1 Executive Summary

Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People is The Asia Foundation’s ninth annual public opinion survey in Afghanistan. Not only does this survey document Afghans’ assessment of the current situation in their country in critical areas of governance and development, it has also established a statistically valid, longitudinal barometer of how people perceive changes in their country over time.

Expert survey teams were deployed from July 17 and July 25, 2013 to gather the opinions and perspectives of a nationally representative sample of 9,260 Afghan men and women. 962 male and female enumerators conducted face-to-face interviews across all 34 provinces of the country, often under challenging conditions. Respondents were all 18 years of age or older, including 14% from urban households and 86% from rural households. The average interview length was 38 minutes, with a range of 20 to 80 minutes. To meet more aggressive margins of error, this year’s sample size represents nearly a 47% increase from previous years.

Important advances were made in ensuring both the quality and accuracy of the data in 2013. The sampling error is a quality indicator that measures overall statistical confidence in the statements that can be made about the survey findings. For 2013 the sampling error for five key questions is +/-1.10% at 95% confidence level. The design effect also is a quality indicator measuring the difference between the actual sampling error and the intended or theoretical sampling error if random sampling had been achieved. In 2013 the design effect for five key questions is less than 2.33 (+/- 0.04).

1.1 National mood

- **Direction of the country.** A majority of Afghans (57%) say their country is moving in the right direction. While this percentage has fluctuated since 2006, it has been increasing in recent years: from 46% in 2011 to 52% in 2012. Overall optimism this year is highest in the Central/Hazarajat, South West, and South East regions.

- **Reasons for optimism.** When asked why the country might be moving in the right direction, Afghans point to reconstruction (32%), good security (24%), an improved education system (13%), the opening of schools for girls (13%), and the active presence of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) (13%). Since 2006, good security and reconstruction have been consistently identified as the main reasons for optimism.

- **Reasons for pessimism.** The main reasons for pessimism about the direction of the country include insecurity (24%), corruption (23%), unemployment (20%), suicide attacks (11%), and the presence of the Taliban (9%). Although the proportion of Afghans who attribute their pessimism about the direction of the country to the issue of insecurity declined in 2012 and 2013, it has been the leading reason for pessimism every year since 2007. The proportion of Afghans citing corruption as a reason for pessimism rose significantly in 2013. The proportion of Afghans citing unemployment is at its highest point since 2006.
• **Afghanistan’s biggest problems: national level.** Afghans identify insecurity (30%), corruption (26%), unemployment (25%), and the economy (10%) as the top four problems currently facing Afghanistan as a whole. While this list of issues has remained fairly constant over the years, the most notable rise this year is in the number of those interviewed citing suicide attacks as the biggest problem (9% in 2013 compared to 4-5% for 2009-2012 period).

• **Afghanistan’s biggest problems: local level.** At the local level, people are concerned about the problems of unemployment (27%) and insecurity (14%) (both of which were among the top national-level problems), but also about critical service delivery issues, including the electricity supply (24%), roads (19%), the availability of drinking water (19%), healthcare (13%), and education (11%). While this list and ranking has not changed significantly over the last eight years, the most notable increase in 2013 is the problem of insecurity, which was 10% in 2012 and 14% in 2013. The longer trendline, however, does not reveal a major shift since 2007.

• **Biggest problems facing women.** When asked about the most pressing problems facing women today, Afghans consistently identify education and illiteracy (27%), a lack of job opportunities for women (12%), women’s rights (10%), forced marriages and dowry payments (9%), and domestic violence (8%). While men and women reported many of these issues with equal frequency, women cited job opportunities with significantly higher frequency than men. Women’s rights issues were cited as a concern with significantly higher frequency in rural areas than in urban areas. Pashtuns were significantly more likely to identify human rights as a concern than Afghans from other ethnic groups.

### 1.2 Security

• In 2013 a majority of Afghans (59%) report always, often, or sometimes fearing for their own safety or security or that of their family. While there was a significant drop in overall fear for safety in 2012 (to 48% from 56% in 2011) there was a sharp increase in fear for safety this year to 59%. People in the West region report feeling the most fear, and people in the Central/Hazarajat region the least fear.

• Around three quarters of Afghans say they would be afraid when encountering international forces (77%) and traveling from one part to another part of Afghanistan (75%). A clear majority would be afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration (68%) and vote in a national election (59%).

