



# Afghan Media in 2010

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## Priority District Report Spin Boldak (Kandahar)

**October 13, 2010**

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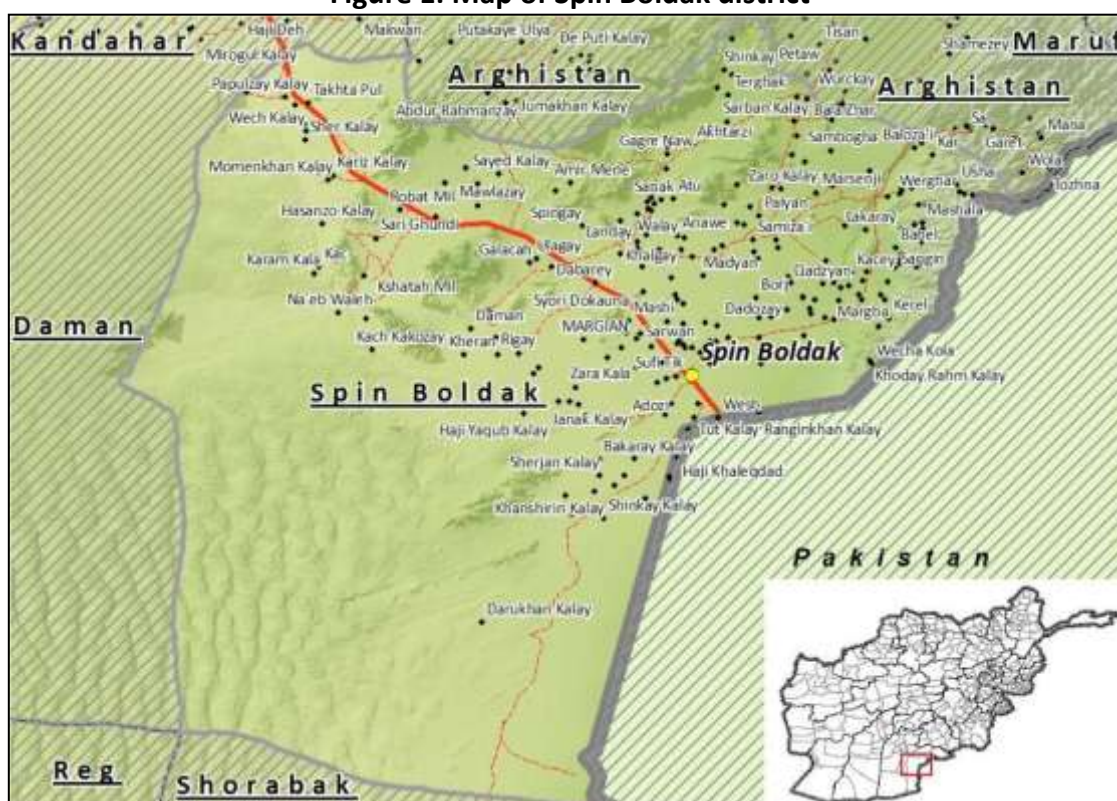
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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 District profile

Spin Boldak district is located in southwest Kandahar province, along the border with Pakistan. It borders Arghistan district to the north and Daman district to the south. Most importantly, it is the last town on the road linking Kandahar to Quetta (Pakistan), one of the main transit routes for goods imported from and exported to Pakistan. Its main and busiest town is Wesh, on the border opposite Chaman in Pakistan. The administrative center is Spin Boldak, about 100km from Kandahar (a 2-5 hour drive), which is smaller than Wesh.

**Figure 1: Map of Spin Boldak district**



Partly desert (in the south), with few areas irrigated (and those only intermittently), the district is not very fertile. Nevertheless, agriculture represents the primary source of income for many villages. Main crops reported in the district are tobacco, melon, and watermelon. Most settlements are located along the main road from Kandahar to Pakistan and in the northeast of the district.

The most profitable economic activities are trade and transportation along the import and export route, focused mainly on Wesh, where more intense activity (trade of cars, second-hand computers, TVs, and mobile phones) can be observed. The Wesh–Chaman border crossing is the second most important trade route with Pakistan after Torkhan in Nangarhar.

Security is usually perceived as average by the inhabitants. Insurgents are present but they do not control any particular area. This is mainly because of the constant presence of foreign and domestic troops in recent years. Although security incidents are infrequent, insurgents seem to have made themselves a permanent fixture, and local people fear, for

instance, kidnappings at night. Other reports show that security is considered good along the main road but degrades rapidly with distance from the road.

The main development activities are conducted by: the US Army, through funding from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) (paving the road from Spin Boldak to the border, for instance); the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (agriculture development program); and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (water supply and sanitation, implementation of the National Solidarity Program (NSP)). As with military operations, these efforts tend to focus on the axis linking Kandahar to Quetta, for strategic reasons. As a result, the level of security on this axis is reported as better than in the rest of the district.

**Figure 2: Funding strategy in Spin Boldak district<sup>1</sup>**



## 1.2 Methodology

The fieldwork took place in April 2010 and covered the following areas: Kabulian Kalay (5km east of Spin Boldak), Haji Kamal (5km towards the Pakistani border), Nawi Kalay (8km towards the Pakistani border), Mohammed Rafiq Agha Kalay (3km southwest of Spin Boldak), and Spin Boldak (Nawi Kalay area, next to Kandahar Bus Station).

A total of 25 close-ended interviews were conducted in these locations, and an additional 75 were conducted by phone. The audience section below also refers to audience data collected through a phone survey of 61 individuals living in Kandahar province, which took place from July 9 to 23 and from August 22 to 28, 2010. For more details about the sampling methodology, see the main methodology document.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with 11 community leaders (none originally from Boldak, probably because of the limited educational level of the local people).

