



The Asia Foundation

Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People

Key Findings

- In 2009, 42 percent of respondents say that the country is moving in the right direction. This figure is higher than in 2008 (38%). Similarly, 29 percent feel that the country is moving in the wrong direction compared to 32 percent in 2008, signaling a check on the trend of declining optimism that had been evident since 2006.
- The main reason for optimism continues to be good security which has been mentioned by an increasing proportion of respondents each year, from 31 percent in 2006 to 44 percent in 2009. More respondents in 2009 also mention reconstruction and rebuilding (36%) and opening of schools for girls (21%) as reasons for optimism than in previous years.
- Insecurity also remains the most important reason for pessimism, cited by 42 percent of respondents. However, the proportion of respondents that highlight insecurity in 2009 has fallen since 2008 when half of respondents (50%) emphasized this factor.
- Insecurity (including attacks, violence and terrorism) is identified as the biggest problem in Afghanistan by over a third of respondents (36%), particularly in the South East (48%), West (44%) and South West (41%). However, concern about other issues such as unemployment (35%), poor economy (20%), corruption (17%), poverty (11%) and education (11%) has increased in 2009 compared to 2008.
- A slightly higher proportion of respondents give a positive assessment of the security situation in their local area in 2009 (64%) than in 2008 (62%). Although improvements were reported in almost all regions of the country, it is to be considered that there were greater restrictions on the movement of survey researchers due to security concerns and other reasons in 2009 compared to previous years (refer to Appendix 2: Methodology for details).
- Just over half of respondents (51%) say they fear for their personal safety in their local area. However, much higher proportions of respondents report at least sometimes having fears for their safety in the South East (65%), South West (62%) and West (62%), than in other parts of the country. There has also been a

significant rise in the incidence of crime and violence experienced by respondents in these regions since 2008.

- Seventeen percent of respondents report that they or someone in their family have been victims of violence or crime in the past year. Nearly one in ten victims of violence report that this was due to the actions of militias and insurgents (9%) or foreign forces (9%). The incidence of victimization from military type actions has been rising steadily since 2007. Violence resulting from militant/insurgent actions is mentioned most often in the Central/Hazarajat (24%), East (17%), Central/Kabul (11%), South East (9%) and South West (8%). Whereas violence due to the actions of foreign forces is most commonly reported in the South West (22%), South East (11%) and East (10%).
- The proportion of respondents who express fear to vote in a national election rose significantly between 2008 and 2009 (from 45% to 51%). This is now true for the majority of respondents in the South West (79%), South East (68%), West (61%) and East (56%) of the country.
- In 2009, Afghans give a more positive assessment of their economic situation than in previous years, although this prosperity is not evenly shared. Considerably more urban respondents (63%) than rural residents (52%) say they are more prosperous today than they were under the Taliban.
- Unemployment continues to feature amongst the most important problems at both national (35%) and local (26%) levels. Other major problems at the local level concern basic infrastructure and services such as electricity (26%), roads (24%), water (22%) and lack of health care/clinics/hospitals (20%), as in previous years.
- In terms of local amenities and services, respondents continue to report the greatest satisfaction with the availability of education for children (67%), water for drinking (63%) and irrigation (53%) and clinics and hospitals (49%).
- Around two-thirds of respondents (65%) say that the supply of electricity in their local areas is bad and a third of respondents (33%) report having no access to any kind of electricity. This is significantly lower than in previous years.
- Assessments of the performance of the national government have risen slightly from 67 percent in 2008 to 71 percent in 2009. The most commonly mentioned achievements of the current government are reconstruction (32%), establishing peace and security (27%) and a better education system (26%). The most commonly mentioned government failings are insecurity (31%), administrative corruption (29%), lack of job opportunities (20%), weak economy (15%) and weak government (13%).
- The majority of respondents (71%) support the government's attempts to address the security situation through negotiation and reconciliation with armed anti-

government elements. The high level of support for this approach is likely to be influenced by the fact that a majority of respondents (56%) say they have some level of sympathy with the motivations of armed opposition groups.

