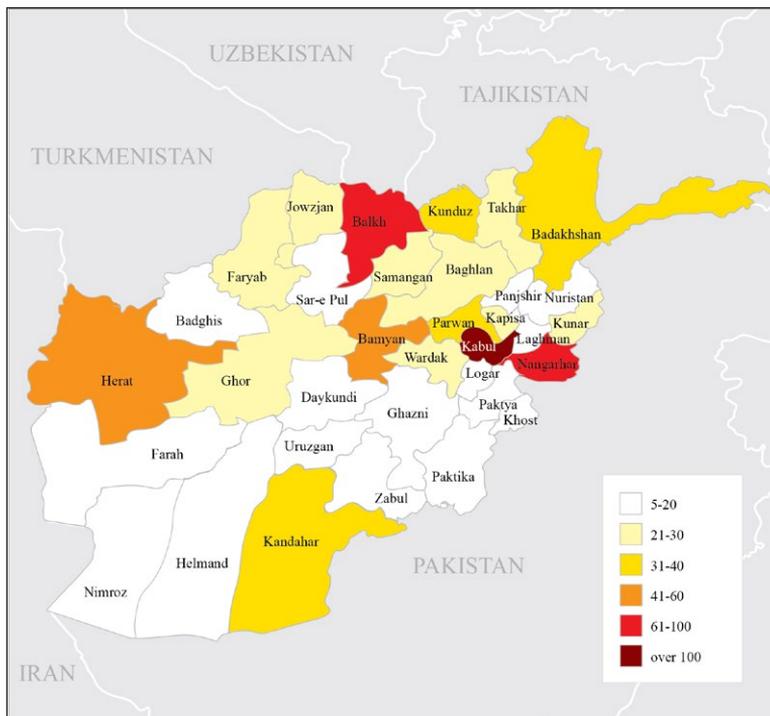


Figure 5: Map of International NGO Presence, 2000–2014.

Table 3: Local NGOs by Province per Year, 2000–2014.

<b>Badakhshan</b>	4	5	11	10	16	19	24	34	33	39	47	56	62	60	63
<b>Badghis</b>	5	5	12	9	13	14	15	20	19	21	29	36	38	33	33
<b>Baghlan</b>	6	8	13	11	19	23	26	31	30	39	42	55	55	46	45
<b>Balkh</b>	15	22	35	31	40	46	50	70	64	72	83	101	107	95	94
<b>Bamyan</b>	10	13	19	15	24	24	27	38	38	43	51	60	65	60	60
<b>Daykundi</b>	–	–	–	–	8	10	12	20	19	24	27	30	32	26	31
<b>Farah</b>	8	8	18	16	20	18	20	25	25	29	34	37	35	35	35
<b>Faryab</b>	7	8	13	12	15	17	23	27	28	34	42	51	55	49	47
<b>Ghazni</b>	21	23	29	27	32	37	42	54	44	47	60	68	69	56	53
<b>Ghor</b>	6	9	14	14	17	15	19	23	24	29	36	44	47	41	41
<b>Helmand</b>	8	8	15	13	16	16	17	21	24	29	35	44	45	44	41
<b>Herat</b>	19	21	35	34	40	44	49	63	59	66	77	94	102	95	99
<b>Jowzjan</b>	6	7	12	9	11	14	16	26	27	31	38	48	49	50	53
<b>Kabul</b>	73	79	116	130	150	167	180	213	212	231	249	264	266	242	250
<b>Kandahar</b>	21	22	29	29	32	32	39	46	46	48	58	65	67	65	72
<b>Kapisa</b>	8	8	17	12	15	16	20	30	30	33	43	47	47	39	38
<b>Khost</b>	9	12	14	10	14	16	20	31	27	28	31	35	36	31	36
<b>Kunar</b>	8	7	11	13	18	22	27	33	27	31	37	50	51	43	50
<b>Kunduz</b>	7	8	11	11	17	21	25	36	33	45	53	60	63	63	60
<b>Laghman</b>	13	14	22	19	24	26	28	39	31	39	45	53	55	57	66

