

AFGHANISTAN IN 2014

A Survey of the Afghan People

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan People is The Asia Foundation's tenth annual public opinion survey in Afghanistan. The longest-running and broadest nationwide survey of Afghan attitudes and opinions, the survey has gathered the views of 65,558 Afghans on a wide range of issues central to the country's growth and development since 2004. The survey series is unique in its broad scope and long duration, tracking long-term trend lines on questions of keen interest to Afghans and the international community alike.

The national mood in Afghanistan this year is one of cautious optimism, reflecting citizens' hopes and fears across the country. In 2014, a large proportion of the Afghan public remains most concerned about insecurity, corruption, and unemployment. This year's survey polled 9,271 Afghan citizens, including 50.1% male and 49.9% female respondents, from 14 ethnic groups across all 34 provinces in the country.

In-person surveys were conducted between June 22 and July 8, 2014, following the June presidential run-off election in Afghanistan. These surveys were conducted by a team of 909 experienced Afghan interviewers (474 male and 435 female), who were deployed across the country. Survey results are weighted to be nationally representative using the 2013-2014 Afghan Central Statistics Office's (CSO) population estimates for provincial, as well as urban and rural, population distributions. This year, the margin of error is +/- 1.5% at the 95% confidence level with a $p=.05$ and a design effect of 2.17 for the probability sample.

The Foundation's longstanding research partner, ACSOR-Surveys, conducted the survey based on current population data from the Afghan government's Central Statistics Office, and Sayara Research provided independent, third-party monitoring for quality control. Eureka Research provided a qualitative research component (a new feature this year) based on using 125 in-depth interviews in five provinces. Together, the Foundation and its survey partners implement quality control processes for the survey guided by principles of validity, reliability, timeliness, and integrity.

This year's *Survey of the Afghan People* includes some new questions about such issues as the 2014 election, migration, women's rights, access to health services, and disaster response. The Foundation has built on its efforts to report statistical analysis alongside the survey findings, highlighting for the reader the ways in which factors like gender, geography, ethnicity, and education may shape Afghan perspectives and opinions on certain issues. An in-depth discussion of the survey methodology is provided in Appendix 1 of this report.

National mood

- **Direction of the country.** In 2014 54.7% of Afghans say their country is moving in the right direction, down from 57.2% in 2013, while 40.4% say it is moving in the wrong direction, up from 37.9% in 2013. Despite yearly fluctuations, the long-term trend since 2006 shows an increase in the perception that the country is moving in the right direction. Overall optimism in 2014 is highest in the East, South East and South West regions. Since 2013, the percentage of Afghans in the East and West regions who say the country is going in the right direction has increased. The largest decreases over the past year in the percentage of people who say the country is going in the right direction are found in the Central/Hazarajat and South West regions.

- **Reasons for optimism.** When asked why the country might be moving in the right direction, Afghans point to reconstruction (36.4%), good security (32.8%), an improved education system (15.1%), the active presence of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) (10.2%), economic revival (8.7%), and democracy/elections (8.7%). Since 2006, good security and reconstruction have been consistently identified as the main reasons for optimism, concentrated in safer regions. Democracy/elections has been increasingly cited as a reason for optimism, exceeding levels reported in 2010 in the wake of the 2009 presidential elections.
- **Reasons for pessimism.** The main reasons why Afghans say the country is moving in the wrong direction include insecurity (38.3%), corruption (in general, and administrative corruption in particular) (24.2%), unemployment (22.6%), a bad economy (10.2%), and election fraud (9.4%). Since 2007 insecurity has been the most frequently cited reason for pessimism, and the proportion of people citing insecurity rose sharply from 2013 to 2014. The proportion of Afghans citing unemployment is at its highest point since 2006.
- **Afghanistan's biggest problems: national level.** Insecurity (34%), corruption (28.4%), unemployment (25.7%), the economy (10.8%), and access to education and illiteracy (7.6%) are the most frequently cited national problems. While this list of issues has remained fairly constant over the years, the biggest increase this year is in the number of people who say insecurity is the biggest problem (34.0% in 2014 compared to 29.8% in 2013). Insecurity is cited most often in the West region (42%) and least often in the North East region (24.5%).
- **Afghanistan's biggest problems: local level.** Unemployment (33.1%) is the most frequently cited local problem. Services are next on the list (22.5% say electricity, 17.5% say roads, and 16.4% say drinking water), followed by security issues (14.1%), education (11.8%), and healthcare (11.2%). While this list and its order has not changed significantly over the last eight years, the percentage of Afghans citing unemployment has risen from 26.0% in 2009 to 33.1% in 2014. Unemployment is the most common local problem in all regions except the East, where lack of electricity (34.3%) is reported as the most common local problem.
- **Biggest problems facing women.** Afghans identify education and illiteracy (23.9%), a lack of job opportunities (14.6%), domestic violence (11.3%), forced marriages and dowry payments (7.2%), and lack of rights (6.2%) as the biggest problems facing Afghan women today. Compared to men, women are significantly more likely to report domestic violence, lack of rights, and lack of jobs as the biggest problems facing Afghan women.
- **Self-reported happiness.** Overall, 78.6% of Afghans say they are somewhat or very happy, including 81.2% of men and 75.6% of women.