- Confidence in representative bodies and their responsiveness to addressing issues of local concern remains relatively high. Sixty-eight percent of respondents say parliament is addressing the major problems of people in Afghanistan and 58 percent say that their MP is addressing the major problems of their constituency in the Parliament. Satisfaction with the performance of MPs in this regards shows a small improvement in 2009 compared to 2008.
- At the local level respondents give the most positive assessment of the performance of Provincial Councils (75%), followed by district authorities (69%) and municipalities (58%). However, in 2009 satisfaction with the performance of municipal authorities has increased while satisfaction with Provincial Councils and district authorities has remained stable.
- In 2009, a significantly higher proportion of respondents than in previous years mention freedom (50%) and peace (41%) as the greatest personal benefits they expect from democracy. This year respondents give greater importance to core democratic values such as rights and law (24%), women's right (21%), government of the people (19%) and Islamic democracy (23%). However, they show less confidence in the likelihood of democracy delivering more tangible benefits such as less corruption (17%) or prosperity (15%).
- The proportion of respondents who say that democracy is the best form of government available continues to fall, from 84 percent in 2006 to 78 percent in 2009. However, since 2008 there has been no change in the level of satisfaction with the way democracy is working in Afghanistan (68%).
- Agreement with the principle of equal rights continues to fall over time, from 90 percent in 2006 and 2007 to 84 percent in 2008 and to 80 percent in 2009. The same is true of support for the principle of peaceful political opposition which has fallen from 84 percent in 2006 to 77 percent in 2009. There is also a decline in the acceptance of differences in political allegiances between individuals, from 54 percent in 2006 to 40 percent in 2009. However, support for allowing opposition parties to hold local meetings rose significantly from 44 percent in 2008 to 54 percent in 2009.
- 2009 sees a certain renewed confidence in the electoral process. Seventy percent of respondents say they believe that voting can lead to improvement, reversing the trend of the last two years. This is accompanied by a steady rise in the proportion of respondents who say they can have some degree of influence over government decisions from 36 percent in 2006 to 42 percent in 2009.

- 2009 also sees a significant rise in public confidence in a number of election-related institutions including the Independent Election Commission (from 58% in 2008 to 67% in 2009) and political parties (47%, which is the highest recorded figure since 2006).
- The survey was conducted in June 2009 with the Presidential and Provincial Council elections scheduled for August. Two months before the elections 82 percent of respondents were aware of the elections and 77 percent had registered to vote. Voter registration was significantly higher amongst men (85%) than women (69%). Around three quarters (73%) of those who had not registered said they did not know where to do this.
- Seventy-three percent of registered voters said they were likely to vote including 48 percent who said this was very likely. However, significant proportions in the South West (35%), South East (29%), Central/Kabul (27%) and West (25%) said they were unlikely to vote. The proportion of respondents who report having no interest in participating in the elections rose sharply in 2009, and has more than doubled since 2004 (from 12% to 16% in 2005, 18% in 2008 and 26% in 2009). Security concerns were also prevalent (18%), particularly in the South East (25%) and South West (30%).
- Sixty-four percent of respondents said that the upcoming elections would be free and fair. Those who thought otherwise identified a range of potential problems including cheating in the vote count (39%) and buying of votes (33%). Only a small proportion mentioned intimidation against voters or party activists (8%). Doubts about the elections being free and fair were highest in the South West (37%), South East (29%), Central/Kabul (25%) and West (23%) regions.
- Views on freedom of expression continue to be divided. Forty percent of respondents say that most people feel free to express their opinions but an almost equal proportion (39%) say they do not. The proportion of respondents who say it is unacceptable to talk negatively about the government continues to fall, from 69% in 2007 to 61 percent in 2009. The proportion who mention poor local security conditions as a barrier to freedom of expression is also lower in 2009 (29%) than in any previous year (40% in 2006, 36% in 2007, 38% in 2008), although there is a small increase in those who explicitly mention a threat from the Taliban (21%) compared to 2008 (18%).
- Support for consultation with religious leaders in government decision-making and to resolve local problems continues to rise, with the highest levels of support in the East (82%), and South West (72%) of the country.
- As in previous years, education and illiteracy (49%) remain the major problems facing women in Afghanistan. However, over the same period there has been a consistent rise in the proportion of respondents who identify the lack of

- Stated support for gender equality remains high, including equal educational opportunities (87%) and women's right to vote (83%). The proportion who say that women should be allowed to work outside the home has decreased marginally each year from 71 percent in 2006 to its lowest level in 2009 (67%).
- Results in 2009 also show a significant decline in support for female representation in governance bodies at all levels compared to previous years.
- Radio remains the most accessible media for Afghan household, particularly in rural areas. However there has been a steady decline in radio ownership and radio listenership since 2007. The proportion of respondents who get their information from Television continues to rise but is still largely confined to urban areas.
- 2009 saw a dramatic rise in mobile telephone ownership compared to previous years. This has meant that for the first time the majority of respondents (52%) now have access to this technology.