Throughout the fieldwork security was an issue: the interviewer received threats by phone, and some interviewees were surprised he was conducting research, an activity considered dangerous.

<sup>1</sup> ISAF, *Governance, Reconstruction and Development: Spin Boldak Report*, April 1, 2010.

## 2 Media landscape

There is no grid electricity in Spin Boldak town, but solar panels in the bazaar are used for streetlights. A few shops and wealthier households use generators.

A few DVD and CD shops are present on the bazaar, but no computer shops. A few cassette sellers at the bazaar have computers in their shops to download music onto mobile phones, charging \$0.12-0.25 for each ringtone.

A minority of restaurants and hotels have TV sets and show videos. No usage of car batteries to operate TV sets was reported in the district center.

Most of the district has phone coverage, with all operators (AWCC, Roshan, MTN, Etisalat, and Afghan Telecom) working at least along the main road. Post offices are present in Spin Boldak town.

### 2.1 Media outlets

There are two district radio stations, one of which was established recently. There is no district TV channel, but there is access to two channels from Kandahar and one from Lashkar Gah. Newspaper distribution is very limited.

#### 2.1.1 Television

There is no local TV in Spin Boldak. The following provincial and national channels are available through terrestrial antennas:

Name	Scope	Ownership	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Helmand RTA	Provincial	Government	Lashkar Gah	45km
Kandahar RTA	Provincial	Government	Kandahar	60km
Hewad	Provincial	Private	Kandahar	35km
Ariana	National	Private	Kandahar	35-75km
Lemar	National	Private	Kandahar	40km
Tolo	National	Private	Kandahar	50km
Shamshad	National	Private	Kandahar	30-160km
Saba	National	Private	Kandahar	30km

Major changes have occurred since 2005, when the only channel available through terrestrial antenna was a Pakistani one and the Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) signal was absent.

There was no cable network reported in Spin Boldak.

Two Pakistani channels are also received in Spin Boldak.

#### 2.1.2 Radio

Besides the shortwave radio stations available throughout Afghanistan, two radio stations broadcast from Spin Boldak and three from Kandahar:

Name	Scope	Ownership	Frequency	Antenna location	Broadcast radius
Boldak	Local	Government	96 FM	Spin Boldak	60km
Spin Ghag	Local	Military	94.5	Spin Boldak	30km
Kandahar RTA	Provincial	Government	105.2 FM 1305 AM	Kandahar	300km
Wranga	Provincial	Private		Kandahar	
AIR	Provincial	Private	88 FM	Kandahar	80km

### **Boldak**

Boldak is a state radio station, linked to Kandahar RTA, established in 2003 and managed by Mr. Najibullah. It is equipped with a 50W transmitter. Coverage extends to Kadani Kalay/Loy Karez in the north, Registan in the south, Bambul in the east, and Hut Mantian in the west. Programming runs six hours a day, but only 30 minutes of content are produced locally (mostly local news, generally sent to Kandahar as well).

The station employs five staff members: a journalist, a manager, an assistant, a technician, and a guard. Operation costs are covered by Kandahar RTA and include salaries (\$700 a month) and fuel for the generator (\$240).

### **Spin Ghag**

Spin Ghag is a US military station broadcasting from the Forward Operating Base (FOB) via a radio-in-a-box (RIAB), 24 hours a day. RIABs are very simple radios (made up of a box, wire, and antenna), with radio transmitters that can broadcast up to 30-40km.

Programming consists of nightly news, leaders' addresses, development project updates, advertising the Tip Line (a call-in number for citizens to report security issues), and discrediting insurgent activities.

Even though it is clearly identified as being controlled by the foreign military, and although foreign forces do not necessarily have a good reputation among interviewees, respondents considered the station useful, as it broadcasts a lot of music, is appreciated by youth, offers local news, and features frequent interviews with General Razziq, a popular figure in the district. As such, the radio station is not considered a proper propaganda tool.

### **Spin Boldak FM**

Spin Boldak FM, a project launched at the beginning of 2010, did not seem to be functioning at the time of the field visit. The equipment initially earmarked for the station has been diverted to Arghandab. No interviewee mentioned it in response to the usage and preference questions.

There was no reported reception of Pakistani radio stations in Spin Boldak.

### **2.1.3 Newspapers**

Distribution of newspapers or magazines is extremely limited in the district center, and even more so in villages. There is no printed press shop in Spin Boldak bazaar.

A weekly from Kandahar, Surghar, is sold by children in the district center. A few newspapers and magazines from Pakistan (such as Jang and Mashreq) are distributed in Wesh, but only Urdu-speaking people can read them.

This represents slight progress compared with 2005, when no newspapers or magazines were observed in the district center.

## 2.2 New media

### 2.2.1 Mobile media

Mobile phones are not really used as a source of information in the district. Downloading ringtones on mobile phones is as far as mobile media gets.

### 2.2.2 Internet

There is no public internet access in Spin Boldak, and no private internet access was reported in the district. No functioning District Communication Network (DCN) access point was reported during the field visit.

While a few have access to elaborate modern mobile phones, people are often not very familiar with mobile phone usage; many of them do not even know their own phone number. Younger people may share content, but the most hi-tech use of mobile phones observed was downloading ringtones. This service is provided by a few cassette sellers at the bazaar for \$0.12-0.25 per ringtone.

## 2.3 Media and information actors

### 2.3.1 Government

There are no representatives of the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) or Bakhtar News Agency (BNA) in the district. There are, however, representatives of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (in charge of the NSP).