Security

- In 2014 a majority of Afghans (65.4%) report always, often, or sometimes fearing for their safety or security or that of their family. Fear for safety has increased since 2013 (59.0%), and since 2006 fear for safety has been on an overall upward trend. The provinces reporting the highest levels of fear for personal safety are Faryab (92.1%), Wardak (89.2%), Farah (87.5%), and Kunduz (87.5%). The provinces most likely to report never or rarely experiencing fear are Panjshir (98.5%), Badakhshan (81.7%), and Bamyan (74.9%). Around three quarters of Afghans say they would be afraid when traveling within Afghanistan (76.4%). A clear majority would be afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration (69.4%), run for public office (70.8%), and encounter international forces (76.6%).
- Afghans who say they have experienced violence or crime this year (15.6% of all respondents) are significantly more likely to report feeling fear for their personal safety than those who have not. The percentage of Afghans who report suffering violence or crime is highest in Logar (39.0%), Ghor (37.5%), and Helmand (37.0%) provinces. Provinces with the fewest reports of experience with violence or crime are Panjshir (1.5%), Badakhshan (2.3%), and Bamyan (1.0%).
- A majority of people who experienced violence or crime say they reported it (69.0%), and overall, a majority of Afghans (58.9%) say that if they were to experience a crime and reported it, they have some or a lot of confidence that the guilty party would be punished. This is a higher level of confidence than was reported in 2013 (45.8%) but the level of confidence has varied widely over the past five years. The percentage of Afghans who agree that the ANP are efficient at arresting those who have committed crimes has increased in recent years, from 70% in 2010 to 82.1% in 2014.
- When asked which forces are most responsible for providing security in their area, 50.4% of Afghans cite the ANP, 24.2% cite the ANA, and 21.7% cite the Afghan Local Police (ALP). Afghans in urban areas are more likely to say the ANP, and Afghans in rural areas are more likely to credit the ANA and ALP.
- Using a composite measure of overall confidence, 86.5% of Afghans are confident in the ANA, and 73.2% are confident in the ANP. Overall perceptions of the ANA and ANP have improved over time, and more so for the ANA than the ANP. However, 55.7% of Afghans still say they think that the Afghan National Security Forces (of which the ANA and ANP are a part) need foreign support to do their job properly.
- Nearly three-quarters of Afghans (72.6%) say that the reconciliation efforts between the Afghan government and armed opposition groups (AOGs) can help stabilize the country. Confidence in reconciliation efforts is lowest in Panjshir (22.3%), Daikundi (48.0%), Balkh (56.4%), and Wardak (58.3%) provinces. Confidence is highest in Jawzjan (92.8%), Badghis (89.1%), and Nangarhar (87.4%). A higher percentage of men (76.8%) than women (68.7%) believe reconciliation efforts can be effective in stabilizing the country.

- Approximately one in three (32.0%) Afghans say they have a lot (6.6%) or a little (25.4%) sympathy with AOGs. Afghans in the East, South East, and South West regions have the highest concentration of sympathy for AOGs. A higher percentage of men (34.8%) express some level of sympathy with AOGs than women (29.5%). Residents of rural areas sympathize with AOGs at a higher rate (35.0%) than residents of urban areas (22.4%). Men from highly insecure areas who were polled using targeted intercept interviews report significantly higher levels of sympathy: 14.7% say they have a lot of sympathy, and 35.4% say they have some sympathy for AOGs.

