

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 to gauge the overall political environment and mood of the population. The poll conducted in July 2009 as compared to the poll in May 2009 indicates a positive trend of Afghan sentiment and a positive future outlook for the country.

However, it also indicates that a great majority of the respondents emphasize a need for change in the period following the August 20 presidential and provincial council elections. Afghan governance institutions fared better when compared to the May 2009 poll. As a result of these trends, President Hamid Karzai's favorability and support levels have risen, though still not to the point of a certain first-ballot victory. Although issues that Afghans care about remain similar to the previous poll, citing security as the base-line issue, there is a growing focus on bread and butter issues centered on the economy, jobs and social services.

- When asked if the country was headed in the right or wrong direction, a majority of 62 percent responded right direction, as compared to 30 percent in May 2009. Twenty-four percent of respondents said their country is moving in the wrong direction, a drop from 37 percent in May 2009.
- Sixty-three percent of respondents stated that their economic situation has improved in the last five years compared to 53 percent in the May 2009 poll. In both samples, May 2009 and July 2009, around one-fifth of the respondents said their economic situation remained static in the last five years. Seventeen percent indicated a deterioration of their economic situation.
- When asked if Afghanistan was more stable today than one year ago, more than one-third of respondents answered positively compared to only 14 percent in May 2009. While this is an improvement from May 2009, a larger part of the sample (43 percent) stated that Afghanistan is less stable than one year ago.
- Afghans seem to have a positive outlook on the future of their economy. A majority, 54 percent, believe the economy will improve over the next year; 25 percent rise when compared to May 2009. A slight rise from 18 to 21 percent said the economy will stay the same, while 14 percent had a negative outlook. There is a noticeable drop in respondents who were uncertain how to respond to the question – from 33 percent in May down to 11 percent in July.
- Security remains a baseline issue for most Afghans at 56 percent; a one percent decrease from 57 percent in May 2009. Economic issues, notably jobs and unemployment, rose from 26 percent in May to 35 percent in July, and from 20 percent in May to 33 percent in July, respectively. This indicates increased awareness of economic issues during the campaign period.

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- The respondents answered positively when asked about the security situation in their region; 52 percent of respondents said the current security situation is peaceful and stable in their region, a dramatic rise from 21 percent in the May poll. More than one-third of respondents in both the May and July polls stated that the security situation is intense and uncertain (moderately insecure) while only 11 percent classified it as critical and unstable (entirely insecure) compared to 25 percent in the May poll.
- Afghans rate the favorability of their relations with other countries as follows: India (24 percent), United States (19 percent), Iran (17 percent), Tajikistan (12 percent) and China (eight percent).
- When asked if Afghanistan needs to change direction in the next five years, an overwhelming majority of more than eight in 10 respondents agreed; only a small margin of nine percent stated Afghanistan should remain the same. Although Afghans seem more positive than two months ago, this indicates a strong willingness to change the current path of their country.
- A majority of Afghans (78 percent) believe they have more personal freedom since the fall of the Taliban.

Performance of Government

President Hamid Karzai fared well in the July 2009 poll and better than in the May poll. However, Afghans also expressed significant concerns about corruption and internal conflicts during his term in office.

- On a five point scale, the Afghan National Army (ANA) received the highest performance rating at of 3.79, a rise from 3.24 in May 2009, while the media followed second at 3.45 and the President at 3.37. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) received a rating of 2.8, an improvement from 2.49 in May 2009. The Taliban received the worst performance rating of 1.91.
- Twenty-seven percent of respondents rated Hamid Karzai's performance as president very good, up from 12 percent in May 2009. One-third of respondents classified Karzai's presidency as good while 18 percent classified it as poor.
- When asked whether Hamid Karzai should remain president for the next five years, a small majority of respondents (51 percent) would give him another chance while 44 percent were of the opinion that someone new should take the helm.
- Respondents were asked to rate Karzai's progress in addressing a number of issues. The President performed well on issues such as social services and education (69 percent), minority and women's rights (67 percent) and national unity (54 percent). Respondents saw less progress in addressing the issue of corruption, where 57 percent saw little or no progress and 49 percent saw little or no resolution of internal conflicts.