### 2.3.2 Other content providers

Boldak radio receives the large majority of its programs from Kandahar RTA through a satellite link. Advertising is managed and sold by Kandahar RTA as well and then sent to Boldak.

### 2.3.3 Media NGOs

No media non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were reported in Spin Boldak.

### 2.3.4 Traditional information sources

As usual in rural Afghanistan, traditional sources include primarily *qawmemeshers* (elders), members of the local *shura* (council), and the *mullahs*. These play an important role in

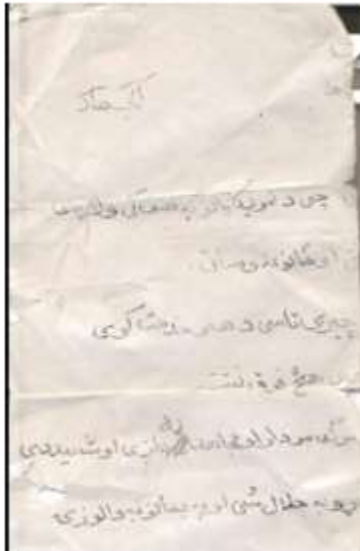
spreading very localized news pertaining to community life and in solving local conflicts, notably over land, water, marriage, or inheritance.

Traditional sources of information often interact with the media, most importantly because the latter consider them significant voices and naturally interview them when producing reports or organizing debates.

### 2.3.5 Insurgents

No illegal radio station was reported in the district. Although insurgents are present in the district, they have no fixed base, and their main interaction with communities is through *shabnama* (“night letters”) and face-to-face meetings. Interviewees did not mention any particular insurgent presence, but this may be caused by fear or sympathy felt towards them.

**Figure 3: Fragment of a night letter from Al Jihad received by the education manager in Spin Boldak, May 2010**





### 3 Audience

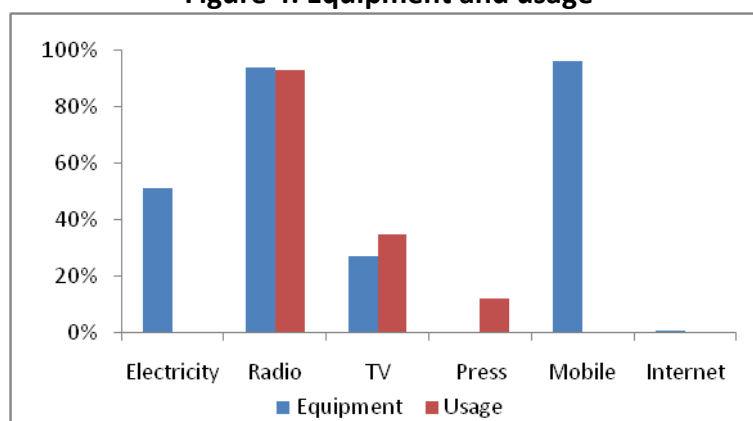
The following is a description of the audience in Spin Boldak, based on 100 interviews. Audience data were also collected through a phone survey of 61 individuals living in Kandahar province (not specifically in Spin Boldak district), which took place from July 9 to 23 and from August 22 to 28, 2010.

#### 3.1 Equipment and usage

##### 3.1.1 Household equipment

Compared with other districts, Spin Boldak respondents are relatively less equipped in terms of media devices, which could be explained partially by low access to electricity and relative poverty (there is no grid electricity, and only 51% of respondents have private generators or solar panels, both in the district center and in rural areas).

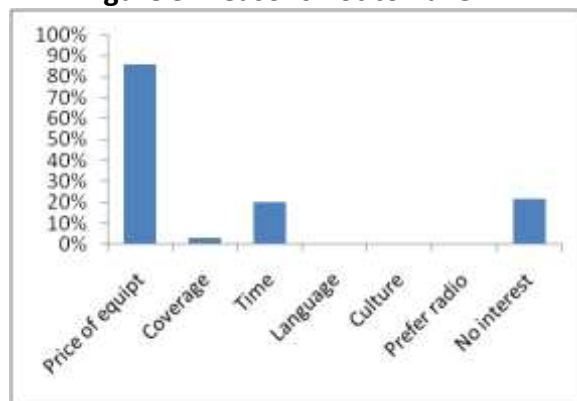
**Figure 4: Equipment and usage**



TV equipment is strongly correlated with income level, with price mentioned as an obstacle by 86%. The qualitative interviews showed that TV is still considered a medium for the relatively rich (businesspersons involved in transportation, for instance). It should be remembered that, in the absence of grid electricity, watching TV requires access to a generator, and running costs are expensive.

Even fewer people have access to satellite and/or DVD/CD players. Radio equipment is nearly universal in the sample (94%).

**Figure 5: Reasons not to have TV**



### 3.1.2 Sources of information and media usage

On all of the topics tested, radio is the primary source of information, far ahead of traditional or even other modern media. Despite the low equipment rate, TV comes second, except on religion, for which the main source remains *mullahs* and mosques.