Economic growth and employment

- More than one-third (39.6%) of Afghans say that their economic situation was better last year than this year, while 36.9% say it has not changed since last year. The percentage of Afghans who say their economic situation has improved over the past year is 21.5%.
- For the first time, this year the survey looked at the issue of migration. Nearly one quarter (22.3%) of Afghans say that they left Afghanistan at some point over the past 23 years (i.e., since the fall of the Najibullah government), while 14.5% say they moved from one province to another. While war and insecurity were the most commonly cited reasons for leaving the country or province, economic reasons are also salient. Among those who left the country, 27.0% say they did so due to the economy or lack of jobs, and among those who moved from one province to another, an even higher proportion (38.8%) moved for economic or employment reasons.
- With regard to the self-reported unemployment rate, the percentage of Afghans who say they are unemployed and currently looking for work increased significantly from 6.6% in 2013 to 10.7% in 2014. Men's self-reported unemployment has dropped from a high of 25.5% in 2009 to 10.0% in 2014, while women's self-reported unemployment has increased from a low of 0.1% in 2009 to a high of 11.3% in 2014. Because the percentage of women who say they are working remains steady, this increase in self-reported unemployment likely does not represent an increase in women's joblessness, but rather an increase in interest among women to join the workforce.
- Over time, the percentage of Afghans who say that female members of their family contribute to household income has increased from 13.9% in 2009 to 22.4% in 2014. The percentage of households with women contributing to household income varies widely between provinces, from a low of 1.1% in Khost to a high of 63.7% in Nooristan.
- Average monthly reported income is \$190 USD (10,839 Afghanis) with Afghans in rural areas reporting a significantly lower household income of \$170 USD per month (9,701 Afghanis) than Afghans in urban households (\$261 USD per month, or 14,903 Afghanis).
- Income shows a significant positive correlation with self-reported happiness; Afghans with higher incomes report higher levels of happiness. However, beyond a threshold of \$700 USD (40,000 Afghanis) per month, the relationship is no longer significant.

Development and service delivery

- The survey asked respondents to evaluate their level of access to various public goods and services in their area. Over half of Afghans report having good access (often or always) to education for children (70.8%), clean drinking water (69.4%), and roads (50.7%). Fewer than half report having good access to clinics and hospitals (44.4%), medicine (43.4%), water for irrigation (40.1%), and electricity (36.8%).
- When asked about their level of satisfaction with the quality of various goods and services in their area, satisfaction with the availability of education for children and clean drinking water are highest (74.3% and 72.9%, respectively), and electricity supply is lowest (37.9%). Satisfaction with the electricity supply declined from 2013 (40.5%) to 2014 (37.9%). Over time, satisfaction with the availability of clean drinking water has shown the greatest gains, compared to satisfaction with other services.
- This year, 64.1% of Afghans say they are aware of some kind of development project in their area, and the two most frequently cited projects are reconstruction or building of roads and bridges (36.1%) and drinking water projects (25.6%). Afghans in the Central/Hazarajat region are least likely to know of any recent development projects in their area (43.8%), while those in the South West region are most likely to know of such projects (70.5%).
- In 2014, the top five most recognized development project funders were the United States, the Afghan government/ministries, Japan, India, and Germany. Recognition of the Afghan government as a funder of local development projects rose 12 percentage points from 2013 to 2014, perhaps due to overall decreasing international aid for Afghanistan and an increase in on-budget funding (development assistance channeled through the host country's core budget) to the Afghan government by the international community. However, overall the highest percentage of respondents (40.7%) say they do not know who has funded development projects in their area.
- Over half (59.1%) of respondents say they have never attended school. The rate is higher among rural Afghans (65.1%) than urban Afghans (40.5%), and higher among women (74.2%) than men (42.1%). Among all regions, Central/Hazarajat has the highest rate of respondents with no formal education (74.9%), while Central/Kabul has the fewest respondents with no formal education (42.2%). Overall, 42.0% of Afghans report having received some Islamic *madrassa* education.
- Regarding proximity to essential health services, more than half of Afghans (57.3%) say they live within 30 minutes of a clinic or hospital, while 6.8% say they either do not have a clinic or hospital in their area or live more than three hours traveling distance from it. Respondents were also asked about their method of transportation to the nearest clinic or hospital. Around half (48.7%) say they walk, while 26.4% say they would travel by car or truck, and 13.5% by motorcycle. Provinces with the longest average commute times are Daikundi (119 minutes), Nooristan (102 minutes), and Ghor (87 minutes).