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Elections

According to the July 2009 poll, a majority of Afghans (81 percent) follow the election closely, and 90 percent expressed a willingness to vote on August 20, 2009. Compared to the May 2009 poll, it seems there are relatively equal numbers of voters in most regions of the country.

- When asked about the motivation to vote in the presidential elections, 19 percent cited security issues while 13 percent cited personal interest and 11 percent cited economic improvement of the country.
- Eighty percent of Afghans identify themselves as politically independent, and 77 percent believe in the secrecy of the ballot. Forty-eight percent were extremely confident in the Independent Election Commission's (IEC) ability to preside over a free and fair election; 44 percent were only somewhat confident in the process. Only eight percent expressed doubt in the IEC's ability to hold a free and fair election.
- The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) rated 62 percent positive with its mandate to investigate incidences of electoral violations and fraud. Twenty-three percent of respondents believed the ECC would seriously investigate electoral violations.
- Fifty-seven percent of respondents believe their provincial governors respect the rules of neutrality of the election process while 27 percent did not. The international community performs well in its support for credible, secure and impartial elections: 62 percent of respondents believe the international community promotes an inclusive election without supporting a particular candidate, while 23 percent expressed doubt with the international community's involvement in the election process.
- Almost 60 percent believe that a run-off vote, or second-round, would be good for Afghanistan.
- Two-thirds of respondents believe that the election will be decided on August 20 while 22 percent believe there will be a run-off.
- Traditional leaders in Afghanistan, such as religious leaders (58 percent), heads of household (57 percent) and tribal elders (51 percent) hold the most influence over Afghans' choice for president.

Candidates

President Karzai's support increased during the campaign period; however, not enough to claim a first-ballot victory. Candidates like Ramazan Bashardost and Ashraf Ghani have experienced an increase in support compared to the May 2009 poll. Abdullah Abdullah's support increased most dramatically in the July 2009 poll to 26 percent, a nearly five-fold increase from the May 2009 poll.

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- Fifty-six percent of respondents believe Hamid Karzai deserves reelection, while 38 percent oppose his reelection bid to the presidency.
- When asked opinions on the leadership quality of major political figures, Hamid Karzai rated 64 percent favorable, Abdullah Abdullah 48 percent, and Ashraf Ghani 34 percent. Those rating most unfavorable were Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq at minus 13 percent, Abdul Rassu Sayyaf minus 16 percent and General Rashid Dostum minus 26 percent. When asked to choose which one person they view most favorably, Hamid Karzai ranked first with 39 percent, followed by Abdullah Abdullah at 20 percent, Ramazan Bashardost at eight percent and Ashraf Ghani at five percent.
- When respondents were asked for whom they would vote if the election were held today, 44 percent said they would vote for Hamid Karzai, up from 31 percent in May 2009 but still short of a first-ballot victory. Abdullah Abdullah ranked second with 26 percent up from seven percent. Ramazan Bashardost ranked at 10 percent up from three percent and Ashraf Ghani doubled his support to six percent.
- Fifty-seven percent of respondents are certain in their support for a candidate, while 32 percent expressed probable support. Eight percent were uncertain of their choice. Forty-five percent of respondents thought that regardless of who they supported, Hamid Karzai would be re-elected.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents thought a unified team of Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani would be a good option for Afghanistan.
- Security, at 30 percent, ranked as the top priority in issues to be addressed by the next president of Afghanistan, a drop from 42 percent in the May poll. The economy and jobs ranked second at 22 percent, up from 12 percent in May. The issue of reconstruction and development was at 11 percent up from seven percent in the previous poll.

International Forces and Foreign Assistance

- When asked which organizations, groups or countries they view favorably, the ANA ranked number one at 67 percent favorable, followed by the United Nations at 58 percent and the United States at 28 percent. Iran ranked at minus 10 percent followed by the Taliban and Pakistan at minus 49 and minus 50 percent respectively.

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