**Table 1: What is the most used source of information?**

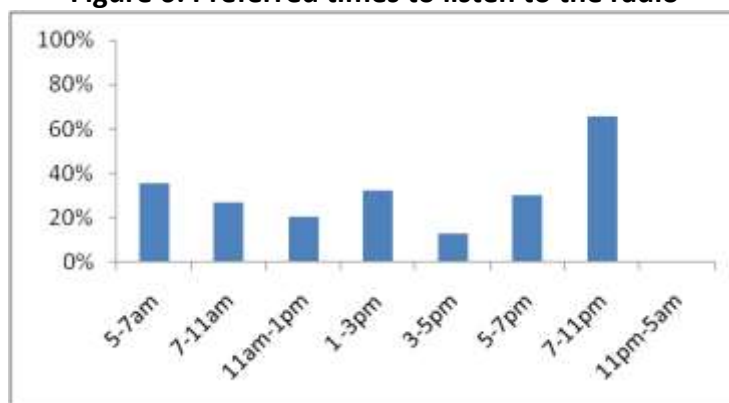
	Mullah, mosque	Newspapers	Radio	TV	Shura	Khan, malik, commander	Other	#
Politics	0%	0%	61%	39%	0%	0%	0%	56
Religion	26%	0%	60%	14%	0%	0%	0%	99
Local news	1%	0%	89%	10%	0%	0%	0%	94
National news	1%	0%	85%	14%	0%	0%	0%	95
International news	0%	0%	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%	64
Development projects	0%	0%	70%	30%	0%	0%	0%	57
Movies and songs	0%	0%	69%	31%	0%	0%	0%	89

Nevertheless, the qualitative interviews showed that traditional sources of information still have importance. Community leaders stressed the importance of word of mouth, and stated that the authority of the *qawmemeshers*, either individually or grouped in the *shura*, is crucial in conflict resolution.

### 3.1.3 Usage patterns

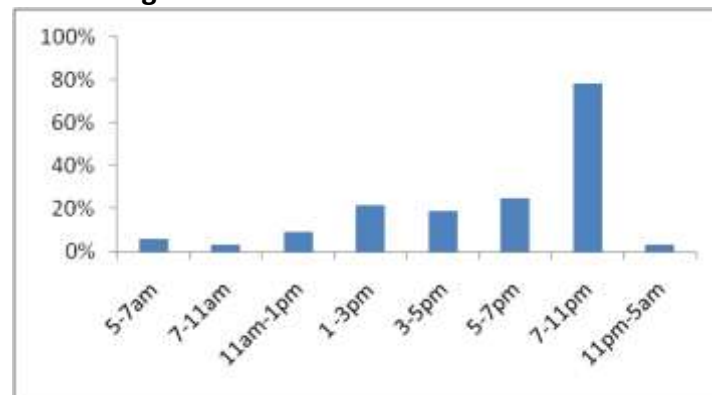
Radio usage is spread rather evenly throughout the day, with a peak in the evening.

**Figure 6: Preferred times to listen to the radio**



Like everywhere else, TV watching is far more focused, with a spike in the evening following the pattern of generator usage (7-10pm) and corresponding with favorite programs (main national news flashes, popular dramas, etc.).

**Figure 7: Preferred times to watch TV**



Qualitative interviews indicated that TV viewing is very much a collective activity among friends. Women and children rarely have access to it, since the TV set is usually placed in the guest room, for neighbors and friends to come and watch – it is socially unacceptable for women to be in the same room as unrelated males.

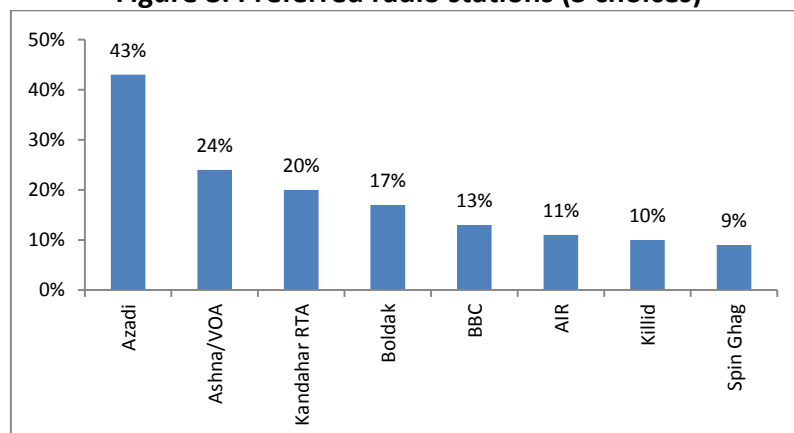
### 3.2 Preferences

#### 3.2.1 Outlets

##### Radio

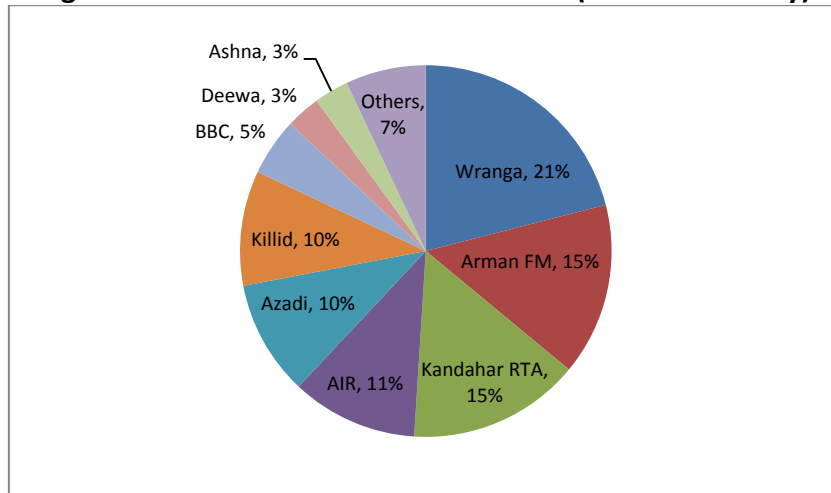
Among the most popular radio stations, the two that are most preferred are Western stations designed for the Afghan audience (Azadi and Ashna/Voice of America (VOA), with the BBC in fifth), broadcast on AM or shortwave. These are followed by provincial or local stations (Kandahar RTA, Boldak, Azada Afghan (Afghan Independent Radio (AIR)), Killid (Kandahar), and Spin Ghag). Although Spin Ghag is ranked low, both qualitative and quantitative research found that it was well-known among interviewees. See Section 3.3 for further details on perceptions of this station.