- Afghans were asked if they had experienced flooding, landslides, earthquakes, or avalanches in the last year in their village, then asked to evaluate the government's response to those events. The most frequently reported type of natural disaster was flooding (26.7%), followed by earthquakes (7.2%), landslides or soil erosion (3.9%), and avalanches (3.7%). The percentage of those who are either somewhat or very satisfied with the government's response ranged from 41-46%, but encouragingly, was higher in the provinces most affected by these types of events.

Governance

- Each year, the survey explores Afghan perceptions of how well the various levels of government are carrying out their responsibilities. This year, 75.3% of Afghans say the national government does a somewhat good or very good job. Around two-thirds say provincial government is doing a good job (67.6%), followed by municipal authorities (58.5%) and district government (56.7%). Views in 2014 are quite similar to 2013.
- Around one-quarter of Afghans say they asked their provincial governor (25.8%) or member of parliament (MP) (25.0%) for help in resolving a problem affecting them over the past in the past two years.
- Among the 22.0% of Afghans who contacted their provincial council member for assistance within the past two years, 72.3% were satisfied (either somewhat or very) with the result. Importantly, men and women's satisfaction with the outcome is not significantly different. Ratings of provincial government performance in the North West, South West, and North East regions have declined since 2013, ratings in the East and Central/Kabul regions have improved, and ratings in the South East, West, and Central/Hazarajat regions are not significantly different compared to 2013.
- When asked about the degree of confidence they have in a wide range of institutions, for the second consecutive year, the highest percentage of Afghans express confidence in the media (72.7%). Prior to 2013, the highest percentage of Afghans expressed confidence in religious leaders (70.0% in 2014). Afghans are least confident (47.3%) in government ministries.
- When asked if they are satisfied with the way democracy works in Afghanistan, 73.1% say they feel somewhat satisfied or very satisfied in 2014, while 25.9% say they are somewhat or very dissatisfied, and 1.0% say they don't know. Over time, reported satisfaction with democracy follows a U-shaped curve, with a low point in 2008 followed by a gradual rise.
- Most Afghans report corruption as a major problem in numerous arenas, ranging from 53.3% in their neighborhood to 75.7% in Afghanistan as a whole. Importantly, all long-term measures for both perception and exposure to corruption have risen since the survey began. The perception of corruption as a major problem in daily life rose sharply from 2013 (55.7%) to 2014 (62.4%). Afghans in the South East and East regions are most likely to say that corruption is a problem (either major or minor) in their daily life.

- When asked how often they had paid a bribe, given a gift, or performed a favor for a list of different authorities and situations, 57.6% of Afghans in 2014 say they encountered corruption in their interaction in at least one authority or in a least one situation in the past year. Over half (54.7%) of Afghans who had contact with the judiciary or courts in the past year say they had to pay a bribe, exchange a gift, or perform a favor. A similar percentage (55.1%) experienced corruption in their interaction with municipal or district authorities. Afghans' experiences with corruption adversely affect their perception of and confidence in various governing institutions.
- Nearly one in five (19.1%) respondents say they took a dispute to a dispute resolution body, and the vast majority (80.7%) say they were satisfied with the result. Nearly half (42.3%) of these disputes were land disputes.
- People in rural areas were much more likely to take their disputes to *jirgas/shuras* (consultative councils) than those in urban areas (44.8% versus 25.8%) and much less likely to use state courts (38.2% versus 61.9%).
- Afghans were asked whether they think *Huquqs* (government mediation offices), state courts, and *jirgas/shuras* are fair and trusted, follow local norms and values, are effective at delivering justice, and resolve cases promptly. In every case, more Afghans think *jirgas/shuras* have these qualities; *Huquqs* came in second, followed by state courts.

