

Women Take A Stand in Afghan Elections

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General Information

Source:	NBC Nightly News	Resource Type:	Video News Report
Creator:	Ann Curry/Richard Engel	Copyright:	NBCUniversal Media, LLC.
Event Date:	08/17/2009	Copyright Date:	2009
Air/Publish Date:	08/17/2009	Clip Length	00:02:58

Description

Afghanistan may be a country where women have few rights, but more than 300 women are running for local office in the upcoming provincial elections. NBC's Richard Engel looks at some of the women taking a stand.

Keywords

[Afghanistan](#), [War](#), [War in Afghanistan](#), [Women](#), [Rights](#), [Abuse](#), [Taliban](#), [Elections](#), [Vote](#), [Candidates](#), [Campaign](#), [Kabul](#), [Burqa](#), [Illiterate](#), [Prison](#), [Jail](#), [Adultery](#), [Operation Enduring Freedom](#)

Citation

MLA

"Women Take A Stand in Afghan Elections." Richard Engel, correspondent. *NBC Nightly News*.

APA

Engel, R. (Reporter), & Curry, A. (Anchor). 2009, August 17. Women Take A Stand in Afghan Elections. [Television series episode]. *NBC Nightly News*. Retrieved from <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=45603>

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"Women Take A Stand in Afghan Elections" *NBC Nightly News*, New York, NY: NBC Universal, 08/17/2009. Accessed Sat Aug 12 2017 from NBC Learn: <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=45603>

Transcript

Women Take A Stand in Afghan Elections

ANN CURRY, anchor:

This is a showdown week in Afghanistan, where Thursday is election day. The Taliban is threatening violence to intimidate voters. US forces are fighting to prevent that. And among the candidates are an unprecedented number of women, hundreds of them, including two women running for president. More now from our chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel in Kabul.

RICHARD ENGEL reporting:

In Kabul, where many women still hide behind the all-covering burqa, Farida Tarana this week was touching up her makeup before hitting the campaign trail for local office.

Ms. FARIDA TARANA: (Foreign language spoken)...

ENGEL: `People here look down on women who go out in public,' Tarana said. `I want to change that.' So Tarana, a 26-year-old pop singer, spent her life savings to launch a campaign with posters and ads on television. Tarana makes public appearances at parks without bodyguards, despite repeated death threats.

Unidentified Woman: (Foreign language spoken)...

ENGEL: `Women don't have any freedom in this country,' this woman said. Only 10 percent of Afghan girls go to primary school. Only 13 percent of women can read. But the greatest injustice to women may be hidden here. It looks like any school, but the classroom is behind prison bars and so is the nursery for Afghanistan's youngest inmates. The children are locked up with their mothers at Kabul's only jail for women, under 24-hour guard, behind rows of razor wire. More than a third of the women here were convicted of the crimes of escaping their homes or adultery.

Each can carry up to a 10-year sentence. But many of the women tell us their adultery was really rape and that they left their homes to run away from abusive husbands.

In the prison sewing shop, we found Thouszi and Nezzanine, both 25. Nezzanine was sentenced to five years for running away from her husband, who tried to force her into prostitution.

NEZZANINE: (Foreign language spoken)...

ENGEL: 'If I show you my back, you would see how badly I was beaten,' she said. 'Anyone in my position would have left, too.'

Thouszi showed me her prison cell, where the women are allowed to play with the children, a rare moment of joy.

You want to be picked up, too? All right, come here.

But Thouszi has two and a half years left on her sentence for abandoning her 71-year-old husband, who beat her with chains.

THOUSZI: (Foreign language spoken)...

ENGEL: 'Of course it is unjust I am here in prison,' she said. 'I am a woman. I am powerless. I have no rights.'

Inequalities candidates like Farida Tarana hope to change.

Ms. TARANA: (Foreign language spoken)...

ENGEL: 'I became a candidate to prove women can be anything they want,' she said, in an election that could be a turning point for Afghan women. Richard Engel, NBC News, Kabul.