



The Asia Foundation

Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People

Key Findings

- Although on a declining trend since 2006, 38 percent of survey respondents say the country is moving in the right direction, while 32 percent say it is moving in the wrong direction, and 23 percent have mixed views. There is a clear trend towards greater pessimism over the last two years.
- The security situation is both the main reason respondents give for saying the country is moving in the right direction and the main concern for those who say the country is moving in the wrong direction. The proportion of respondents who cite insecurity as a reason for pessimism has increased by one-fourth in the past year.
- The biggest problems faced by Afghanistan as a whole are identified as security (36%), economic issues including unemployment (31%), high prices (22%), poor economy (17%), and corruption (14%).
- Overall, the proportion of respondents who have a positive view of the security situation in their local area has decreased in most regions since 2007. Respondents report an improvement in security conditions in the Central Hazarajat, West, and East regions but a consistent degradation in security conditions since 2006 in the South West, South East, and Central Kabul regions (see Appendix 4 for a reference map).
- A large majority of respondents (82%) are against poppy cultivation; however, attitudes have evolved in markedly different ways between regions since 2006. The proportion of respondents who say that poppy cultivation is wrong has increased sharply in Central Hazarajat and the North East, whereas the proportion who disapprove of poppy cultivation has decreased in the South East and East.
- Unemployment is seen as a major problem at both local (28%) and national (31%) levels. Seventy-eight percent of respondents say that the availability of jobs in their local area is very low. Only seven percent of respondents report any improvement in employment opportunities over the last two years.
- The most important local problems relate to lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity (30%), water (22%), and roads (18%). The availability of electricity is considered particularly bad in the North East, East, and South West.

- The biggest problems faced by women in Afghanistan continue to be the lack of education and illiteracy (45%) for the third year running.
- The most widely enjoyed amenity is the availability of education for children which is judged by 70 percent of respondents to be good. Forty-four percent of respondents report improvements in access to schools in the last two years.
- The proportion of respondents who say they are more prosperous today than they were under the Taliban government has decreased significantly since 2006 (from 54% to 36% in 2008), while those who say that they are less prosperous now has increased from 26 percent in 2006 to 36 percent in 2008.
- Two-thirds of respondents (67%) give a positive assessment of the performance of central government, although the proportion of those saying that the government is doing a bad job has almost doubled since 2007. The government's performance is judged most positively with respect to the provision of education and healthcare. Respondents are least positive about government performance in the economic arena and in combating corruption.
- At the local level, respondents are most satisfied with the performance of provincial government (74%) followed by district authorities (67%). Respondents are least satisfied with the performance of municipal authorities (50%). Satisfaction with government at all levels has fallen since 2007.
- Public opinion about the justice system, both informal and formal, remains positive. Respondents continue to have a higher level of trust and confidence in traditional dispute resolution mechanisms than they do in the modern state justice system, particularly in rural areas. Satisfaction with shura and jirga mechanisms is higher than that for state courts in terms of accessibility (76% vs. 68%), fairness and trustworthiness (70% vs. 50%), their effectiveness in following local norms and values (69% vs. 50%), and delivering justice (69% vs. 52%). Both systems are judged least positively on the timeliness of their procedures (50% vs. 38%).
- Again in 2008 the most common definition of democracy mentioned by respondents is freedom, followed by peace. The proportion of respondents who mention fundamental principles of democracy, such as government of the people and rights and law, has fallen consistently since 2006.
- More than two-thirds of respondents (68%) say that they are satisfied with the way democracy is working in Afghanistan; however, significant levels of dissatisfaction are recorded in the South West (44%), South East (35%), and East (33%) of the country.

- Local representative bodies, both formal and informal, enjoy the confidence of around two-thirds of respondents including shura and jirga (69%), Community Development Councils (65%), and Provincial Councils (65%).
- Nearly half of rural respondents (47%) and a quarter of urban dwellers (23%) are aware of a Community Development Council (CDC) in their locale. Across the country as a whole, awareness of CDCs has risen from 37 percent of respondents in 2006 to 42 percent in 2008.
- Just over half of respondents (53%) are aware of the forthcoming 2009 elections and just under half (48%) say they know how to register to vote. Around three quarters of respondents (77%) say they are likely to vote. However, positive responses on all these issues are significantly higher amongst men than women.
- Seventy-two percent of respondents express some level of confidence in the Afghan government to manage a free and fair election process in the future. The most important challenge is seen to be insecurity followed by weak government and corruption.
- Fifty-one percent of respondents use the radio as their main information source for national news, and twenty-one percent use television. Television is the preferred information source for over half of the respondents in urban areas.