Images of long lines of Afghan women patiently waiting to cast their votes in last October’s presidential election, and the candidacy of a female doctor for president, seem vividly to symbolise the progress of women since the fall of the Taliban just over three years ago. The images of hope are not wholly misleading. Large numbers of women participated as voters, poll workers, and civic educators in many parts of the country. However, the real test – for women’s rights, and for Afghanistan itself – lies ahead, with local and parliamentary elections. This time women will run for office in greater numbers, and the role of local warlords will be at stake as never before.


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