• Nineteen percent of those surveyed say they or a family member experienced violence or a criminal act in 2013. Among those, around half experienced crime and half experienced violence. Looking at incidents of crime and violence since 2007, the reported level of violence experienced is increasing, while the reported level of crime experienced is decreasing. By far, the most frequently experienced type of crime or violence in 2013 was a physical attack or beating (21%). Having some or a lot of fear for safety is significantly correlated with having experienced crime or violence.
• Only half (51%) of Afghans have some level of confidence that perpetrators of violence or crime will be punished; confidence has declined across all regions of the country. On a positive note, people’s willingness to report incidents of crime or violence has increased significantly over the past year, from 52% in 2012 to 64% in 2013. Afghans who are confident that the guilty party would be punished are significantly more likely to have reported their incident of crime or violence. The institutions to which people most frequently reported crime or violence were the ANP and their local shura/jirga (informal justice system). Although overall only 2% of respondents reported incidents to the Taliban, in Zabul province 51% reported incidents of violence or crime to the Taliban.

• Over the last seven years, the level of confidence in both the ANA and the ANP has been relatively stable and high. In 2013, 88% of respondents say they are confident in the ANA, while 72% of respondents say they are confident in the ANP. Urban Afghans have higher levels of confidence in these institutions than rural Afghans, and Pashtuns have lower levels of confidence than other ethnic groups.

• Lower levels of confidence in the ANP (25-65%) are concentrated in the South West, South East, and Central/Kabul regions. The South West, North East, and North West regions contain several provinces that have the highest level of confidence in the ANA (90-98%).

• Since 2009, there has been decreasing support for armed opposition groups (AOGs). In 2013, only a third (35%) of respondents say they have a little or a lot of sympathy for the armed opposition. Pashtuns are significantly more likely to have some sympathy for AOGs than other ethnic groups; urban Afghans are significantly more likely to have no sympathy than rural Afghans, and women are significantly more likely to have no sympathy for AOGs than men. The provinces with the lowest percentage of Afghans reporting a lot of sympathy for AOGs are Badakshan and Panjshir (less than 1%), and the provinces with the highest percentage include Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan, Daikundi, Paktika, Logar, Wardak, and Laghman (20-44%). When asked why Afghans might disagree with the goals of the AOGs, the main reason cited reason is that they kill innocent civilians.

• There is a high level of public awareness (74%) of the government’s attempts at reconciliation with AOGs, and a majority of Afghans (63%) say that these efforts can help stabilize the country. People more likely to agree that reconciliation efforts can lead to stability are largely concentrated in the provinces bordering Pakistan (70-88% in most of those provinces).

1.3 Economic growth and employment

• Most Afghans (76%) report that their household economic situation is better now than in the Taliban period.

• The most common employment sectors are agriculture (45%), skilled workers and artisans (10%), and informal sales and business (9%). On average, only 5% of women are employed, compared to 79% of men. The West region has the highest male employment rate, and the Central/Kabul region has the lowest. Only 17% of Afghans surveyed report having female members
of the household contributing to household income, with women from rural households significantly more likely to contribute to household income than women from urban households.

1.4 Development and service delivery

- When asked to assess a range of local services, most Afghans say they are satisfied with the availability of drinking water (74%) and education for children (72%). Around half are satisfied with the availability of irrigation water (53%), clinics and hospitals (52%), and medicine (50%). Less than half are satisfied with the condition of roads (43%) and the supply of electricity (41%). Satisfaction with the supply of water for irrigation has risen over the last two years, and satisfaction with the electricity supply has been gradually rising since 2009.

- The three most recognized types of development projects involve reconstruction or opening of new schools, building of roads and bridges, and improving the drinking water supply.

- The top five most frequently mentioned donors are the United States (46%), Japan (24%), Germany (16%), India (16%), and China (7%). The United States has consistently been the most recognized donor since 2009.

- The two main fuel sources Afghans use for heating are firewood (26%) and animal dung (20%). The two main fuel sources for cooking are firewood (48%) and bottled gas (21%). The use of firewood for heating has declined since 2009, and the use of grass and other biomass for heating has increased during the same period.

- Nationally, the most common form of household water supply is a well, with 58% of urban respondents reporting that they use a well compared to 66% of rural respondents. More urban residents (38%) have piped water than rural residents (11%). Thirteen percent of Afghans say they have not had enough water over the past five years. More than 30% of people in 47 districts of 17 provinces say they have not had enough water.

- Among those Afghans who report using water for irrigation, 80% say that availability is good or very good. The main reason given for poor availability is decreased availability from natural springs.