(Contd.)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>Logar</b>	13	17	26	16	23	23	26	35	37	39	45	50	53	40	43
<b>Nangarhar</b>	36	39	60	56	70	70	76	98	92	97	102	119	123	109	116
<b>Nimroz</b>	5	5	9	9	12	13	13	16	18	23	27	33	33	31	31
<b>Nuristan</b>	2	2	6	4	11	12	13	15	13	16	17	24	24	21	24
<b>Paktika</b>	5	7	14	8	10	15	15	22	18	21	23	26	27	23	26
<b>Paktya</b>	11	12	15	15	18	20	19	31	24	28	36	37	37	40	47
<b>Panjshir</b>	-	-	-	-	11	13	15	17	21	26	29	35	35	28	32
<b>Parwan</b>	13	14	27	15	21	24	27	40	39	43	52	68	69	62	64
<b>Samangan</b>	6	7	15	11	13	17	21	25	25	32	41	52	50	47	47
<b>Sar-e Pul</b>	6	6	7	6	11	12	14	17	17	20	26	34	35	36	35
<b>Takhar</b>	4	6	10	9	14	16	19	26	26	31	41	47	49	43	43
<b>Uruzgan</b>	5	6	9	9	11	14	13	16	20	27	31	39	36	32	33
<b>Wardak</b>	16	18	25	21	27	28	31	38	34	36	43	49	53	45	45
<b>Zabul</b>	7	8	13	11	13	15	14	16	18	20	25	30	30	27	29

Table 4: International NGOs by Province per Year, 2000–2014.

<b>Badakhshan</b>	7	9	15	22	27	23	27	27	27	29	34	32	38	39	35	37
<b>Badghis</b>	3	6	12	10	12	10	12	10	11	11	11	11	12	13	13	13
<b>Baghlan</b>	2	5	14	15	13	15	17	17	20	20	21	23	20	22	21	25
<b>Balkh</b>	7	14	34	43	46	41	45	46	52	52	61	65	68	69	62	60
<b>Bamyan</b>	3	5	21	18	19	21	27	28	30	30	32	34	41	38	37	36
<b>Daykundi</b>	–	–	–	–	2	5	6	7	6	6	8	8	10	14	11	16
<b>Farah</b>	5	4	9	8	8	9	10	9	9	9	9	8	10	10	11	12
<b>Faryab</b>	4	5	10	10	13	13	14	14	16	16	17	18	21	23	22	26
<b>Ghazni</b>	5	5	14	16	15	13	12	17	19	19	18	18	18	16	15	17
<b>Ghor</b>	5	7	11	11	11	12	14	16	15	15	16	17	22	21	17	17
<b>Helmand</b>	4	5	8	7	8	8	8	7	9	9	10	13	12	13	15	17
<b>Herat</b>	9	14	31	34	38	36	42	42	45	45	45	50	52	60	56	56
<b>Jowzjan</b>	3	6	14	14	16	16	16	16	17	17	21	20	19	21	20	22
<b>Kabul</b>	33	60	143	166	177	189	192	201	203	203	207	210	207	198	198	200
<b>Kandahar</b>	8	12	27	32	34	36	37	37	39	39	33	35	32	32	32	32
<b>Kapisa</b>	4	4	10	8	16	17	16	16	19	19	21	24	25	26	27	26
<b>Khost</b>	4	4	9	9	11	12	11	14	13	13	16	15	16	18	18	20
<b>Kunar</b>	7	8	12	10	13	14	14	14	16	16	16	15	16	18	19	21
<b>Kunduz</b>	3	9	18	21	19	19	22	23	24	24	28	31	33	35	35	34
<b>Laghman</b>	6	7	13	10	11	13	15	18	19	19	18	16	15	20	20	20

(Contd.)

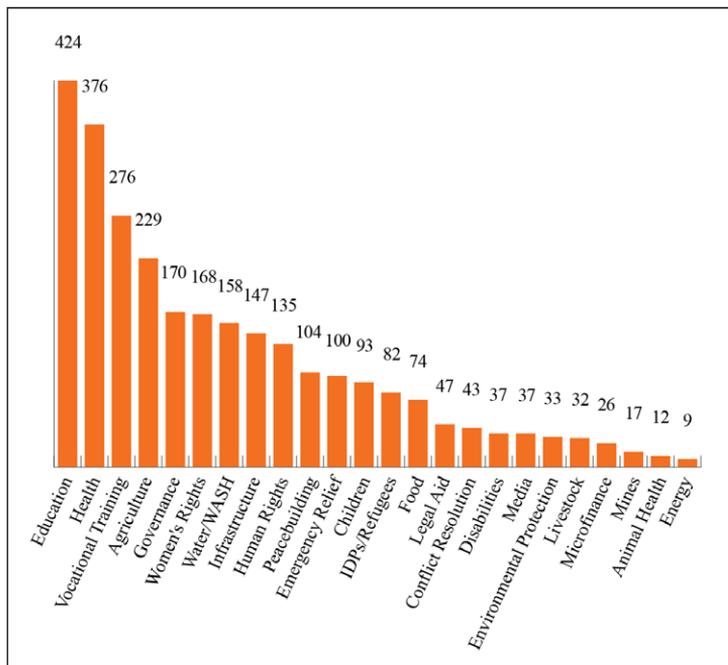
Logar	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Nangarhar	9	16	40	41	44	44	44	50	53	53	58	61	63	59	56
Nimroz	2	4	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	7	8	8	8	7	9
Nuristan	5	5	6	5	5	6	6	7	8	9	9	7	8	9	8
Paktika	2	2	5	4	6	8	8	10	8	10	10	10	9	10	11
Paktya	3	3	9	11	8	10	10	15	14	15	13	15	16	17	19
Panjshir	–	–	–	–	6	7	7	8	11	12	12	13	15	15	17
Parwan	6	12	20	23	25	26	26	25	22	27	28	31	30	29	29
Samangan	3	4	11	9	9	12	13	13	15	18	19	18	21	21	23
Sar-e Pul	2	6	7	7	6	7	7	8	9	11	12	14	19	18	16
Takhar	4	9	19	23	23	25	26	25	24	25	26	26	30	29	27
Uruzgan	2	3	5	2	2	3	4	4	4	8	10	12	13	14	14
Wardak	9	12	17	14	16	17	20	20	21	20	25	26	24	24	23
Zabul	2	2	4	2	2	2	2	3	5	5	5	4	5	7	8

