

IRI Afghanistan Index

Afghanistan Environment

Over the course of its Afghanistan polling program, which began in 2003, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has tracked a number of indicators in order to gauge the overall political environment and mood of the population. Recent polling indicates a decline in public sentiment since 2004, though Afghans see an improvement in their personal economic situation (53 percent said their economic situation was better today than five years ago).

- When asked if they felt that the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, 30 percent responded right direction, as opposed to 79 percent in April 2004, a significant drop of more than 49 point or 60 percent. Thirty-seven percent of respondents said that their country is moving in the wrong direction, as opposed to 30 percent in April 2004. Around a quarter of the population was unsure of where their country is moving. More than half of the respondents (52 percent) said that their country is less stable now than last year, while only 14 percent said the opposite.
- Only 29 percent of respondents felt that the economy would improve in the next year, while 38 percent indicate the economy will either get worse or stay the same. One third of respondents did not know how to answer this question, while 60 percent characterized the political and security situation in the region as either *intense and uncertain* (moderately insecure) or *critical and unstable* (entirely insecure). Of neighboring countries, only 11 percent view Pakistan favorably, while Tajikistan (39 percent) and China (33 percent) are viewed most favorably.
- Thirty-six percent of respondents identified security as the first and most important issue facing Afghanistan today. However, only a total of five percent identified terrorism, foreign forces and improvised explosive devices (IED) as a problem. The open-ended response sections on political issues in the IRI survey has illustrated that Afghans identify the term security more with personal security rather than issues of terrorism, foreign forces, Taliban and IEDs. Corruption only ranked at three percent as a top of mind issue for Afghan voters, while 20 percent identified the economy, unemployment and poverty as significant issues.

Performance of Government

IRI polling indicates that respondents do not necessarily link the person President Hamid Karzai with the Office of the President or the Government of Afghanistan. Public debate on issues of security, government corruption and elections do not connect with a majority of respondents, who would rather see substantive proposals about the ways and means the economy will improve their quality of life (employment, jobs, education, reconstruction). When corruption is explored, the great majority of respondents see corruption as a serious problem (81 percent), however on average approximately 40 percent of respondents have experienced it firsthand.

- IRI polling asked respondents to rank the performance of various institutions involved with governance in Afghanistan, with one ranking poor and five ranking highest. The Office of the President was ranked the same as the parliament and police (2.8). The media and the Afghanistan National Army were ranked 3.2. However, when respondents were asked directly about Karzai's performance as President, 28 percent said fair, 27 percent said good, and 12 percent said very good. The responses appear to show a distinction Afghans make between Karzai the person versus the Office of the President.

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- When respondents were asked open-ended questions regarding what politicians talk too much about, the predominant answer was security at 23 percent. Government, elections and rule of law were at 16 percent. Corruption and abuse of power ranked at 13 percent.
- When respondents were asked what issues politicians talk too little about, 20 percent cited economy, employment and quality of life, 12 percent cited education and 10 percent cited reconstruction/development.
- There is optimism for women in public life in Afghanistan; 27 percent cited too few women being in government. When asked whether they would vote for a woman for parliament, a majority (57 percent) said yes, with 33 percent opposed. Forty-seven percent would vote for a woman for municipal council with 42 percent opposed. There is less tolerance for a woman president, with 50 percent opposed and 42 percent in favor.
- It is estimated that 70 percent of Afghans are below the age of 35. Only 11 percent of respondents answered that there were too many young people elected in government, with three times that figure (30 percent) citing too few and 36 percent were satisfied with present youth representation.
- When asked about corruption, 81 percent of respondents claimed it to be a serious issue. Sixty-one percent believe that the current government performed well in controlling corruption in comparison to the previous government (Taliban). Experiencing corruption yielded interesting results. Of respondents who indicated they experienced corruption, 48 percent said they have experienced corruption when dealing with a police officer and traffic violation, 46 percent with a municipal official when issuing a license or permit, 39 percent with a provincial official issuing various licenses, 35 percent with bribing a politician for job consideration and 28 percent said they have experienced corruption in the health services.

Elections

There is a dramatic decline of support for the President in the south and east of Afghanistan, Karzai's traditional base of support. Almost three quarters of Afghans polled indicated that they registered as voters, with likely voters at 59 percent. Only 33 percent of likely voters polled in favor the President, falling short of the required 50 percent plus one first ballot victory.