**Figure 8: Preferred radio stations (3 choices)**



Audience survey data from Kandahar province as a whole show that Wranga has the largest audience share (21%) among radio stations, followed by Arman FM and Kandahar RTA (both with 15%). AIR (11%), Azadi, and Killid (both 10%) follow, as the fourth and fifth most listened radio stations in the timeframe analyzed.

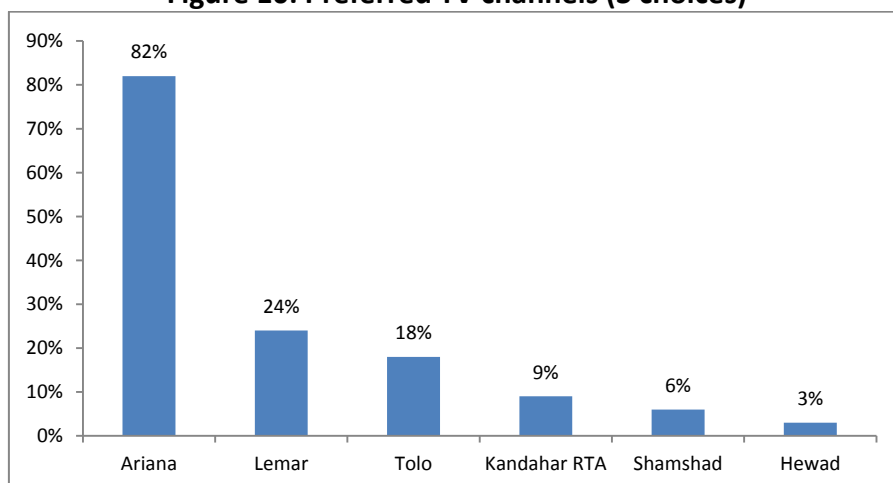
**Figure 9: Most listened to radio stations (audience survey)**



**Television**

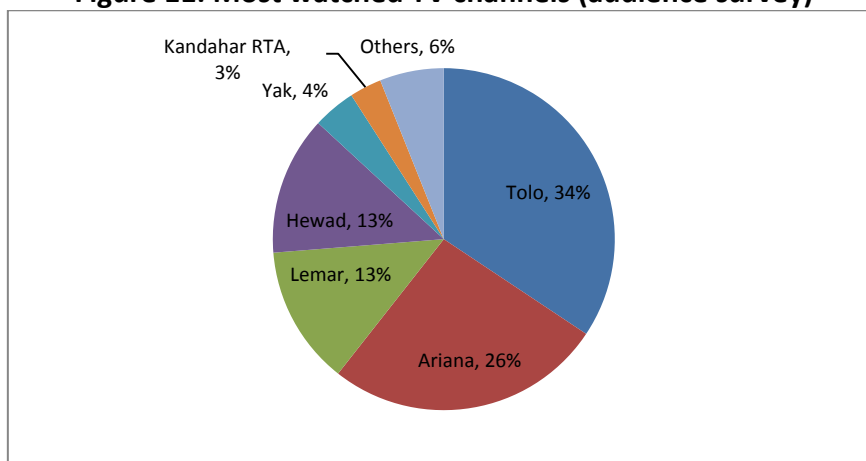
Interviewees expressed a strikingly strong preference for Ariana over purely Pashto channels such as Lemar, traditionally preferred in the south, and Shamshad. Ariana’s more serious and conservative style may explain this preference in the conservative Spin Boldak district: Lemar’s programming is very oriented towards entertainment, which is often criticized. Shamshad’s use of eastern/Pakistani Pashto is probably also a deterrent. Differences in the quality of the terrestrial signal may be a factor as well; Ariana is reported as having the best one.

**Figure 10: Preferred TV channels (3 choices)**



Audience survey data from Kandahar province as a whole indicate that Tolo has the greatest TV audience share (34%), followed by Ariana (26%) and, equally, Lemar and Hewad (13%).

**Figure 11: Most watched TV channels (audience survey)**



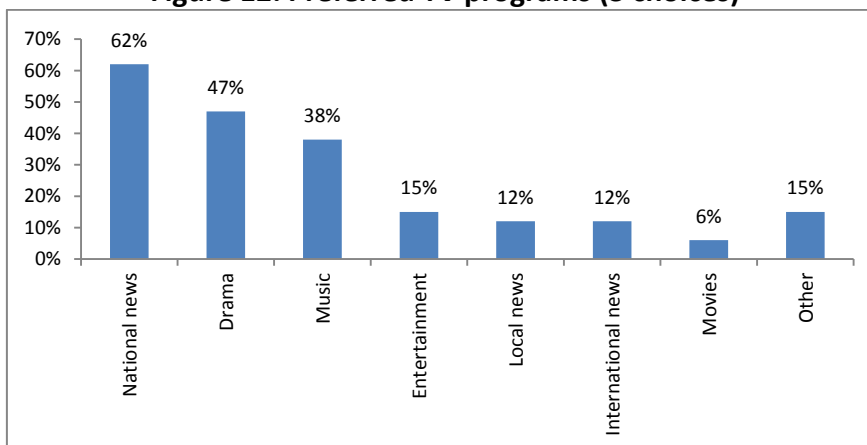
**Printed press**

Two-thirds of press readers mentioned the weekly Surghar, from Kandahar. This was followed by Ganj (“Treasure”), Milli Wahdat (“National Unity”), and Islami Diwa (“Islamic Predication”).