Political participation

- In 2014, 67.4% of Afghans surveyed said they feel very safe or somewhat safe expressing their opinions about the government in public. Residents of Parwan (94.3%), Panjshir (91.9%), and Samangan (86.0%) provinces are most likely to say they feel safe criticizing the government. The provinces where people feel the least safe doing so are Uruzghan (43.9%), Ghor (49.2%), Herat (51.3%), and Zabul (51.9%). Afghans living in urban areas (76.2%) are more likely to feel safe speaking out about the government in public than those in rural areas (64.5%).
- The percentage of Afghans who say they feel fear while participating in an election (45.8%) in 2014 is significantly lower than 2013 (57.2%). People are more afraid to engage in other political activities, such as participating in a peaceful demonstration (69.4%) and running for office (70.8%). Among the three activities, fear of voting in an election showed the greatest variation among geographic regions, ranging from 61.0% of residents of the South West to 31.6% in Central/Kabul. People are most afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration in the West (78.4%) and least afraid in the Central/Hazarajat region (50.4%).
- When asked whether they feel they can influence local government decisions, 55.9% of Afghans say they have a lot or some influence, up from 47.9% in 2013. People in Nangarhar (81.1%), Kunduz (77.4%), Samangan (76.0%), and Kandahar (73.6%) provinces are most likely to say they have influence over local government decisions.
- Around two-thirds (64.9%) of Afghans say that religious leaders should be involved in politics, an overall increase from 58.1% in 2013. The biggest regional increases are shown in in the East and South West, while the proportion of Afghans in the Central/Kabul region who say religious leaders should be

involved has decreased.

- Most respondents (85.9%) say people should vote for themselves, regardless of what community elders think, with no significant variation in responses by age, gender, or ethnicity.
- When asked how women should make their voting decisions, 56.0% of Afghans say women should decide for themselves and 25.6% say women should decide for themselves but consult with men. More urban Afghans (68.2%) than rural Afghans (52.1%) say that women should decide on their own. Pashtuns (20.8%) were most likely to say men should decide for women, compared to 14.7% of Tajiks, 13.8% of Uzbeks, and 13.2% of Hazaras.
- For the 2014 presidential elections, one in three Afghans (33.5%) say they relied primarily on the media (including TV, radio, and the internet) to learn about the candidates and decide who they would vote for. Another third (39.3%) say they relied on family and friends, followed by 11.8% who turned to community *shuras* and 10.0% who relied on information from mosques.
- The survey found that ethnicity tended to influence voter choices more than other factors. When asked directly, Afghans say they would consider voting for a candidate of a different ethnic background than their own. However, in 2014 most Afghans also say that they voted for candidates from their own ethnic group.
- Well over half (61.6%) of Afghans surveyed say that they were somewhat or very concerned about security threats during the election, with people in the South West region (67.9%) being most concerned and people in the Central/Hazarajat (44.5%) region least concerned. Significantly more women (24.2%) than men (18.6%) say they were very concerned.
- Among Afghans who say they didn't vote in the first election, 32.2% say it was because they didn't have a voting card, 18.0% said their family did not permit them to vote, and 11.6% say they did not vote due to insecurity. Afghans gave similar explanations for not voting in the run-off election.
- When asked immediately after the run-off election whether the election was free and fair, 63.3% of Afghans said yes. Those who think it was not free and fair cite lack of open polling stations in their area (47.8%), not enough ballots (47.8%), and a belief that the ballots were counted dishonestly (45.5%).
- When asked about the level of confidence they have in the Independent Election Commission (IEC) to do its job (a question that also applied to a wide range of other institutions, see Governance above), 66.4% reported they have a great deal or a fair amount of confidence in the IEC.
- Around two-thirds of Afghans (64.0%) say they believe the result of the presidential election will make their lives better, a significant increase from 56.4% in 2013. Men (68.5%) are slightly more likely to say the election result will make their life better than women (60.1%).

Access to information

- As in previous years, in 2014 the most widely used source for obtaining news and information in Afghanistan is radio (77.4%), followed by television (58.4%), mobile phones (48.1%), mosques (46.9%), community *shuras* (36.4%), and the internet (5.6%). Compared to 2013, reliance on radio and mobile phones as a main source of news and information dropped considerably for both urban and rural areas, largely due to the expansion of other available options, such as television and the internet. In rural areas, reliance on television and mobile phones is less common compared to urban areas, while

the mosque and community *shuras* are more common compared to urban areas.