- Sixty percent of respondents say they have had no education (76% of women and 44% of men). Lack of education is more common among rural respondents than urban respondents. Uzbek women were significantly less likely to have had formal education than other ethnic groups, closely followed by Pashtun women. Hazara women were significantly more likely to have had formal education at any level than women from any other ethnic group. Younger women are significantly more likely to be educated than older women.

- Among those with formal education, 25% had completed primary school, 20% completed secondary school, 36% completed high school, 12% completed grade 13 or 14, and 6% completed university or higher. Afghans with some level of education were significantly less likely to say that the country is moving in the right direction than Afghans with no education.
1.5 Governance

- Three quarters (75%) of respondents give national government performance a positive assessment. After a high of 80% of Afghans satisfied with national government performance in 2007 dropped to a low of 67% in 2008, Afghans’ satisfaction with national government performance has been gradually rising over the past five years.

- Satisfaction with all levels of subnational government performance declined this year, with the most notable decrease in the level of satisfaction with provincial government performance (from 80% in 2011-2012 to a seven-year low of 68% in 2013). In 2013, 59% of urban Afghans say municipal authorities are doing a good job and 66% of rural Afghans say district authorities are doing a good job. Respondents from the North West region are consistently the most likely to report that their provincial and district-level governments are doing a good job.

- Afghans give a particularly negative assessment of their member of parliament’s performance in two key areas: listening to their constituents and representing their needs, and delivering jobs and development.

- Around one quarter (27%) of Afghans have received help from their provincial governor in resolving a problem or issue affecting them in the past two years, with rural residents more likely to have obtained such help than urban residents. Similarly, around one quarter (24%) of Afghans have had contact with a provincial council member over the past two years regarding a personal or local problem; contact with provincial council members has been on an upward trend since 2006.

- Over half of respondents (58%) say they are aware of a community development council (CDC) in their area, and awareness has been rising since 2006. Awareness of CDCs is noticeably higher among men than women. Among those who are aware of their local CDC, 63% are satisfied with their performance; citizens from the Central/Hazarajat region report the highest level of satisfaction.

- When asked about the level of confidence they have in various public institutions, organizations, and officials, in virtually all cases Afghans’ stated level of confidence in these various entities reached an eight-year low in 2013. The entities with the highest levels of public confidence are the Afghan Land Authority, electronic media, religious leaders, and community shuras/jirgas. Public confidence in parliament showed the sharpest decline in respondents’ level of confidence: a 15% drop from 2012 to 2013.

- Afghans see corruption as a major problem in all facets of life and at all levels of government. Around half say corruption is a major problem in their neighborhood (49%), daily life (56%), and local authorities (58%). Around two thirds (68%) say it is a major problem in their provincial government, and around three quarters (77%) say corruption is a major problem in Afghanistan as a whole. The perception that corruption is a major problem in Afghanistan as a whole is at its highest point in 2013 since 2006. Nonetheless, around half (47%) of Afghans still say that district and provincial government is applying about the right level of effort to fight corruption.
• Afghans routinely experience corruption in a wide range of situations, including when in the district or municipality office, encountering the ANA and ANP, interacting with the judiciary/courts, dealing with the state electricity authority, seeking public healthcare services, when applying for jobs, when applying for school, and when receiving official documents.

• When asked about the availability of dispute resolution mechanisms and services in their area, 71% of Afghans say they are generally satisfied. In the past two years, 19% have taken a dispute to the Huquq (formal justice system dispute resolution service) or village jirga/shura (local informal justice system) and a high proportion report some level of satisfaction with the outcome. The main types of disputes involve land, family matters, commercial matters, and other property disputes.

• Overall, Afghans consider the local informal justice system (shuras/jirgas) to be more fair, trustworthy, effective, efficient, and in line with local norms and values than the formal state courts. For example, 67% say jirgas/shuras resolve cases in a timely and prompt fashion, while only 46% say the same of the state courts.

1.6 Political participation

• Around a quarter (23%) of Afghans report that it is safer today for people in their communities to express their opinions than it was a year ago, 17% say it is less safe, and 56% say that it is no different than a year ago.

• Those who say people in their area feel safer this year to express their opinions tend to attribute it to things like improvements in local security conditions and guaranteed free speech. Respondents who say it is less safe to express opinions this year cite things like poor security and the presence of the Taliban. A person who is afraid of foreign forces is significantly more likely to report having fear to express opinions. Afghans who fear for their personal safety or that of their family are significantly more likely to feel less safe to express their opinions.