**3.2.2 Programs**

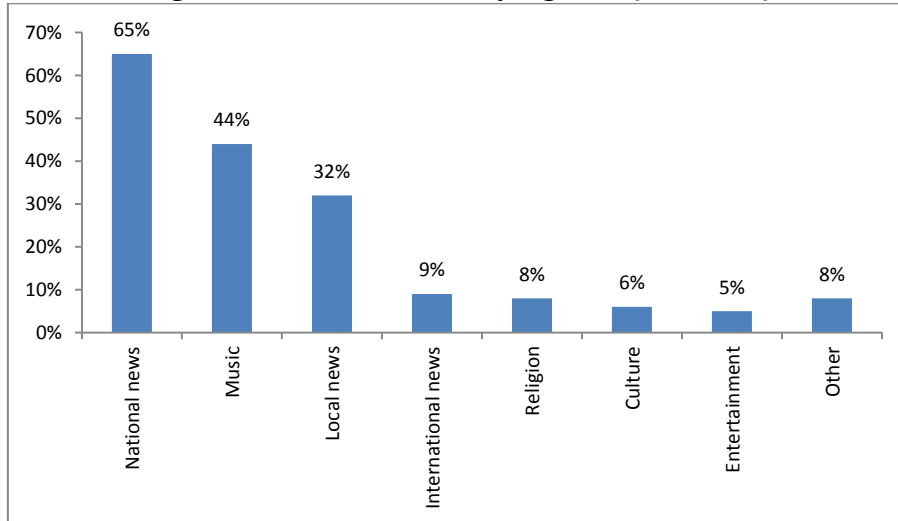
TV is used primarily for national news, broadcast on most channels right on the spike of TV usage at 8pm. Entertainment programs, more specifically dramas and music, follow closely.

**Figure 12: Preferred TV programs (3 choices)**



TV preferences initially follow roughly the same pattern as radio programs, with national news first. But then rather a strong divide appears, since 30% of respondents also disliked music. The qualitative interviews cast light on this situation, showing that youth would like to hear more music, whereas elders object and try to ban it (within their families, at least).

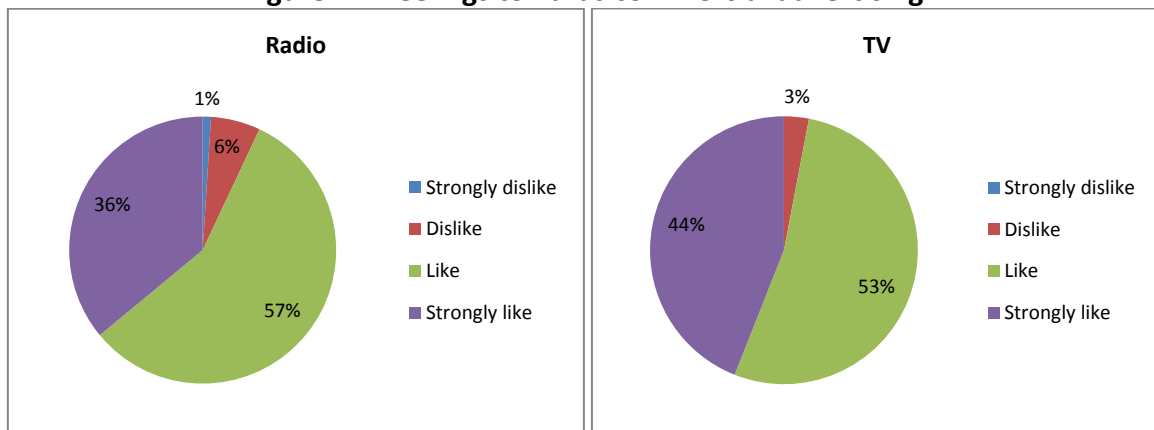
**Figure 13: Preferred radio programs (3 choices)**



### 3.2.3 Advertising

The vast majority of Spin Boldak respondents are in favor of commercial advertising, with around 40% strongly advocating its use both on the radio and on TV. Commercials are considered useful by all TV viewers and 95% of radio listeners. But most interviewees think the current amount of advertising is enough (80% for radio and 68% for TV).

**Figure 14: Feelings towards commercial advertising**



Like other districts, the most remembered commercials include those for mobile phones, banks (particularly Kabul and Azizi Banks), and airlines.

### 3.2.4 Personalities

A few local media personalities have achieved notoriety but none of them real fame: Najibullah, the owner of Boldak radio and the main speaker on the station; General Razziq, an officer in the Afghan National Army (ANA) in charge of securing the border; and a strongly liked *mullah* from Kabulian Kalay who, however, does not appear on the media.