- Seventy-four percent of respondents claimed to be registered to vote in 2009 elections. Of the 22 percent that said they did not register, 22 percent cite security, 21 percent cite access to voting offices and 12 percent cite corruption and abuse of power as reasons for not registering to vote.
- During the time of the sample (May 3-16, 2009), respondents were asked how likely they were to vote if the presidential election was held today. Fifty-nine percent polled likely, while 33 percent polled unlikely. Regional voter turnout figures show lower turnout in the Southwest (Kandahar, Helmand, Nimruz, Daikundi, Zabul) with 30 percent claiming they won't vote and an additional 25 percent unlikely to vote. Northern Afghanistan figures demonstrate great interest in voting, with the northwest region (Faryab, Jawsjan, Saripul, Samngan, Balkh) showing 61 percent likely voters, and the northeast region (Kunduz, Baghlan, Thiqr, Badakshan) showing 67 percent likely voters. The central region (Kabul, Wardak, Parwan, Kapisa, Logar, Panjshir) also polled at 67 percent likely to vote. Voter turnout is projected at 65 percent in the western region (Heart, Badghis, Ghor, Farah), and 57 percent in the eastern Region (Ningarhar, Kunar, Laghman, Nuristan). The southeast region (Paktiya, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni) polled at 62 percent likely to vote.

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- People cited security at 17 percent, reconstruction and development at 14 percent, and the election itself at 14 percent as the main reasons for voting in the presidential election. Of all respondents, an overwhelming 78 percent considered themselves as Afghan first, with Tajik and Pashtun segments expressing their respective national identities 10 percent each. Seventy percent of respondents said that they would be willing to vote for a presidential candidate of a different ethnic group than their own.
- At the time of the survey, Karzai was at the height of his strength as the sole declared candidate, Ali Ahmed Jalali was rumored to be the serious alternative while other national figures like Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah commenced their exploratory bids. When asked whether Karzai has done a good enough job to deserve re-election, 43 percent of likely voters replied positively, with 28 percent of likely voters responding negatively. Of the sampled likely voters, 79 percent said that they voted in 2004 election, of which 51 percent claimed that they had voted for Karzai. Thirty-three percent of voters polled said they would still vote for Karzai in 2009, while 64 percent are either undecided or will vote for others.
- Support for Karzai has deteriorated since the 2004 election when he received a 54 percent first-ballot victory. If the presidential election was held today, 31 percent of likely voters line-up in Karzai's column, falling short of a 50 percent first ballot victory. This suggests a second ballot or run-off vote to be a possible scenario.

Profile of Hamid Karzai Voters IEC 2004 vs. IRI 2009:

- A considerably large number of males (71 percent of the sample) stated they voted for Karzai in 2004 while only 24 percent say they would vote for the incumbent in 2009. Female voters remained relatively static with a drop from 29 to 23 percent. Fifty percent of Pashtun respondents said they voted for the incumbent in 2004, while only 26 percent would vote for him again in 2009. Meanwhile, two percent of Turkmen voters stated support for Karzai in 2004, increasing more than ten-fold in 2009 to 30 percent. Of respondents who stated that Afghanistan is moving in the right direction, 98 percent voted for Karzai in 2004 while only 32 percent said they would vote for him in 2009.
- *Central Region:* Karzai in 2004 received 53 percent of the vote in Kabul, and would receive 36 percent at the time of the IRI poll. In Kapisa, Karzai dropped from 37 percent to six percent, while the most dramatic decline can be seen in Logar (87 percent to 14 percent) and Wardak (61 percent to 10 percent). In the central region, Karzai increased his support incrementally in Panjshir from one percent to four percent, and in Parwan from 26 percent to 37 percent.
- *Northeast Region:* Karzai has increased support in the northeast region of Afghanistan, almost doubling his support from 12 percent to 23 percent in Thiqar, increasing from 13 percent to 46 percent in Kunduz, and from six to 35 percent in Baghlan when compared to 2004 election results. Karzai posted a loss in Badakshan from 41 percent to 31 percent.
- *Northwest Region:* Karzai has marked increases in all provinces in the northwest region. In Saripul, the incumbent gained from 12 percent to 29 percent, seven to eight percent in Samngan, doubling from 12 percent to 25 percent in Jawzjan, and tripling in Fariyab from 10 percent to 30 percent. The incumbent maintained support in Balkh at 31 percent.