Using these operational definitions, the data reveal that 595 (67 percent) of the NGOs that were active in Afghanistan between 2000 and 2014 were apolitical, while 296 (33 percent) were political. This is highlighted in **Figure 7**. Furthermore, of the 296 political NGOs, 215 (73 percent) were simultaneously engaged in apolitical sectors of activity, while only 81 (27 percent) were solely working in the political sectors of governance, conflict resolution, human rights, peacebuilding, and/or women’s rights. This finding reveals that there was a considerable overlap between apolitical and political NGO activity in Afghanistan during the period under analysis.

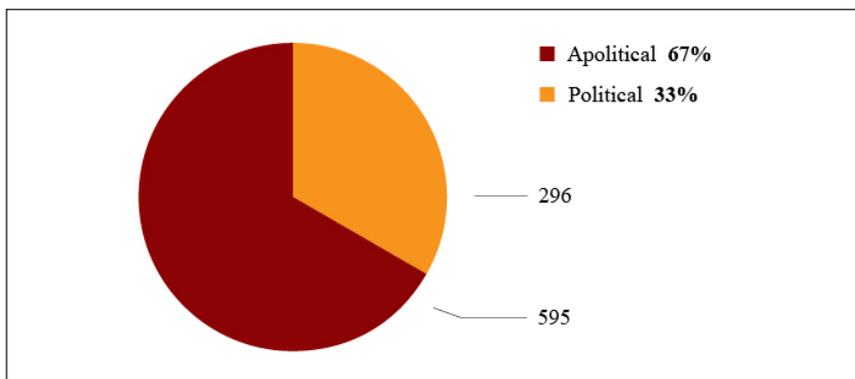
peacebuilding, and/or women’s rights. This finding reveals that there was a considerable overlap between apolitical and political NGO activity in Afghanistan during the period under analysis.

**Conclusion**

Previous information on international and local NGO activity in Afghanistan has been limited and scarce, especially at the subnational-level. The dataset introduced in this



**Figure 6:** NGOs by Sector of Activity, 2000–2014.



**Figure 7:** Apolitical and Political NGOs, 2000–2014.

article helps to fill this gap by providing information on 891 NGOs that were active in the country between 2000 and 2014. It is hoped that the data and information presented will be of use to academics, practitioners, and policymakers working on issues pertaining to international development. The author encourages the dissemination and use of the data for research purposes, and requests that this article be cited as the source of information. The complete dataset with provincial- and NGO-specific information is available for download at the Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX)<sup>5</sup> website: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/afghanistan-ngo-presence-between-the-years-2000-and-2014>.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Several NGOs were critical of the PRT initiative in Afghanistan, claiming that the mixture of military and humanitarian operations had a negative impact on their security. However, recent empirical studies have called into question the validity of this argument (see Mitchell 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> Of the NGOs that were contacted, 54 percent did not respond, 20 percent were no longer active, 17 percent provided confirmation, 8 percent of messages bounced, and one percent refused to provide a response because of security concerns.
- <sup>3</sup> Daykundi and Panjshir provinces were first established in 2004. Hence, **Table 2**, **Table 3**, and **Table 4** do not include data for these provinces prior to this period.
- <sup>4</sup> The author acknowledges the somewhat contentious debate surrounding how to define “apolitical” and “political” NGO activity. Discussions with academics, humanitarians, and colleagues revealed little agreement on how certain sectors should be classified—specifically education, legal aid, and media—which many believed could fall into either category. However, the sectors of conflict

resolution, governance, human rights, peacebuilding, and women’s rights were largely agreed upon as being consistent with how “political” activity has been conceptually defined in extant literature.

- <sup>5</sup> HDX is managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Launched in July 2014, the goal of HDX is to make humanitarian data easy to find and use for analysis.

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