### 3.3 Perceptions and impact

#### 3.3.1 Comprehension

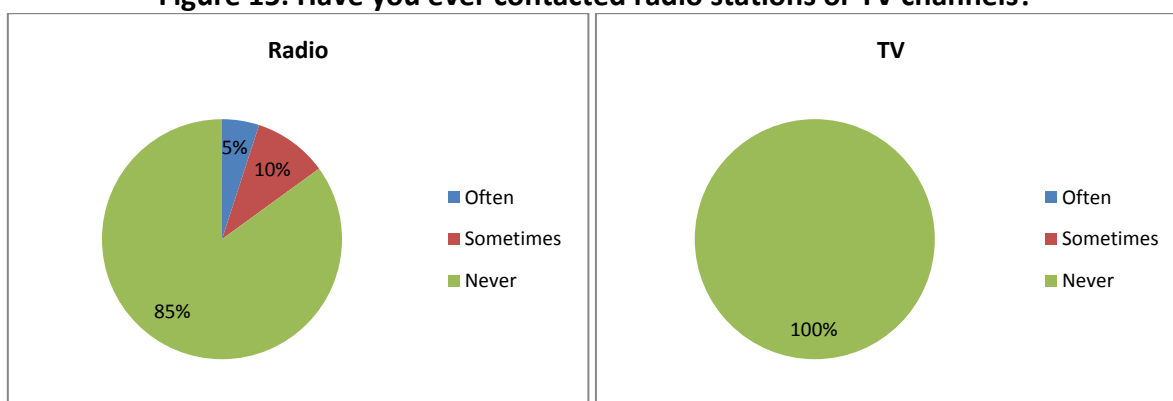
Spin Boldak respondents are among those reporting the fewest understanding difficulties relative to radio content (only 4%, from time to time). Printed press and TV are slightly more problematic, with 25% of respondents admitting occasional problems. This is probably because many of the preferred TV channels broadcast a significant part of their programs in Dari, and may also allude to consumption of Pakistani media (newspapers, TV channels).

#### 3.3.2 Participation

Spin Boldak respondents are not eager to interact with the media, especially TV channels. Although 15% have contacted a radio outlet, nobody has contacted a TV station. The main reasons for interacting with radio stations are to request a song (71%) and to ask a question (57%), done by phone in all cases.

The most contacted stations are the favorite and the closest ones: Boldak, Kandahar RTA, Killid, and AIR.

**Figure 15: Have you ever contacted radio stations or TV channels?**

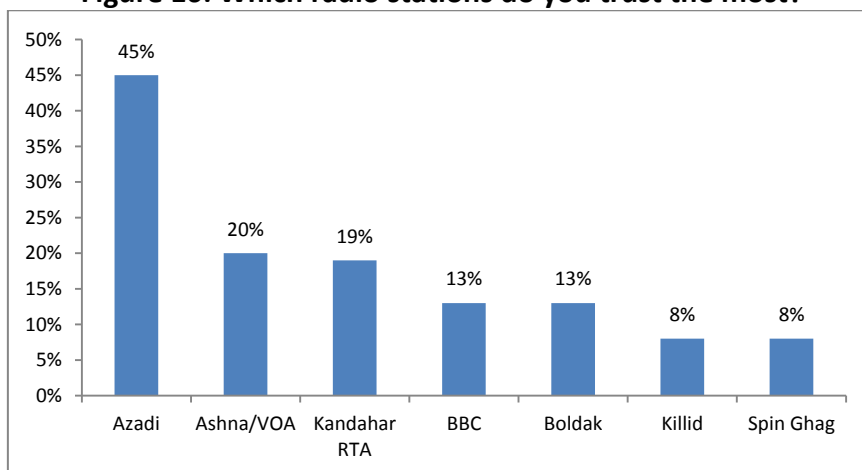


The qualitative interviews revealed further details on participation. It is usually youth who call to suggest or dedicate songs. Some complained that the number does not always work; others admitted they did not know how to contact the station, which partially explains low levels of interaction.

#### 3.3.3 Trust

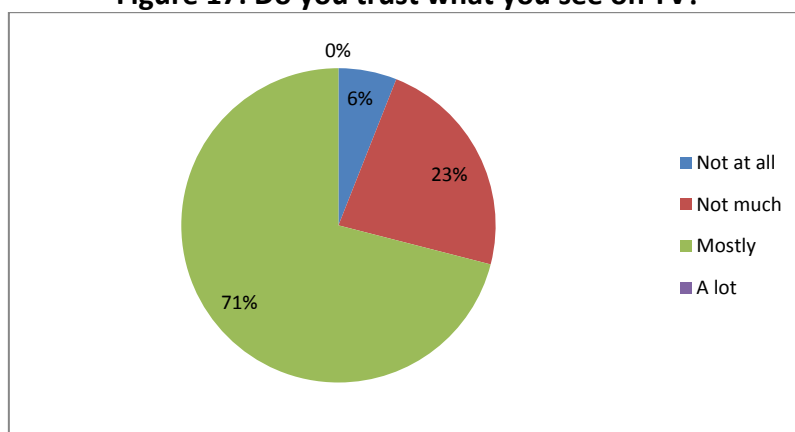
The trust ranking matches preferences exactly, although the private Kandahar station AIR is omitted. In the qualitative interviews, discrediting insurgent activities, which is part of AIR’s programming mandate, seemed to be perceived as propaganda; community leaders also questioned its reliability for local news.

**Figure 16: Which radio stations do you trust the most?**



Almost three-quarters of respondents trust what they see on TV, and figures are even higher for radio. Even on religion, on 23% trust *mullahs*, compared with 62% trusting the radio.

**Figure 17: Do you trust what you see on TV?**



The qualitative interviews showed a high level of trust in Spin Ghag radio, which may be explained by General Razziq’s frequent appearances on this medium.

### 3.3.4 Perceptions of the local media

A total of 22% of interviewees stated that the programs of Spin Ghag radio could be better, probably referring to the large amount of music broadcast.

A total of 95% respondents felt that local radio stations generally bring benefits to the community in terms of local news, but only 18% felt the content was likely to be objective.

### 3.3.5 Circulation and impact

When asked what *local* radio station they listened to the most, 60% of Spin Boldak radio users answered Boldak and 37% Spin Ghag.

The large majority of Boldak users were satisfied with its quality. Most Spin Ghag users judged it positively, but 31% felt it could be improved.



