

AFGHANISTAN IN 2006

A Survey of the Afghan People



The Asia Foundation

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Key Findings

- The national mood was found to be positive on the whole, with 44 percent of Afghans saying the country is headed in the right direction. While 21 percent felt it is headed in the wrong direction, 29 percent had mixed feelings and four percent were unsure.
- Good security was cited as a reason for the country going in the right direction. For people who were disappointed with the direction, however, lack of security was not seen as one of the major reasons.
- The major national-level problems were identified as a poor economy, uncertain security situation, slow pace of reconstruction and development, and unemployment. Also of concern were corruption and the continued presence of Taliban, which are perceived to be detrimental to progress.
- At the local level, survey respondents thought the major problems were unemployment (34%), electricity (25%), water (18%), poverty (18%), poor economy (17%), and corruption (8%).
- Nearly half of the respondents felt free to express their political opinion. However, their attitude towards tolerance of the political views of others was mixed. Although, as a principle, 84 percent of the respondents felt that the government should allow peaceful opposition, on a personal level 63 percent said they would not allow political parties they disliked to hold meetings in their area.
- Although over 75 percent of the respondents felt that the government did not care much about their opinions, 75 percent of them also felt that voting could bring change.
- Asked to define democracy, 54 percent of the survey respondents defined it as freedom, while 37 percent defined it as peace.
- Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were satisfied with the way democracy works in Afghanistan.
- Sixty-two percent of the respondents reported having voted in the parliamentary elections of 2005. Over half (54%) believed that the elections were free and fair. More than half believe that the next elections will also be free and fair.

- Though only 37 percent of those surveyed were aware of Community Development Councils (CDCs), 80 percent of those who knew about the CDCs were satisfied with their work.
- An overwhelming majority of survey respondents said they trusted the Afghan National Army (87%) and the Afghan National Police (86%).
- The survey found that the public perception of corruption as a national problem was widespread. However, people's actual experience of having encountered or engaged in corruption was lower.
- Though 80 percent felt poppy cultivation was wrong, they cited economic reasons for continued cultivation, and few made any linkage of poppy cultivation to terrorism, insecurity, or greater corruption.
- An overwhelming majority (86%) of Afghans surveyed said they agreed to the principle of 'equal rights regardless of gender, ethnicity, and religion.'
- A significant majority of survey respondents were in favor of women's rights to education and work.
- Almost half of the respondents felt that men and women should have equal representation in political leadership.
- Both men and women respondents identified the lack of education/illiteracy as the single biggest problem faced by women in Afghanistan.
- For reporting a crime, 63 percent of the survey respondents went to the police, while for resolving problems the preference was to go to elders of the local shura (44%), followed by the police (37%). While 61 percent felt religious leaders should be consulted on problems, most reported having resolved problems through local elders.
- Sixty percent of the Afghans surveyed felt that an Islamic nation can attain democracy without becoming westernized, while 35 percent felt democracy challenged Islamic values.
- Fifty-four percent of the Afghans surveyed felt that they are currently more prosperous than under the Taliban regime, while 26 percent felt less prosperous, and 12 percent felt that there has been no change in their prosperity.
- Radio remains the main source of information, but television has emerged as the second most important source, replacing word-of-mouth, which is the third most important means. The growth of local radio and television was much more evident than local print media.