• A high proportion of Afghans (68%) would be afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration. Women are significantly more likely to be afraid to participate in a demonstration than men; wealthier Afghans are more likely to be afraid to participate in peaceful demonstrations than those who earn less; and Pashtuns are more likely to report having a lot of fear than Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. The main reasons why respondents are likely to be afraid of participating in a peaceful demonstration are fear of foreign forces, fear of travel, and fear of the ANP and ANA.

• About three quarters of Afghans (76%) agree that it is acceptable to criticize the government in public. Agreement is highest in the Central/Kabul region and lowest in the West region, and higher in urban areas than rural areas.

• Around half (48%) of Afghans say they can have some level of influence over local government decisions. Pashtuns are significantly more likely than all other ethnic groups to say they have influence, Tajiks significantly less likely than Pashtuns, and men significantly more likely than women.
• There is majority support (58%) for the idea that religion and politics should mix, while just over a third (38%) say that politics and religion should not mix. The proportion of people who agree that politics and religion should be mixed has declined considerably since 2011 and 2012 (69-70%).

• When asked about elections in Afghanistan, a majority (61%) of Afghans surveyed say that in general they are free and fair. People are nonetheless concerned about things like corruption in counting the votes, vote buying, and security.

• Nearly three quarters (58%) of Afghans would have some level of fear to run for public office. Citizens from the North East and Central/Kabul (49%) regions would have significantly less fear compared to other regions. Women are more afraid of running for public office than men, but compared to 2012, both men and women would be significantly more afraid of running for public office in 2013. In fact, the level of fear to run for public office was significantly higher in 2013 than in all previous years.

• Around half (59%) of Afghans say they would experience some level of fear when voting in a national or provincial election. The trend for this question peaked in 2010 after the national elections, but overall it appears to be on an upward trajectory. Pashtuns are significantly more afraid of voting in a national or provincial election than other ethnic groups in 2013. Afghans in the Central/Kabul and West regions express significantly more fear of voting this year compared to 2012.

• Most Afghans (81%) agree that each person should vote for himself/herself, regardless of what the community thinks, but only half (53%) say women should decide who to vote for on their own. Forty-six percent say men should be involved in women’s voting decision in some way. Women and urban residents are significantly more likely to say that women should decide on their own.

• For obtaining election information, Afghans by far and most frequently rely on relatives and family members as their main source, but also on (in descending order) weekly community shuras, mosques, and twice-weekly village markets and bazaars.

• Most Afghans (81%) say that election day security conditions are a factor in their decision to travel to polling stations to vote. Around half (56%) say that the outcome of the 2014 election will make a positive difference in their lives. One quarter (24%) say it will make no difference, and only a small number (15%) anticipate that it will make their lives worse.
1.7 Access to information

- Most Afghans (80%) use radio to obtain information. Around half use mobile phones (57%) and television (54%). Very few use the internet (3%), a computer (2%), and a fixed line phone (less than 1%).
- Rural Afghans are significantly more likely to use radio, and urban Afghans significantly more likely to use television and mobile phones. More women than men report using a television for obtaining information. Four times as many men as women use a computer and the internet.
- In terms of social sources of information, the most common means of obtaining information is by far through family and friends, then mosques, community shuras/jirgas, and bazaars. Women are significantly more likely than men to rely on friends and family, and significantly less likely than men to obtain information at the mosque.

1.8 Women in society

- Nearly all Afghans (90%) agree with the idea that everyone should have equal rights under the law, regardless of their gender. Women and urban residents express stronger support than men and rural Afghans.
- A majority (62%) of Afghans disagree with the traditional practices of baad (a traditional practice of giving a daughter to another party as a penalty or payment for some offense) and badal (an exchange of daughters between families for marriage). When asked whether a girl’s guardian should wait until she is of adult age and should always consult her first before arranging her marriage, three quarters (74%) of Afghans agree. There were only slight differences between men’s views and women’s views on these issues.
- A majority of respondents agree that a widow should be entitled to a portion of mahr (mahr is a provision of Shariah law that obligates a husband at the time of marriage to give a gift of money, possessions, or land to his wife, the aim being to provide her some financial security; the wife may take the gift at the time of marriage or defer, receiving all or part of the gift at a later date). Twenty-six percent of respondents disagree, with men disagreeing at a higher rate than women.
- Less than a quarter (21%) of women say that they know where women can take their problems to be resolved. The Directorate of Women’s Affairs, the Human Rights Council, and the district government office are the most commonly-cited institutions.
- Around half of Afghans (54%) say state courts treat women and men equally. Sixty-eight percent say there should be special local jirgas and shuras for women only.
- Afghans’ support for equal representation of men and women in elected government positions is at 44% in 2013. Over time there has been a slight but noticeable decline in support for equality in leadership positions, down from a high of 50-51% in the 2006-2008 period.
- The vast majority of respondents (83%) agree that men and women should have equal oppor-
tunities in education. Although there has been a steady decrease in the level of strong support for gender equality in education between 2006 (58%) and 2013 (43%), the overall level of support (i.e., including those who either strongly or somewhat agree with equal opportunities) has stayed high and constant. Women were significantly more likely to support equal opportunities in education than men, as were urban respondents.