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- *Western Region:* Karzai has lost support in most provinces in the Afghan west, most notably in Farah where he dropped from 75 percent to 12 percent. Badghis support was halved from 61 percent in 2004 to 29 percent in May 2009, while in Herat support fell from 58 percent to 35 percent. Karzai has seen a marginal increase in support in Ghor from 28 percent to 31 percent, and a drop in Bamiyan from nine to four percent.
- *The Pashtun Belt - Eastern, Southeast and Southwest Regions:* Karzai has thinning support in all 14 provinces comprising Afghanistan's predominantly Pashtun population when the current poll is compared to 2004 elections results.
 - *Eastern Region:* In Nuristan, Karzai's support fell from 58 to 32 percent. Kunar province posted losses from 95 to 35 percent, and Laghman posted a three quarter drop from 88 to 22 percent. The biggest drop in this region is noted in the swing province of Ningarhar, where Karzai has five times less supporters than he did in 2004, dropping from 95 to 17 percent.
 - *Southeast Region:* Khost sees the smallest decline from 96 to 72 percent. In Paktika, Karzai has lost more than half of his support from 88 to 42 percent. In Paktiya, the incumbent's support is one seventh its former strength, dropping from 96 to 13 percent. Karzai has lost almost all support in Ghazni, dropping from 52 percent in 2004 to three percent.
 - *Southwest Region:* In Hazara-dominated Daikundi, Karzai retains half his support from 13 to seven percent. Zabul, Uruzgan, Nimruz, and more-so Kandahar and Helmand show declining support as well. Zabul posts 86 to 22 percent, Uruzgan posts 77 to 17 percent and Nimruz posts 89 to 16 percent; all decline in support in what is seen as the President's base of support. Kandahar and Helmand post losses from 91 to 16 percent and 90 to 12 percent respectively.
- Afghans remain deeply negative about a number of national figures. General Abdul Rasheed Dostum and Ustad Abdul Rasul Sayyaf rank as the most unfavorable figures in Afghanistan, with -34 percent favorability ratings. They are followed closely by Vice Presidential Candidate Karim Khalili at -33 percent, and Hazara strongman Hajji Mohammed Mohaqiq at -32 percent. Burhanudin Rabbani remains the best known and most divisive figure at -27 percent favorability.
- Forty-two percent of Afghans polled said that the first priority of the newly elected president should be security. The economy and reconstruction polled collectively at 19 percent.

Security & International Forces

While waning, Afghans remain generally pleased and supportive of the presence of the international community in Afghanistan. Assistance efforts are often marred by corruption and abuse of power, while a majority of respondents felt that investments in people and infrastructure outweigh troop increases.

- When asked about prioritizing a wide array of foreign assistance, education, healthcare and building roads/water systems polled at 84 percent importance. Securing basic human rights and strengthening democracy respectively polled at 71 and 45 percent importance and a troop increase bears 67 percent importance rating.
- From this array, respondents were asked to choose which single one was the most important. Education and healthcare polled at 40 percent, building roads/water systems at 28 percent, increasing troops at 18 percent, and securing basic human rights at seven percent.

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- Respondents ranked head of tribe and tribal elders at 60 percent, when asked what individuals at the community level should International Security Assistance Forces speak to in order to achieve security and stability. Mullahs ranked at only three percent along with police, while provincial council and district governor leaders each ranked at one percent.
- In gauging support for rehabilitation and development projects by the international community, 57 percent of respondents said they were satisfied with the efforts, while 30 percent noted they were unsatisfied. Among those unsatisfied, 13 percent noted corruption and abuse of power.
- Radio and television are evenly matched as sources of broadcast political news, with 41 and 40 percent respectively. State-owned RTA television seems to receive 23 percent of viewership, while independent media Tolo/Lemar receive 24 percent combined. Arianna TV is at 10 percent with Shamshaad at four percent. BBC and Radio Azadi remain the gold standard for broadcast radio news, at 34 and 29 percent respectively.
- Sixty-eight percent of respondents feel that the government should reconcile with the Taliban, 14 percent do not. Sixty-seven percent of respondents said they experience more personal freedom now than under the Taliban.

The Ten Percent

Through a study of the survey cross tabulations, an interesting segment of about 10 percent of respondents seemed worth noting. This segment cited Pashtun ethnicity ahead of Afghan identity, 77 percent are located in central or southern Afghanistan, 60 percent have less than a primary level education and one third are in their 20s. Fifteen percent earn less than \$20 USD/month, less than one percent categorize themselves as professionals, and they are twice as likely compared to other respondents to get their political news from family, friends or the mosque.

- Twenty percent of these respondents said they felt more personal freedom during the Taliban, compared to the national average of only eight percent of the others. Twenty-seven percent of these respondents saw no change in their personal freedoms between Taliban and current times.
- Sixty percent of this segment rate the government negatively as opposed to 34 percent of the national average, and 39 percent have a very negative view towards foreign troops as opposed to 29 percent of the national average.
- Citing their personal motivation for voting in upcoming elections, this segment cares less about the economy and rule of law, and care more about preventing acts of violence and abuses of power. It also seems that this segment represents the part of the Pashtun community who are essential stakeholders in legitimizing the elections process. During the period polled, this segment was five times more likely to vote for Gul Aga Sherzoi than was the overall sample.

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