- Television ownership has risen from 36.9% in 2007 to 58.3% in 2014, while the use of television as a source of news and information increased from 54.8% in 2013 to 58.4% in 2014. Internet use also increased from 3.2% in 2013 to 5.6% in 2014, and has nearly doubled in urban areas over the past year.
- While media use may not directly drive voter participation, Afghans who report using television and radio for obtaining news and information are significantly more likely to report having voted in the first round of presidential elections than those who do not use television and radio.
- Afghans who use television and community *shuras* for information are significantly less likely to report sympathy for AOGs. By contrast, those who report use of radio, mobile phones, and the mosque as primary sources for news and information are more likely to report sympathy for AOGs. This finding holds even after controlling for region and other demographic factors.
- Respondents who use television as a source of news and information are significantly more likely to say that women should have the same right to education as men (even when controlling for factors like gender, education, and region).

Women in society

- Only 19.2% of all Afghans say they are aware of an organization, institution, or authority where women can go for assistance with their problems. Among those who know of such a place, 44.4% cite the Directorate of Women's Affairs, 13.7% cite the Human Rights Council, and 12.3% cite the District Governor's Office.
- When asked whom they would turn to for help to resolve a family problem, 29.5% of Afghan women say they would seek help from family and friends, followed by elders of the local *jirga* (15.0%) and the local *malik/khan* (a village head or local tribal leader) (10.9%).
- Just over half (52.5%) of Afghans say state courts treat men and women equally. Among people who took a dispute to a *shural/jirga*, there is sizeable support (64.5%) for the idea of special women's *shuras/jirgas*, with women more likely to support the idea than men.
- Over two-thirds (69.7%) of women surveyed say they voted in the presidential run-off election of 2014, compared to the 43.4% of women who say they voted in the presidential election of 2009. Among Afghans who say they did not vote in the first round of the election, resistance from family members was a much more commonly cited reason by women for not voting than by men.
- This year, for the first time ever, the number of Afghans who say that political positions in government should be mostly for men (46.1%) has overtaken the number who say that political positions should be shared equally between men and women (42.1%). Regionally, Afghans in the South West region are most likely (59.9%) to say that political positions should be mostly for men, while Afghans in the Central/Hazarajat region (59.3%) are most likely to say that political positions should be shared equally between men and women.
- Despite these barriers to women's political participation, the percentage of women who say they feel able to influence local government decisions increased from 41.2% in 2013 to 52.2% in 2014. The same

pattern appears for the 2014 presidential elections, where 60.5% of women say it will make their lives better, significantly more than women surveyed in 2013 (54.0%).

- This year the survey asked respondents whether women should have the same educational opportunities as men at various levels and in various arenas. There is strong support for women's education in Islamic *madrasas* (92.3%), primary schools (83.9%), high schools (82.0%), and universities in their home province (71.9%), but less support for women to study in another province (45.2%) or to go abroad on a scholarship (33.4%).
- Around two-thirds (67.8%) of Afghans say that women should be able to work outside the home. This year, respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree that women should be able to work in a range of specific employment environments. Schools are seen as most acceptable (with 83.6% of Afghans in agreement), followed by hospitals or clinics (80.8%) and government offices (70.0%). There was much lower support for women's employment in the police or the army (41.9%) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (40.9%).
- Overall, 79.1% of Afghans say they disagree with the practice of *baad* (where a daughter is given to another party as a penalty or payment for some offense), with a minimal difference between men's and women's responses. The highest percentage of Afghans who say they agree with the practice of *baad* live in the South West region.
- When asked if *baddal* (the exchange of daughters between families for marriage) is acceptable, 62.8% of Afghans say they disagree with the practice, with women more likely to disagree than men (64.7% to 60.6%). Afghans in the South East and South West regions, which are predominantly rural, are significantly more likely to agree with the practice than all other regions.
- Nationally, 87.3% of Afghans somewhat or strongly agree that a daughter should receive her *miras* (an inheritance as a portion of her father's estate upon his death).