- A majority (63%) of Afghans agree that women should be allowed to work outside the home; this has been the case since 2006. Women and urban Afghans are significantly more likely to agree. Regionally, the highest level of support for women working outside of the home was in Central/Hazarajat and the lowest was in the South West. Nearly all Afghans who support the idea of women working outside the home support equal opportunities in education for men and women.

### 1.9 Enhancements in methodology

- Over the last nine years, the *Survey of the Afghan People* has assessed the perceptions of Afghan citizens across all 34 provinces. As in previous years, survey fieldwork was conducted by ACSOR-Surveys for The Asia Foundation in Afghanistan. This year, the Foundation conducted additional in-house quality control and for the first time, independent, third-party monitoring conducted by Sayara Media Group.

- In the spirit of continual improvement, The Asia Foundation has made some important changes to the survey presentation this year. As in previous years, technical improvements have been made to the sample size, sampling plan, sampling method, and survey questionnaire. Please see Appendix 2: Methodology for further detail.

- In 2013 the sample size was increased to 9,260 respondents (from 6,290 in 2012). This increase in sample size by 47% from previous years meets more aggressive margins of error. Respondents were selected using stratified finite sampling techniques, with a minimum target set of 192 respondents per province (last year, the minimum set was 100 respondents per province).

- A number of changes were made to the survey questionnaire based on a statistical analysis of the results for 2012. As a result of this analysis, the wording of select questions was changed to ensure that they measure the intended concept more clearly. A total of 32 questions were deleted from the 2012 questionnaire, while 38 questions were added. For example, four new questions were added to improve the information available on voting behavior and decisions, and new questions were added on water (five new questions) and land issues (four new questions), as these topics are at the root of many local conflicts in Afghanistan.

- Additional advances were made in quality control, and will continue to improve in the 2014 survey. The 2013 survey includes three new substantive checks for quality control: (a) non-response analysis (Don’t Know and Refused responses) over time by province, district, enumerator, gender, ethnicity, and number of observers present for the interview; (b) logic tests to check for bias, as well as question reliability and validity; and (c) scales for increased reliability and validity, including cross-analysis against key trend questions.
As in 2012, deteriorating security was a challenge for accessing sampling points in 2013. While sampling points are randomly identified, opinions on key trends may differ significantly between safe and unsafe districts. In an effort this year to reduce the negative impact of sampling replacements on representativeness, this year’s survey included 840 “intercept” interviews, a technique where respondents from insecure districts are intercepted while shopping or traveling in more secure ones, in addition to 2,079 respondents from “man-only” districts, where female enumerators cannot travel due to security concerns.

• As a result of efforts to survey insecure areas, this year reflects an oversampling of men (64%) compared to women (34%), as well as an oversampling of rural areas compared to urban areas. However, due to the increase in sample size, the total number of women surveyed this year is more than most previous years.

• Eleven provinces were over-sampled, with the minimum sample size set to 402 respondents to reduce sampling error and allow for a statistically reliable provincial-level comparative analysis. To avoid the problem of having to replace sampling points due to inaccessibility as a result of insecurity or other reasons, a larger number of sampling points than necessary (about 30%) were selected; this way, any substitutions made would have already been randomly chosen, and so sampling point substitution had no impact on the randomness of the overall sample.

• The main findings are presented in the report using geographical and demographic criteria to examine and then describe any statistically significant differences in perceptions of survey respondents. The main statistical tests used to describe any differences reported were Chi-Square tests, correlations, and regression analyses.

• The goal when presenting the findings has been to provide sufficient context and detail for readers to draw their own conclusions. As in previous years, however, interpretation of the results has been kept to a minimum.