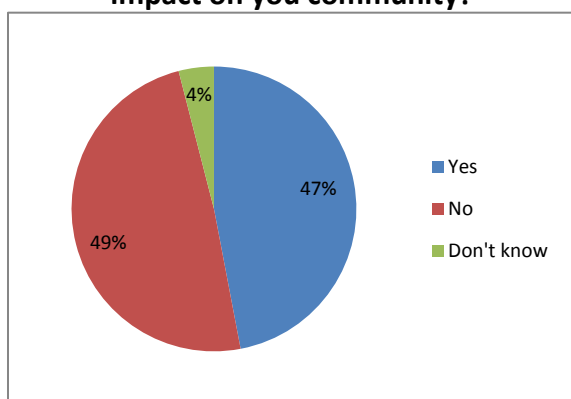
**Table 2: How would you qualify your favorite radio station?**

	Not very good	Could be better	Good	Very good
Boldak	8%	10%	38%	44%
Spin Ghag	9%	22%	38%	31%

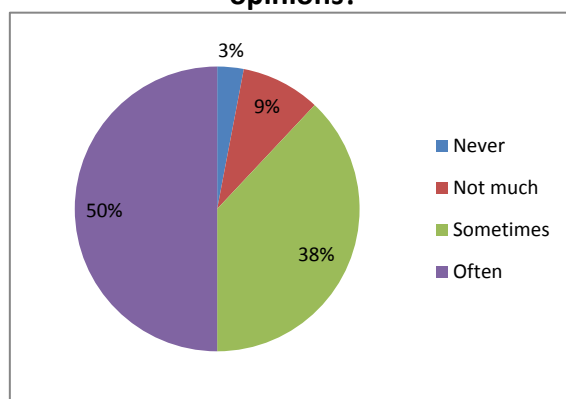
Spin Boldak respondents were critical about the role of their local radio station in their community. Half of them (49%) did not see any impact, and for 30% radio brought no or few new ideas. The Spin Boldak sample was far more critical than other districts included in this study.

Still, respondents felt that ideas brought by radio are usually good (95% of interviewees), 81% of respondents discuss radio programs with friends and family, and 93% of them think radio helps them shape their opinions. TV is equally powerful in terms of shaping opinions (88%) and bringing new ideas (96%).

**Figure 18: Does local radio change have an impact on you community?**



**Figure 19: Can TV make you change your opinions?**



### 3.3.6 Development project communication and educational campaigns

Spin Ghag radio broadcasts information campaigns that people remembered and generally found useful (on health, vaccinations, and narcotics).

## 4 Conclusions and areas of opportunity

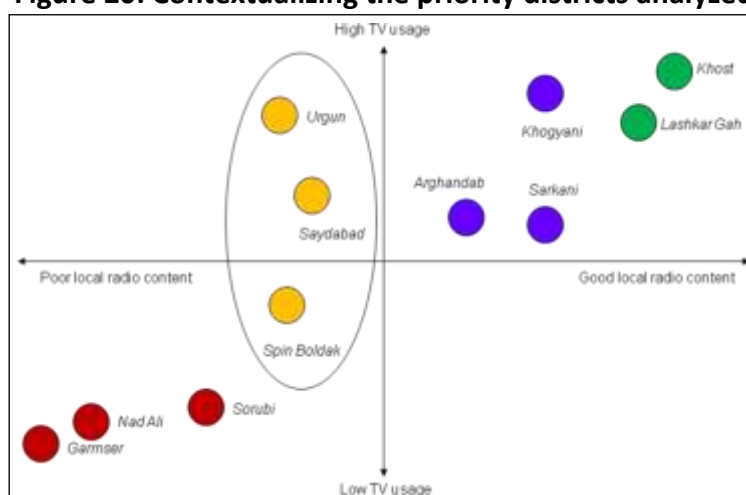
Spin Boldak has a richer media landscape than other rural districts. The center of Spin Boldak is quite well covered by broadcast media, given the proximity of two provincial centers (Lashkar Gah and Kandahar, with several state-run and private outlets in the latter) and its strategic location on a major international axis. The northwest tip of the district is about 35km away from Kandahar city at the crow flies, so villages are still within the coverage area of media broadcasting from the provincial center. The district center is also covered by national and provincial signals.

In the long run, however, only effective coverage of the whole district can ensure that the split between a well-protected relatively rich central axis and the surrounding land in the hands of the insurgents does not worsen. The south does not enjoy the same quality of coverage, and mountainous as well as linguistic barriers mean that the penetration or influence of Pakistani media is not as significant in Spin Boldak as in the eastern region. The district is also largely left out by written media such as newspapers, magazines, and internet.

Production of local content is limited, particularly on the state-run radio station Boldak, which relies on programs received from Kandahar. The military local station, Spin Ghag, ranks last in terms of preference and trust (although it is still the second local radio station in terms of notoriety, after Kandahar RTA). Also, further penetration of TV seems to be particularly constrained by high prices of equipment and power, since there is no grid electricity.

Figure 20, which classifies the districts analyzed for this study into four groups on the basis of TV usage and quality of local radio content, illustrates the district's positioning in relation to the others.

**Figure 20: Contextualizing the priority districts analyzed**



In this context, training and resources could be allocated to Boldak (the favorite station after national outlets), to boost the production of local news, local reports, and local programs. There is also room for better buy-in by local communities, probably dependent on stronger interaction and airing of more diversified programming (networking military radio stations for common program production, on top of local content, seems a possibility).

Printed press penetration, in a district with 43% declared illiteracy (the highest rate in all 11 rural districts included in the study), relies above all on progress in the education sector, which is essential before a significant distribution network can be established.